

When *the* Rocks Cry Out



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Isa. 20:1, Nah. 3:2-7, Luke 19:40, John 20:24-31, Heb. 11:24-27.

Memory Text: “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (*Hebrews 11:24, 25*).

Key Thought: Archaeology has played a key role in affirming the veracity of the Old Testament.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Bible faced an onslaught of attacks from many sources. The greatest were coming from, sad to say, Bible scholars themselves, who argued that we just couldn’t trust the Bible and its historical accounts. All sorts of new theories were proposed to explain the origin of the Bible, and though varying one from another, they had one major point in common: All brought the biblical accounts into disrepute. Interestingly enough, when these attacks were at the strongest, archaeologists began making startling discoveries, and, bit by bit, challenges against the Bible were being answered.

“In light of past discoveries,” wrote a well-known Bible scholar, “one may expect that future archaeological finds will continue to support the biblical traditions.”—Edwin Yamauchi, *The Stone and the Scriptures* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1973), p. 168.

This week we’ll take a quick look at some discoveries and how they have answered some challenges.

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 5.

Faith and Archaeology

“I tell you,” he replied, ‘if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out’” (*Luke 19:40, NIV*).

Though Jesus probably wasn’t talking about archaeology when He made the above statement, He might as well have. Over the years various archaeological discoveries, such as the Rosetta Stone and the Behistun inscription, have done much to help confirm the Bible record.

Don’t, however, take our word for it. Read the few quotes below by these archaeologists:

Dr. W. F. Albright, perhaps the most famous archaeologist of the twentieth century, said: “There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition.” —*Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1942), p. 176.

Millar Burrows, from Yale: “On the whole, however, archaeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the Scriptural record. More than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine.” —*What Mean These Stones?* (New Haven, Conn.: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1941), p. 1.

K. A. Kitchen: “In terms of general reliability. . . . the Old Testament comes out remarkably well, so long as its writings and writers are treated fairly and evenhandedly.” —*On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), p. 500.

However nice it is to have these quotes and others, we mustn’t base our faith on archaeology, because, like all disciplines, it is still a human endeavor. People have to interpret the evidence, and so a subjective element always arises. Also, what happens when someone makes a find that some scholars interpret as contradicting the biblical account? Is our faith then shattered? Though it’s nice when archaeological interpretations fit what we believe, our faith must rest, not on rocks and inscriptions, but on the promises of God as revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

Read John 20:24-31. What principle that has application in our own experience of faith in Jesus is revealed here? What lessons can you draw from this account, particularly verse 29, that helps us understand what faith is about?

Some Prophecies Confirmed

The Bible, as we know, is filled with prophecies, many of them already fulfilled. It's exciting, from our standpoint, to look back and see how archaeology shows us that these prophecies were fulfilled as the Bible said they would be.

For example, Nineveh was the capital of Assyria at the height of its power and glory. It was one of the centers of the world. From its administrative offices governors were dispatched to rule over a vast empire, reaching from Persia and Arabia in the east to the green shores of the Mediterranean in the west, and from the border of Ethiopia in the south to the Black Sea in the north. Yet, according to the Bible, it wasn't going to last.

According to Nahum, what was going to happen to this great city Nineveh? See Nah. 3:2-7.

Through the combined forces of the Medes and the Babylonians, the city was destroyed in 612 B.C. The palaces were burned, its temples were broken down, and its strong fortifications were demolished.

Read Isaiah 13:19-22. What was to be the fate of another great kingdom, Babylon?

Archaeological discoveries over the years have revealed that Babylon was once, indeed, a magnificent city that had, among other things, (1) a wall about the main city more than 11 miles long and 85 feet thick; (2) many gates, including the Ishtar Gate with its enameled bricks showing 575 dragons and bulls and 120 lions; and (3) the gorgeously decorated palace of Nebuchadnezzar with its banquet hall and throne room, 57 feet wide and 168 feet long. Yet, whatever its ancient glory, as affirmed by archaeology, the city today remains in ruins.

Babylon in ruins? Nineveh in ruins? Today it would be comparable if someone said that the United States would be in ruins. What lesson should there be here for us about how fleeting anything earthly is? What should our priorities in life be?

More Affirmations

Look up the following texts: *Genesis 15:20, Exodus 3:8, Joshua 1:4, 1 Kings 10:29, and 2 Chronicles 1:17.*

What nation is mentioned in each of these texts?

These were just a few times, out of dozens, that the Hittites were mentioned in the Bible. For many years, however, this was seen as evidence that the Bible couldn't be trusted historically. Why? Because no other ancient sources referred to the Hittites. Thus, some saw this lack of other sources as proof that the Bible couldn't be trusted. The Hittites were deemed a mythical people, or, at most, an insignificant tribe occupying a village or two. Thanks to numerous archaeological discoveries, however, we now know that the Hittites once ruled the greater part of Asia Minor, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River, and that their power was scarcely inferior to that of Assyria or Egypt. It was only when the empire ended around 1200 B.C. that they finally vanished from history, though small city-states remained. Again, the rocks have cried out testifying to the accuracy of the Bible.

Another biblical record also confirmed is the relationship between Israel and Moab. How does the Bible depict that relationship? *2 Kings 3:4-27.*

In a little village eastward from the Dead Sea the Moabite stone, a stone inscribed by King Mesha, was found. It tells of Moab's oppression by the nation of Israel, as depicted in the Bible. This stone is now in the Louvre museum in Paris. It is regarded as very precious since its writing differs very little from early Hebrew. It was engraved about 850 B.C.

Suppose no Moabite stone had ever been found. It's not hard to imagine critics saying, "Oh, more proof that the Bible is unreliable," just as they did with the Hittites. What lessons can we learn from this about what faith should and should not be based on?

Ebla and Other Discoveries

Another important discovery was the Ebla Tablets, found in the Syrian city of Ebla (Tell Mardikh) in the 1970s. These were a whole library of clay tablets, about fifteen thousand of them, dated from about twenty-three hundred years before Christ. The Ebla Tablets are “now considered more significant for elucidating ancient history and the early background of the Bible than any other archaeological discovery ever unearthed.”—*Thompson Chain Reference Bible*, pp. 1653, 1654.

Read Isaiah 20:1. What king is mentioned there?

For years it was claimed that there was no such king, and thus the Bible wasn’t trustworthy. But in the 1840s, archaeological discoveries uncovered a palace with a statue and inscription telling all about Sargon, king of Assyria. The Bible was, again, confirmed by archaeology.

What tragic end came to Sennacherib, king of Assyria, who took the throne after Sargon? 2 Kings 19:36, 37.

Interestingly enough, an unearthed Assyrian record says that on the twentieth day of the month Tebet, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was killed by his son in a revolt.

The discovery of the law code of Hammurabi in 1901–1902 in Susa and the excavation in Nuzi have shown that some of the practices of the patriarchs—such as the experience of Sarah giving her slave girl to Abraham (*Gen. 16:1–3*), the selling of the birthright for food (*Gen. 25:33*), and married daughters receiving a handmaid (*Gen. 29:24, 29*)—were common practices in the ancient world.

Whether in archaeology, science, history, or whatever, it’s always nice when things affirm what we believe, and we should be thankful for these affirmations. At the same time, what message is found in Hebrews 11:1 that is so important for us to remember?

More Insights

Read Hebrews 11:24-27. According to these texts, what did Moses give up for his God?

What might have been some of those treasures that Moses left behind? In 1922 Howard Carter discovered the tomb of Tutankhamen, who lived in the fourteenth century B.C. Carter's discovery helps us better understand the text regarding Moses and the treasures of Egypt. There are more than seventeen hundred objects on display in the Cairo Museum that were found in Tutankhamen's tomb. These include the king's mask of pure gold, a golden death boat, 143 jewels, and many other precious ornaments. This one tomb alone has a multimillion dollar treasure that dazzles the senses. Again, this is just one tomb of one pharaoh. Yet, according to the Bible, Moses left those precious treasures because "he saw him who is invisible" (*Heb. 11:27, NIV*).

Siegfried Horn said that the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb also has answered the Bible critics who said that "the mentioning of iron in the stories of the books of Joshua and Judges is strong proof of a late date for these books, because it was thought that iron had not been used before the twelfth century B.C. The iron objects of King Tutankhamen's tomb however, show that the critics were wrong and that iron objects were used in that very age."—*The Spade Confirms the Book* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Pub. Assn., 1957), p. 121. The discovery gives more evidence for the historical accuracy of the Bible stories.

Read 1 Samuel 15:2, 3. What did God tell the Israelites to do?

Many find such texts as these disturbing. During the years, however, archaeology has added some light that can help us better understand what was going on. Some archaeologists have argued that the Canaanite religion was exceedingly cruel and bloodthirsty, and it led the Canaanites to violent and degrading acts. If this is true, it could help explain why the Lord used the Israelites to bring judgment upon them. Meanwhile, Genesis 15:16 unveils a principle that can help us better understand what was happening here.

Why is it so important for us to trust in the Lord and His goodness, despite such hard texts to understand, such as 1 Samuel 15:2, 3? Go over in your own mind examples of God's love, mercy, and forgiveness. Ask the Lord to give you faith to trust, despite things that are hard to understand.

Further Study: “Archeology and the Recovery of Ancient History,” pp. 99–132 in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1.

“Skepticism toward ancient writings, well founded in many cases, was then also extended to the writings of the Bible. Many people thought that the Biblical records about this world’s ancient history, and the stories about the patriarchs, prophets, judges, and kings, were in most cases just as legendary as those of other ancient peoples which had come down to us through Greek and Latin writings. The most famous historians and theologians of the 19th century were the greatest doubters of the veracity of the stories of the Bible, and were among its most vigorous critics.

“This attitude has greatly changed since the turn of the [twentieth] century. Much more respect is now shown toward the Old Testament, its narratives, and its teachings than was shown a few decades ago. The results of explorations in the Near East have done more than anything else to bring this about.

“In the flood of light thrown by archeology upon the ancient civilizations the Old Testament stands forth not only as historically reliable but also as unique in scope, power, and lofty ideals in comparison with the best products of the ancient world.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 100.

Discussion Questions:

- ① As a class, talk about the whole question of faith in God. What is faith? Where does it come from? What causes people to lose it? What role can archaeology have in our faith? At the same time, why must we not put too much emphasis on it, or any other discipline, such as science? What can we do to help strengthen each other’s faith?

- ② Suppose evidence for the existence of the Hittites had never been found. Critics still would be using that lack of evidence to attack the Bible, despite the fact that the Hittites really did exist. In other words, just because proof isn’t readily available doesn’t mean something isn’t true. What lessons can we learn from this account about what our faith needs to be based on and what we shouldn’t base it on?

Margarita's Mission

by JEANE ZACHARY

In a village outside Tijuana, Mexico, a small company of Adventist believers are building a church. The first thing they built was the baptistry. These members were serious about leading people to Jesus.

One member, Margarita Carrillo, joined the Adventist Church four years earlier. Margarita has a passion to fill the church. And she is.

While other members were busy giving Bible studies and preaching, Margarita felt she couldn't. She could not read or write. Her husband and children tried to teach her, and slowly, painstakingly, she sounded out each syllable of a word. Then God showed Margarita she had other gifts she could use.

A family in the village had a 13-year-old daughter who was troubled by an evil spirit. The family was desperate to find a cure for their child. Margarita organized prayer vigils on behalf of the girl and her family. They prayed that God would drive out the evil spirit. Little by little they saw changes in the girl's life.

As neighbors also saw the difference, they began asking questions about God and the Bible. Some began studying with church members, and a few months later 14 people were baptized. Later another 16 people were baptized.

As Margarita saw these people make their decisions for Christ, she sensed God's power at work. She had felt that she could not be a leader unless she could read, but she stepped out in faith and began leading the weekly prayer meetings, memorizing the Bible texts she would need to share with the congregation.

The believers continue building their church. Some make the bricks, others lay the bricks, and another has begun building a pulpit. Meanwhile, the congregation continues to grow. And Margarita continues to experience God's power growing in her. And in spite of her difficulty reading, she gladly shares God's love with those she meets.

Our mission offerings help congregations such as Margarita's buy Bible study guides and other materials to teach and nurture their new believers.



Margarita (left). Jeane Zachary lives in southern California.