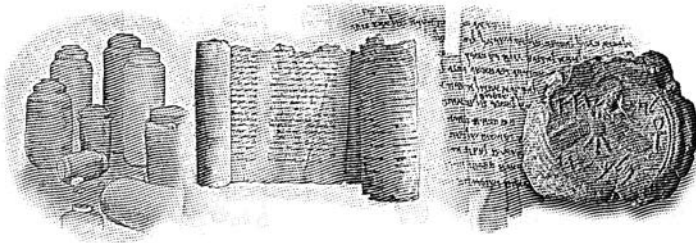


The Bible *as* History



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Samuel 17, Isa. 36:1–3, Isa. 37:14–38, Daniel 1, Daniel 5, Matt. 26:57–67, Heb. 11:1–40.*

Memory Text: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt” (*Exod. 20:2 [also Deut. 5:6], NKJV*).

The Bible is constituted in history. Biblical history moves in a linear direction from an absolute beginning, when God created all things, to an ultimate goal, when He will restore the earth at His second coming.

The historical nature of Scripture is one characteristic that distinguishes it from the sacred books of other religions. The Bible assumes the existence of a God who personally acts in history; it does not try to prove that existence. In the beginning, God speaks, and life on earth is created (*Gen. 1:1–31*). He calls Abram out of the Chaldees. He delivers His people from the bondage of Egypt. He writes the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone with His own finger (*Exod. 31:18*). He sends prophets. He sends judgments. He calls people to live and share His divine law and the plan of salvation with other nations. Ultimately, He sends His Son Jesus Christ into the world, thus dividing history forever.

This week, we'll look at some of the key issues in history as portrayed in the Bible and at some of the archaeological evidence that helps substantiate history as expressed in the Bible.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 6.

David, Solomon, and the Monarchy

The monarchy of David and Solomon represents the golden age in Israel's history. But what if David and Solomon did not exist, as some have claimed? What if their kingdom was not as extensive as the Bible describes, as some also have claimed? Without David there would be no Jerusalem, the capital of the nation (*2 Sam. 5:6–10*). Without David there would be no temple built by his son, Solomon (*1 Kings 8:17–20*). Finally, without David there would be no future Messiah, for it is through the line of David that a Messiah is promised (*Jer. 23:5, 6; Rev. 22:16*). Israelite history would need to be completely rewritten. Yet, that history, as it reads in Scripture, is precisely what gives Israel and the church its unique role and mission.

Read 1 Samuel 17. How does God provide a decisive victory for Israel? Who is used for this victory? Where does the victory take place?

Notice the precise geographical description of the battle lines in 1 Samuel 17:1–3. The site of Khirbet Qeiyafa is located on the hills exactly in the area of the Israelite camp described in this chapter. Recent excavations there revealed a massively fortified, garrison city from the time of Saul and David overlooking the valley. Two contemporaneous gates were excavated. Since most cities in ancient Israel had only one gate, this characteristic may help identify the site as Shaaraim (*1 Sam. 17:52*), which in Hebrew means “two gates.”

If this is the case, then we have identified for the first time this ancient biblical city. In 2008 and 2013, two inscriptions were found that many believe represent the oldest Hebrew writing ever discovered. The second inscription mentions the name Eshbaal, the same name as one of Saul's sons (*1 Chron. 9:39*).

In 1993, excavations at the northern city of Tel Dan uncovered a monumental inscription written by King Hazael of Damascus, who records his victory over the “king of Israel” and the king of the “house of David.” This is the same way the dynasty of David is described in the Bible, adding more powerful archaeological evidence that David existed in history, just as the Bible says.

Think through the implications of what it would mean for our faith if, as some people claim, King David did not really exist?

Isaiah, Hezekiah, and Sennacherib

Read Isaiah 36:1–3 and Isaiah 37:14–38. In this account of a massive Assyrian campaign against Judah, how does God deliver His people?

In 701 B.C., Sennacherib campaigns against Judah. The account is recorded in Scripture. It also is recorded by Sennacherib himself in several ways. In his historical annals, discovered in the capital city of Nineveh, he boasts, “Forty-six of his [Hezekiah’s] strong walled towns and innumerable smaller villages in their neighborhood I besieged and conquered.” In Sennacherib’s palace at Nineveh he celebrates his defeat of the Judean city of Lachish by covering the walls of a central room of the palace with relief depictions of his siege and battle against the city.

Recent excavations at Lachish have uncovered the massive destruction debris of the city after it was burned by Sennacherib. But Jerusalem is miraculously spared. Sennacherib is able to boast only this: “As for Hezekiah the Judean, I shut him in his city like a bird in a cage.” There is no description of destroying Jerusalem, and no account of captives being taken into slavery.

It is true that Jerusalem was besieged, but the Bible records that the siege lasted for one day only, as the Angel of the Lord delivers Jerusalem. As Isaiah had predicted, “ ‘Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city, or shoot an arrow there, or come before it with a shield, or cast up a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come into this city, says the LORD. For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David’ ” (*Isa. 37:33–35, RSV*).

Interestingly, only Lachish is prominently depicted in Nineveh, the Assyrian capital. Jerusalem is not found on the palace walls. Sennacherib could boast only of his defeat of Lachish. The showdown between the God of heaven and the gods of the Assyrians is demonstrated in the deliverance of His people. He sees the acts of aggression by Assyria. He hears the words of Hezekiah’s prayer. God acts in history.

How can you remember that the God who so miraculously delivered Israel at this time and place is the same God whom you pray to, rely on, and trust in today?

Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, and Babylon

In July 2007, a scholar from the University of Vienna was working on a project in the British Museum when he found a tablet from the time of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. On the tablet, he found the name “Nebusarsekim,” the name of a Babylonian official mentioned in Jeremiah 39:3. Nebusarsekim is one of many individuals, both kings and officials, who (thanks to archaeology) have been rediscovered from the time of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar.

Read Daniel 1 and Daniel 5. How do the early decisions of Daniel correspond to the acts of God in using him as His servant and prophet to impact millions of people through history?

Daniel “purposed in his heart” (*Dan. 1:8*) to remain faithful to God in regard to what he both ate and prayed. These good habits, formed early in his experience, became the pattern that would give him strength for his long life. The result was clear thinking, wisdom, and understanding that came from on high. This was recognized by Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, so that he was elevated to the highest positions in the kingdom. But, perhaps more important, it resulted in the conversion of King Nebuchadnezzar himself (*Dan. 4:34–37*).

Nebuchadnezzar was the son of Nabopolassar. Together they built up a glorious city, unsurpassed in the ancient world (*Dan. 4:30*). The city of Babylon was enormous, with more than 300 temples, an exquisite palace, and surrounded by huge double walls 12 and 22 feet thick. The walls were punctuated by eight major gates, all named after the major Babylonian deities. The most famous is the Ishtar gate, excavated by the Germans and reconstructed in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin.

In Daniel 7:4, Babylon is described as a lion with eagle wings. The processional way leading up to the Ishtar gate is lined with images of 120 lions. An image of a huge lion pouncing on a man also was found during excavations and still stands today outside the city. These all testify to the lion as an appropriate symbol for Babylon the Great. Biblical history and its prophetic message are confirmed.

Daniel 1:8 said that Daniel “purposed in his heart.” What does that mean? What are some things that you need to “purpose in your heart” about doing or not doing?

The Historical Jesus

Read Matthew 26:57–67, John 11:45–53, and John 18:29–31. Who was Caiaphas, and what was his role in the death of Christ? Who was Pontius Pilate, and how was his decision most important for the Sanhedrin to accomplish its goals?

Caiaphas was high priest and instigated the plot to seek the death of Jesus. His existence also is recorded by Josephus, the Jewish historian writing in behalf of the Romans. “Besides which he also deprived Joseph, who was also called Caiphas [*sic*], of the high priesthood, and appointed Jonathan, the son of Ananus, the former high priest, to succeed him.”—*Josephus Complete Works* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1969), book 18, chapter 4, p. 381.

In 1990, a family tomb was discovered south of Jerusalem containing 12 ossuaries, or bone boxes. The coins and pottery from the tomb date it to around the middle of the first century A.D. The most ornate of the ossuaries, with multiple sets of bones in it, contains the name “Joseph son of Caiaphas.” Many scholars believe this to have been the tomb and bone box of Caiaphas, the high priest so directly involved in the death of Jesus.

In 1961, an inscription bearing the name of Pontius Pilate, the prefect of Judea under Emperor Tiberius, was found on a stone in the theater at Caesarea Maritima.

Thus, in both of these cases, some of the principal figures surrounding the death of Christ have been corroborated by history.

Secular historians of the first two centuries also speak of Jesus of Nazareth. Tacitus, the Roman historian, writes of Christ, His execution by Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius, and early Christians in Rome. Pliny the Younger, a Roman governor, writes in A.D. 112–113 to the emperor Trajan, asking how he should treat the Christians. He describes them as meeting on a certain day before light where they gather and sing hymns as to a god.

These archaeological discoveries and historical sources provide an extra, nonbiblical framework for the existence of Jesus, who was worshiped within the first 50 years after His death. The Gospels themselves are the primary sources about Jesus, and we should study them carefully to learn more about Jesus and His life.

Though it’s always nice to have archaeological evidence that supports our faith, why must we learn not to make our faith depend upon these things, as helpful as they might at times be?

Faith and History

We don't live in vacuums. Our choices influence not just ourselves, but others, as well. In the same way, the lives of many of God's ancient people have had a great impact on the future of others besides themselves. In Hebrews 11, that well-known "faith" chapter, we see in summary the influence of many of these ancient heroes of faith.

Read Hebrews 11:1–40. What lessons can we learn from these ancient heroes and by studying their lives?

Enoch _____

Noah _____

Abraham _____

Sarah _____

Joseph _____

Moses _____

Rahab _____

Samson _____

Faith is not simply a belief in something or someone; it is acting in response to that belief. It is a faith that works; this is what is reckoned as righteousness. It is those faith actions that change history. Each of these actions depends on a reliance on God's Word.

Noah acted in faith when he built the ark, trusting in the Word of God over experience and reason. Because it had never rained, experience and reason suggested that a flood made absolutely no sense. But Noah obeyed God, and the human race survived. Abraham, then called Abram, left Ur in southern Mesopotamia, the most sophisticated city in the world at that time, and went out, not knowing where God would lead him. But he chose to act on God's Word. Moses chose to become a shepherd leading God's people to the Promised Land rather than to become the king over Egypt, the greatest empire of its day. He trusted in the Almighty's voice, calling out from the burning bush. Rahab decided to trust the reports of God's deliverance, protected the two spies, and became part of the lineage of Jesus. How little we know about how our decisions will affect the lives of countless people in this generation and those to come!

What crucial decisions are impending before you? How do you make the choices that you do, and why?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “David and Goliath,” pp. 643–648, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Hezekiah,” pp. 331–339; “Deliverance From Assyria,” pp. 349–366, in *Prophets and Kings*; section 4.k., in “Methods of Bible Study,” which can be found at <http://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/bible-interpretation-hermeneutics/methods-bible-study>.

“The Bible is the most ancient and the most comprehensive history that men possess. It came fresh from the fountain of eternal truth, and throughout the ages a divine hand has preserved its purity. It lights up the far-distant past, where human research in vain seeks to penetrate. In God’s word only do we behold the power that laid the foundations of the earth and that stretched out the heavens. Here only do we find an authentic account of the origin of nations. Here only is given a history of our race unsullied by human pride or prejudice.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 173.

“He who has a knowledge of God and His Word has a settled faith in the divinity of the Holy Scriptures. He does not test the Bible by man’s ideas of science. He brings these ideas to the test of the unerring standard. He knows that God’s word is truth, and truth can never contradict itself; whatever in the teaching of so-called science contradicts the truth of God’s revelation is mere human guesswork.

“To the really wise, scientific research opens vast fields of thought and information.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 325.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Flesh out the question asked at the end of Wednesday’s study. Yes, it’s good when we find archaeological evidence that confirms biblical history. But what happens when archaeological evidence is found that is interpreted in ways that contradict the biblical story? What should this tell us about the fact that we must depend on the Word of God as the Word of God and trust it as such, regardless of the claims of archaeology or any other human science?
- 2 Think about all biblical prophecies that have been fulfilled in the past that, from today’s vantage point, we can see as having been fulfilled. Think, for example, of most of the kingdoms of Daniel 2 and Daniel 7. How can we learn from these prophecies, which have been fulfilled in history, and to trust the Lord about the prophecies that are yet for the future?

From Armenia to Cyprus

By ERMINE ORPHANIDI

I was born in Armenia to a Greek father and an Armenian mother. From childhood, I believed in God and wanted to own a Bible. But at the time, Bibles were hard to find and very expensive in Armenia.

One day, a Seventh-day Adventist neighbor invited me to a series of meetings. Those who attended faithfully would receive a free Bible. I jumped at the idea of finally owning a Bible.

Death always bothered me. It seemed like such a meaningless end to life. Then the preacher spoke about the resurrection at Jesus' second coming. It was amazing. I can still vividly remember the picture that he showed of resurrected people coming out of their graves. When a call was made for baptism, I was the first to stand.

Something happened. Before baptism, I tried to read the Bible a few times, but I couldn't understand it. I wondered how others could spend hours reading it. After baptism, everything began to make sense. I consider this to be one of the many miracles that God has performed in my life.

Four months after my baptism, I moved to Cyprus. Though part Greek, I did not speak Greek and felt like a stranger in a strange land. For 16 years I didn't know about the Adventist church in Cyprus. Many trials came my way, but God stood by me.

Then, through a friend, I located the church. Apprehension filled me on my first visit. How would the church members relate to me? All apprehension vanished as the members enveloped me with love. To this day, my church is my family, my second home.

Since that first visit five years ago, I have hardly missed a Sabbath. Now I am fluent in Greek. I enjoy teaching adult and teen Sabbath School classes. Even more remarkable, my mother, sister-in-law, and two nieces also attend church with me. The love of the members won them over. I am waiting and praying for the day, soon, when my son will also take his stand for Jesus.



I thank God for His goodness and look forward to a happy life with Him here and for eternity.

Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help construct a new church building and community center in Nicosia, Cyprus. Thank you for helping to spread the gospel around the world.