

LET THE

# STONES SPEAK



The magazine of the  
ARMSTRONG-MAZAR INSTITUTE OF BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

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A New  
Archaeology  
Institute Emerges



# LET THE STONES SPEAK

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## FROM THE EDITOR

- Why We Are Starting a Biblical Archaeology Institute** 1
- Rethinking the Search for King Solomon** 6

## INFOGRAPHIC

- The Wealth of the Kingdom** 14
- Top 10 Biblical Archaeology Discoveries of 2021** 16
- Let the Stones—and the Science—Speak** 21
- Is the Book of Jonah ‘Entirely Ahistorical’?** 26



FROM THE EDITOR | GERALD FLURRY

# Why We Are Starting a Biblical Archaeology Institute

This exciting field of scientific study has bright days ahead, but only if we get back to using biblical history.

**F**OR MANY YEARS NOW, I HAVE KEENLY followed the field of biblical archaeology, especially the archaeology of ancient Jerusalem. I have studied the Bible for more than 50 years, and have researched and written extensively on virtually all the major biblical characters, events and time periods.

For a student of the Bible, few experiences are more inspiring than being able to see tangible evidence—ancient walls, clay artifacts, ostraca and seals—that verifies biblical history. This is why biblical archaeology, to me, is one of the most exciting scientific disciplines we can practice. (A few years ago, I learned that I am a descendant of King David, which adds a personal interest in this critical field.)

Sadly, the field of biblical archaeology today is fraught with controversy and tension. Scientists and scholars are divided about the role of the Bible in archaeology, and whether it should even be used when excavating in Israel. Too often, the archaeologist who uses the Bible is labeled a religious zealot and his science is considered prejudiced. Many believe that science and the Bible are mutually exclusive—that

using the Bible as a historical source makes science illegitimate.

Not only is this view false, it is unscientific. The truth is, good archaeology considers *all* the evidence, *including* the detailed history documented in the Bible, and goes where the evidence leads. It is also true that good Bible research means *proving* and *testing* what you study.

There was a time when science and the Bible happily coexisted. Many of the world's greatest scientists and academics—giants like Sir Isaac Newton, Samuel Morse and Blaise Pascal—were Bible believers. Most of the great universities, including Harvard, Princeton, Yale and Oxford, were founded with a strong biblical foundation.

It simply isn't rational or *scientific* to say that science and the Bible are mutually exclusive. Yet this is what is being taught to future scientists in our schools and universities. And it has infected many of our scientific and archaeological institutions.

In the field of biblical archaeology, the momentum today is with the biblical minimalists, who discredit the Bible and believe it should not be used in archaeology.

Remarkably, this skepticism has developed even as archaeological discoveries *proving* the biblical record—and obligating responsible scientists to use Bible history in the practice of archaeology—have increased to an unprecedented scale.

When you consider the technology now available, the advanced methodology being practiced on dig sites, and the growing number of artifacts associated with the Bible that underscore the Bible's role in archaeological excavation, we really ought to be in the heyday of biblical archaeology!

Yet regrettably, biblical archaeology is in a state of malaise and decline.

The ailing condition of biblical archaeology has concerned me for many years. I discussed this topic with Dr. Eilat Mazar, a biblical archaeologist, on a few occasions before she died last May. My staff have discussed it with other scientists and academics, both in America and in Israel, including the late Hershel Shanks, the founder of *Biblical Archaeology Review* and a wonderful advocate of biblical archaeology.

Last September, managing editor Brad Macdonald attended an archaeology conference in New Mexico. At the conference, Dr. William Dever, a highly esteemed scholar in the field, delivered a lecture in which he lamented the deteriorating state of biblical archaeology, especially in America. Dr. Dever relayed how universities are shuttering archaeology programs, how key positions in archaeology departments are vacant and not being filled, how students are losing interest in the field, and how some archaeology institutes have lost their identity.

I don't think the situation is quite so bad in Israel, though we have heard similar stories.

From what I can tell, the field of biblical archaeology is experiencing an identity crisis. Unless something changes soon, this crucial field of study will vanish.

After years of consideration, I feel compelled to do what I can to stop this gloomy trend.

This is why we have recently established the Armstrong-Mazar Institute of Biblical Archaeology (AMIBA). I would like to tell you about our new institute.

## Why AMIBA?

AMIBA is a nonprofit, academic and educational institution headquartered in Jerusalem, Israel.

The ultimate mission of this institute is to showcase and share Israel's biblical archaeology with the largest audience possible, especially the people of Israel. One of our main objectives is to promote the Bible as a credible and essential historical source in the practice of archaeology.

As I explained, we believe science and the Bible are compatible and can work in harmony. AMIBA deeply values science and the scientific method. My staff strives to operate at the highest scientific standard possible. We believe that using all available tools to practice good science includes consulting biblical history.

We plan to share and promote Israel's biblical archaeology via multiple platforms.

First, we will continue to publish this magazine under its new name, *Let the Stones Speak* (previously *Watch Jerusalem*). I believe there is an urgent need, and a strong appetite both inside Israel and around the world, for a magazine that vigorously supports and promotes biblical archaeology. As our staff and resources grow, we hope to increase the size of this magazine.

Second, on the institute's new website, [ArmstrongMazar.com](http://ArmstrongMazar.com), visitors can access scientific reports, read well-written articles, watch informative videos and documentaries, listen to archaeology podcasts, study interactive maps and illustrations, and peruse online exhibits. All of our research, as well

as regular updates on our archaeological excavations and activities, will be published on this website. (The site is now live, so please visit it.)

Third, the Armstrong-Mazar Institute of Biblical Archaeology will sponsor public seminars, create archaeological exhibits in Jerusalem and around Israel, and conduct private tours of ancient Jerusalem, primarily the Ophel and the City of David. Tours are now available: To make a reservation, visit the website and click the Tours tab.

Finally, AMIBA will continue to sponsor and participate in archaeological excavations in Jerusalem. As many of our readers know, we have worked in

## AMIBA OBJECTIVES

- To promote the Bible as a credible and essential historical resource in the practice of archaeology in Israel
- To feature and continue the archaeological work of Dr. Eilat Mazar and her grandfather, Prof. Benjamin Mazar
- To analyze and explain archaeological excavations and discoveries past and present in the context of the Bible
- To challenge the unwarranted and unsupported criticisms leveled against the use of the Bible in archaeology in Israel
- To encourage archaeologists to consider and employ Bible history in the practice of archaeology

archaeological excavations in Jerusalem, in the City of David and on the Ophel since 1968. The last 15 years, we supported the work of the late Dr. Mazar in Jerusalem with dozens of Herbert W. Armstrong College students who served as dig volunteers and staff.

AMIBA might be new, but our presence in the field of biblical archaeology is not. In addition to participating in multiple excavations on the Ophel and in the City of David, we have hosted two major exhibits in America: *Seals of Jeremiah's Captors Discovered* and *Seals of Isaiah and King Hezekiah Discovered*. Both exhibits marked the world premiere of major archaeological discoveries from the Ophel and the City of David.

Over the past two decades, we have developed good relations with several key organizations in Israel, including Hebrew University, the Israel Antiquities Authority, the City of David Foundation and the Israel Exploration Society. We are grateful for the support we have received from these institutions, and we will continue to support their various activities and programs.

## Why Fear the Bible?

Many scholars believe the Bible is largely fiction; some say its authors stole their characters and stories from other nations; many believe we have only a handful of artifacts supporting the biblical record. For these reasons and others, many archaeologists and scholars believe that Bible history should not be employed in the practice of archaeology.

This lack of confidence in the Bible is remarkable. Over the past 150 years, literally *hundreds* of biblically significant artifacts have been found, and most have been uncovered in the last few *decades*. Today, dozens of biblical characters—kings, princes, pharaohs, court officials, prophets—have been substantiated through archaeological excavation, not just in Israel, but across the Middle East and beyond.

Archaeology is validating numerous biblical figures and corroborating entire passages and significant features of the historical record preserved in the Bible!

Consider the example of King Hezekiah, one of Judah's great monarchs. The archaeology of King Hezekiah is a good example of science and the Bible working together to increase our understanding—and this example really shows what the Armstrong-Mazar Institute of Biblical Archaeology is all about.

In 2015, Dr. Eilat Mazar and her colleague, epigraphist Reut Ben-Aryeh, revealed the identity of a bulla we had

uncovered in excavations on the Ophel in 2009. The text on the seal read, "Belonging to Hezekiah, [son of] Ahaz, King of Judah."

This electrifying discovery made news headlines around the world. The Hezekiah bulla is the only seal impression belonging to a Judahite king ever to have been found in controlled archaeological excavation. It is proof of the validity of the biblical record. We were excited and honored to publicize the find by exhibiting this bulla, along with several other related artifacts, in our auditorium in Edmond, Oklahoma.

Now, this tiny clay seal is *far* from the only evidence we have of King Hezekiah. Perhaps you have walked through Hezekiah's Tunnel, the 1,750-foot passageway that connects the Gihon Spring with the Pool of Siloam. Hezekiah carved this tunnel during Assyria's eighth-century B.C.E. invasion of Judah. At Tel Lachish, archaeologists have uncovered the massive siege ramp used by the Assyrian army to sack the fortified city. In ancient Nineveh, archaeologists have found clay prisms that literally document Sennacherib's military campaigns in Judah during the time of Hezekiah. King Sennacherib is on record as saying, "As for Hezekiah, I shut him up like a caged bird in his royal city of Jerusalem." We also have the gigantic wall reliefs, also found in Nineveh, that depict King Sennacherib's siege of Lachish.

Just this past July, excavations on the eastern side of the City of David uncovered another section of an Iron Age wall. The archaeologists who excavated the wall believe it was part of the fortifications built by King Hezekiah when he prepared for the Assyrian invasion.



Eilat Mazar gives Gerald Flurry a tour of the Ophel excavation in October 2012.

In just this one example, we have several artifacts—uncovered in scientific excavations conducted in several distinct locations—harmonizing with the biblical record to provide a remarkably detailed understanding of Assyria's invasion of Judah!

Can you see how *compatible* the Bible and science are? Without science, one could easily consider the biblical account a mere myth. On the other hand, these relics of the past—without the history recorded in the books of Kings, Chronicles and Isaiah—could not alone provide the rich, detailed understanding of Assyria's invasion of Judah.

This is a clear example of how science and the Bible can WORK TOGETHER to powerfully enhance our understanding of Israel's history.

This is also an example of what we plan to do with our new institute: AMIBA will bring science and the Bible together to amplify our understanding of history.

Some Bible skeptics might oppose this approach to King Hezekiah. But think about it: Is it really *unscientific*

or *prejudiced* to merely set scientific evidence alongside biblical history? Wouldn't it be *unscientific* and *prejudiced* if, in our analysis of the Hezekiah bulla, Hezekiah's tunnel, the siege ramp at Lachish, the Assyrian wall reliefs and prisms, we categorically *ignored* the history recorded in the Bible?

In truth, the biblical record supplies invaluable context and understanding to the hard evidence emerging from the ancient stones of Israel. Time after time, these two sources of study are proving to be two narrators telling the same story—the magnificent history of the nation of Israel.

## The Mazar Method

I would now like to tell you a little about the scientists who taught us to approach archaeology this way. Their guidance and example were so essential, I felt it was important to include them in the name of our new institute.

From 2006 until her death on May 25, 2021, we worked side by side with Dr. Eilat Mazar on her digs in Jerusalem. Before that, the predecessor of our work, the late Herbert W. Armstrong, had worked alongside Eilat's grandfather Prof. Benjamin Mazar since 1968. Our archaeological legacy in Jerusalem extends back more than 50 years.

There are some very talented archaeologists in the world, especially in Jerusalem, but I believe Dr. Mazar was one of the best. Many factors must converge to make an outstanding scientist or scholar. A person must be intelligent. He needs a strong work ethic and a willingness to labor and sacrifice. A peculiar talent or special capacity for the work is also indispensable. Eilat possessed all these qualities and had a certain gift for excavation.

But what really set Dr. Mazar apart was her scientific integrity and objectivity, and her courage to follow the science even if it went against the grain or made her unpopular.

Isn't this the mark of a great scientist or scholar? He is without partiality and prejudice. He considers *all* the evidence and goes where the evidence leads, even when it contradicts his own expectations

# OUR NEW LIBRARY

When Dr. Eilat Mazar died last May, she left behind a splendid library of about 4,000 books and research materials. Eilat inherited many of her books and other belongings, including furniture, from her grandfather, Prof. Benjamin Mazar, the former president of Hebrew University and a man who, thanks to his pioneering role in many of Israel's institutions, could be considered one of Israel's founding fathers.

When a scholar dies, it is common for his or her research library to be consolidated and sold at auction. Many institutions and wealthy collectors are prepared to pay good money to own the personal library of an esteemed scholar.

Last summer, we asked Dr. Mazar's family about their plans for her library, and inquired about purchasing it. After a few short discussions, Eilat's family agreed to sell us the library. In November, thanks to the tireless efforts of Avital Mazar (Eilat's sister), as well as Eilat's children, to catalogue and process the books, we began taking possession of the library.

In addition to the Mazar library, we acquired another 4,000 archaeology- and history-related books and research materials from Hebrew University in Jerusalem. We are grateful for Hebrew University's support.

This means the Armstrong-Mazar Institute of Biblical Archaeology now has a research library of about 8,000 volumes. Roughly half of the books are in English; the rest are mostly Hebrew, with some in German, French and other languages.

Our new research library is currently operating from one of our properties in Jerusalem. We hope to move it to a new office in Jerusalem, where we anticipate opening the library to the public and to fellow academics and researchers.

or assumptions. The quality that truly distinguished Dr. Mazar as a great scientist was her willingness to set aside the prejudices of her field and consider the biblical record as the invaluable source of history that it is.

In archaeology, there is a lot of room for interpretation. Stones and ancient walls are inert and silent. They don't *literally* speak to the archaeologist, unveiling their history. Ruins and artifacts must be interpreted. They need to be analyzed in the context of their surroundings and their time period, and against the backdrop of other digs and finds in the region and across the nation.

And in the land of the Bible, artifacts must be interpreted against the backdrop of the Bible.

A scientist must not neglect a portion of this evidence and leap to his own private interpretation. His view must be informed by and consistent with the science. It must be grounded in evidence and built around the message told by the artifacts, ruins and the historical text. The more that it is, the more that the true story of these ancient relics *can* be coaxed out.

In this sense, the stones of an excavation *do* speak. They provide the scientific framework of the interpretation that develops.

The role of the archaeologist, then, is to *let* the stones speak—to *listen* to the stones.

Dr. Mazar set an outstanding example in this.

Eilat was a biblical archaeologist. Some think this term refers to a Bible-thumper who disregards the scientific method and wants to see the Bible in every bucket of dirt. This is how many journalists, and even some colleagues, want to characterize Eilat.

But this is untrue. Being a biblical archaeologist simply meant that Dr. Mazar considered the Bible another tool in her archaeology. Eilat, like her grandfather, believed that the Hebrew Bible contained an authentic historical record of people, places and epochs in Israel.

Dr. Mazar developed her interpretations by listening to the stones (science)—and listening to the biblical record. These days, only a handful of archaeologists are prepared to pay heed to the biblical record.

Eilat never considered the Bible more important than science. In fact, she wasn't religious at all. But she was willing to use the Bible in her archaeology, and she unapologetically used Bible history when interpreting her archaeology.

When you view it like this, when you consider Bible history another tool in the pursuit of understanding, the field of biblical archaeology isn't the least bit contentious. And it shouldn't be. It is unfortunate that the role of the Bible in archaeology has become so controversial. I believe this is hindering us from uncovering some truly remarkable history.

Both sides bear some responsibility for this. In the early days of biblical archaeology, some archaeologists were more motivated by religious belief than by science. Though sincere and hardworking, these people simply didn't practice good science. This led to some of them jumping to erroneous conclusions or misidentifying certain sites and artifacts. Some early biblical archaeologists were more inclined to see what their religious convictions hoped for than what the science revealed. Some of them didn't *let the stones speak*.

Around the mid-to-late 19th century, the work of the early biblical archaeologists began to be reexamined. This was reasonable. Some of their conclusions needed to be tested, challenged and revised. Meanwhile, the development of new technologies and methods provided more-accurate scientific understanding.

Sadly, it didn't take long for the Bible critics to begin to make some of the same mistakes made by the individuals they were criticizing. Many of them allowed their aversion to religion and the Bible, *rather than science*, to motivate their criticism of the early Bible scientists. They thus took on an entirely *unscientific* view of the Bible and its place in archaeology. Many outright rejected the Bible as a source of history and a necessary tool in archaeology.

Just like the individuals they criticized as Bible fundamentalists, the Bible skeptics also didn't *let the stones speak!*

Dr. Eilat Mazar, and a handful of other scientists today, avoided the hazards posed by these two extremes. This is how AMIBA operates, too.

## Hope in Archaeology

The nation of Israel, like America, Britain and many others, is experiencing somewhat of an identity crisis. Our nations are losing sight of who they are and forgetting our remarkable history. A growing number of people despair about the future.

One of the solutions to this problem, I believe, is to study history. There is often great hope in history. And when it comes to national history, no country or people on Earth has a past as rich and well documented—and as hope-filled—as Israel.

Today, this ancient past is mainly found in two places: in the Bible and in the ancient tels and ruins scattered across Israel.

The purpose of biblical archaeology is to excavate and understand this history. When we do this, we not only grow in our knowledge and understanding of Israel's ancient past, we can grow in hope. And this is what the Armstrong-Mazar Institute of Biblical Archaeology is all about: education, science, Bible history and hope. ■


*With editorial assistance by Brad Macdonald*

# Rethinking the Search for King Solomon

Are we using the right metrics  
to judge the United Monarchy?

BY CHRISTOPHER EAMES AND BRAD MACDONALD





One of the great debates in the world of biblical archaeology is about the historicity of the biblical kingdom of kings David and Solomon. Were Israel's two greatest kings, as the Bible records, powerful monarchs reigning over a prosperous and significant kingdom? Or were they petty tribal chieftains who governed little more than a small village community in the Judean mountains?

It wasn't long ago that this debate centered around whether David and Solomon even existed. But this controversy effectively ended in 1993 with the discovery of the Tel Dan Stele, which explicitly mentions Judah's royal "house of David." Since then, the debate has shifted to focus on the size and significance of the 10th-century B.C.E. United Monarchy.

A primary metric scholars and archaeologists use to measure the size and significance of an ancient civilization is the presence of large structures. Evidence of what we term "monumental buildings," such as Egypt's pyramids or the giant walls of Babylon, is a sure sign of prosperity and power.

There's no doubt that monumental ruins can be proof of a formidable civilization. But monumentalism is far from the *only* evidence of civilizational power and sophistication. Some believe scientists have focused too much on monumentalism, especially in the debate over the size and significance of David and Solomon.

Do we need to change the metrics of how we measure the significance of the United Monarchy?

Before we look more closely at this topic, it's important to note: Archaeologists *have* uncovered evidence of 10th-century B.C.E. monumental structures, both in Jerusalem and across Israel. In Jerusalem, Dr. Eilat Mazar had excavated a royal complex she attributed to King Solomon (uncovering massive 10th-century walls and a large gatehouse), as well as the similarly dated Large Stone Structure in the City of David. Meanwhile, large structures from the same period have been uncovered in Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer (all cities the Bible says Solomon expanded and fortified; 1 Kings 9:15).

The Bible describes the legendary wealth of Solomon's kingdom. Passages such as

1 Kings 3:12-13 and 1 Kings 10 state that the "riches and honour" of Solomon were unmatched by *any* king during his lifetime.

But how could Solomon's kingdom be greater than that of Egypt, Assyria or Babylon? Tenth-century Israel had some monumental structures, but no pyramids, ziggurats, Forbidden City or Great Wall. Surely the archaeological record suggests that the Bible exaggerates the power of the United Monarchy.

This is the natural conclusion *if* we look primarily for monumentalism as proof that a civilization was significant. But what if we are looking at this too narrowly?

### Rethinking Our Approach

In his book *How the West Won: The Neglected Story of the Triumph of Modernity*, historian Rodney Stark considers the nature of civilizational greatness. Stark examines some of the great empires of history and shows the large dichotomy between the wealth, power and education of the leaders and the general population.

"[M]ost people," Stark writes, "lived lives of misery and exploitation in tyrannical empires that covered huge areas." He then quotes anthropologist Marvin Harris, who observed that those living under powerful regimes existed "just a notch above barest subsistence ... little better off than their oxen."

It's a noteworthy point, especially in our practice of archaeology. Many of the "great" and "significant" empires of history boasted impressive, *monumental* structures and physical accomplishments—but *these came at the expense of their subjects, even their entire economies and societies, which were impoverished.*

"We remain fascinated by accounts of the opulent splendor of ancient imperial courts, of gigantic palaces with golden fixtures," Stark continues. "In all the ancient empires, monumentalism was rife. Pharaohs built pyramids, huge statues such as the Sphinx, immense shrines and even whole personal cities. The rulers of Mesopotamia built enormous ziggurats .... But despite such monuments and fabulous royal wealth, THE GREAT EMPIRES WERE VERY POOR" (emphasis added throughout).

Describing ancient Egypt, Egyptologist Ricardo Caminos wrote that "peasant

families always wavered between ABJECT POVERTY and UTTER DESTITUTION.”

“Too often historians have noted the immense wealth of rulers without grasping the sacrifices this imposed on the populace,” Stark continues. “The Egyptian pyramids, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, and the Taj Mahal were all built as beautiful monuments to repressive rule; THEY WERE WITHOUT PRODUCTIVE VALUE AND WERE PAID FOR BY MISERY AND WANT.”

Looking back on history, the natural tendency is to determine significance by considering the grandness of structures and the opulence of the ruling class. Often, these are the only significant remains we have of the ancient world. But as Stark and others observe, evidence of grand buildings does not define national success or significance.

Think about this in a modern context. We don’t evaluate the size and significance of nations today by primarily considering the wealth of the top 1 percent. We employ all sorts of metrics to determine a nation’s true significance, including living standards, quality of education, literacy rates, the size and wealth of the middle class, economic sustainability, and cultural sophistication.

Imagine what archaeologists thousands of years in the future, with an equivalently limited number of textual references, would think while observing the “ruins” of our societies. What would they deduce?

When you consider history’s greatest, wealthiest, most powerful polities, does Communist-era Romania come to mind? Probably not. But it would to archaeologists in the future, *with a bias toward monumentalism*.

If they looked at large ruins, they might conclude that Romania’s last Communist dictator, Nicolae Ceaușescu, was the *real* “Ramses” of history. After all, he commissioned the heaviest, most expensive and second-most expansive administration building in the world, the “Palace of the Parliament,” for the personality cult surrounding himself and his family. The building, completed in 1997, is believed to weigh over 4 million tons, containing 1 million cubic meters of marble, 700,000 tons of steel and bronze, 3,500 tons of crystal glass and gold-leaf ceilings. The energy cost of Ceaușescu’s palace (70 percent of which remains unused and empty) is roughly equivalent to that of a medium-sized city.

If future archaeologists looked only at personal wealth, Ceaușescu’s Romania might look like one of the most powerful and significant countries in the world! But is this really the mark of national wealth and significance? Romania has the highest poverty rate in all of Europe. An estimated 30 percent of households live in slums; many homes have four or five family members

living in a single room. And this represents marked improvement since the fall of communism in Romania.

What might we learn if we measure the significance of the United Monarchy using some of these other metrics?

Instead of focusing mainly on monumental buildings, what if we consider the evidence of carefully planned and developed towns and cities? What if, in addition to searching for evidence of correspondence between elites, we searched for evidence of widespread literacy? What if there was evidence in 10th-century Israel of a market-driven economy and a well-fed, well-dressed populace with a high standard of living?

Surely this would substantially impact the debate about the biblical historicity of David and Solomon’s United Kingdom—Israel’s overall wealth and significance.

In reality, these are exactly the sort of metrics we *need* to use when studying the United Monarchy. Why? Because Bible history shows this is how David and Solomon’s success was defined.

## **Biblical Monumentalism?**

Although 10th-century B.C.E. Israel didn’t have pyramids or ziggurats, the Bible *does* describe a monumental Solomonic structure. The temple in Jerusalem certainly would have been a “wonder” of the ancient world. (For obvious reasons, this structure is impossible to “unearth”; the temple site has been attacked and leveled numerous times.)

Even still, despite its majesty, the temple was comparatively *small* in size. The main building was only roughly 27 meters long by 9 meters wide (1 Kings 6:2). Compare that to the dimensions of Babylon’s ziggurat temple, which had a 100m-by-100m base. The same applies to the city of Jerusalem itself, which was comparatively *small* during the reigns of David and Solomon (2 Samuel 5).

Certainly, grand Iron II (biblical kingdom period) structures have been discovered in ancient Jerusalem. These include the *largest* Iron Age structure in all Israel, the Stepped Stone Structure; the even larger *unearthed* structure, Charles Warren’s Large Tower (unmatched in height by anything in Israel until the time of the Temple Mount); and the Extra Tower’s stone ashlar, bigger than any other construction stones in Israel until the time of Herod’s Temple Mount. Yet Jerusalem as a whole, compared to other kingdoms or empires, was a small city with a small population.

But this doesn’t mean Jerusalem, or Israel, was insignificant. There is a reason for Jerusalem’s physically diminutive state.

Studying biblical history, it’s clear that Jerusalem was not supposed to be a Babylon, a Ramses or a

While Jerusalem—especially the temple and royal Solomonic complex—was materially significant and impressive, it was not outlandishly large or ostentatious. The city was not created to flaunt the splendor of a human king.



Forbidden City. That is, neither biblical Jerusalem nor its infrastructure were designed to showcase the power and wealth of a human ruler. Jerusalem was selected as the capital for its historical *religious* significance (i.e. Genesis 14, 22). It was also chosen for its *diplomatic* significance: The city was situated directly on the border of the tribal territory of Judah and Benjamin (Joshua 15:8; 18:28). King David's establishment of his government at Jerusalem clearly served as a symbol of tribal reconciliation between the northern tribes formerly supporting the Benjamite King Saul and the new king of the tribe of Judah.

At first, Jerusalem was not built on the back of impoverished citizens or slaves. It was a *joint international effort*, one in which a friendly neighboring power *sent its own experts* to work side by side with skilled Israelite laborers (2 Samuel 5; 1 Kings 5).

The point is, while Jerusalem—especially the temple and royal Solomonic complex—*was* materially significant and impressive, it was not outlandishly large or ostentatious. The city was not created to flaunt the splendor of a human king.

Bible history shows that Jerusalem was created to illustrate and enhance the relationship between God and His people, and to facilitate the education, culture and prosperity of the entire kingdom and populace!

This reality is revealed early on in the Bible. In Deuteronomy 17, Moses gives instruction for Israel's future monarchs: "When thou art come unto the land

which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein; and shalt say: 'I will set a king over me ...' [N]either shall he greatly multiply TO HIMSELF silver and gold. ... [This law] shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life .... THAT HIS HEART BE NOT LIFTED UP ABOVE HIS BRETHREN ..." (verses 14-20).

The Torah contains numerous laws regulating the conduct of a king, right down to the proper treatment of servants and the forbidding of slavery. This admonition for equitable rule is applied specifically to David and Solomon, the kings responsible for conquering the city and establishing it as the capital.

2 Samuel 23, which includes the "last words of David," demands fair and just rule. 1 Kings 2 documents King David's advice to Solomon, where he explicitly admonishes his son to "show kindness" to certain individuals, even allowing them to "eat at thy table." 1 Kings 3 records Solomon's prayer following his coronation. Here, Israel's new king prays that God would give him "an understanding heart" to rule over "Thy people which Thou hast chosen, a great people .... [F]or who is able to judge this Thy great people?" (verses 8-9).

The Bible is clear: The kingdom of Israel, especially under King David and King Solomon, was to be a *different* kind of empire. The driving aspiration of Israel's leaders wasn't personal aggrandizement or the construction of monumental buildings to showcase their power; the chief goal of the monarch was to facilitate the

development of an entire population of wealthy, sophisticated, educated people to create God's model nation.

Of course, the majority of Israelite rulers did *not* adhere to this ethos. But David and Solomon in large part did! Under these two kings, not only did the capital city of Jerusalem prosper and grow in wealth and stature—the *whole kingdom did!*

When we examine the historicity of the United Monarchy, we need to measure it by this standard.

So using these metrics, let's consider what the archaeological record tells us about David and Solomon.

## Welcome to Timna

Historical realities dictate that we should not expect to find evidence of a wealthy populace by uncovering an abundance of gold, silver and other signs of material riches. The land of Israel has been invaded, pillaged and destroyed dozens of times throughout history, so such discoveries are a rarity.

But there is plenty of other evidence available for us to study, even 3,000 years on. For a case study, let's travel to the far south of Israel and examine a *desert mining community*.

Timna is an ancient desert copper-mining site located in the far south of modern-day Israel, just north of the Gulf of Aqaba. (See map, pg. 14) The site lies in the ancient geographical region of Edom. The Bible records that this region was conquered by King David at the start of the 10th century: "And he [David] put garrisons in Edom; and all the Edomites became servants to David" (1 Chronicles 18:13).

The Timna mining region is dotted with massive slag heaps, some more than 6 meters high, and is peppered with *10,000 mine shafts*, some more than 40 meters deep. These mines have been operational on and off over the course of several millennia.

When these mines were first excavated in the 20th century, they were sensationally reported to be mines of King Solomon. Famous archaeologist Nelson Glueck posited that they were the very mines from which Solomon extracted copper to manufacture the vast amount of bronze contained in the temple. By the end of the 20th century, this assertion had been overturned, with archaeologists pointing instead to a 12th-century B.C.E. Egyptian shrine and other Egyptian remains in the area, showing the Egyptians could only have been responsible for what was a prodigious output of copper at this time in history.

As it turns out, more recent excavations and testing have shown that the earliest excavators were right: The mines do in fact belong in the same period as King Solomon. In 2013, new carbon dating and slag analysis revealed that copper production actually



*dropped off* at the time of Egyptian control and only began picking up after they *left* the region. Then, two centuries later, the mines *surged* to their *greatest productive quantity in history*, specifically during the 10TH CENTURY B.C.E.—the very time of kings David and Solomon. (Interestingly, overall productivity dropped off again during the ninth century B.C.E., after the United Monarchy broke apart.)

Dr. Erez Ben-Yosef of Tel Aviv University is one of Timna's primary excavators. Over the past couple of years, he has highlighted what he considers an "architectural bias" in archaeology (especially as it applies to Timna). He believes there is a tendency to overemphasize the presence of stone structures and related "monumentalism" as "proof" of the existence of powerful ruling kingdoms. He highlights how this architectural bias led to the misassociation of Timna's prodigious output with Egyptian dominance.

"[Later] research in Timna *intentionally avoided using the Old Testament* as a background to archaeological interpretations—in accord with the increasing awareness of biblical criticism in these decades," wrote Ben-Yosef. "[B]etween 1970 and 2012 this paradigm was so dominant that contradicting evidence was suppressed and overlooked .... [T]he Hathor Shrine and the inscriptions bearing the names of 19th and 20th Dynasties pharaohs, which indeed testify to an Egyptian imperial involvement in the Late Bronze Age, overshadowed any contrasting evidence available at



Timna Valley

the time” (“The Architectural Bias in Current Biblical Archaeology,” 2019).

We’ll get to some of the intriguing individual discoveries in a moment. But first, consider this overview of the Timna mines and their prodigious 10th-century peak-production with a similar example examined by Stark in *How the West Won*.

## Industrial Enterprise

In the same chapter dealing with monumentalism and the tyrannical poverty of ancient empires, Stark cites a case in point of mining many centuries later in China. The application to Timna here is noteworthy.

Late in the 10th century C.E., a powerful iron industry developed in northern China. By 1018, Chinese industrialists—private citizens—were producing about 35,000 tons of iron per year. They were making a lot of money, much of which they reinvested in their mines, which led to even greater production, technological development (and general prosperity). Importantly, Stark emphasizes that China’s thriving iron industry was “not a government operation.”

By the 11th century, the thriving iron industry was dead. What had happened? Stark explains how the Chinese imperial court—when it discovered the growing wealth of the industrialists and the high wages they were paying their peasant workers—swept in and secured the mines in a state monopoly. Unsurprisingly, the output of the mines slowed and finally stopped.

When “the elite seizes all production above the minimum needed for survival, people have no motivation to produce more,” Stark writes. “The economic system of ancient empires and of all despotic states has come to be known as the *command economy*, since the state commands and coerces markets and labor ....”

Powerful authoritarian governments tend to monopolize private industry. Enlightened, sophisticated and advanced governments refrain from doing so.

The two sides of this coin can be seen at Timna.

Evidence at the site shows that under Egypt’s despots in the 13th to 12th centuries, the mining operation was relatively sluggish, only starting to pick up once the Egyptians left the region. Conversely, the mine reached its *highest* level of production in the 10th century B.C.E. Not only that, as Ben-Yosef discovered, evidence shows that this is when new smelting technologies were being developed, causing the mine to increase production and efficiency.

Clearly, the central government controlling the region at this time served to *encourage* Timna’s copper production. Only a deferential and benevolent government would have allowed for the general populace, including this distant mining town, to become successful and enriched—a system opposite a “command economy.”

This sort of central administration could not only be classified as significant and advanced, it’s also entirely consistent with the Bible’s description of Solomon’s administration.

But it’s notable not just *what* and *how* the 10th-century Timna miners were producing—it’s also what they were *wearing* and *eating* while doing it.

## Well-Dressed Miners?

“In despotic states where rulers concentrate on exacting the maximum amount from those they control, subjects become notably avaricious too,” Stark writes. “They consume, hoard and hide the fruits of their labor, and they fail to produce nearly as much as they might. ... *The result is a standard of living far below the society’s potential productive capacities.*”

This was certainly *not* the case at 10th-century Timna. As *Haaretz’s* Ariel David reported in 2019: “[E]xcavations at Timna have shown that around the year 1000 B.C.E. ... fortifications were built around the site and remains were found showing that the *local workers were clothed with expensive textiles and enjoyed food imported from afar.*” These “fortifications” align with 1 Chronicles 18:13, which says David built “garrisons” in the area.

The evidence of rich food and clothing surprised scientists. For decades, Timna was assumed to be a dirty,

Textile fragments  
collected during  
excavations at Timna



For decades, Timna was assumed to be a dirty, grungy mining town where slaves lived a base existence. But several snippets of clothing unearthed from the Timna dumps in 2019 tell a very different story.

grungy mining town where slaves lived a base existence (with Glueck naming part of the site “Slave Hill”). But several snippets of clothing unearthed from the Timna dumps in 2019 tell a very different story.

First, the clothing of this period was not the plain, minimalist style worn by Egyptian workmen. It was more along the lines of Joseph’s “coat of many colors.” Several beautiful, colorful fragments of woven wool fabric were found, some variously striped with orange, black, blue and red weaves. (The Bible often describes the use of such blue and red dyes, and even mentions a personal request by King Solomon for a skilled man who can work in “crimson and blue yarn”—2 Chronicles 2:7; New International Version.) Analysis of the samples revealed that these fabric colors were achieved with a rather complex dyeing practice using certain faraway Mediterranean plants.

And just last year, a scrap of 10th-century royal purple (*argaman*) fabric was discovered at the mines. To emphasize just how significant this is, consider: This fabric dye, at various points throughout history, was traded for as much as 10-20 times its weight in gold. This precious shellfish-derived dye is mentioned

several times in the Bible, particularly in relation to the temple—yet this discovery constitutes the first time it has been discovered in Iron Age Israel, predating existing specimens by 1,000 years. And it was found in an *ancient refuse* dump in the middle of the desert, in a 10th-century *mining* location.

Besides the clothing adorning Timna’s residents, archaeologists uncovered a bounty of other remains that point to the richness, productivity and wealth of this desert mining community. The remains were remarkably well preserved, thanks to the intense, dry heat. These included dozens of other textile fragments, as well as rich Mediterranean-sourced foods that could not have readily been grown in the area. Scientists found evidence of figs, grapes, olives, pomegranates, wheat and almonds—and even fish *not* sourced from the nearby Gulf of Aqaba, but from the north, from the distant Mediterranean. *All roads led NORTH—into Israel’s heartland.* Even analysis of donkey manure revealed a diet of crop that had originally come from the *Jerusalem* region.

What kind of wealthy, well-funded, well-dressed, well-fed people were on the scene at this time? And what kind

of central government existed to allow for such a high standard of living? Bible history provides the answers.

As noted, Dr. Ben-Yosef highlights the problem of “architectural bias” among those who dismiss the significance of this 10th-century period in antiquity based on a lack of monumentalism or stone structures, even when there is substantial evidence of advanced civilization.

In his 2019 article, Ben-Yosef wrote: “This [archaeological] flaw ... is essentially the overemphasis given to stone-built features in the identification of social complexity, geopolitical power and historical role of biblical-era societies. Inadvertently, the debate and the focus on the chronological placement of architectural remains have deepened the reliance on stone as *the key* for assessing the strength, size, geopolitical impact and even mere existence of biblical-era kingdoms, and in turn for ‘solving’ questions related to the historicity of the biblical accounts.

“[T]he total reliance on stone-built archaeological features to assess social complexity [has] a fundamental impact on the attempts to assess the historicity of biblical accounts based on the archaeological record, *evidently by generating a tendency towards minimalism*. This is especially relevant to the constant efforts to understand the genesis of ancient Israel and its neighboring kingdoms.”

### What Is Real Wealth?

If we are looking primarily for signs of “monumentalism” among 10th-century Israelite ruins, it isn’t hard to dismiss those that *do* exist (as is often done by the skeptics) and conclude that David and Solomon were little more than tribal chieftains ruling over a gaggle of loosely aligned villages. But if we expand the metrics we use to measure the significance of the United Monarchy, the debate quickly changes. The example of Timna, an isolated mining town with a thriving economy and wealthy citizens, is compelling—and it is *not* an isolated example. Are there other “Timna’s” out there?

In Jerusalem and all across Israel, evidence exists suggesting the biblical record is accurate when it describes the United Monarchy as prosperous, expansive and significant—not just for its rulers, but also its general population.

What kind of wealthy, well-funded, well-dressed, well-fed people were on the scene at this time? And what kind of central government existed to allow for such a high standard of living? Bible history provides the answers.

How, then, should the real “wealth” of a kingdom be measured? By its impressive structures? The 13th-century B.C.E. Ramses is considered one of the richest, most powerful and wealthy pharaohs of all time, with all the associated “monumental” structures. But what would the contemporary workers at Egyptian-controlled Timna mines say? How would they evaluate their own prosperity? How would they evaluate the pharaoh? How would they compare their situation with that of their 10th-century Timna counterparts? How would they evaluate *our* civilization, which looks back on that Egyptian empire with wonder?

How should *real* national wealth be measured? By the ruler? Or by the ruled?

In evaluating the evidence of David’s and Solomon’s significance, we should not expect to find an ostentatious royal family dripping in hoarded riches and honored with cult-like monumentalism at the expense of their citizens. Instead, we should look for evidence of an overall populace of educated, cultured, wealthy people living and participating in a vibrant economy. That is the superior national wealth spoken of in the Bible.

And that is the wealth being uncovered by archaeology. ■

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# The Wealth of the Kingdom

## CIVIL ENGINEERING BLUEPRINTS ●

Parallel Iron IIA gatehouses have been found in Jerusalem, **Gezer**, **Megiddo** and **Hazor** (1 Kings 9:15). Comparative analysis of the chambered gatehouses reveals similar dimensions to the nearest centimeter—thus attesting to a centralized governmental authority and “building code” utilizing a parallel blueprint.

The similarities also indicate equality in building standards. This gatehouse design wasn't about arbitrarily making a single city greater or safer than another based on the whims of its individual ruler. There was a tangible, structural code employed in construction across the kingdom. (Other “standardized” Judahite buildings include casemate-wall houses and four-room houses.)



## THE EGYPTIAN EYEWITNESS ●

The 13th-century B.C.E. Merneptah stele records that “Israel is laid waste, and his seed is not.” This fits precisely with the parallel judges period. Note the words of the contemporary Prophetess Deborah: “[T]he highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways. The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel ...” (Judges 5:6-7; King James Version).

About 300 years later (see 1 Kings 14; 2 Chronicles 12). As recorded on **Sheshonq's Bubastite Portal wall inscription**, dozens of Israelite cities and villages were defeated and pillaged. How was this possible if Israel at this time were merely a small rural community led by tribal chieftains? Archaeologists Israel Finkelstein and Neil Silberman claim that only around 5,000 people lived in 10th-century B.C.E. Judah. Why would Sheshonq/Shishak invade Israel if there were virtually nobody there and no riches to pillage? Bible history tells a very different story.



## POTTERY

Closer analysis of pottery remains indicates a transformation beginning with Israel's Iron IIA period. It is from this time that there is some evidence of wheel-thrown pots being made (a process that allows for smoother designs and faster, mass-production manufacturing). It is also from this period forward that we get an indication of local pottery vessels made of more carefully processed, specific clay compounds, as well as an increased interest in overall product quality over the preceding Iron I period.



MEGIDDO

HAZOR

MEDITERRANEAN  
SEA



## LITERACY

One key proof of national wealth and an educated populace is literacy, which is rare in the ancient world. Ancient typical writing systems were often comprised of hieroglyphs and cuneiform syllabaries, and contained hundreds, even thousands of symbols that only a dedicated scribe could learn.

Rodney Stark notes the importance of literacy as a measure of civilizational significance, although he largely credits Greece and its 24-letter alphabet as lighting the spark of literacy among the common man. But Greece's alphabet was derived originally from the Hebrew-Phoenician alphabet.

Recent discoveries, particularly from later Judahite periods, show, again, "surprising" levels of literacy, outdoing even the examples cited by Stark. At one tiny Judahite desert outpost, **Tel Arad**, analysis of 18 different pottery "ostraca" inscriptions attested to at least 12 different writers, which included even the low-ranked quartermaster's deputy.

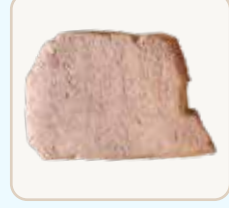
Such ostraca are not found during the earlier Solomonic era. It appears that these rather primitive, yet easily preserved, items were not used as a form of communication at this time. One theory is that papyrus was the primary writing material, which over time disintegrates unless carefully preserved.

One notable hint toward literacy comes from the "Solomonic" city of Gezer. The 10th-century B.C.E. "**Gezer Calendar**" is a small etched hand tablet by a certain "Abijah" (a common Israelite name during this biblical period). It contains a month-by-month accounting of various harvesting duties. The inscription is believed to have constituted some kind of school exercise, given the easily erasable limestone material it was written on, the mundane nature of the text, and the wider, sloppier-than-typical (for official inscriptions) lettering. Other suggestions include a farmer's "calendar" or even the lyrics to an ancient nursery rhyme.

## 'SOLOMON'S MINES'

Carbon dating and slag analysis at the **Timna copper mines** prove that the mines operated at their highest output during the 10th century B.C.E. (a period in which the Bible attests the Israelites as having control over the region—1 Chronicles 18:13). Copper is a primary component of bronze, thus fitting the need for an enormous quantity of the material described in the biblical account of Solomon's temple building. General finds at the site during this period consistently point to a northward-bound trade, with remains of pack-animal feed traceable to the Jerusalem region, and rich clothing dyes and food products likewise supplied from the northern Mediterranean coast in Israelite territory. Similar evidence, dating to the same period has been found at the **Faynan copper mining site**.

GEZER



JERUSALEM

DEAD SEA

TEL ARAD

FAYNAN



TIMNA

RED SEA

# TOP 10 BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY DISCOVERIES OF 2021

CORONAVIRUS LOCKDOWNS ONCE AGAIN INTERRUPTED ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS IN ISRAEL IN 2021, BUT IT DIDN'T PREVENT THE DISCOVERY OF SOME MARVELOUS ARTIFACTS AND REVELATIONS. HERE'S OUR SELECTION OF THE TOP FINDS OF 2021, IN ASCENDING ORDER OF SIGNIFICANCE.

## 10 KING HEROD'S STAIRCASE AND GOLD RING

Robinson's Arch is one of Jerusalem's most iconic archaeological features. Named after the biblical scholar Edward Robinson, who first identified the arch in 1838, this 15-meter-wide archway juts out of the Western Wall some 20 meters above ground level.

Archaeologists have debated its original design and purpose for decades. In March 2021, less than two months before she died, archaeologist Dr. Eilat Mazar published new evidence demonstrating a revolutionary design that suggests the colossal stairway built by King Herod in the first century was far grander than originally believed.

In her final book, *Over the Crossroads of Time: Jerusalem's Temple Mount Monumental Staircases*, Dr. Mazar concluded that the famous arch was actually part of a monumental FOUR-way staircase. Prior to this, archaeologists assumed it was merely a standard stairway to street level, with either one or two entrances. If Robinson's Arch was part of a giant four-way staircase, as the new evidence suggest, then it is utterly unique among ancient classical architecture.

In her final book, Dr. Mazar also published the discovery of a 2,000-year-old miniature gold ring from her grandfather's

excavations, which had not yet been revealed to the public. The tiny "baby's ring" could only fit the finger of a newborn. The discovery appropriately constitutes a final "joint effort" between the queen of Jerusalem archaeology, Eilat



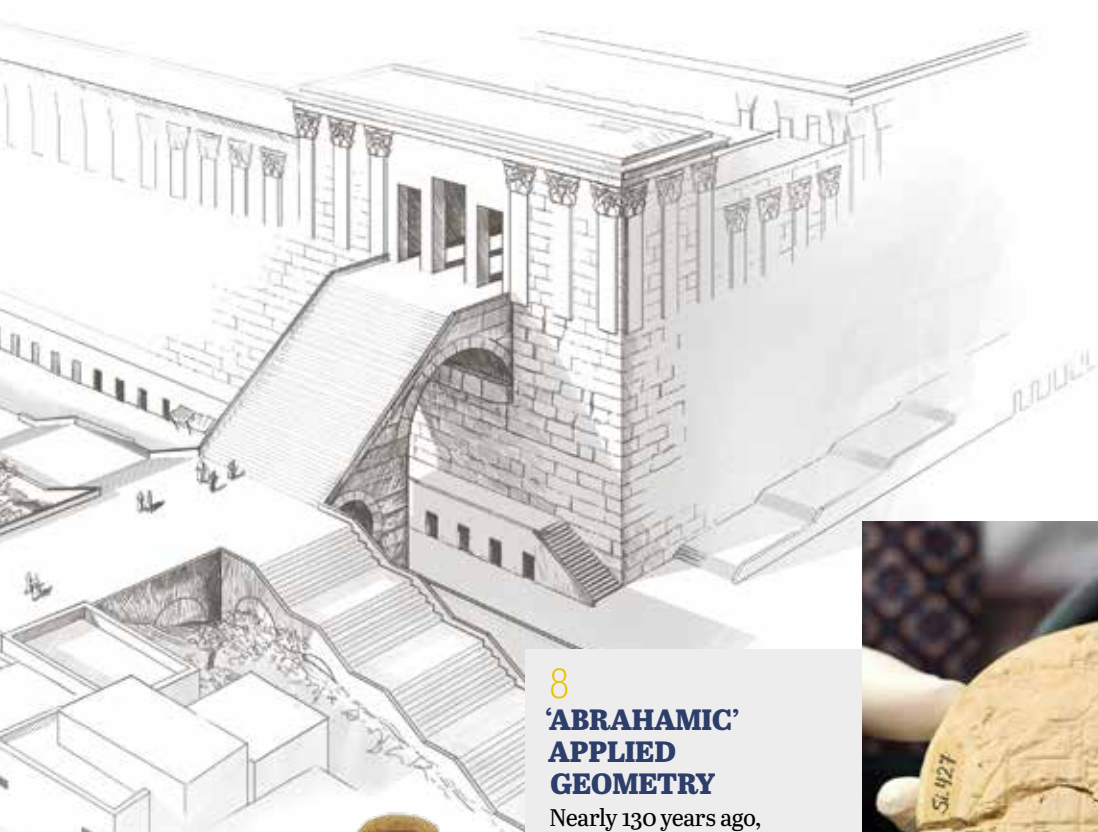
## 9 'JABAL'S' CATTLE CULT

On April 30, a six-person team of researchers from the University of Western Australia published a research article in the journal *Antiquity* identifying monumental rectangular stone structures, or *mustatils* (Arabic for "rectangles") scattered throughout northwest Arabia as part of a prehistoric cattle cult. This new research confirmed the suspicions of many scientists.

The stone structures, all of which were dated to the sixth millennium B.C.E., were characterized

as the "first large-scale, monumental ritual landscape anywhere in the world [and] the earliest evidence for cattle cult in the Arabian Peninsula." Along with cattle-related remains and rock art, evidence showed that the *mustatils* were more than merely cattle pens; they were also used in ritualistic activity.

This "monumental" discovery invokes a detail recorded in Genesis 4:19-20. In this passage, Jabal, son of Lamech (an individual sometimes associated with this Arabian region), is identified as "the father of such



## 8 **'ABRAHAMIC' APPLIED GEOMETRY**

Nearly 130 years ago, scientists uncovered an intriguing mathematical artifact. However, its significance wasn't fully understood until recently, thanks to the work of Dr. Daniel Mansfield, a mathematician from the University of New South Wales in Australia, who calls it "the oldest example of applied geometry in the world."

The artifact, known as Si.427, is a circular tablet that dates to the Old Babylonian Period (1900–1600 B.C.E.). The face of the tablet depicts a land map divided into specific territories and boundaries. What is remarkable is that the tablet is not just a rough sketch, but an extremely accurate land survey.

Even more remarkably, Dr. Mansfield's research shows that the map displays an understanding and application of the Pythagoras Theorem, often credited to the sixth century B.C.E. mathematician Pythagoras. In other words, Si.427 shows that the ancient Babylonians were using Pythagoras's math theories more than 1,000 years before he was even born!

Dr. Mansfield's findings mark a sensational development in our understanding of the history of mathematics. It also attests to the mathematical genius of ancient Babylon, and perhaps one especially influential mathematician and astronomer mentioned by the likes of early historians Berossus, Josephus, Eupolemus and Philo: *Abraham!*

Born and raised in ancient Babylon, both the Bible and ancient documents record that Abraham was a skilled mathematician and land surveyor. (Genesis 23:17-18)

Thanks to Si.427, we now know that the Babylonians during the time of Abraham did, in fact, possess an understanding of advanced mathematics, with a direct application to land surveying.

Mazar, and the dean of biblical archaeology, her beloved grandfather Benjamin. The ring is a tiny testament to nearly a century of Jerusalem archaeological work by the Mazars, uncovering the rich history of the Holy Land.

as dwell in tents [the Hebrew word can mean ritualistic chambers], and *of such as have cattle*" (King James Version). The italicized portion is not in the original Hebrew.

This passage has long been interpreted by Jewish commentators as the first biblical record of institutionalized idol worship (i.e. the fifth-century Genesis Rabbah, 23:3), with Jabal being the "first among men to erect temples to idols" (*Legends of the Jews*, 1.3.5); notably, such early worship in the context of *cattle*.

## 7 ARMON HANATZIV BOG

A private toilet cubicle was discovered during recent excavations at Armon HaNatziv, a wealthy eighth-to-seventh-century B.C.E. promenade area overlooking the City of David. The toilet, made of carved limestone, is a comparatively rare discovery, as only the wealthy of the ancient world typically could afford such luxuries.

In addition to the seat and septic tank beneath (a veritable treasure trove for studying ancient diets),

some 30 to 40 bowls were found within the cubicle area—items the excavators theorize may have held some type of air freshener, such as aromatic oils. Just outside the toilet cubicle, an ornamental garden was discovered as part of the mansion grounds, containing remains of fruit trees and aquatic plants.

The so-called Commissioner's Palace fits with the biblical period of increasing wealth and opulence at the end of the reign



of King Hezekiah, following Sennacherib's failed siege (i.e. 2 Chronicles 32:27-29).

## 6 JERUSALEM'S EAST WALL

In 2021, archaeologists working on the eastern slopes of the City of David uncovered a significant stretch of a First Temple period fortification wall that stood at the time of the Babylonian invasion in the sixth century B.C.E. This stretch of wall was preserved to a length of 40 meters and is 3 meters tall and 5 meters wide. Below the wall, a number of significant small finds were discovered, including administrative stamps.

Archaeologists are yet to secure a definitive date for the wall's construction but believe that it was probably constructed around the late eighth and early seventh century B.C.E. This would fit neatly within the biblical account

of King Hezekiah's siege preparations and "strengthening" of Jerusalem's wall in anticipation of an attack by King Sennacherib and the Assyrian army (2 Chronicles 32:5).

The discovery of this stretch of wall completes a much longer fortification line. Separate lengths of this city wall on either end, to the east and south of the city, had previously been uncovered. With the discovery of this in-between length of wall, Jerusalem's



overall southeastern fortification can now be seen to a full combined length of 200 meters.



## 5 CAVE OF HORRORS DEAD SEA SCROLL

Within a cave located on the edge of a sheer cliff in the Dead Sea region (ominously called the "Cave of Horrors"), archaeologists uncovered a trove of 2,000-year-old items, including some 80 fragments of a Bible scroll containing preserved verses from the books of Nahum and Zechariah. In order to excavate the cave, archaeologists had to rappel 80 meters

from the top of the cliff.

After examining the script, experts from the Israel Antiquities Authority Dead Sea Scrolls unit determined that it was the product of two different scribes. The texts were notable in that, while they were written in Greek, the names of God were written in the Hebrew language used during the First Temple period.

## 4 SOLOMONIC PURPLE

Excavations at the ancient desert copper mines in Timna, southern Israel, may provide a glance into the wardrobes of King David and Solomon. Published in the January issue of the *PLOS One* journal, the discovery of fragments of 10th-century B.C.E. royal purple-dyed fabric was announced among the refuse of the ancient miners.

Royal purple, known as *argaman* in the Hebrew Bible, was a precious shellfish-derived dye

mentioned several times in conjunction with the reign of Solomon—the color used most significantly for the temple. Roman records show that the dye was so valuable that it was worth as much as 10-20 times its weight in gold. This rare archaeological discovery (due to



the fragile preservation of textiles) predates the oldest existing example of the dye by 1,000 years.

## 3 ALPHABETIC SCRIPT

In April, researchers from Austria and Israel announced the discovery of an inked potsherd inscription (ostrakon), which constitutes, by a significant margin, the oldest alphabetic script discovered in Israel. Dating to the 15th century B.C.E., the fragment has been hailed as a “missing link” in the development of the alphabet. Previously, the earliest clear

example of the script in the Levant dated to the 12th century B.C.E.

This discovery challenges the theories that the alphabet was brought into Canaan by the Egyptians during a later period of Egyptian dominance. It proves that the alphabetic script was present in Canaan some 200 years earlier than what certain scholars had proposed and that it can be witnessed

at the time the Israelites arrived in the Promised Land, as per biblical chronology. (Ironically, the earliest forms of the alphabet, “proto-Sinaitic”—predating its emergence in Canaan—have been found among a *slave* community in Egypt.)



## 2 JERUSALEM'S EARTHQUAKE—AND PIGLET?

In excavations on the eastern slope of the City of David, close to the Gihon Spring, archaeologists uncovered evidence of the catastrophic eighth-century B.C.E. event dubbed “Amos’s Earthquake.” The excavation unveiled a collapsed wall and displaced structures. Usually, damage of this magnitude is accompanied by a burn layer or the remains of weapons, both of which suggest destruction by conflict. In this case, there was no such evidence.

Written in the early-to-mid-eighth century B.C.E., the books of Isaiah and Amos warn of an earthquake befalling the land of Israel. The book of Amos begins with the postscript: “The words

of Amos ... two years before *the earthquake.*” The infamous quake is also documented in Zechariah 14:5.

Alongside the evidence of an earthquake, archaeologists found the remains of one of the casualties of this event—the articulated skeleton of a small piglet. Given that the piglet was located in a place where butchering evidently took place, it is clear the animal was intended for consumption. Bible critics point to the presence of a pig in Jerusalem as evidence against the existence of early biblical kosher laws.

In fact, the presence of a pig in



Jerusalem during the mid-eighth century B.C.E. fits perfectly with the biblical record. For example, passages in Isaiah explicitly condemn the Jerusalemites for “eating swine’s flesh” (Isaiah 65:2, 4; 66:17). Instead of disputing the biblical account, this fascinating discovery verifies it.



## 1 GIDEON/JERUBBAAL INSCRIPTION

For the first time ever, archaeologists excavating in southern Israel uncovered an inscription bearing the name of a biblical-era judge. The 3,100-year-old inked pottery inscription bears the name of Jerubbaal, the lesser-known name for Gideon (Judges 7:1).

The pottery inscription was found in Khirbet al-Ra'i, in excavations led by Prof. Yosef Garfinkel and Saar Ganor. There is some

debate as to whether or not this was *the* Jerubbaal of the biblical account. Some have noted the roughly 120-kilometer distance between the findspot and the famous battle between Gideon and Midian. However, there are several reasons to believe this *is* the Jerubbaal of the Bible.

First, the ostrakon dates to the same time period (end of the 12th century B.C.E.). Second,

Jerubbaal's fame spread across *all* Israel (with pilgrimages from all Israel to his hometown). Third, Jerubbaal's large family included 70 sons, who would have necessarily spread over a vast area. Fourth, the findspot of Khirbet al-Ra'i is linked to the Gideon account: Judges 6 shows that the Midianite oppression extended all the way to include this general territory on the Philistine border (verse 4). Fifth, the name Jerubbaal is rare, mentioned *only* in the Bible in connection to Gideon and found *only* on this potsherd dating to the same period. And finally, the meaning of the name, as explained in Judges 6, makes it one that would not necessarily be favorable to either a follower of God or Baal, thus explaining a rarity of use.

The evidence is tantalizing that this is *the* Gideon/Jerubbaal of the Bible. At the very minimum, the ostrakon demonstrates the use of the name during this period.

## SPECIAL MENTION SOLOMON'S SILVER TRADE

Dr. Sean Kingsley has been diving in Israel's coastal waters since he was a teenager. In his quarterly magazine, Kingsley shared evidence from both underwater and above-ground excavations pointing toward the biblical maritime trade empire of King Solomon, and specifically the sourcing of "Solomon's silver."

The Bible records that, together with the Phoenicians, Israel's 10th-century B.C.E. king presided over a vast commercial empire, one that included a network of mines, ports and ships, including a large port in Tarshish (1 Kings 10). Compiling a veritable mountain of discoveries, Dr. Kingsley identifies the Spanish city of Huelva, linked

with the famous silver mine of antiquity (Rio Tinto, still in use today), as biblical Tarshish. (The name for the mine in 17th-century Spanish literature was "Cerro Solomon," or the "Hill of Solomon.")

Excavations at Huelva revealed massive Iron Age furnaces and sandstone molds for processing silver. Additional finds include an abundance of Phoenician pottery as well as murex snails, the source of the famous royal purple dye the Phoenicians



were experts in processing, and which the Bible records Solomon importing. This incredible evidence has been dated to within the 10th century B.C.E. the period of King Solomon's reign. ■

# Let the Stones—and the Science—Speak

How have we arrived at the point where many archaeologists consider using Bible history to be the relic of a past era of archaeological research?

BY BRENT NAGTEGAAL

A FEW WEEKS AGO, I FOUND A LITTLE BLUE BOOK. I was moving boxes inside the cluttered office of the late Dr. Eilat Mazar, which, aside from a couple of laptop computers, probably looked exactly like it did when it was occupied by Eilat's grandfather Prof. Benjamin Mazar, eminent archaeologist and former president of Hebrew University.

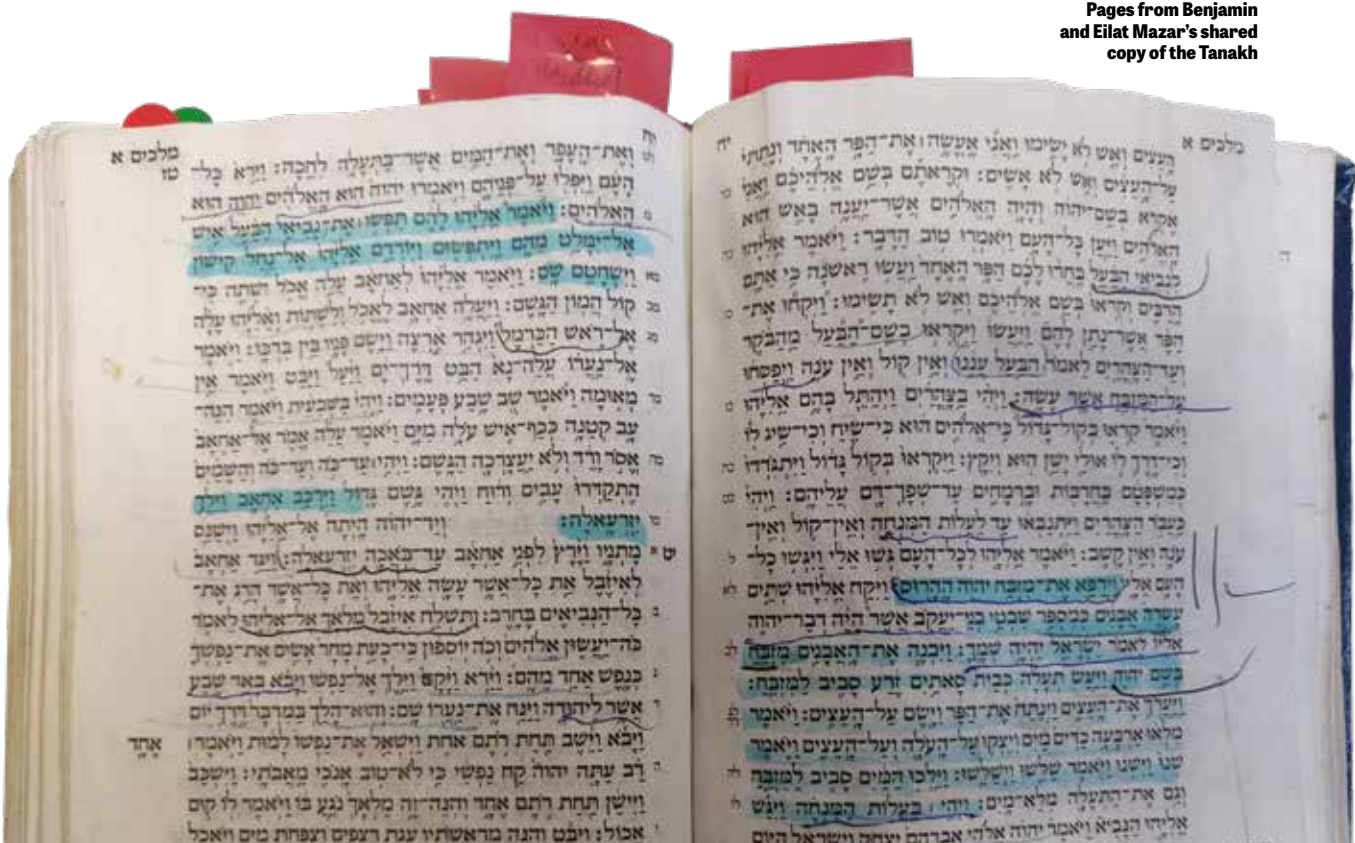
Desks, shelves, drawers and metal closets were covered and filled with books, final excavation reports, binders, field notes, photographs, excavation maps and even boxes of unpublished artifacts, all representing two lifetimes of scientific work. But this tiny blue book caught my eye.

The pages were dog-eared, wrinkled and discolored after decades of dusty fingers passing through them again and again, making so many highlights, underlines and handwritten notes in pencil and in blue and black ink that much of the print was hard to read.

It was a copy of the Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible. Inside the cover, it bore two names—Benjamin Mazar and Eilat Mazar.

I worked with Dr. Mazar for more than 15 years. She had told me enough stories about her grandfather for me to know that she inherited this trait of highlighting and marking from him, just as she inherited this book: Even though neither she nor he was religious, the reason they left behind such a heavily marked Hebrew Bible is that they both used it—heavily—as part of their archaeological work. Even still, I was moved by their obvious affection for the Bible.

Pages from Benjamin and Eilat Mazar's shared copy of the Tanakh





Benjamin and  
Eilat Mazar

I thought about the advice Professor Mazar had given Dr. Mazar, and that she had given me: “Pore over it [the Bible] again and again,” he said, “for it contains within it descriptions of genuine historical reality.”

These two scientists practiced what they preached for almost a century. Then I thought, *Who is going to keep this work alive?*

Professor Mazar’s use of the Bible was natural for him: He was known for carrying it everywhere he went. Dr. Mazar’s use of the Bible was natural for her. But using the biblical record is unnatural for most modern archaeologists. Journalist Andrew Lawler recently wrote, “[U]p until the end of her life, she remained one of the last university scientists digging with a spade in one hand and a Bible in the other, eager to uncover clues to the people and places described in Scripture” (Aeon, Dec. 10, 2021).

With Dr. Mazar gone, what will be the future of biblical archaeology?

### ‘Let the Stones Speak’

One of Dr. Mazar’s most famous phrases was, “Let the stones speak.” She used it in almost every interview, and I probably heard her say it dozens of times. In a way, it perfectly embodies her archaeological approach.

What did she mean by this? Some of her peers argued that what the stones and artifacts reveal

requires interpretation, and obviously it does. So why did Dr. Mazar keep saying, “*Let the stones speak?*”

Discoveries made in excavation rarely interpret themselves. Usually, material uncovered in excavation provides only a narrow understanding. The best that science can do of itself is inform us about the material culture of the people: the types of vessels they used, the weapons they fought with, the tools they employed for industry. Through careful excavation, archaeologists are then able to determine *when* the items were used. If they can know this, then they can date the structure in which they were found. All of this is important archaeological information. But absent historical records and accounts, they tell us little about the broader nature—the culture, history and behavior—of the actual people who used them.

For example, ancient pagan idols have been uncovered across Israel,

though they have been present in certain time periods but missing in others. Why is this? Did the idolaters suddenly become atheists? If we only considered the idols, it’s impossible to understand the full picture. But when you consult the ancient text, you find specific records that one Jewish king led one generation of Jews in idolatry, and the next not only discontinued their use but eradicated them from the territory almost completely.

Without a historical text, our understanding is incomplete and largely conjecture. With a historical text, our understanding becomes fuller, richer *and* more accurate.

Dr. Mazar excelled at explaining relationships of artifacts, buildings and stones to human history. Why? Because the ancient text Eilat relied on so heavily was the best, most scientifically and historically accurate source available for the land of Israel.

“Archaeology cannot stand by itself as a very technical method,” Eilat once told me. “It is actually quite primitive without the support of written documents. Excavating the ancient land of Israel and not reading and getting to know the biblical source is stupidity. I don’t see how it can work. It’s like excavating a classical site and ignoring Greek and Latin sources. It is impossible.”

Dr. Mazar did not consider the Bible divine; she actually thought that some of its records could have been





## How did we arrive at the point where many archaeologists consider using Bible history to be a relic of a past era of archaeological research?

subject to exaggeration or error (like Greek, Latin and all other historical sources). Yet for her and her grandfather, “there was no question about the Bible reflecting history, [and] there was no real reason to assume, ever, that what the Bible tells us is not a historical source.”

Dr. Mazar, no more devout than the next archaeologist, *could not practice science in good faith without using Bible history*. It was impossible for her to uncover ruins and artifacts that obviously matched biblical records and to pretend that they did not. She strove to approach her study with humility, to put aside personal bias, to ignore peer pressure, and to give voice to the truest account for what had been uncovered. She let the historical text and the discovery itself do the talking. She let the stones speak.

She was, in a word, intellectually honest. And remarkably, that made her controversial.

### Using and Misusing the Historic Text

How did we arrive at the point where many archaeologists consider using Bible history to be a relic of a past era of archaeological research?

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, when the field of archaeological exploration across the Middle East began, most of the scientists were firm Bible believers. Archaeologist G. Ernest Wright wrote in *Biblical Archaeology* (1957), “The Bible, unlike the other religious literature of the world, is not centered in a series of moral, spiritual and liturgical teachings, but in the story of a people who lived at a certain *time and place*” (emphasis added).

However, many early archaeologists were too hasty to connect their discoveries to the Bible. Mistakes were made. One archaeologist placed biblical Sodom and Gomorrah south of the Dead Sea in locations that dated to the wrong period; another found evidence of an ancient local flood in Mesopotamia and claimed he’d found proof of the biblical flood. While 19th-century explorers such as Edward Robinson were surprisingly accurate in locating biblical *places*, they were extremely limited in their ability to date their finds.

Not until the 1930s did archaeologists improve dating accuracy, particularly through excavations by William Foxwell Albright at Tel Bet Mirsim, as well as the work of

Wright. They were able to map changes in pottery styles to the passing of time. By the 1950s, archaeologists were armed with improved scientific methods and capable of testing the interpretations and conclusions of the early fundamentalists, some of which were shown to have been flawed.

The new archaeologists, many of whom were Bible skeptics, claimed that the early archaeologists were wrong because they relied on the Bible. They identified the Bible as the chief reason for the mistakes in interpretation. Their reasoning went something like this: *Early archaeologists used the Bible and it caused them to make some terrible mistakes. Therefore, we must not use the Bible in our practice of archaeology.*

But this reasoning isn’t logical. The Bible wasn’t responsible for those mistakes in misdating and misnaming. The problem was with those interpreting the archaeology and the Bible history.

Yet today this anti-Bible bias is firmly entrenched. One commentary on the biblical world published last year highlighted this change, asserting that the biblical books relating to the kings of Judah and Israel should not be considered a primary historical source. “In 1982, it was still possible to write in relation to Iron IIB, that the ‘primary sources of knowledge for the period of the divided monarchy in Judah and Israel ... are the books of the Bible, complemented by contemporary inscriptions and by the results of excavations.’ This claim,” wrote James E. Harding, “now appears naive” (*The Biblical World*, Second Edition).

Is the anti-Bible view that now dominates this field the result of scientific fact? Or is it a function of the same anti-Bible bias that now courses through education, politics and other fields of science, from microbiology to astronomy?

“Today, it is very common to throw the baby out with the bathwater,” writes Hebrew University Prof. Yosef Garfinkel in *Debating Khirbet Qeiyafa*. “This is part of the much wider realm of intellectual developments formulated in the West during the last decades of the 20th century. Today, we are in a postmodern and deconstructive era. Everything is relative, there is no right or wrong, and contradictory approaches are all legitimate.”

Professor Garfinkel has seen firsthand how this

post-truth view is infecting biblical archaeology. Garfinkel excavated at Khirbet Qeiyafa, a Davidic-era site between Jerusalem and Gaza. His motivation for digging Khirbet Qeiyafa had nothing to do with the Bible or seeking to prove the biblical account of King David. In fact, David wasn't even on his mind.

However, as excavations progressed and 3,000-year-old remains were uncovered, all the ethnic and political markers pointed to the fact that Judah controlled this site.

Professor Garfinkel faced a choice. While he hadn't set out to "prove the Bible," the archaeology at Khirbet Qeiyafa correlated well with its record of David's kingdom. Garfinkel could have remained silent, but he did what any honest archaeologist would do: He linked his discoveries with a contemporary historical source that describes the time and place in question.

He let the stones speak. And they said the same thing as the contemporary historical source: the Bible.

Unfortunately, Garfinkel's colleagues have engaged in an impassioned and unscientific attack on his identification of the site as being controlled by Judah. While their arguments do not present a more probable scientific identification, they have muddied the waters and created enough confusion to leave many onlookers uncertain of what to believe.

## Quality Archaeology

A contemporary eyewitness is generally the most reliable source for describing an event. Generally, the more time that elapses, the more opportunities arise for error. This is why some scholars routinely assert that the authors of the Bible wrote their books as long after the events as possible. This makes it easier to question or dismiss Bible records. But are these scholars following the science, or are they exhibiting their overall anti-Bible bias?

"Arguably, the most problematic sources are the books of the Hebrew Bible," Harding writes, "not because of their inherent biases and prejudices ... but because they are composed of a complex variety of highly redacted sources, which were for the most part compiled, edited and collated long after the events to which they purport to refer, ... What primary sources do still exist within the Hebrew Bible are now found in secondary, or even tertiary, contexts. [T]he biblical sources must thus be read with a critical eye on their ideological biases and complex literary growth, but they should not be sidelined entirely" (op cit).

The cost of marginalizing the ancient text is not insignificant, and scholars who take this highly skeptical view of Bible history are often more limited

# SEARCHING FOR DAVID'S PALACE

**A**N ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION can be an extremely expensive endeavor, often subject to numerous, time-consuming academic and political hurdles, especially in Jerusalem. The location also determines what, if anything, you will find. This is why archaeologists, when deciding where to dig, consider as many facts as possible.

The ancient structures that archaeologists can learn from the most are typically the city gates, palatial structures and places of worship. During excavations in the City of David in the 1980s, Dr. Eilat Mazar noticed a geographical feature mentioned in the Bible that could help identify the location of David's palace. To pinpoint the possible location, she did

what most scientists would never consider doing: She consulted the Bible.

Critical to her theory was 2 Samuel 5:17. This verse states that when a Philistine force approached Jerusalem, King David "went down to the hold." If the biblical text was accurate, as Eilat believed, this meant that David's palace had to be situated adjacent north of Jerusalem.

"[T]here is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the biblical description," Andrew Lawler quoted Dr. Mazar as saying. "The Bible is quite careful in its use of going up and going down." Lawler then inserted, "This was just the sort of literal interpretation that many of her colleagues avoided, given that the biblical

accounts of this era were written several centuries later by scribes with a political agenda" (Aeon, Dec. 10, 2021).

Many scholars view the Bible as unreliable because it is theological and because some of its records were recorded centuries later. Yet they readily rely on other sources that were written by flawed, biased people centuries after the fact.

One wonders, for example what political gain a Jewish scribe writing hundreds of years later would achieve by making up the fact that David "went down to the hold" rather than writing something else, or writing nothing at all. Fictions or flaws on the part of the scribe would have been subject to fact-checking, since

in their archaeology. An archaeologist with this view could never have done what Dr. Mazar did to uncover the palace of David. He would never study 2 Samuel 5:17 and accept its literal interpretation, then use the verse to develop a scientific hypothesis, and then eventually uncover a massive 10th-century B.C.E. structure (see sidebar).

The scholarly jury is definitely still undecided on when the Bible was first authored. The records of David's life, they say, could have been written during his lifetime (later 11th century through early 10th B.C.E.) to as late as the fifth century B.C.E. Scholarly consensus for the dating just does not exist.

Even if the records of David's life were edited one final time hundreds of years after he lived, that would not necessarily invalidate those records.

"[M]inimalist scholars ... assume that the time at which a certain biblical tradition was written, edited or received its final shape is also the time that the text describes," Garfinkel writes. "If a visitor to Paris today sends a letter with a description of Notre-Dame Cathedral, the construction of the cathedral according to minimalist methodology, should be dated to the 21st century C.E. Along the same lines, the play *Julius Caesar*, written by Shakespeare in the late 16th century

proves, according to minimalist theories, that Julius Caesar is a purely mythological figure. ...

"As far as the archaeology of the southern Levant in the Iron Age is concerned, one simply cannot ignore the main historical text that has reached us from antiquity" (op cit).

Honest mistakes and intellectual dishonesty have occurred on both sides of the debate over whether to consult the Bible for Middle East archaeology. But archaeologists still must face a choice. Each must decide for himself whether consulting this ancient record is intellectually honest—and whether they want to use it in their science.

What would be the immediate future of biblical archaeology over the next months and years if we cleared out the blatant bias, applied modern tools, methods and knowledge, and used the Bible for what it is: an ancient source containing a number of historical facts verified by archaeology?

It's not too hard to speculate. A monumental structure in the City of David, and a well-worn little blue book from a cluttered office at Hebrew University, give us a good idea of what is to come. We just need to follow the example of Dr. Mazar and let the stones speak. ■

his contemporaries knew the geography of Jerusalem. A rational approach, like Dr. Mazar's, would conclude that the scribe who wrote that David went down to the hold did so because that is exactly what David did, and it was deemed important to record that fact.

In any case, the best way to test such a hypothesis is to dig. That is exactly what Mazar pushed for, for years. The January-February 1997 *Biblical Archaeology Review* published "Excavate King David's Palace!", by Eilat Mazar, and it included an illustration of ancient Jerusalem, a large arrow, and the words "It's there."

"[A] careful examination of the biblical text combined with sometimes unnoticed results of modern archaeological

excavations in Jerusalem enable us, I believe, to locate the site of King David's palace," she wrote in that article. "Even more exciting, it is in an area that is now available for excavation. If some regard as too speculative the hypothesis I shall put forth in this article, my reply is simply this: Let us put it to the test in the way archaeologists always try to test their theories—by excavation."

Dr. Mazar stood by her theory for 10 years. Finally, she was permitted to begin excavating in 2005. Almost immediately, her team began uncovering a massive structure that dates to the time period that includes King David.

Back then, many scholars criticized her dating of the

building. But that criticism proved unscientific. Even most of those same critics now accept the dating as accurate.

Today Dr. Mazar's identification of the Large Stone Structure as the palace of King David remains controversial. Eilat did not rush to this conclusion; in fact, she always remained open to other explanations for what the Large Stone Structure might be. But looking at the size of the walls, the time period, the artifacts associated with it—and after considering all this evidence in the context of the ancient text—Dr. Mazar came to the most logical and scientific conclusion.

Dr. Mazar let the stones speak, and they strongly suggested this was the palace of King David. ■

# Is the Book of Jonah ‘Entirely Ahistorical’?

Gratuitous torture, dimensions, animals, plants and period-specific impotence—all a remarkably accurate depiction of the infamous ‘bloody city’ in the book of Jonah. BY CHRISTOPHER EAMES

**T**HE BOOK OF JONAH IS A SHORT, FOUR-CHAPTER book best known for the “great fish” account, as well as the “taming” of the Assyrians—something that, to the surrounding nations at the time, might have seemed even more miraculous than surviving three days in the belly of a sea creature. It is also a story commonly derided by critics.

The Wikipedia page on Jonah about sums it up: “The consensus of mainstream biblical scholars holds that the contents of the book of Jonah are entirely ahistorical. ... Many scholars regard the book of Jonah as an intentional work of parody or satire. If this is the case, then it was probably admitted into the canon of the Hebrew Bible by sages who misunderstood its satirical nature and mistakenly interpreted it as a serious prophetic work.”

It’s a brutal summary. But is it fair?

From an archaeological perspective, there is nothing to be said for the “great fish” part of Jonah’s story. But virtually everything else in this story is supported by the historical record. Let’s examine the book of Jonah and see how it compares to the evidence on the ground.

## Meet Jonah

According to biblical chronology, the Prophet Jonah was on the scene during the first half of the eighth century B.C.E., during the prosperous reign of Israel’s King Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25).

Jonah 1:1-2 state, “Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying: ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me.’” The prophet immediately fled, catching the next boat to Tarshish—precisely the opposite direction of Assyria (verse 3).

The book of Jonah doesn’t tell us exactly what Assyria’s wickedness was, nor does it state why Jonah was so fearful. But the end of the book suggests that God’s punishment was for the “evil way” of “every one,” for “the violence that is in their hands” (Jonah 3:8).

We get a truly vivid picture of Assyria’s violent early-eighth-century B.C.E. status, and thus Jonah’s trepidation, by considering various archaeological discoveries.

## Meet the Assyrians

Ashurnasirpal II (circa 883–859 B.C.E.) was one of Assyria’s most famous and notorious leaders. He lived about 100 years before Jonah. This king was known for hanging his enemies on posts, flaying them, and lining city walls with their skins. He also burned his enemies, or beheaded them if they were fortunate—those still alive had noses, ears, eyes, arms and other extremities removed.

His son Shalmaneser III (858–824 B.C.E.) continued in his footsteps. His famous bronze Balawat gates depict Assyrian soldiers hacking apart the captured enemy alive, chopping off hands and feet. Heads were hung from walls during his reign, and impaled captives were lined up on display. “Pillars” of skewered human heads stood like totem poles.

As an example of later Assyrian brutality, King Esarhaddon (seventh century B.C.E.) recorded on one of his prisms his parading of conquered nobles through the streets—wearing “necklaces” of the decapitated heads of fellow nobles around their necks. Another records a defeated Arabian leader being taken to Nineveh and made to live in a kennel alongside the dogs that guarded the city gates. On King Sennacherib’s prism inscriptions (late eighth century B.C.E.), the ruler bragged about creating so much blood from death and disembowelment that his horses waded through it like a river. Sennacherib described ripping out men’s testicles “like the seeds of summer cucumbers.” As for the city of Nineveh itself, to which Jonah was directed, the Prophet Nahum aptly described it specifically as “the bloody city” (Nahum 3:1).

This was the kind of terror faced by enemies of the Assyrian Empire at the time of Jonah. No wonder the prophet was fearful of carrying God’s warning message—and no wonder God’s threat of divine destruction and retribution!

## A ‘City of Three Days’ Journey

Skip forward to Jonah 3 where Jonah submits to God’s will and sets out on his journey to Assyria. “... Now, Nineveh was an exceeding great city, of three days’ journey. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s

journey, and he proclaimed, and said: ‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown’” (verses 3-4).

Here we start to see a description of a truly gargantuan city. Nineveh during this period served as chief city of the Neo-Assyrian Empire—and archaeological evidence bears out its truly domineering presence. (Historians consider Nineveh to be the *largest city in the world* during at least the seventh century B.C.E.) Jonah describes the city as “three days’ journey” in size. Is this an exaggeration?

The meaning of this passage is unclear, and there are a couple of ways it could be interpreted. One option is that it relates to the circumference of the city (ancient measures of cities typically noted their size by circumference). The city-mounds of Kouyunjik, Nimrud, Karamless and Khorsabad form a parallelogram edge around this Assyrian territory. Accounting for these as part of the wider Nineveh area gives the city a circumference of about 95 kilometers. Given that a “day’s walk” is just over 30 kilometers (as specified by fifth-century B.C.E. historian Herodotus), the circumference fits perfectly with Jonah’s account.

This agrees with other secular historians, such as first-century B.C.E. Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, who recorded that Nineveh was 480 stadia (89 kilometers) in circumference. The historian Strabo, of the same century, wrote that Nineveh was “much greater” than Babylon—and he stated that “the circuit of [Babylon’s] wall is 385 stadia” (71 kilometers). Fifth-century B.C.E. historian Xenophon recorded that Nineveh’s city walls were some *30 meters tall* and 15 meters thick. And within that territory, excavations have revealed that the central city hub of Nineveh included an area of roughly 2,000 acres.

Jonah’s account also exhibits another certain geographical tidbit, which Craig Davis points out in his book *Dating the Old Testament*: “Jonah left Nineveh and watched it from the east. Nineveh was located on the east bank of the Tigris River, with hills east of the city. This would give Jonah a good vantage point to view the city.” This matches the Bible’s description (Jonah 4:5).

## Mourning Horses

The destruction Jonah warned about never occurred or at least not immediately. Assyria’s king actually commanded his city to *repent*. Jonah 3:7-8 record the king’s decree: “Let neither man *nor* beast, *herd nor flock, taste any thing*; let them not feed, nor drink water; but let them be covered with sackcloth, both man *and* beast, and let them cry mightily unto God ....”

This is truly peculiar. The Bible records humans fasting on numerous occasions. But *animals* fasting and wearing sackcloth? This was no ordinary practice.

Nineveh during this period served as chief city of the Neo-Assyrian Empire—and archaeological evidence bears out its truly domineering presence.



There is, however, textual evidence of such extreme behavior being practiced in this part of the world and at roughly this time.

Herodotus described an act by the neighboring Persians (not the Assyrians, but still representing these Asiatic peoples and their customs): “When the cavalry returned to camp, Mardonius and the whole army mourned deeply for Masistius, cutting their own hair *and the hair of their horses and beasts of burden*, and lamenting loudly. ... So the barbarians honored Masistius’ death in their customary way” (*The Histories*, Book 9, 24.1-25.1; emphasis added throughout).

Apparently for the people of this Mesopotamian or Eastern region, the mourning of animals was a “customary way.” First-century C.E. historian Plutarch recorded similar acts of contrition and mourning.

## A Peculiar Political Situation

As the book of Jonah relates, Nineveh was spared destruction thanks to the repentance of the king and populace. This is where things get really interesting. Because something very peculiar happened in Assyria during this precise window in the eighth century: *It stopped going to war*.

Let’s first step back and look at the wider geopolitical picture. Pairing the book of Jonah with 2 Kings 14:25 (where Jonah is mentioned), we can roughly date the book to the latter part of the first half of the eighth century B.C.E., around 770–750 B.C.E. This fits into a very unusual period in Assyrian history, known as the “Period of Stagnation” (783–745 B.C.E.), which lasted through the reigns of three successive kings.

The first king during this period, Shalmaneser IV (circa 783–773 B.C.E.), maintained the normal, yearly military campaigns for most of his reign. Still, his rule was marked by an apparent decentralization of power and the rise of lesser officials (like General Shamsi-ilu) taking on greater-than-normal roles and

responsibilities. There is a sense of this in the book of Jonah—after all, the book does not mention *Assyria* but rather *Nineveh* and the king specifically. Perhaps the two names were somewhat more synonymous during this time if Nineveh included the parallel-ogram territory of Kouyunjik, Nimrud, Karamless and Khorsabad at the heart of Assyria. Whatever the answer, little is known from the reigns of Assyria’s kings during this 40-year period.

What little is known is witnessed on the Limmu, or Eponym, Lists. These are official Assyrian lists that document, year by year, a short sentence about what occurred in the empire that year, alongside the name of a lottery-drawn governor. For example, the eponym from year 812 B.C.E. reads: “During the eponymy of Inurta-ashared, governor of Raqmat, campaign against Chaldea.”

Notice: In addition to the governor’s name, there is a reference to the military campaign undertaken by the king of Assyria that year. (These invaluable year-by-year limmus span several centuries of the Assyrian Empire, right back into the Old Assyrian Empire. They are standardized lists, several of which have been discovered from different parts of the empire.)

Back to Shalmaneser IV, the first king of the eighth-century Period of Stagnation. A military campaign took place every single year throughout his reign and continued into the reign of the following king, Ashur-dan III. His first three eponyms document foreign military engagements. But notice the recording for his fourth year of rule: “During the eponymy of Aplaya, governor of Mazamua, *the king stayed in the land.*”

This is remarkable. Every prior year, *for 41 years without fail*, Assyria’s leaders had engaged in a military campaign. But not this year!

No explanation is given for why the “king stayed in the land” (sometimes an explanation is given, despite the brevity of each line). This kind of behavior, without good reason, did not last long—it was not seen as befitting an Assyrian king. Either the king went to war or he was overthrown. The last time a king *did* “stay in the land,” 41 years earlier, was the same year the elderly king died.

In the two years after this, King Ashur-dan III returned to the campaign trail. But then more trouble set in. The next two eponyms read: “During the eponymy of Inurta-mukin-niši, governor of Habruri, campaign against Hatarikka; PLAGUE”; “During the eponymy of Sidqi-ilu, governor of Tušhan, THE KING STAYED IN THE LAND.”

At this point, everything begins to crumble for Assyria. The next five eponyms show that no campaigns occurred and that the empire was struck by “revolt,” “plague” and even an “eclipse of the sun” (a foreboding sign for the deeply superstitious Assyrians; and one that may be referenced in Amos 8:9).

In fact, from the very first year Ashur-dan III “stayed in the land” to the end of the reign of the next and final “stagnant” king, Ashur-nirari V, campaigns took place during only *eight* years out of 23. Ashur-nirari V “stayed in the land” for his first five years and campaigned in only two out of the nine years he was on the throne. This was not normal for mighty Assyria. What happened?

## The (Temporary) Downfall of an Empire

Given the lack of discoveries (besides these lists) relating to the reigns of Ashur-dan III and Ashur-nirari V, historians cannot be sure. What is sure is how well the Period of Stagnation fits in with the account in the book of Jonah, as well as 2 Kings.

Perhaps Ashur-dan III “stayed in the land” during the fourth year of his reign—the first time something like that happened in 41 years—because of Jonah’s warning message. The 760s B.C.E. date would certainly fit. And perhaps in the year following, the political pressure to return to the campaign trail became too much, so the king went back to war. But after only three campaigns, more domestic disasters (revolts, plagues and an eclipse) brought him home.

Was this series of unfortunate events somehow related to God’s threat to overthrow Nineveh unless it ceased hostilities? (Jonah 3:4). And could such a series of events, keeping Assyria at bay, be directly related to God “saving” Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II? (see 2 Kings 14:27).

This was the message related by the first-century Jewish historian Josephus. “Jonah had been commanded by God to go to the kingdom of Nineveh; and when he was there, to publish it in that city, how it should *lose the dominion it had over the nations*. [H]e stood so as to be heard, and preached that *in a very little time they should lose the dominion of Asia*” (*Antiquities*, 9.10.2).

The impotent Ashur-nirari V reigned nine years before he was overthrown around 745 B.C.E. He was replaced by Tiglath-Pileser III, the infamous king who ended Assyria’s Period of Stagnation.

This isn’t all of the evidence supporting Jonah’s historical account. Other proofs include the fact that we know the shipping port Joppa (Jaffa) was functioning at the time (Jonah 1:3); the well-attested practice of casting lots (verse 7); and the large merchant vessel replete with hold, sail and rowing capability, befitting merchant travel of the time (verses 3, 5, 13).

Even the use of the Aramaic language in Jonah is noteworthy. Some have criticized the book of Jonah as a late imagination because it contains some Aramaic words. This might be the case if the *entire* book was

in Aramaic (which the Jews adopted following the sixth-century B.C.E. Babylonian captivity), but there is only a small amount of Aramaic in the book. And it's the section describing Jonah's contact with the sailors, who would at the time most likely have been Aramaic-speaking Syro-Phoenician merchants.

And consider the "gourd" that grew up over Jonah to shade him as he encamped east of Nineveh (Jonah 4:6). This word is believed to refer to the castor oil plant *Ricinius communis*, which has broad leaves. This plant appears to be mentioned in an Assyrian medical text as a drug whose effects precisely match that known to *Ricinius* (*A Dictionary of Assyrian Botany*, R. Campbell Thompson). The Bible describes the plant quickly sprouting up by divine miracle. But even on its own, *Ricinius* is known for rapid growth and is an important plant throughout the arid East.

And what about the "worm" that killed the plant? (verse 7). This was no normal worm. The Hebrew word actually refers to a small insect known as a "crimson worm," or *Coccus ilicis*. Red dye was created by crushing these insects. Aside from farming for their dye, the *Coccus* family is a major pest for crops, and the insects thrive in desert-type environments such as in Nineveh. These insects are known throughout the ancient Near East.

## Why It Matters

Why does establishing the accuracy of Jonah's account matter? It matters because the Bible as an ancient historical text is under fierce debate.

"Traditionalists" believe the biblical books were written as described; that is, Moses was the author of the Torah, Isaiah the author of his book, etc. Conversely, the largely secular "minimalist" camp deemphasizes the significance and power of ancient Israel as described in the Bible, ascribing the Hebrew texts to imagined accounts written centuries later—primarily in the post-exilic period after the Babylonian captivity.

Recall the Wikipedia summary of the book of Jonah: "The consensus of mainstream biblical scholars holds that the contents of the book of Jonah are entirely ahistorical." This is how many scholars today view the entire biblical record. Some believe it is entirely fabricated; others think it is a mixture of truth and fiction.

Whatever you believe about the ultimate authorship of Jonah, certain facts cannot be avoided. The book of Jonah contains remarkably detailed knowledge of Nineveh, a city long since destroyed. And the events Jonah describes fit remarkably well into a brief window of time in Assyria's history.

Given the facts, can the objective scientist or scholar truly believe the book of Jonah is "entirely ahistorical"? ■

## Take a Tour With Us

**As part of its mission to share ancient Jerusalem's biblical history, the Armstrong-Mazar Institute of Biblical Archaeology provides personal tours of the City of David and the Ophel.**

**If you want to see how the modern science of archaeology is bringing to life the pages of the Bible, don't miss our tour.**

### REVIEWS

Our ancient Jerusalem tour of the Ophel Excavations, the City of David, King David's Palace, the Gihon Spring, Hezekiah's Tunnel and finishing at the Pool of Siloam was the most deeply extraordinary experience that we will never forget. The guide's commentary, based on many years of experience excavating these areas and researching all the historical data, was so compelling that we had three additional people request to join our group as we were going.

Perth, Western Australia AUSTRALIA

We thoroughly enjoyed our tour of the Ophel and City of David. The tour guide was very friendly and knowledgeable. He was personally involved in archaeological digs at these sites, which really came through in the detail and enthusiasm of the tour. For example, he was able to point out the exact location where certain artifacts that gained international acclaim were found, which gave more life to the tour.

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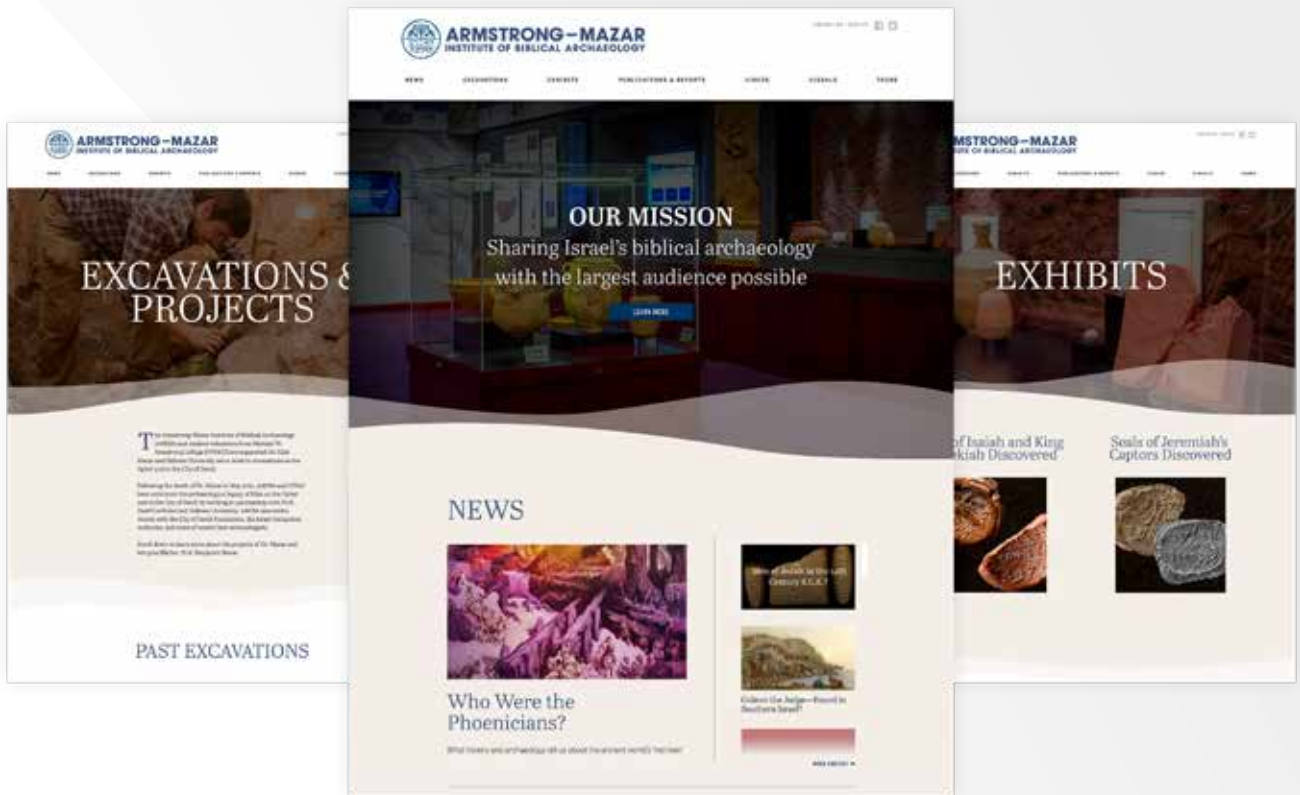
### LET THE STONES SPEAK

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