

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?

I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

► **Key Text:** *Matthew 5:18*

► **Teach the Class to:**

Know: That Bible truths have been uncovered by many archaeological findings.

Feel: That God has given assurance that His Word is true by the preservation of historical records and artifacts.

Do: Seek to understand how to apply the principles of the Bible to daily life.

► **Lesson Outline:**

I. The Unhidden Truth (*Luke 19:40*)

A Bible scholars in the early nineteenth century tried to prove that the Bible was untrustworthy. Why did their attempts fail?

B Discuss how some archaeological discoveries have proven the authenticity of the Old Testament.

C Why is it important that we do not rely wholly on scientific evidence to determine our faith in the Bible?

II. Evidence of Biblical Empires (*Dan. 2:21*)

A Show the parallel between historical and biblical accounts of ancient empires.

B How do historical records such as the Moabite Stone and the Clay Tablets of Ebla validate Bible truth?

III. More to Come (*Matt. 24:35*)

A Archaeologists expect future findings to further validate the Bible.

B What role does personal experience play in one's faith in the Bible?

► **Summary:** The Lord has given evidence that His Word is true through the many findings of archaeologists.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate!**

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners' experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer the question, *Why is this lesson important to me?*

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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Since the nineteenth century, the Bible has been under attack for its alleged lack of historical authenticity. There are scholars who claim that most of the events in the Bible never occurred or occurred differently from the Bible's account. Their material is quite influential with people who are only a little informed, because it often is delivered with an air of authority by specialists who should know what they are talking about. Fortunately, most attempts to gain information about the world of the Bible and biblical events usually support the biblical account.

Believers, especially those who encounter friends, family, and co-workers who believe the Bible is inaccurate, owe it to themselves to become familiar with the relevant archaeology.

► STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, **What do I need to know from God's Word?**

Bible Commentary


I. Faith and Evidence

(Review John 20:24-31 with your class.)

Faith is often preceded by the adjective *blind*. This refers to faith in the absence of supporting evidence. Yet this passage clearly shows Jesus was not opposed to giving evidence for His mission. And it was not just Thomas who demanded proof and received it. Consider John the Baptist in Luke 7:20-23. Obviously, Jesus is happy to provide evidence in order to ease our doubts.

Consider This: While Jesus provides Thomas with the evidence he seeks, He goes on to say “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (*John 20:29, NRSV*). Is Jesus saying that belief without evidence is superior to belief as a response to evidence? Is there ever a point at which all reason for doubt can be removed?

■ *Discuss the significance of evidence in light of Hebrews 11:1 and 1 Peter 3:15.*

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**II. Archaeology and Prophecy***(Review Isaiah 44:28, 45:1-7 with your class.)*

Consider This: Fulfilled prophecy always has been a powerful witness for the Christian faith, and of the messiahship of Jesus in particular. How has archaeology helped to confirm the accuracy of prophecies that already have occurred?

“Cyrus is mentioned some 23 times in the literature of the Old Testament. . . .


“What many people do not realize in reading Isaiah 44:28ff. is that this heathen ruler was named by the prophet long before the monarch was even born. Isaiah prophesied in the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (1:1). His ministry thus occurred in the latter portion of the eighth century B.C. (ca. 740-701 B.C.). This was some one hundred fifty years before Cyrus came to the throne! . . .

“Excavations at Babylon (1879-82) led to the discovery of a clay barrel, known as the Cyrus Cylinder, which contained a marvelous historical confirmation of the biblical narrative. It portrays the benevolent policies of Cyrus in the following fashion: ‘All of their peoples I gathered together and restored to their dwelling-places.’”—Wayne Jackson, “Cyrus the Great in Biblical Prophecy,” Christian Courier Web site [<http://www.christiancourier.com/archives/cyrusProphecy.htm>].

III. The Bible as a Reliable Guide to Ancient History*(Review Genesis 15:20 with your class.)*

The Bible not only is supported by archaeology and contemporary scholarship, it also has proven to be a reliable guide for studying the ancient world. Much of what has been taken to be evidence of its historical unreliability has been shown, with time, to be precisely the opposite, as was the case with the “imaginary” people known as Hittites.

Consider This: Our willingness to trust a person, an institution, or a document is based on his/her/its record of authenticity when tested. What can we say about the Bible’s performance in this regard?

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**IV. The Bible in Historical Context**

Consider This: The events in the Bible occurred in a time and place quite different from our own. Therefore, some of its content is not easy to understand. How has archaeology brought the world of the Bible closer to us? How important is it to understand the cultural/historical world of the Bible?

“As the fitly-spoken word of man must have suitable conditions of time, place, and circumstance, so it is with the word of God addressed to man. The apples of gold are placed in a dish of wrought silver. This also is of noble metal, and to make it, many threads are bent and blended together into a design, and the design is repeated to form a vessel of usefulness and beauty, but is inferior to the fruit of gold, and its purpose that of service. So the word of revelation shines in a setting of human disposition, domestic incident, social customs, and amid special surroundings.”—G. M. Mackie, *Bible Manners and Customs* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), p. 5.

► STEP 3—Practice!


Just for Teachers: This step of the learning cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question, **How can I practice the information I just learned?**

Thought Question:

The Bible itself seems to make few efforts to prove its points in a philosophical, scientific, or historical sense. Why might we find it necessary to do so? Consider this in the light of 1 Corinthians 1:22-26.

Application Question:

Most of us accept God’s goodness, in spite of the fact that we encounter incidents that are repugnant to us in biblical passages. Our experience and study lead us to the conclusion that God is trustworthy, and therefore an explanation must exist that will resolve the question. How would you respond to a skeptic who accuses you of circular reasoning in this regard: that because God is good, what He does must somehow be good?

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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.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**Witnessing**

It is inspiring to see archaeology confirming biblical truths to a skeptical twenty-first century world. How can we bring these facts to the attention of friends, family, and strangers who may not be aware of them?

Consider This: To supplement your Bible study with information about archaeological finds, search the Web, or subscribe to a periodical such as *Biblical Archaeology Review*. Be prepared to share the information you find with others. You might be surprised at who actually welcomes this material.

► **STEP 4—Apply!**

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question: **With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?**

- 1 Think of a biblical figure with whom you identify. Look into the circumstances of daily life and world history at the time this figure was living. Find such information at your local Christian bookstore or library. Also search the Web. With the information you find, imagine what a day in this person’s life might have been like.
- 2 When you study the Bible, see what insights archaeology brings to the topic. As always, the Web is an excellent resource. Try the Christian Answers site [<http://www.christiananswers.net/archaeology/home.html>].
- 3 Even the secular world is interested in the historical/archaeological background of the Bible. Look for major news magazines that have cover stories on these topics. They often take a skeptical viewpoint, so be prepared to analyze them and to discuss them with unchurched friends and relatives.
- 4 If you are puzzled by material in the Bible, pray to God for answers. Document the process in a prayer journal. You probably will not get an answer in a supernatural way, but be prepared for a discussion or item that “just happens” to come your way to clear it up.

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:

- ❶ 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?
- ❷ 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?