

Archaeology: Friend or Foe of the Bible

Archaeology is the study of past human life that is revealed in the relics of ancient people. While archaeology may appear to the casual viewer as a branch of science, it is not pure science. Except where it uncovers written records of the people being investigated, much of the conclusions of archaeological inquiry will be no more than educated guesswork. Nevertheless, archaeology can provide valuable insights into past civilizations and we recognize that the conclusions of such investigations are valid, at least as valid as the evidence upon which it is based. Archaeology, with its application of scientific methods and techniques, has been extremely useful in historical reconstruction.

With all things considered, we find archaeology to be a great friend of the Bible, not a foe. There are two areas in particular that archaeology has been found to be very supportive of the Bible. The first is in the discovery of people and places named in the Bible that previously were nowhere to be found in secular history. Archaeological finds of the past century and a half have served largely to silence the critics who maintained the Bible was not a reliable source document because of the lack of corroborative evidence from extra-biblical sources. The second is in the uncovering of manuscript evidence that assures us that we have a reliable text for the Bible. Archaeology has not only provided us with the evidence that the Bible is truly an ancient text, but the text that we have today is truly representative of that ancient text. For the balance of this article we will consider the discoveries that have verified the Bible as an accurate source document. The manuscript evidence will be considered in the next issue.

One criticism of the Bible was that Moses could not have written the first five books because writing had not been developed by his time. In 1902 the "Code of Hammurabi" was found which provided the information to answer this charge. The code was found inscribed on an eight foot high stone containing some 247 laws. The inscription was dated at about 600 years before the time of the Exodus, proving that, in fact, writing was known long before the time of Moses and that, indeed, he could have written the Pentateuch.

Another criticism of the historicity of the Bible was that the Hittites, mentioned about 40 times in the Old Testament, were nowhere to be found in the historical record outside the Bible. In 1906 at Bogazkoy, Turkey, the site of the Hittite empire was discovered. The finding not only demonstrated the existence of the Hittites, but also revealed another example of a written language prior to the time of Moses.

These discoveries, and countless more like it, have served to assure us today that the Bible is an accurate source document for history and geography. Dr. William F. Albright summarized the contribution of archaeology to this end when he wrote, "There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition." He further wrote:

The excessive skepticism shown toward the Bible by important historical

schools of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, certain phases of which still appear periodically, has been progressively discredited. Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source history."

Archaeology consistently shows itself to be a friend of the Bible and provides corroborating testimony to the Bible's claims.