

## **The Canonization of Scriptures** (Reliability Through Archaeology)

I. Another means of determining the reliability of the Canon is to consider its content in relation to archaeology.

II. If we are to believe that the Bible is reliable, all historical content must be reliable.

III. If the historical content is unreliable I would have good reason to question the reliability of the entire text.

IV. Let's consider these evidences for the reliability of the **Biblical text from Archaeology**.

### *1. Initial comments from Archaeologist*

A. *Nelson Glueck*, the renowned Jewish archaeologist, wrote: "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference." He continued his assertion of "the almost incredibly accurate historical memory of the Bible, and particularly so when it is fortified by archaeological fact."

B. *William F Albright*, known for his reputation as one of the great archaeologists, states: "There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition."

Albright adds: "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 of history."

C. *Professor H.H. Rowley* (cited by Donald F. Wiseman in *Revelation and the Bible*) claims that "it is not because scholars of today begin with more conservative presuppositions than their predecessors that they have a much greater respect for the Patriarchal stories than was formerly common, but because the evidence warrants it."

D. *Merrill Unger* states: "The role which archaeology is performing in New Testament research (as well as that of the Old Testament) in expediting scientific study, balancing critical theory, illustrating, elucidating, supplementing and authenticating historical and cultural backgrounds, constitutes the one bright spot in the future of criticism of the Sacred text."

E. *F.F. Bruce* notes: "Where Luke has been suspected of inaccuracy, and accuracy has been vindicated by some inscriptional evidence, it may be legitimate to say that archaeology has confirmed the New Testament record."

Bruce adds that “for the most part the service which archaeology has rendered to the New Testament studies is the filling in of the contemporary background, against which we can read the record with enhanced comprehension and appreciation. And this background is a first-century background. The New Testament narrative just will not fit into a second century background.

G. Millar Burrows summarizes: “On the whole such evidence as archaeology has afforded thus far, especially by providing additional and older manuscripts of the books of the Bible, strengthens our confidence in the accuracy with which the text has been transmitted through the centuries.”

H. Sir Frederic Kenyon says: Archaeology has not yet said its last word; but the results already achieved confirm what faith would suggest, that the Bible can do nothing but gain from an increase of knowledge.”

He adds “Archaeology has produced an abundance of evidence to substantiate the correctness of our Massoretic text.”

I. William Albright writes concerning the accuracy of the Scriptures as the result of archaeology:

“The contents of our Pentateuch are, in general, very much older than the date at which they were finally edited; new discoveries continue to confirm the historical accuracy or the literary antiquity of detail after detail in it .... It is, accordingly, sheer hypercriticism to deny the substantially Mosaic character of the Pentateuchal tradition.”

## *2. Old Testament Examples of Archaeological Confirmation*

### **A. Elba Kingdom:**

An archaeological find that relates to biblical criticism is the recently discovered Ebla tablets. The discovery was made in northern Syria by two professors from the University of Rome, Dr. Paolo Matthiae, an archaeologist; and Dr. Giovanni Petinato, an epigrapher. The excavation of the site, Tell Mardikh, began in 1964, in 1968 they uncovered a statue of King Ibbit-Lim. The inscription made reference to Ishtar, the goddess who “shines brightly in Ebla.” Ebla, at its height of power in 2300 B.C., had a population of 260,000 people.

It was destroyed in 2250 B.C. by Naram-Sin, grandson of Sargon the Great.

Since 1974 17,000 tablets have been unearthed from the era of the Ebla Kingdom.

An example of the contribution of the Ebla discovery is in relation to Genesis 14, which for years has been considered to be historically unreliable. The victory of

Abraham over Chedorlaomer and the Mesopotamian kings has been described as fictitious and the five cities of the Plain (Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Zoar) as legendary.

Yet the Ebla archives refer to all five Cities of the Plain and on one tablet the Cities are listed in the exact same sequence as Genesis 14. The milieu of the tablets reflect the culture of the patriarchal period and depict that, before the catastrophe recorded in Genesis 14, the area was a flourishing region experiencing prosperity and success, as recorded in Genesis.

B. During the excavations of **Jericho (1930-1936)** Garstang found something so startling that a statement of what was found was prepared and signed by himself and two other members of the team. In reference to these findings Garstang says: **“As to the main fact, then, there remains no doubt: the walls fell outwards so completely that the attackers would be able to clamber up and over the ruins into the city.”** Why so unusual? Because the walls of cities do not fall outwards, they fall inwards. And yet in Joshua 6:20 we read “...The wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city every man straight ahead, and they took the city.” The walls were made to fall outward.

C. **Julius Wellhausen**, a well-known biblical critic of the 29th century, felt that the record of the laver made of brass mirrors was not an original entry into the Priestly Code. By stating so he puts the record of the tabernacle much too late for the time of Moses. However, there is no valid reason for employing the late dating (500 B.C.) of Wellhausen. There is specific archaeological evidence of such bronze mirrors in what is known as the Empire Period of Egypt's history (1500-1400 B.C.). Thus, we see that this period is contemporary with Moses and the Exodus (1500-1400 B.C.)

D. **Henry M Morris** observes: **“Problems still exist, of course, in the complete harmonization of archaeological material with the Bible, but none so serious as not to bear real promise of imminent solution through further investigation. It must be extremely significant that, in view of the great mass of corroborative evidence regarding the Biblical history of these periods, there exists today not one unquestionable find of archaeology that proves the Bible to be in error at any point.”**

### *3. New Testament Examples of Archaeological Confirmation*

A. Luke's reliability as an historian is unquestionable. Unger tells us that archaeology has authenticated the Gospel accounts, especially Luke. In Unger's words, **“The Acts of the Apostles is now generally agreed in scholarly circles to be the work of Luke, to belong to the first century and to involve the labors of a careful historian who was substantially accurate in his use of sources.”**

B. Sir William Ramsay is regarded as one of the greatest archaeologists ever to have lived. Concerning Luke's ability as a historian, Ramsay concluded after 30 years of study that "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy...this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians.

Ramsay adds: "Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness."

What Ramsay had done conclusively and finally was to exclude certain possibilities. As seen in the light of archaeological evidence, the New Testament reflects the conditions of the second half of the first century A.D., and does not reflect the conditions of any later date. Historically it is of the greatest importance that this should have been so effectively established. In all matters of external fact the author of Acts is seen to have been minutely careful and accurate as only a contemporary can be.

C. It was at one time conceded that Luke had entirely missed the boat in the events he portrayed as surrounding the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1-3). Critics argued that there was no census, that Quirinius was not governor of Syria at the time and that everyone did not have to return to his ancestral home.

First of all, archaeological discoveries show that the Romans had a regular enrollment of taxpayers and also held censuses every 14 years. This procedure was indeed begun under Augustus and the first took place in either 23-22 B.C. or in 9-8 B.C. The latter would be the one which Luke refers.

Second, we find evidence that Quirinius was governor of Syria around 7 B.C. This assumption is based on an inscription found in Antioch ascribing to Quirinius this post. As a result of this finding, it is now supposed that he was governor twice - once in 7 B.C. and the other time in 6 A.D. (the date ascribed by Josephus).

Last, in regard to the practices of enrollment, a papyrus found in Egypt gives directions for the conduct of a census.

It reads: "Because of the approaching census it is necessary that all those residing for any cause away from their homes should at once prepare to return to their own governments in order that they may complete the family registration of the enrollment and that the tilled lands may retain those belonging to them."

D. Luke writes of the riot of Ephesus and represents a civic assembly (Ecclesia) taking place in a theater (Acts 19:23ff). The facts are that it did meet there as borne out by an inscription which speaks of silver statues of Artemis (Diana in KJV) to be placed in the "theater during a full season of the Ecclesia." The theater, when excavated, proved to have room for 25,000 people.

E. *The Pavement*. For centuries there has been no record of the court where Jesus was tried by Pilate (named Gabbatha or the Pavement, John 19:13)

*William F Albright* in the *Archaeology of Palestine* shows that this court was the court of the Tower of Antonia, which was the Roman military headquarters in Jerusalem. It was left buried when the city was rebuilt in the time of Hadrian and not discovered until recently.

F. *The Pool of Bethesda*, another site with no record of it except in the New Testament, can now be identified “with a fair measure of certainty in the northeast quarter of the old city (the area called Bezetha, or ‘New Lawn’) in the first century A.D., where traces of it were discovered in the course of excavations near the Church of St. Anne in 1888.”

## **Conclusion**

After trying to shatter the historicity and validity of the scripture, I came to the conclusion that it is historically trustworthy, states Josh McDowell. If one discards the Bible as being unreliable, then he must discard almost all literature of antiquity.

One problem I constantly face is the desire on the part of many to apply one standard or test to secular literature and another to the Bible. One needs to apply the same test, whether the literature under investigation is secular or religious.

Having done this, I believe one can hold the Scriptures in his hand and say, “*The Bible is trustworthy and historically reliable.*”