

# Ancient Israel: Why Study Ancient History?

**U**nderstanding ancient history can help us better understand how God worked with His people. This series of articles will deal with the Old Testament, from the time of Abraham through the time of Judah's captivity in Babylon. The purpose of this historical background is twofold:

## 1) To give fuller understanding of the Bible

The Bible is not an English book. The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew, with some Aramaic sections. Each language uses idioms that are unique and difficult to translate. When you work with a book in translation, you inevitably lose something.

### The Bible is not written in 20th-century language

The world we will discuss starts with Abraham, about 2000 B.C., and extends to 586 B.C., the time of the captivity of Judah. The Bible describes social and legal institutions that are very different from the ones in the world today. But the Bible was written to people who understood those customs and didn't need explanations of what they meant.

For example, an institution that exists today is shaking hands. If you lived in a completely different culture thousands of years ago, where nobody shook hands, you might ask, "What's 'shaking hands'? How do you do it? What's its purpose?" But we wouldn't think it necessary in writing today to explain what shaking hands was, how you did it or what it meant, because we all understand that.

But we have the reverse problem. We read about their ways of doing things, without explanation, and sometimes their customs are very different. For example, Sarah provided her handmaiden Hagar to Abraham. This is usually misunderstood by people in our culture, including most people in the Church. We will try to see it from the light of what it meant in her day and age.

### English has changed

Not only do we have the problem of dealing with the Bible in translation, we work with a translation done in 1611. Even in reading our own language, because it has changed so much, we can sometimes misunderstand.

For example, the King James Version refers to a "creek." Today, *creek* means a small stream. But in King James English, it meant a harbor or bay.

Or the word *anon*, as in "I will do that anon." Today, people think it means "in a short while." But in the days of King James it meant "immediately."

So we have these two problems: the problem of the original language not being appropriately translated, and

the problem that even if it was appropriately translated, English itself may have changed in meaning between then and now.

### Social and legal customs

Some of the customs we read about in the Bible are not explained and we do not fully understand. Sometimes we don't even notice them because we don't understand. Let me illustrate.

### The Ninevites' animals fast

In Jonah 3:5, we read that after Jonah delivered his warning, "the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast" to show that they were repenting, which is what God wanted them to do.

And they "put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes."

But notice what it says in verse 7: "And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth."

Why did the king command animals to fast and wear sackcloth? With our 20th-century perspective, we would think this is funny. But the people didn't mean it to be funny. They believed God and fasted with a serious purpose. The Bible doesn't explain it because in that age, nobody would need to have it explained; it would have been obvious.

The answer is that animals were considered to be full members of the community. And this was to be a community-wide fast, and every member of the community would be expected to participate. That's how they would show God how serious they were.

### Naaman wanted Israelite soil

Another illustration is in II Kings 5. Naaman, the commander in chief of the armies of Damascus (Syria), had an Israelite maid. He was a leper, and his maid induced him to go to Elisha, believing that Elisha would call on God and heal Naaman. When he obeyed the instruction of Elisha to bathe in the River Jordan seven times, he was healed. He offered a gift to Elisha, but Elisha refused it.

Then Naaman made a request of Elisha in II Kings 5:15: "And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth,

but in Israel." Naaman made a statement of faith, that the only God in earth is the God in Israel. Not *of* Israel, but *in* Israel. That little preposition makes a big difference. In those days, people believed that God was localized. Notice what Naaman asks in verse 17: "Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord."

Why did he ask for earth? Naaman thought that God had power only on His own soil. Naaman was in Israel, where Israel's God healed him. He wanted to pray to this God since He was so powerful, and the only one that really was a God. But how could he pray to Israel's God when he got back to Syria? Well, if he took Israelite earth back home, he could build an altar on that Israelite earth and then everything would work. He was a prisoner of his own culture. That's why he asked for Israelite soil.

This illustrates why sometimes we don't fully understand what is written in the Bible because of cultural differences.

## **2) To shed more light on biblical events**

The second purpose is to shed more light on things mentioned in the Bible by understanding some of the things that aren't written.

The Bible is like a laser beam — it may describe an event or a period of time, but it has a narrow focus. It illuminates a certain event, but many times only a small part of that event. We can learn something about that event from the Bible, but it helps to know more about it.

### **Geography**

In accomplishing these purposes, we're going to use a number of fields of study that are related to history. First, geography. One thing we will touch on is why the Philistines and the Israelites had conflict. It's not just because they were living side by side. It's easier to have conflict with people you're living next to, but that doesn't mean you have to have conflict. But geography, especially rainfall, has a lot to do with why there was conflict.

Another geographic matter: The area where God settled Israel was invaded by every major people of the Middle East: Egypt, Syria, Babylonia, Persia and many other smaller peoples. They tried to control the land where God put Israel. We will understand why only when we look at geography.

We read in I Kings 9:15 that Solomon built three fortress cities: Gezer, Megiddo and Hazor. Why those three cities, and not others? When you look at the geography, it becomes clear.

When Jeroboam established a capital for the north-

ern kingdom of Israel, why did he choose Shechem? From geography we get a good part of the answer.

### **Archaeology**

Archaeology has probably contributed more than any other related field to our understanding of biblical history. Let me quote from an article by Harry Orlinsky, a major authority on the history of ancient Israel. He wrote in 1975 in a magazine called *Bible and Spade*: "The destruction of Solomon's Temple and the Babylonian Exile are two events that we all take for granted. You may wonder what there is about the Destruction and the Exile that we need archaeology for.... Everyone knows that Solomon's Temple was destroyed and a Babylonian Captivity followed; so that archaeology can play but a relatively minor role here.

"However, when I started out as a college student in Semitics, in the late twenties and the thirties, the Destruction and the Exile had come to be increasingly regarded by serious scholars as fictitious, and my teacher...used to gloss over this period because he did not feel entirely secure with the data for it.... Simply because the Bible related these events was hardly enough assurance for a scholar that these events had actually taken place."

That's not the opinion of any scholars today. Why? Because archaeology since the 20s and 30s has abundantly proved that there was a captivity and restoration. That's why archaeology is an important tool. Later we'll address the question: Does archaeology prove the Bible, or should we expect it to?

### **Comparative literature**

Another field of study we will touch on is comparative literature, which can show us how words that are rarely used and obscure in the biblical text were used by other peoples of the same period. That helps us understand how they should be understood in the Bible.

Comparative literature also gives us idioms and literary devices that were commonly used at the time the biblical books were written. Without this insight, we wouldn't understand their purpose, or we might even make the mistake of taking them literally when they were meant to be taken figuratively.

### **Comparative religion**

Comparative religion has been used in a wrong way by many scholars. But it can illustrate certain passages about the pagans that are mentioned in the Bible, passages that are too brief for us to understand. It gives us a wider understanding of what the pagans were condemned for.

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# Ancient Israel: Archaeological Methods

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Archaeology has contributed much to our understanding of the biblical period. To understand how archaeology can be used properly to contribute to our understanding of the Bible, we need to understand its methods, especially how archaeologists arrive at dates, and the limitations of archaeological methods.

We need to keep these limits in mind so that when we find information that seems to contradict the Bible, we can understand why that situation might exist. It isn't necessarily so just because an expert says it's so. Experts do not always agree, even when they are looking at the exact same evidence!

## A definition of archaeology

First, a procedural definition of archaeology: "The systematic recovery of the surviving remains of ancient civilizations, and the analysis and interpretation of those remains in an effort to reconstruct the material civilization and the values of ancient societies."

"Material civilization" includes the kind of houses, tools, weapons, transportation methods, social class structure and other things. "Values" include religion, social customs and legal matters. Archaeology is a mixture of science and art. "Systematic recovery" is a scientific aspect, though intuition enters also.

## Finding sites

To recover ancient remains, you have to find where people lived in ancient times. Otherwise you're not going to find much except by accident. So archaeologists look for the remains of ancient cities. In the Middle East, these places are often called *tels* (or *tells*).

A tel is a hill that doesn't look natural. It may rise abruptly out of the landscape, and its contours may look too regular. Even when it's covered with vegetation it doesn't look like a natural hill.

Another technique for finding ancient sites is aerial photography, which can show things that would not be visible at ground level. For example, in the Philistine coastal plain near Ashkelon, an aerial photograph shows many right angles partly obscured by sand dunes. At ground level you'd see the dunes but probably wouldn't notice how regular the corners were. In this way aerial photography can show an ancient site even where there are few if any visible signs at the surface.

## Finding specific sites

Although much can be learned from anonymous sites, archaeologists usually want to find a specific place. They don't want to dig just anything that's old. They don't want

to dig a biblical site; they'd like to find a particular biblical site. But how?

Often, the name of the place has changed. A different people may live there, with a different culture and language and a different name for the city. But clues may exist as to what the ancient name was.

For example, there is a site in Iraq called Babil. It is Babylon. In Israel there is a village with the Arabic name Mukhmas. The modern Arabic name closely resembles the ancient biblical name, Michmash.

Sometimes the current name is not derived from the old name, but commemorates something about the place. A site in northern Israel is called Tel el-Qadi. *Tel* means hill, *el* is an Arabic prefix and *qadi* is the Arabic word for "judge." What can we associate with "judge"? Who "shall judge his people"? Dan. This is the ancient city of Dan. The essence of Dan as a judge (the Hebrew word *din* means "judgment") was preserved in the Arabic name.

## Austen Layard finds his city

In the middle of the 19th century an adventurous Englishman was passionately interested in ancient things, and he wanted to go to the Middle East and dig. He became an official in the British Foreign Service, and with his family connections he got a post in Iraq.

He wanted to find one particular ancient city, which his contemporaries said had never existed. But Layard was convinced that the place did exist, and he wanted to find it. So he traveled around and asked the local people the names of large mounds. He was looking for a big city, so he asked only about large mounds.

He found a very big mound in one place, but the local name had no connection with the ancient name he was looking for, so he was about to leave. But it is very rude to leave an Arab abruptly, so he continued the conversation by asking the name of a small mound nearby.

It was Nebi Yunis, which means "the prophet Yunis."

And immediately chills went down his spine. Yunis was the Arabic name for the prophet Jonah. And that's why chills went down his spine — Layard was looking for the city of Nineveh!

Right by this big mound was a little mound that by local tradition was called the mound of the prophet Jonah. Layard dug, and sure enough, the large mound was Nineveh. He, more than anyone else, helped establish the fact that the Assyrians really existed.

We call these names that are similar to ancient names *toponyms*. They are a good indication of what the ancient name was, but they're not always reliable. Sometimes a

nearby place, rather than the actual site, will pick up the ancient name. For instance, a mound in southwest Israel is named Tel Lakis. This isn't biblical Lachish; another tel nearby is biblical Lachish.

### Geographic descriptions

We have covered two methods to find a particular site: place names that haven't changed and toponyms. A third way archaeologists can find a particular site is by using an ancient document that gives a general description of where the place was.

For example, Judges 21:19 tells us that Shiloh is "north of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah." The highway is still there, so they looked east of the highway south of the valley of Lebonah and found Shiloh. Anyone who ignores geographic information in assigning a name to a place does so at his own peril.

### Excavation methods

Once a site has been found, the next step is digging things up. In this area, archaeology has matured considerably. In the early days they just dug anywhere. They were more interested in getting good-looking specimens than in learning about ancient societies.

Even after archaeologists became interested in trying to understand ancient societies better, they engaged in a lot of aimless digging all over the site. Then they advanced to a specific method, the trench method. They dug a trench through the hill, like cutting a slice out of a layer cake. But because some layers don't go across the whole tel, a trench may not reveal them.

Today, archaeologists use the Wheeler-Kenyon method. The Kenyon part of that name is from Kathleen Kenyon, who did much to advance biblical archaeology. Part of the site is divided into squares, usually five meters on each side. The squares are dug, but walls between the squares are often left in place. This preserves the grid and shows the layers that have been dug through.

Only parts of the site are dug. To dig the entire site would take too long and cost too much. Even if it were practical to dig the whole site, it's not wise. Something should be left for others, who might have better methods.

Sometimes a small part of the square is dug a bit deeper. This is called a probe trench, and can reveal what might be underneath. That can tell the diggers whether to dig quickly, or slowly. The earth must be carried away in buckets and wheelbarrows. Sometimes the dirt must be sifted for small objects such as coins.

Measurements must be taken — detailed measurements when important objects are found. Records are kept, usually daily, of what happened in each square. Scale drawings are made of architectural features. Some finds are photographed. A dig usually involves systematic removal of artifacts and features, so the findings must be accurately recorded.

The specimens are preserved for scientific analysis. Pottery is measured and drawings are made from different views and compared to known samples. The most difficult area of archeological method is interpretation. This is where archaeology is mostly art.

### Written documents and inferences

Written documents are invaluable, since they can tell us about the values and motives of the people. For example, the Cyrus cylinder records a decree similar to the one we find in Ezra 1:1-4, allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem. This cylinder gives us an idea of the motive behind the one we read in the Bible.

When archaeologists do not have written records, they make inferences. Sometimes they can be very easy. If a firepit disrupts the pattern in a mosaic floor, it is a simple inference that the mosaic is older.

Part of Herod's palace near Jericho is just like a Roman villa. So you draw the conclusion that Herod liked Roman architecture. One type of brickwork in his palace is unique to Italy. Did Herod send craftsmen to Italy to learn the technique, or did he bring Italian craftsmen to Jericho? We have no written record, so we don't know.

Gezer, Hazor and Megiddo have similar city gates, all from the 10th century B.C. Who built them? Solomon, who lived in the 10th century, built fortresses at these three cities (I Kings 9:15). Probably — note the word *probably* — Solomon is responsible for these gates, but we can't be certain. Perhaps we are missing the remains of what Solomon built. We have to be careful.

Here's one last example: holes carved into stone. What were they for? Dove-cotes? Mailboxes? Storage cabinets for personal possessions? Depositories for the cremated remains of people? We can't be certain. The conventional answer is that they were dove-cotes, for doves used as carrier pigeons.

*These articles were condensed from Richard Paige's Ancient Israel class at Ambassador College (Pasadena).  
To be continued.*

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# Ancient Israel: Archaeological Dating

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**F**inding ancient remains is rather meaningless unless they can be put into some type of time framework. They must be located in time if they are to be of any real use to the historian. *But how is this done, and how reliable are the methods for doing so?*

Archaeology involves the systematic recovery of ancient remains and their interpretation. When it comes to systematic recovery, archaeology is generally done in a very scientific way. But when it comes to interpretation, the element of art comes into play.

While at times the conclusions can be certain, sometimes they are more subjective. It is in the area of interpretation — and this includes dating — that archaeology is most vulnerable to criticism.

## Relative and absolute dating

“The Importance of Dating” (*The Biblical Archaeology Review*, March 1977) is an article by the late Paul W. Lapp, who served as Director of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem, the most prestigious organization involved in archaeology in the Holy Land. Let’s notice what he wrote about a very important part of archaeology — chronological dating.

Dr. Lapp makes a distinction between *relative* dating and *absolute* dating. Relative dating is imprecise — the only thing that can be said about two objects is that one is older than the other by an unknown amount.

For example, in one of the buildings of Herod the Great’s palace complex at Masada is an oven built across a corner of a mosaic floor. It’s clear that the mosaic floor is older than the oven. This is an example of relative dating. It’s because of other data that we can turn that sequence into a fairly accurate absolute date.

We know from other records when the fortress at Masada was built. That gives us an absolute date within a few years for the mosaic floor. We know that the Zealots occupied the building between A.D. 70 and 73. If we conclude that the Zealots built the oven, we can also give it an absolute date.

There’s no intrinsic characteristic of the thing itself that enables us to give it an absolute date. It’s other information that we can relate to it that enables us to give it a date, and turn it from a relative date into an absolute date.

## Difficulties of absolute dating

How precise are absolute dates? You may read an article that says, “This level of this city is dated to the ninth century B.C.” Or it might even say, “circa [often ab-

breviated c., meaning approximately] 854 B.C.” How seriously should you take such claims?

In answer to the question, “Is archaeology able to provide datings precise enough to be of historical value?”, Dr. Lapp wrote: “Scholars disagree on an answer to this question. Sober replies vary from ‘Sometimes’ to ‘Almost never.’”

Notice Dr. Lapp’s own answer to this question about the precision of dates: “Positions tend to become over-polarized when the weaknesses and tentativeness of the best hypothesis are not emphasized or when the ‘best’ hypothesis is ignored as one among several interpretive options.” Maybe there were several possible interpretations and the scholar didn’t like the best one. So he shoves it aside and presents something that is weaker. But without access to all the information, you won’t know that.

Notice what Dr. Lapp says in answer to the question about the precision of dates: “I *tend* to feel that archaeological material is *sometimes* susceptible of sufficient chronological precision to be of historical importance” (emphasis ours). That’s quite a qualified statement! But he’s stating the case honestly. When you read, you have to watch for these qualifications. They are very important. However, not all scholars alert you to possible difficulties.

A scholar may present all of the evidence in support of a particular date for certain ruins, but never say a word about the drawbacks or weaknesses of the evidence. Although some might read his article and think the date is certain, the scholar may be hiding some of the things that weaken his hypothesis.

Continuing with the article: “The evidence of ancient history is so limited [only about one-thousandth of the original material has survived to our day] that very few statements approach the indubitable. To illustrate, Ahab was killed in a battle near Ramoth-gilead about 850 B.C. The probable site of Ramoth-gilead suffered a major destruction about the middle of the ninth century B.C.”

So we know Ahab was fatally wounded about 850 near Ramoth-gilead. And we know the site of Ramoth-gilead was destroyed about 850. It would seem logical to link the two events together and say that after Ahab lost the battle his enemies destroyed the city. It might seem logical, but it can’t be proven! There’s nothing in the archaeological material that proves the Syrians, who defeated Ahab, were responsible for the destruction. It’s just the most likely conclusion.

But as Dr. Lapp says: “The destruction could have oc-

...curred a few years before Ahab's death when a cow kicked over a lamp or a few years thereafter when an enemy set his neighbor's grain heap ablaze.... Where is the line to be drawn between such hypotheses and the objectionable practice of overcorrelation of Biblical and archaeological material?" Again, notice how Dr. Lapp's answer highlights the problem we face as readers of archaeological literature: "It takes well-balanced judgment to draw that line appropriately, and *no two historians* would draw it at exactly the same point."

How close can an archaeologist come to the true date when he does assign a date? Notice this revealing statement by Dr. Lapp: "It is now *frequently* [not *always*] possible to date archaeological groups within a quarter- or half-century [within 25 to 50 years]."

However, Dr. Lapp cautioned that "correlations with such material are certainly more convincing than material dated no more closely than within a century or *two*." The latter situation "is the case with the *vast majority* of archaeological finds in Palestine to date." So when an archaeologist gives a date, it's *usually* within 100 to 200 years, rather than within 25 or 50 years.

We have to keep that in mind when we, based on the biblical record, feel that some material should be given a date, let's say 1400 B.C., and archaeologists who do not accept the accuracy of the Bible say, "No, that material is 1550 B.C." The dates are 150 years apart — still within the range of probable uncertainty (100 to 200 years), which is likely to happen in most cases.

#### Archaeological dating techniques

What tools are available to the archaeologist that can be used to date archaeological material?

Many people have heard about radiocarbon dating and guess that archaeologists use it heavily. But for the period we're mainly interested in, from the time of Abraham on, archaeologists don't often use radiocarbon dating because such dates have too large a margin of error. The older the artifact, the larger the margin of error.

For example, something might be given a date of 1720 B.C. plus or minus 175 years. The real date could be anywhere between 1895 B.C. and 1545 B.C. That's not precise enough to be of value to a historian. So radiocarbon dating is not used often by archaeologists interested in the biblical period.

#### Documents and inscriptions

The most accurate dates come from documents or inscriptions, which frequently say something that can be used to give an absolute date. It might say, "The 20th year of king so and so." If you are able to establish the reigning dates of that king, you will know very precisely the date of the document.

Although numerous inscriptions and documents have

been found in Egypt and Greece, not many have been found in Palestine. The reason is that most of the documents written in Palestine were written on papyrus, which is very perishable. In the dry areas near the Dead Sea and in the far south, some parchment has survived.

The inscriptions we do have were written on clay tablets, as was the method in Mesopotamia, or on potsherds (broken pieces of pottery). But they are rare, so we can rarely use inscriptions to date archaeological material in Palestine.

#### Coins

Many people think that coins would be an ideal dating tool. But coins were not used in the area of Palestine before the sixth or fifth century B.C. Therefore, for most of the period we're interested in, there are no coins.

Coins are also heirlooms. People saved them for generations, for a time when the family might need emergency cash. So if a coin is found at a certain level, it might have been minted generations before it was finally dropped where it was found.

Additionally, since coins are small, they present what is called a stratigraphic problem. They can easily slip down from one level to another. The level in which the coin was found isn't necessarily the level in which it was dropped. Hence, despite what one might have expected, coins are not a good dating tool.

#### Pottery an ideal dating tool

A good dating tool must have certain characteristics. Most important, there must be a lot of it. Otherwise you might not find any in a level you wanted to date. If you have plenty of it in every level, you can't miss it.

Archaeologists in Palestine, following the lead of Sir Flinders Petrie, a leading excavator in the early 1900s, have decided that there is only one tool that makes sense to use in dating archaeological material in Canaan or in Palestine. That is pottery.

Pottery is one of the most simple, unassuming, humble things you can find in a dig. Yet it is the major tool archaeologists use to give chronological dates to the different levels. No matter where you dig in a level, you'll find pottery. Broken pieces of jars, jugs, bowls and lamps litter virtually every level of every tell in Palestine. Its abundance helps make pottery a valuable dating tool.

The second characteristic of a useful dating tool is that it must be widespread in area and time. Pottery is found just about everywhere in the Middle East. No matter what site you dig on, unless it's a very ancient site, you'll find pottery.

The third characteristic is that it must be indestructible or nearly so. You can't rely on something as a dating tool if it tends to deteriorate or decompose. Pottery is indestructible. Once it's been made, it can be broken, but it's still going to be there.

Finally, a dating tool must change its style or shape frequently. If pottery was made in exactly the same way with the same shape and decoration for 500 years, it wouldn't help much. But if every 20 or 50 years features such as the decoration, colors, design or location of the handle were changed, pottery could be used to date other finds. Fortunately, potters were always fiddling with basic pots and plates; they got tired of the old styles and often altered what they did.

#### Basic assumptions about pottery

There are two basic assumptions about pottery that are made when it is used as an archaeological dating tool. All the dates that you read about in books and articles dealing with archaeological levels in Palestine are based on these two assumptions. As you'll see, there are certain weaknesses.

The first assumption is that the same pottery is used everywhere in the region at the same time. The region we're talking about is ancient Israel, from Dan to Beersheba. It is assumed that if an oil lamp of one kind is found at Dan, and the same kind of oil lamp is found at Beersheba, they both come from the same period. Although there had to be a time lag, it is ignored.

Archaeologists assume that the time lag can be ignored because it would not have been long. It wouldn't have taken 100 years for the style to travel. It might have taken only 10 or 20 years. If you're trying to date a level in its proper century or half-century, a difference of 10 or 20 years is not important.

The second assumption is linked to the first: that pottery styles change *simultaneously everywhere* in the region. It is assumed that there wasn't a gradual phasing out of one style and a gradual introduction of the other. In other words, that there are no overlaps.

Obviously, that couldn't happen, but archaeologists assume that the overlap was probably 10 or 20 years and can be ignored.

The question now is, Are these two assumptions correct? Was the same pottery used simultaneously in Dan and Beersheba? And when the styles changed in Dan, did they change very quickly to the same style in Beersheba? Did this actually occur? Archaeologists assume it did.

#### Assumptions not always valid

These assumptions need to be called into question, since it has been demonstrated quite convincingly that the assumptions are not always valid.

Archaeologists had a problem at the ancient city of

Lachish. They were interested in two levels. Level II, which had suffered a massive destruction, was dated as belonging to the conquest of Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C. There was no question about that.

The question was, When was the level beneath it, Level III, destroyed? The arrangement of the levels suggested that Level III was the result of the destruction in 701 B.C. by Sennacherib. The Bible records that Sennacherib, king of Assyria, destroyed Lachish during the time of King Hezekiah.

Someone suggested: "Let's compare the pottery at Level III to the pottery of Samaria when it was destroyed by the Assyrians in 720." They found totally different kinds of pottery. The Samarian forms had gone through several changes before reaching the style found in Lachish Level III. Therefore the conclusion was that the pottery at Lachish must be a lot younger than the Samarian pottery. Based on the evidence of the pottery, archaeologists assigned a date of 597 B.C. to Level III, since they knew that Nebuchadnezzar campaigned in the region that year.

But archaeologists working at Lachish have recently confirmed indubitably that Level III is the 701 B.C. destruction. The pottery-based date was wrong. The pottery in use in Lachish in 701 was totally different from the pottery in use in Samaria only 20 years earlier. The assumptions were wrong.

The assumption that the same pottery is in use throughout the region at the same time is thus not totally reliable. Just because the same kind of pottery is found in two cities doesn't mean you're dealing with the same time period. Contrariwise, just because you find two kinds of pottery doesn't prohibit it from being essentially the same time period!

However, it's the refusal of the archaeological community to accept this possibility that makes it impossible for them to reconcile the Bible with the physical evidence concerning Joshua's conquest. You might ask: "Why do they refuse? It was demonstrated to be true at Lachish. Two kinds of pottery, yet the same time period."

They answer: "The Bible is insufficient evidence. In the case of Lachish, it was proven by the stratigraphy that different styles existed at the same time. We accept that fact in the case of Lachish and Samaria. But we cannot accept that for the time of Joshua unless we see physical evidence in the ground. It's not proof enough just because the Bible says it had to be that way."

The Bible is not viewed to be especially authoritative. That's the problem.

# Ancient Israel: Problems of Archaeology

Archaeology is a combination of science and art. Especially in interpretation, many things are subjective. Let's look at the major problems that make archaeology a science with largely tentative conclusions.

## 1) Limited evidence

First, archaeologists must work with limited amounts of evidence. Only a thousandth of all the potential evidence from antiquity has survived to the current day. Are the things that have survived representative of the whole? Or are they giving us a skewed impression of what an ancient civilization was like?

Paul Lapp discussed this in the article "Palestine, Known But Mostly Unknown" (*The Biblical Archaeologist*, December 1963). "Such a tiny fraction of the archaeological material has been excavated, and such a small fraction of that satisfactorily published, that even the most assured archaeological conclusions must still be considered far from final." This is still largely true.

There are some things beyond doubt, but the vast majority of even the most assured conclusions are not final, though they might be 90 percent so.

Continuing with the article: "In view of the vast amount of unknown material, archaeologists will be forced to modify or reformulate many, if not all, their hypotheses regarding the development of Palestine as the flood of new evidence continues to grow. Palestinian archaeology may be past infancy but has hardly gotten beyond childhood."

One example of how new evidence is forcing archaeologists to change their hypotheses is provided by the recent study of Canaanite cities of the Late Bronze age conducted by Rivka Gonen of the University of the Negev. Most scholars believed that Canaanite cities were heavily fortified in the Late Bronze age, when Pharaoh Thutmose III conquered Megiddo. However, Rivka Gonen's research has demonstrated that almost none of the cities of Canaan — including Megiddo — were fortified in the Late Bronze age.

Many things are changing, especially in the time period of the conquest. Many long-held beliefs among critical scholars have been thrown out, and some new things are in, some of which are faddish.

## Why evidence is scarce

There are thousands of Palestinian sites of potential archaeological value, but only one site in 200 has been the scene of major archaeological work, Dr. Lapp wrote. Many sites would not merit extensive excavation — they

are not important enough. But if only one in four were promising, major excavations have been carried out at only 2 percent of the potential sites.

All the conclusions about what Palestine was like have been based on excavations at 2 percent of the sites — not a very thorough sample, even though among those 2 percent were some of the larger places.

To illustrate the difficulties of obtaining evidence, he writes: "If you were an archaeologist interested in gathering evidence on cult practices in the Early Bronze age, you might wish to put the names of sites at which Early Bronze sherds [potsherds] occur in a hat and select three at random.

"Chances are good that one of the sites is covered with masses of Byzantine and Roman debris." It would be too time-consuming and expensive to dig there. "Another is the site of a modern village, and the third is located where there is not an adequate labor force or water supply."

But in any case, "If...you studied every Early Bronze tell with care, were well acquainted with all pertinent material excavated...and came to the conclusion that precisely this spot on this mound is the most promising in Palestine for recovering Early Bronze cult material, most experienced Palestinian archaeologists would probably offer generous odds *against* your finding what you were looking for." Why? "Perhaps what you seek will remain hidden a few feet from your excavation." For example, when Kathleen Kenyon was digging in the City of David, she was looking for the wall that had protected the Jebusite city. She dug a trench down the slope of the hill for a distance of 22 meters. However, she found evidence for the wall in the last half meter of her trench! But if she had decided on a trench only 20 meters long, she might well have concluded that the city had no wall at all.

Or, Dr. Lapp writes, perhaps there were cult remains there, magnificent ones, extensive ones. But they may have been completely removed in a later occupation of the site.

Another difficulty might be that this site simply never had a cult area. Even if you find clear cultic remains, as Dr. Lapp noted, how would you know that what you found is "typical"? The cards are stacked heavily against the archaeologist.

Dr. Lapp wrote that only a fraction of archaeological results had been satisfactorily published. An example of this is the Temple Mount excavation. The vast amount of the information from that excavation has yet to be published. It may never be published, because only one man can read the notes, and he is in precarious health. If



he dies, all the evidence will be gone, because practically nothing was left for the future.

## 2) Complications presented by the evidence

There are many complications that are presented by the evidence itself.

A) *Tells are not arranged like layer cakes.* A layer of occupation may cover only part of the tell. If you dug at one position, you would find that the site was inhabited during a certain period. But if you dug in another place, you would think the site was uninhabited during the same period. You would be wrong just because you happened to dig in the wrong place.

B) *The original material may have decomposed.* Wood and leather decompose in the soil. In rare cases, an earth cast is left that shows what the actual remains were like. But the cast can easily be dug up and destroyed unless someone notices something to suggest this has occurred.

For example, in Ur in southern Mesopotamia, one of the workers noticed that there were two very regularly shaped holes in a tightly compacted floor. They poured in plaster of Paris, removed the soil and found they had produced a cast of an ancient lyre.

C) *Methods differ.* Archaeologists do not use the same methods for excavating or for recording the data. On one dig, bulldozers were used. The man in charge was certain that nothing important was in that material, but a lot of archaeologists quail at the thought of what might have been lost because of that method.

And since the finds were recorded in an unusual fashion, other archaeologists cannot read the data. Most archaeologists are kept in check by the peer pressure of their colleagues. But this man was so distinguished that the peer pressure was muted.

D) *Stones are often used again.* Just because you find stones that have the characteristics of the Israelite period doesn't mean the building was built during that period. The stones may have been taken from an earlier structure and used in a later one.

In the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount, Corinthian-style columns surround the area where the "rock" is. They came from various Byzantine churches in Jerusalem. The Persians had destroyed the churches in 614, about 20 years before the Moslem Arabs came in. There were a lot of good columns, and they were reused.

## 3) Pottery-based dates

The third area where there are difficulties are dates based on the assumption that the same pottery is in use everywhere in the region at the same time. In Lachish level III, the assumption was proven wrong. But the archaeologists say, "Better to use something that isn't perfect than to have nothing to use at all."

There are other problems in the way pottery has been used to arrive at dates. For years, Mycenaean 3b pottery

was used to assign dates for levels in Greece, Cyprus, Syria, Phoenicia and Palestine. The dates for Mycenaean 3b were well-known, based on the conclusion of a reputable archaeologist. Everyone assumed the dates were correct. But someone investigated how the dates had been established and found that the man had done a particularly shoddy bit of work. Not one piece of pottery had been found in a clearly dated context.

Paul Lapp, in "The Importance of Dating," in *The Biblical Archaeological Review*, March 1977, wrote that an "obstacle to systematic development of chronological precision was the neglect of detailed, critical pottery studies.... Often no distinction was made between dates proposed for unstratified examples [Mycenaean 3b, for example] and for specimens from a context with good links to absolute chronology. This chorus of uncritical datings had the unfortunate result of gaining for the datings an undeserved confidence. If a dozen archaeologists cite a similar date for a certain form, it [is assumed that it] must be correct. Unfortunately, in many cases the dozen archaeologists were all merely repeating what was originally an uncritical oral tradition."

What happens if later evidence shows that a once-accepted date has been an error? How is this new evidence accepted? Dr. Lapp writes: "Once such relationships were made, it became difficult to gain general assent for new proposals, even when they were based on much stronger evidence."

## 4) Questionable interpretations

Let's take a look now at a fourth area of problems — questionable interpretation and reporting. Again quoting from Paul Lapp: "The treatment of the Sacred Area [at Shechem] in the preliminary report...may prove instructive.... The chief hypothesis is that the structure under the Fortress Temple forecourt, previously designated a palace, is now to be interpreted as a courtyard temple like Temples I and II at Bogazkoy [in Turkey]."

But the hypothesis seems dubious, since "important parts of the courtyard...remain unexcavated. As is common in a preliminary report, the hypothesis seems to be set forth in the most favorable light. The Bogazkoy parallels are considered remarkable, but differences...are not specified. Possible objections to the hypothesis such as the lack of cult objects and installations, the occurrence of domestic jar burials and ovens...and the presence of a non-cultic structure...are not considered." The man saw what he wanted to see and ignored everything that seemed to argue against his hypothesis.

Dr. Lapp knew about these things because he talked to someone who had been part of the excavation staff. But most people, even scholars, have to rely on what's written in the report. They have to trust that their colleague is giving them all the evidence and not just a portion of it.

Dr. Lapp goes on in his article: "The archaeologist is constantly tempted or forced to expand theories upon a small evidential base. He builds his hypotheses on the small excavated portion of a building...or on tatters of buildings disturbed by later occupation. He frequently uses arguments from silence." He bases his argument on the fact that things are absent, even though he has excavated only a small fraction of the mound.

For example, there is a man who disagrees with the general opinion as to where ancient Bethel and Ai are. He dug at a place that he thinks might be the true site of Ai. He dug for two seasons, but did not find any remains from the Canaanite period. His critics scoffed, but the third season brought to light evidence that the site was occupied at the right period.

Nelson Glueck convinced most archaeologists that the Trans Jordan was uninhabited during the period when the Bible would place the Israelite arrival in Canaan. He said that there was no kingdom of Edom or Moab for the Israelites to have problems with. He had investigated the surface of the mounds in the area and found no pottery from that period. He did not do a single excavation, but he came out with the conclusion that everyone accepted uncritically. Despite the fact that later surveys, and a few excavations, have demonstrated that his conclusion was erroneous, some critics of the Bible still quote Glueck in an effort to discredit the biblical account of the conquest.

Why do scholars tend to present the evidence in the most favorable light? Why do they tend to shove aside data that seems to contradict what they want? One reason is that they'll lose their source of money if they do not show exciting things coming out of the earth. Also, to maintain the prestige of the dig and staff morale, they tend to over-dramatize what they find.

##### 5) Interpretation is subjective

The fifth area of problems is interpretation, the key of the archaeological procedure. For example, in the dig at Megiddo some long, narrow buildings were found. They were originally called stables, but now some people claim that they are storehouses. The scholars are looking at the same evidence but coming to different conclusions.

If you read a statement such as "Archaeologists have concluded that..." and the statement contradicts the Bible, what can you do? You have to remember that the statement doesn't mean that all archaeologists would conclude that. Some things are clear, but for most cases, it's a subjective thing.

Another example is the altar at Beersheba. The altar itself wasn't found in one piece. The altar had been disassembled and the stones had been used in other places. Because of the workmanship, the archaeologists were

sure the stones were originally part of the same thing. When they found the top parts of the altar, with the horns, they knew it had to be an altar. The stones fit together very well.

The question was, Where had this altar stood when it was being used? Yigal Yadin, in an interview that appeared in *The Biblical Archaeology Review*, said that the altar had been in a house they had found. He made a persuasive case by putting the archaeological evidence with biblical evidence. But the next issue carried an article by Anson Rainey, who wrote, "There is not one scrap of evidence, biblical or archaeological, to support Yadin's conclusions."

Yigal Yadin had used II Kings 23:8, but the verse is ambiguous. The high places mentioned in the verse could have been in Jerusalem or Beersheba, but Rainey showed that it seems more likely to have been Jerusalem. The verse refers to the "Gate of Joshua." Beersheba had only one gate, so why would it have needed a name?

Anson Rainey also revealed that some of the stones of the altar had been buried under a rampart that leads into the city. And the rampart was built at the same time as the house. Therefore the altar had already been dismantled before the house was built.

Yigal Yadin had found a drainage channel, which he claimed was to drain blood away from the altar. But the drainage channel didn't originate near the altar, and it appears to have gone into the well of the city. It was probably to help collect drinking water.

We have to be careful. Just because an argument is persuasive doesn't mean it's right — it may just be that someone is skillful in presenting the evidence that supports his hypothesis.

All archaeologists have a bias when they investigate material. It can be pro-biblical or anti-biblical. This is illustrated in an article by J. Edward Barrett, "Piety and Patriotism — Secularism and Skepticism: The Dual Problem of Archaeological Bias" (*The Biblical Archaeological Review*, Jan./Feb. 1981):

"Biblical archaeology's search for truth is more like a process than a proof, sometimes achieving tentative consensus, but seldom if ever achieving unquestionable knowledge. Data that is reviewed by one mind suggests an interpretation that is often different when reviewed by another.... Of course, piety, patriotism, ideology, training, and the opposite expression of these, influence the archaeologist's judgment, just as they do the historian's. In candid moments, every professional archaeologist knows this — the best scholars know it about themselves; others only know it about their colleagues."

Richard Paige

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# Ancient Israel: Chronology of the Exodus and the Israelite Conquest of Canaan

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**W**hen was the Exodus and the Israelite Conquest of Canaan? This is probably the single most complicated area in biblical studies today. The Bible indicates one time period; most scholars believe it was at another time. We need to understand the reason for this confusion.

## Basic assumptions

To help us understand why this is such a controversial issue, we need to understand the assumptions various scholars bring to the subject. While there are two basic approaches — either the historical accounts of the Bible were written under divine inspiration or they were not — the situation is more complicated than this.

Some scholars believe that the Bible is inspired in its spiritual message but not in the physical details — especially those relating to historical accounts. Others claim that nothing in the Bible can be viewed as “inspired writings”: that the Bible simply records the ideas of men. Yet, while some of this latter group of scholars understandably view the Bible as essentially worthless (as a historical source) unless its statements are confirmed by external evidence, other scholars in this group have a great deal of respect for the accuracy of the text.

What do these assumptions have to do with establishing a date for the Exodus and the Israelite Conquest of Canaan? A great deal. Those who do not believe the Bible is inspired in its historical material do not feel there's a need to look for a harmony between what the Bible says and what is found in the archaeological record. They don't get upset when they find discrepancies; they accept only “objective” (i.e., non-biblical evidence).

Those who believe that the biblical account has been inspired to be historically accurate (that includes us) *must* look for agreement between what the Bible says and what is found in the archaeological record. They are disturbed when historians date a biblical event to a time that cannot be harmonized with statements about that event in the Bible. If discrepancies appear, the chronological placement (rather than the biblical text) must be adjusted. A date that is in accord with the apparent meaning of the biblical text must be preferred, even if there is no evidence outside the Bible that justifies that date.

Scholars shouldn't rush to say that the text is in error whenever they find what seems to be a discrepancy between archaeological evidence and the apparent meaning of the text. One should wait patiently. Later discoveries

often explain the difficulties in the text. For example, I Chronicles 5:26, “The God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, and the spirit of Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria” (Authorized Version). It looks like God stirred up two kings. But the verse continues, “and he carried them away.” Who is “he”? The pronoun and verb are singular, but two kings are mentioned, joined by *wa*, the Hebrew conjunctive for “and.”

Why doesn't the subject match the verb? Many explanations were offered to explain this “error” in the text. However, none proved to be necessary. Archaeologists eventually discovered that the Assyrian king Tilgath-Pilneser gave himself the name Pul when he conquered Babylon. So it was one man; that's why it has a singular verb. The Hebrew conjunctive *wa* (which can also mean “that is to say”) should have been translated to reflect *this* meaning, rather than the more usual meaning of “and.” The newer translations have corrected the translation of this verse to accord with this new understanding.

Patience is often needed — until additional information becomes available that will clarify seeming peculiarities in the text. But many modern-critical scholars are impatient, and are quick to advance their personal corrections of the text so that the text will agree with *their* conclusions.

## The year of the Exodus

If we view the historical material in the Bible as inspired of God, we must place great weight on certain scriptures that concern the date of the Exodus. The most important is I Kings 6:1: “It came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel...that he began to build the house of the Lord.”

This verse identifies the fourth year of Solomon's reign as being the 480th year after the Exodus. Scholars do not agree exactly when Solomon's fourth year was, but many would accept it as being *about* 964 to 963 B.C. If the Exodus was 480 years before, it would have been about 1443 B.C., in the middle of the 15th century B.C.

## Pharaoh of the Exodus

If one examines Egyptian history (using the “high chronology” for the 18th dynasty), 1443 would place the Exodus in the 10th year of the reign of Pharaoh Amenhotep II (some books prefer the Greek variant Amenophis

II). Do the surviving records of ancient Egypt offer any support for this? We have available to us Egyptian records that record the deeds of Amenhotep II (especially his military campaigns). It is interesting to note that the records available to us fail to list any campaigns after his ninth year (1444 B.C.). His successor, Thutmose IV, launched no campaigns whatsoever. It wasn't until the reign of the next pharaoh, Amenhotep III, that there was a renewal of Egyptian imperial activity.

This gap is significant because it occurred during the period known as the 18th dynasty of Egypt — one of its most powerful, most expansionist, most imperialistic periods. Almost every pharaoh in this dynasty campaigned actively somewhere to expand Egyptian power. For example, Thutmose III, the father of Amenhotep II, was one of the greatest conquerors in Egyptian history.

Amenhotep II was following right in his father's footsteps up through his ninth year and then, suddenly, imperial expansion stopped. It wasn't until the days of his grandson that Egyptian power again began to expand.

This is what we would expect, given the events surrounding the Exodus. The army of Pharaoh was drowned in the sea. The Israelites "borrowed" from the Egyptians. The slaves (both the Israelites and the "mixed multitude") left. The plagues would have caused great loss of livestock, the loss of a harvest. These factors would have had a great negative impact on the Egyptian economy.

Also, the last plague killed the firstborn. In Egyptian society, government offices were usually passed from father to son, usually the firstborn. The trained administrative core of Egypt, a lot of top generals, etc., would have been killed. When they all died, it would have left the nation in chaos. It would have taken more than a generation for them to recover enough to be able to launch outward again.

#### Circumstances of Moses' adoption

Moses was adopted by the "daughter of Pharaoh." What was his potential as an adopted son — what did he give up when he left Egypt? "Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (Hebrews 11:24).

But what did this title mean? In the Egyptian royal family, the throne did not pass to the heir just because he was the son of the pharaoh. Based on the Isis/Osiris myth, a daughter of the ruling pharaoh (known as the "throne princess") was the one through whom the crown was usually inherited. It was the son of the pharaoh *by the daughter of the previous pharaoh* (the throne princess), who usually became the next pharaoh.

If the throne princess was barren, a son of the pharaoh by a secondary wife would usually be designated as the heir. In order to strengthen his claim to the throne, it was a common practice for the heir to marry his sister, or

half-sister, who became the new "throne princess." (A man who was not the son of the previous pharaoh might secure the throne by this method as well.) The preferred method of succession to the throne, however, was for the son of the pharaoh and his chief wife (the throne princess) to be the heir. He, then, was often referred to as the "son of Pharaoh's daughter" to highlight the legitimacy of his claim to the throne.

Thus, when Moses refused to be called "the son of Pharaoh's daughter," he was refusing to become the heir to the throne. He chose "to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" (verses 25-26).

While this background information is interesting, is there any likelihood that Moses would have been adopted by a "throne princess" of the 18th dynasty of Egypt?

Scripture tells us that Moses was 80 years old at the time of the Exodus; if we use 1443 B.C. as the date of the Exodus, it would place Moses' birth in 1523. The throne princess (daughter of the previous pharaoh) at that time was named Hatshepsut. Hatshepsut was the chief wife of Thutmose II. They were childless. Hatshepsut, then, if we have dated events correctly, would have been the woman who adopted Moses and groomed him to be the next pharaoh. Is there anything in the Egyptian records to suggest that this is what might have happened?

Thutmose II, Hatshepsut's husband, died while Moses was still young. Thutmose II had decreed that Hatshepsut should rule jointly with Thutmose III, his son by a secondary wife. Although Thutmose III was accorded the royal titles, Hatshepsut effectively exercised the real power alone. Indeed, contrary to all precedent, she declared herself pharaoh. In keeping with this declaration, she had herself depicted in monumental statues as a man — with a masculine physique and even with the traditional false beard. All the traditional titles of pharaoh were appropriated by her, with only one exception — the mighty bull.

Hatshepsut was eventually overthrown by Thutmose III about 1483 — when Moses would have been about 40 years old! Was that a coincidence, or were the events related? Could the fact that Hatshepsut's designated successor was found to be a murderer of an Egyptian (Exodus 2:14-15) have been the key to Thutmose III's success in winning the support of leading Egyptians in his power struggle with Hatshepsut? If this is the case, Moses would have had good reason to flee Egypt.

#### Additional evidence for a 15th-century date

As we have seen above, I Kings 6:1 indicates that the Exodus and the Israelite Conquest of Canaan occurred in the 15th century B.C. The known facts of Egyptian history seem to accord well with this chronological placement as well. However, at least one other scripture also seems

to lend support for a 15th-century date. This is Judges 11:26. This verse relates Jephthah's attempt to counter the Ammonite oppression of the Israelites living east of the Jordan River. Seeking to avoid a military confrontation, Jephthah engages in a diplomatic exchange with the Ammonites in which he states that Israel had been living east of the Jordan for 300 years.

Most everyone agrees that Jephthah lived around 1100 B.C. Since Jephthah placed the Conquest about 300 years earlier, it would place that event about 1400 B.C., again supporting the traditional 15th-century date.

Finally, let's consider the contribution (although it is minor) of the series of documents found in the royal archives at Tel El-Amarna (the Arabic name for the city that was the capital of Egypt during the reign of Pharaoh Akhenaton). These tablets include the diplomatic correspondence of not only Akhenaton, but that of the last half of the reign of his father, Amenhotep III. These tablets reveal much about the state of affairs in Canaan during the period from 1400 to about 1350 B.C.

Since the traditional date for the beginning of the Israelite Conquest is about 1403, the letters might be expected to mention the Israelites. Indeed, the letters from the kings of Jerusalem, Hazor and Megiddo mention a people called *Apiru* who were destabilizing the region.

As modern-critical scholars have correctly pointed out, the term *Apiru* is not necessarily linguistically linked with the term *Hebrew*; nor is it an ethnic term, since it was used from about 2000 to about 600 B.C. to describe any group that was outside the established social order. Thus, although no positive correlation can be made (other than the timing of the incursions of these armed "marauders"), the Amarna tablets do offer some general support for the thesis of a 15th-century date for the Exodus and the Israelite Conquest.

#### Evidence for a 13th-century Exodus

Based on I Kings 6:1, the Exodus can be dated to the middle of the 15th century, coinciding with what appears to have been a rather sudden collapse in Egyptian political and military power. Forty years earlier, we find evidence of a tremendous power struggle in which an overly ambitious female pharaoh was thwarted in her *previously successful attempt* to block the accession of the "rightful" heir to meaningful royal power. Forty years before that, there is evidence of a childless throne princess, who, conceivably, would have had strong motives to adopt a son — especially one seemingly provided for her by the god of the Nile.

All these details are what we would expect to find in the historical record if the Exodus and the Israelite Conquest of Canaan took place in the 15th century B.C.

So why do many modern-critical scholars insist on a 13th-century Exodus? Even if *they* do, why should we

even consider their reasons? First, we must realize that the conclusions of the modern critics are not irrational; they are based on evidence — evidence that we must look at. In the next several pages, I'll attempt to summarize that evidence. Second, we need to know what the criticisms of the traditional date are if we are to seek a satisfactory means of rebutting the criticisms.

As we will see, there are legitimate alternatives to the conclusions of the modern critics — alternatives that do not contradict the biblical account. Although these may be satisfactory to us, we can't expect these alternative answers to convict the modern-critical scholars. For they not only see no need to eliminate any apparent contradictions between the archaeological evidence and the biblical text, but will not accept the biblical text as evidence unless it is supported by unequivocal "extra-biblical" (i.e., archaeological or secular literary) evidence. Given the current state of archaeological knowledge, this is not always possible.

#### Evidence from Egypt

Scholars did not begin to criticize the traditional 15th-century date of the Exodus and the Israelite Conquest until a lot of archaeological research had taken place in Egypt and Palestine. Let's summarize the evidence that led to their conclusion that one should look to a time other than the 15th century for evidence of these events:

- 1) The city of Rameses that is mentioned in the biblical text (Exodus 1:11) as one of the "store cities" built by the enslaved Israelites must have been named for Pharaoh Rameses II, who lived in the 13th century. Earlier, scholars had thought the name Rameses was simply a historical update given by a later editor (similar to the mention of the city of Dan in Genesis 14, even though it wasn't named Dan until the time of the Judges). However, archaeologists excavating the city built by Rameses II in Goshen couldn't find any remains of an earlier city from the 15th century.
- 2) Although she may have been motivated to do so, there are no Egyptian records of Hatshepsut having adopted *anyone* as her son.
- 3) During the 15th century, the 18th dynasty of Egypt had its capital in Thebes, 400 miles away from Goshen. This would have made it impossible for Moses to relay messages back and forth as described in the Bible.
- 4) Although conservative scholars have associated the Amarna tablets' references to *Apiru* with the Israelite invaders of Canaan, this association is not conclusive and does *not* constitute proof that the 15th-century invaders of Canaan were Hebrews.
- 5) Pharaoh Seti I campaigned in Canaan in about 1300 B.C. and made no mention of the Israelite tribes. Around the year 1290 (using the "middle chronology" for the 19th dynasty), Rameses II campaigned in

Canaan, and he didn't mention the Israelite tribes, either. Moreover, the Bible doesn't mention the military campaigns of either of these pharaohs. This seems to suggest that the Israelites were not then in Canaan (as a 15th-century date would demand).

- 6) Around 1225, Pharaoh Merneptah campaigned in Canaan, and he *does* mention Israel. (In fact, it is the first documentary evidence that has been found of the name Israel.) Since the earlier pharaohs *failed to mention* the presence of the Israelites, and Merneptah *does*, the conclusion was drawn that the Israelites must have arrived in Canaan between 1290 and 1225, rather than at the end of the 15th century.

#### Evidence from Edom and Moab

- 7) Numbers 20 mentions that Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom, asking permission to pass through his land on the way to Canaan. Edom refused, threatening to fight Israel if they tried to pass through (verse 18). "So Edom came out against them with many men, with a strong hand" (verse 20). Modern critics claim this implies there was a strong, settled community in Edom. The same thing is implied about Moab, because the Israelites went around Moabite territory, too.

In the 1930s Nelson Glueck (pronounced "Glick"), of Hebrew Union College, conducted an archaeological survey in the lands east of the Jordan River, including the area of ancient Ammon, Moab and Edom. Based on his survey results, he concluded that there were no settled communities in these areas between 2300 and 1300 B.C. If Israel had gone through in the 15th century, they could have walked through without asking anyone's permission. Since Israel *did* ask permission, and Moab and Edom did not exist as settled kingdoms until about 1300 B.C., the Israelites must have made their requests during the 1200s (the 13th century B.C.).

#### Canaanite cities not destroyed in the 15th century

Interesting as the items above may be — and strong arguments against an Exodus and Israelite Conquest of Canaan during the 15th century B.C. — evidence that began to be assembled from the intensive excavation of Palestine west of the Jordan River during the 1930s and 1940s appeared to be even more damaging to the traditional 15th-century dating of these biblical events.

The 15th century is also known (in archaeological circles) as Late Bronze I. If the traditional date for the Exodus is correct, the Israelites would have invaded Canaan around 1400 B.C., the end of the Late Bronze I period. So we should expect to find evidence that certain Canaanite cities were destroyed at the end of the Late Bronze I.

The Bible gives us many details about where the Israelites went and which cities they conquered. Numbers

21:1-3 records the Israelites' first Canaanite conquest. The king of Arad, in southern Canaan, attacked the Israelites. The Israelites eventually defeated him, destroyed his cities and renamed one city Hormah. However, archaeologists found that Arad wasn't inhabited during the Late Bronze I — nothing existed on the site between about 2350 B.C. (approximately the end of the Early Bronze III) and about 1100 B.C. (Iron Age Ia).

After the Israelites had journeyed around Edom and Moab, they began to enter the territory of King Sihon the Amorite. Sihon attacked, and was defeated and the Israelites occupied Heshbon (Numbers 21:21-26). However, archaeologists found that Heshbon and Dibon (two cities mentioned in the biblical text as having been destroyed by the Israelites) were not even founded until the Iron Age (about the ninth century B.C.).

After the Israelites crossed the Jordan River, they camped at Gilgal, conquered Jericho and Ai, and were tricked into making an alliance with Gibeon. Then the Israelites had to defend Gibeon when Gibeon was attacked by the leaders of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon. They chased the Canaanites, and Joshua 10 says they conquered the cities of Libnah, Lachish, Eglon, Hebron and Debir. Then, in a northern campaign, after defeating a league of Canaanite kings at the waters of Merom (in upper Galilee), they burned the city of Hazor (Joshua 11).

What did the modern-critical scholars find when they looked at the archaeological evidence? Let's begin with Jericho. Kathleen Kenyon, as a result of her investigations at Jericho, concluded that the city had been destroyed at the end of the Middle Bronze Age (about 1550 B.C.). She also concluded that the city remained uninhabited until around 1440, whereupon it was continuously inhabited until 1325. According to the traditional date for the Conquest, the destruction of Jericho would have been about 1405 B.C. But — according to Dame Kathleen Kenyon — there was no sign of any destruction of the city *anytime* between 1440 and 1325 B.C.

What about the conquest of Ai? Excavations were carried out by a French team headed by Judith Marquet-Krause in the 1930s and again in the 1960s by an American team directed by Joseph Calloway. Both teams concluded that Ai was destroyed near the end of the Early Bronze Age (about 2440 B.C.), and it remained *uninhabited* until the Iron Ia period (shortly after 1200 B.C.). Even then, it was an *unwalled* village. Yet, not only does Joshua 7:5 mention a city gate (implying that Ai had a wall), but two chapters of the Bible are devoted to the conquest of Ai — a city that apparently did not even exist during the 15th century!

What about Gibeon? The archaeologists found that Gibeon was inhabited in the Middle Bronze Age and in the Iron Age, but was uninhabited during the entire

Late Bronze Age (about 1550-1200 B.C.). What of the cities that attacked Gibeon? Jerusalem did exist — according to the evidence unearthed by the excavations in the City of David (at which our students assisted). We aren't sure where the sites of Libnah and Eglon are. Jarmuth has been located, but the evidence so far is too inconclusive for archaeologists to make any determinations about its history during the Late Bronze Age.

Hebron apparently did not exist in the 15th century; it has remains from the Late Bronze II (13th century), but not the Late Bronze I period. At the site of Tel Beit-Mirsim (identified as the location of Debir by W.F. Albright), again, there are no remains from the Late Bronze I. Finally, although there was a destruction of Lachish during the Late Bronze Age, it was apparently destroyed too late in the period to be associated with the 15th century B.C.

All this archaeological evidence appears to be in conflict with the dating of the Israelite Conquest in the end of the 15th century (end of the Late Bronze I) — and thus in conflict with the date apparently demanded by I Kings 6:1 and Judges 11:26.

Let's look at northern Canaan. Joshua 11 mentions the Israelite victory over the king of Hazor and kings of other northern areas. Then Joshua burned Hazor (verse 11). Here — at last — we find a positive match between the Bible and the archaeological evidence! There is a 15th-century destruction of Hazor.

Out of a list of 14 cities that figure prominently in the biblical account of the Conquest, we can find positive links with only three of them (Jerusalem, Hazor and Lachish — the last being highly suspect). All the other cities were either apparently uninhabited at the time, or apparently continued to be occupied with no disruption (Jericho), or cannot be identified (Eglon and Libnah), or have been insufficiently excavated for conclusions to be drawn (Jarmuth).

The results of this archaeological research present major problems to those who believe the Conquest was in the 15th century. Although we'll find that there are answers to these problems — to be discussed later — let's continue our examination of the evidence that so strongly influenced the modern-critical scholars, not just *against* the 15th-century date for the Conquest, but *in favor* of a 13th-century date.

#### **Canaanite cities destroyed in the 13th century**

By now, I think you can understand why many scholars began to look at I Kings 6:1 more critically. Perhaps, they thought, they weren't getting many "matches" between the biblical accounts and the archaeological evidence because they were looking in the wrong time period. The evidence caused the scholars to question the chronological information given in I Kings 6:1. The

scholars hadn't originally been critical of the 480-year figure in the text; it was only in the light of what they considered to be conclusive archeological evidence that they went back to the text and said, "Let's see if the number 480 can be understood in another way."

The critical scholars claimed that the 480 years mentioned in I Kings 6:1 should not be taken literally. It is probably a secondary number derived (they stated) as a result of multiplying 12 by 40, two biblically important numbers. The writer (they stated), writing in the days of Solomon (or later), didn't know how long it had been from the Exodus to the fourth year of Solomon, but thought it was 12 generations. He estimated the length of a generation as 40 years because one generation had spent 40 years in the wilderness before dying out.

However, although individuals do survive longer, 25 years is a better estimate for an average generation. Since the product of 12 generations times the more realistic 25 years per generation is 300, the modern-critical scholars concluded that the Exodus took place about 300 years before Solomon — in the 13th century. This would have placed the Israelite Conquest about 1225 B.C. (the Late Bronze IIb). They then concentrated their attention on the archaeological record from that period.

William Foxwell Albright had conducted a dig at Beitin, a village believed to be the site of the biblical city of Bethel. At the level of the Late Bronze IIb period, he found that a fire had destroyed the whole city. Underneath the ashes were the remains of a very sophisticated culture; above them was an inferior culture. This destruction and sudden cultural change convinced Albright that he had found evidence of Joshua's invasion — destruction of a sophisticated urban Canaanite culture, followed by the Israelites, who had wandered the desert for 40 years. Albright called it "a complete break from the Late Bronze and the Iron Age strata. It is so complete that no bridge can be thrown across it. We are compelled to identify it with the Israelite conquest."

Archaeologists found more evidence for a late date in northern Canaan. Almost all the northern Canaanite cities were destroyed in the Late Bronze IIb (the 13th century B.C.). Albright led the way and others joined, in no small part because Albright was so famous.

#### **Dramatic cultural change in the 13th century**

I want to quote extensively from "Is the Biblical Account of the Israelite Conquest of Canaan Historically Reliable?" (*Biblical Archeology Review*, March/April 1982), by Yigael Yadin. [Editor's note: parentheses show comments that were in the original article; brackets show comments by Richard Paige.]

"All archaeologists agree that at the end of the Late Bronze Age [about 1225]...the material culture we associate with this period abruptly stopped [i.e., the Late

Bronze Age culture was suddenly replaced by an Iron Age culture].

"Late Bronze agriculture was based on fortified [walled] city-states. At the end of the period, many of these cities were destroyed. The archaeological evidence shows conflagrations and destructions which cannot be attributed to famine or earthquakes. Sometime later (that is, in a later archaeological stratum), a new and completely different culture developed, sometimes on the destroyed site and sometimes on a new site.

"This new culture (Iron Age culture) was initially rather poor architecturally, so poor it can hardly be called urban. This culture appears to reflect the first efforts at settlement by a semi-nomadic people. While this is the general pattern, certain destroyed sites were rebuilt immediately with fortifications and the attributes of a proper city.... The fact is, however, that excavation results from the last 50 years or so support in a most amazing way (except in some cases to be mentioned later) the basic historicity of the Biblical account.

"The Biblical narrative in broad outline tells us that at a certain period nomadic Israelites attacked the city-state organization of the Holy Land, destroying many cities and setting them on fire. Then, slowly but surely, the Israelites replaced these cities with new, unfortified cities or settlements. At the same time, they attempted to occupy certain cities but were unsuccessful [Judges 1 lists some cities they tried to occupy but could not].

"The residents of those cities continued to live side by side with the new invaders. As already indicated, this description — leaving out the words 'Canaanite' or 'Israelite' — is exactly the picture which the archaeological finds present to us: a complete system of fortified cities collapsed and was replaced by a new culture whose material aspect can be defined as the first efforts of semi-nomads to settle down."

Though the archaeological data did support *some* of the biblical account, according to Yadin it contradicted many of the biblical details. So, in accordance with the basic assumptions of many modern-critical scholars, Yadin decided that the portions of the biblical accounts of the Conquest that match the archaeological findings should be regarded as authentic reports; the other parts of the accounts (that do not match the archaeological findings) should be viewed as fictional additions. The theory of men like Yadin is that there was a Conquest, but the Bible only incidentally reflects the facts. The narrative, written hundreds of years later, was just an approximation of how the Conquest actually took place, and thus many of its details are hopelessly inaccurate.

#### Problems with the 13th-century theory

Albright became convinced that the archaeological evidence supported a 13th-century Conquest — but his

theory was based in large part on his excavation at Beitin, which he concluded was Bethel. However, while Joshua 12:16 states that Joshua conquered "the king of Bethel," the Bible *does not state* that Bethel itself was destroyed. Indeed, Judges 1:23-25 indicates that it continued to exist as a *Canaanite* center until it was eventually occupied by the "house of Joseph" several decades (at least) after the initial conquest of the land under Joshua. So the archaeological evidence at Beitin can't really be said to "match" the account in the Bible.

What about the Canaanite cities in the north? Many scholars have been impressed by the large number of Canaanite cities that were destroyed and burned in the last part of the Late Bronze Age (just before the beginning of the Iron Age) and see this as the handiwork of the Israelite invaders of Canaan. However, all of these cities were destroyed by fire. The Bible specifically states that Joshua *did not* burn any of the northern cities he conquered *except Hazor* (Joshua 11:12-13).

There are many other problems if one seeks to claim that the archaeological evidence provides strong support for the idea that the Israelites conquered Canaan during the late 13th century B.C. The problem with attempting to match the cities mentioned in the Book of Joshua with those that were destroyed in the same part of the Late Bronze Age II (13th century B.C.) cannot be accomplished any more successfully than the previous effort to match the evidence from the Late Bronze I (15th century B.C.). [See summary of the article by J. Maxwell Miller on the next page.]

#### Multiple-conquest theories

The problem of matching the biblical account and the available archaeological evidence is further complicated by the fact that it has proved impossible to associate the destructions of Hazor, Bethel (if one accepts that it is Beitin) and Lachish (all of which were destroyed in the 13th century B.C.) with the work of one man (Joshua), as the Bible maintains.

Albright originally dated the destruction of Beitin to 1299, while the date for the 13th-century destruction of Lachish was originally set at 1225, almost 75 years later! But supposedly both were destroyed by Joshua's invasion. The excavators at Lachish pressured Albright to lower his date for the destruction of Beitin. While Albright did later agree to a lowering of his date for the destruction of Beitin (a change he was never comfortable with) to 1250 B.C., this still left a gap of 25 years between the destruction of Beitin and Lachish, a gap that it was hoped later evidence would help to close. However, later evidence has made the gap *larger* and not smaller!

Lachish is still being excavated (and partially reconstructed). The latest evidence supports a date of about 1140 for the destruction of Lachish. This not only



produces a gap of at least 110 years (160 years if one accepts Albright's original date) for the destruction of cities which, supposedly, were conquered by a coordinated campaign of conquest, under the leadership of one man, but it also places the destruction of one city (Beitin) far too early and the other (Lachish) far too late for the time of Joshua.

This has given rise to the theory (embraced by a fair number of scholars) that there were multiple conquests: separate groups of peoples moving into Canaan at different times, only later joining into a 12-tribe confederacy. It has even been suggested the 12 sons of Jacob were fictitious — that the story was made up because the people divided themselves into 12 groups, each to take care of the main religious shrine (the tabernacle at Shiloh) one month a year. There's no evidence for that, of course, but if you don't believe the Bible is historically reliable, any speculation is permitted.

Archaeologists have even had problems when they *do* find evidence that a city was destroyed at what they believe to be "the right time." For example, Yigael Yadin was able to demonstrate that the city of Hazor (Joshua 11:11) was destroyed about 1225 B.C. After remaining uninhabited for about 40 years, there was a settlement of tents and huts (which they conclude are Israelite), which existed *without interruption* until the time of Solomon. Thus, the archaeological evidence indicates that following its destruction in 1225, there was *no further*

*Canaanite occupation* of the city. Judges 4, however, tells us that after Hazor's destruction by Joshua, the Israelites, led by Deborah, fought against Jabin, the Canaanite king of Hazor. In order to reconcile this discrepancy, two Israeli scholars (Aharoni and Avi-Yonah) have gone so far as to suggest a separate invasion by Hebrews led by Deborah before the time of Joshua!

### The Book of Judges

As if this is not confusion enough, one also needs to consider the implications of accepting a 13th century B.C. date for the Israelite Conquest on the chronology of the Book of Judges. This book contains narrative material from the time of Joshua's death to the time of Saul, about 1050. However, if the Conquest was in 1225 B.C., as most modern-critical scholars would have it, Joshua would have died about 1200, and all the events of Judges have to be squeezed into 150 years.

It is generally agreed that the Israelites' struggle with the Philistines began around 1100 or 1125. So everything before Samson would have to be compressed into 100 years *or less*. Such a "compression" of the events distorts the whole structure of the Book of Judges.

A modern-critical scholar might say that the figure of 300 years given by Jephthah (Judges 11:26) was achieved by rounding or was the unreliable guess of an ill-informed individual, but to reduce it to only 75-100 years (as is required by a 13th century B.C. date) makes it impossible

#### J. Maxwell Miller: Most of the Evidence Doesn't Fit

J. Maxwell Miller summarized some of the problems with the 13th-century Conquest theory in the beginning of an article in *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, July-December 1977, "Archaeology and the Israelite Conquest of Canaan: Some Methodological Observations."

"Albright's proposed correlation of biblical and archaeological data [as being essentially correct if you ignore some of the details] in terms of a thirteenth-century B.C.E. exodus-conquest has served as a standard working hypothesis, especially among English speaking scholars, since the late 1930s....

"As artifactual data relevant to the end of the Late Bronze Age have continued to accumulate from Palestinian sites, the inclination has been to attribute any approximately thirteenth-century city destruction to the Israelite invaders, regardless of whether the city in question is even mentioned in the biblical conquest traditions. When excavations at the cities which do figure in the conquest traditions have yielded little or no LB [Late Bronze] remains, this negative evidence has been explained away in one fashion or another.

"Actually some of the archaeological evidence which was available during the 1930s, especially that from Jericho and Ai, was already then rather damaging to Albright's position; and not all the archaeological arguments which he was able to marshal in support of

a thirteenth-century exodus-conquest have survived the test of time. Finally [note this] *we have reached the point, it seems to me, where more archaeological evidence must be explained away in order to maintain Albright's position than can be called upon to support it.*" Most of the evidence doesn't fit (italics added).

"The archaeological situation at the cities which figure prominently in the conquest tradition is as follows. Hormah...Arad, Heshbon, Jericho, Ai, Gibeon and now Jarmuth...have yielded little or no evidence of even having been occupied during LB, much less of having been destroyed during the thirteenth century.... Hebron and Debir...appear to have been occupied during LB-Iron I [c.1225-1200], but there is no indication at any of these places of a major destruction which could be attributed to an Israelite invasion.

"Bethel [Beitin] was occupied and destroyed more than once during LB-Iron I. But the Bible conspicuously excludes Bethel from Joshua's conquests.... Eglon has been associated with Tell el-Hesi; but there is little to recommend this identification, which leaves only Lachish and Hazor. Here finally are two cities which the Bible claims to have been conquered by Joshua and where archaeological remains could be interpreted in terms of a thirteenth-century conquest — not a very high percentage." □

to accommodate all the events contained in chapters 1-10 of the Book of Judges.

### The infiltration theory

Finally, the Bible states that the Canaanites lived in impressive walled cities (Numbers 13:28). A recent analysis by Rifka Gonen (of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem), however, has demonstrated that the Late Bronze Age was one of the *least* urbanized in the history of Canaan. Following the destruction of the cities at the end of the Middle Bronze Age (and some destruction at the end of the Late Bronze I), *63 percent* of the cities remained uninhabited for at least part of the Late Bronze period. In the hill country, where Joshua's campaign centered, *95 percent* of the cities existing at the end of the Middle Bronze Age were uninhabited. Of the few cities that were resettled, *most were unfortified*: without any walls at all!

How can we reconcile that archaeological finding, which we have no reason to doubt, with the spies' mention of the heavily fortified cities?

Yadin wrote about the "basic historicity" of the biblical accounts of the Conquest. How can one suggest any kind of historicity for the biblical accounts with all of these major discrepancies with the archaeological evidence? How can one attempt to maintain that there is an agreement between the biblical accounts and the archaeological evidence if the specifics of the biblical accounts are discounted? The truth is, there is *no agreement between the two at all!*

So where do we stand with the attempt to reconcile the archaeological evidence and the biblical record? James Pritchard, in a book about his excavation at Gibeon, looked at the archaeological evidence of Jericho, Ai and Gibeon, and commented: "It suggests that we have reached an impasse on the question of supporting the...conquest with archaeological undergirding."

Yes, the archaeologists are at an impasse. They concluded that there is no archaeological support for a Conquest in the 15th century. They then claimed that the archaeological evidence was better for a 13th-century date. However, on closer examination, the evidence for the 13th-century date is not any better. These problems have led some archaeologists and biblical historians to state that there is no support for the biblical accounts of the Conquest anywhere between the 15th and the 12th century B.C.!

As a result, there has been a major movement away from the theories about a military conquest of Canaan by a large number of outsiders in favor of a modification of a theory originally presented by George Mendenhall about 30 years ago. Largely the work of Norman Gottwald (a sociologist who is neither an archaeologist nor a biblical scholar), this theory postulates that before, or about

the same time as, the Israelite incursion into Canaan, there was a revolt by Canaanite peasants against their feudal Canaanite overlords that resulted in the destruction of most of the cities in Canaan (especially in the central hill country). The cities that remained (or revived) were primarily in the coastal plain, the Shephelah, the borders of the Jezreel Valley and the northern Galilee.

According to the theory, the liberated peasants, after their successful revolt, not willing to risk being forced back into serfdom by their former overlords, fled to the central hill country, where they amalgamated with the *small number* of Hebrews who had *peacefully* infiltrated that region after the destruction of the strong Canaanite centers by the rebels. Although they outnumbered the Hebrew newcomers, these Canaanite rebels, outcasts from their own political and social system, pledged themselves to accept the Hebrew God when they joined with the Hebrew newcomers to become a new "nation."

According to this theory, the ceremony at Shechem (Joshua 24:1-15), where all those present pledged themselves to forswear the "gods of the Amorites" (as well as all other gods), although it has been "reworked" by later editors to reflect the traditional national "mythology" of the Exodus from Egypt, still preserves the memory of the pact made between the Canaanite peasants and the Hebrew immigrants.

After several hundred years of settling down in the largely unoccupied hill country, the expanding population of this "mixed nation" (Canaanite in culture and Hebrew in religion) again came into conflict with the Canaanites living in the remaining urban centers and, in the process of warring against them, destroyed their cities. It is these later battles (according to Gottwald and his adherents) that serve as the raw material for the "battle accounts" that form the core of the Book of Joshua.

### Examining this latest theory

Indeed, Rifka Gonen's evidence seems to support this. Between 1400 and 1200, there was a gradual increase in the number of settlements, accelerating in the period between 1200 and 1000. For example, in the southern hills of Samaria, there were five settlements at the end of the Late Bronze Age. At the end of the Iron I period, around the year 1000, there were 103. They share the same kind of pottery and architecture, which we identify as Israelite. The first settlements are clustered between Shechem and Shiloh, then they spread into the Galilee and Judah, then Beersheba and the Shephelah region (the southwestern foothills).

Although many scholars have become fascinated with Gottwald's theory, it has not won universal acceptance by any means. This is largely because of the numerous details preserved in the biblical account — details that simply could not, and would not, have been made up

hundreds of years later. The Bible records some of the battles of Joshua, battles in which the Israelites won through divine assistance or by utilizing clever strategies, not by superior force.

If the Canaanite cities were destroyed only after several hundred years of "Israelite" settlement, as Gottwald has suggested, the Israelites would have been so numerous that they would have overwhelmed the walled cities by virtue of numerical strength. They wouldn't have invented stories that showed a need to rely on "tricks." [For details of the military stratagems used, see the excerpts from the article by Abraham Malamat from the March-April 1982 *Biblical Archaeology Review* in the box on the next page.]

If the archaeologists and biblical historians have reached an impasse that is so great as to prompt many to accept the kind of theory proposed by Norman Gottwald (which makes a "hash" out of the Book of Joshua, the patriarchal narratives, the Exodus and the wilderness wanderings), where does it leave us?

We still believe in the historical accuracy of the biblical account. But can this belief be defended in a rational way, or do we simply have to say it's just a matter of faith? I think it can be defended in a rational way.

#### Can a 15th century B.C. date be defended?

What has been the response of conservative scholars to this "flood" of archaeological evidence that seems to contradict the biblical accounts of the Exodus and the Israelite Conquest? Have they simply chosen to ignore this "evidence" and maintain a simplistic faith in the integrity of I Kings 6:1? No. They have been very active in defense of the traditional 15th-century date of the Exodus and the Israelite Conquest. Let's take another look at the claims of the modern-critical scholars and consider how they can be satisfactorily answered.

First, let's consider I Kings 6:1. The modern-critical scholars claim that the number 480, while reflecting that there were 12 generations between the Exodus and Solomon, is in error because the presumed 40 years per generation is unrealistic. I think we can admit that 25 years is a more realistic number for the time between the birth of one generation and the next. However, that need not lead inevitably to the conclusion reached by many modern-critical scholars.

The modern-critical scholars suggest that the writer of I Kings knew there had been 12 generations between the Exodus and Solomon on the basis of I Chronicles 6:4-10, which they say indicates that there were 12 generations of priests from the time of the Exodus generation (Eleazar) until the time of Zadok's grandson (not great-grandson) Azariah, who, along with his grandfather and father, began to serve in Solomon's temple.

However, if we look at the genealogy of Heman the

singer in I Chronicles 6:33-37, we find that it lists *not 12, but 19 generations* from the time of Solomon back to the Exodus generation. Apparently the genealogy of the priests has been shortened; some names have been omitted. Perhaps it was done to present a symmetrical pattern of two sets of 12 generations. The first set runs from Eleazar, the Exodus generation, through Azariah, the generation that saw the foundation of Solomon's temple. Then there are 12 generations from Azariah to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, who saw the founding of the Second Temple.

The fact that a similar thing was done in Matthew's genealogy of Christ lends support to this idea. We can't test the accuracy of the whole genealogy, but we do have a record of the kings of Judah, and we know that Matthew omitted four kings in his list of the ancestors of Joseph: Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah and Jehoiachim. Generations were skipped, creating a symmetry: 14 generations from Abraham to David, 14 generations from David to the captivity and 14 generations from the captivity to Christ. It is without question a shortened genealogy, not a literal one. The list says one man begat another, but it wasn't meant to be taken literally; it simply meant he was an ancestor. While we might not write history that way, they didn't see anything wrong with it. We have to accept the literature in the way they wrote *then*.

So we can see from this biblical example that genealogical lists aren't always complete. Some names might be missing.

What then about the 19 generations of singers mentioned in I Chronicles 6? Since the genealogy of the priests may have been shortened to create a symmetry, the genealogy of the singers is most likely the one that is complete. Isn't it interesting that if we use the modern-critical scholars' figure of 25 years per generation, this gives us about 475 years between the Exodus and Solomon? Thus the Bible again indicates it was about 480 years between the Exodus and Solomon.

#### Re-examination of Egyptian evidence

Let's look at the matter of Moses' adoption. The critics suggest that Moses was born during the early years of the 19th dynasty. But all the throne princesses of that dynasty had an abundance of royal sons, making it very unlikely that a throne princess would risk the strong social disapproval involved in adopting a Hebrew child.

In contrast, Hatshepsut not only lacked a son, but she is also known to have had a very independent spirit, strong enough to make herself Pharaoh. Having an adopted son who could be the heir to the throne may explain why she seized the throne — to prevent Thutmose III from assuming power. Another fact that fits is that Thutmose III seized the throne from Hatshepsut about the time when Moses would have been 40. And since

### Details of a Military Conquest

An interesting article by Abraham Malamat appeared in the March-April 1982 *Biblical Archaeology Review*. Malamat's primary expertise is with the period of the monarchy, with the relationships between the Israelite kingdoms and Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia. But he turned his attention to the Israelite Conquest in this article, "How Inferior Forces Conquered Fortified Canaanite Cities." His observations suggest that the Israelites were less numerous than the Canaanites.

"Both the 'infiltration' model and the 'revolt' model hold some truth. No doubt some peaceful infiltration and settlement occurred. No doubt there was dissension and some insurgence in the Canaanite cities, with some Canaanites even joining forces with the invading Israelites. Consider, for example, Rahab, the harlot, who let the Israelites into Jericho...and the informer from Bethel who showed the Israelites the way into that city (Judges 1:24-25).

"But there is a third 'model' — the Biblical tradition, *per se* — that describes an outright military conquest of Canaan, and this third model cannot simply be discarded. Without accepting every detail of the Biblical account, it is nevertheless clear that alongside a peaceful settlement...and some unrest and revolt in the Canaanite cities...there was Israelite military action which achieved forceful penetration into Canaan....

"A basic element of Israelite consciousness is that Canaan was 'inherited' by force, whether this force was an act of God or of man. This tenet is like a leitmotif that runs through the Biblical sources." This theme is not just in Judges and Joshua but elsewhere in the Bible. He says, "at the core, a military conquest remains." You have to accept the fact there was some sort of military conquest.

The biblical account "reflects an intimate and authentic knowledge of the land, and a knowledge of its topography...and...military strategy — which strongly support the conclusion that the settlement of the Israelites in Canaan was accompanied by substantial military operations."

Let's look at a few examples of how the topography affected the battles. The way of Atharim (the Scorpion's Pass), the way that the spies went up to investigate Canaan, is a significant route into the southern region. The Israelites' presence near southern Canaan upset the king of Arad, since his job was, so to speak, to guard the southern portions of the country. So he attacked and was defeated. The Israelites then went east, passing around the land of Edom and Moab.

The Canaanites did not try to stop the Israelites from crossing the Jordan River, despite the fact that it could be crossed in only a few places. These fords were guarded at other times, such as in the time of Gideon or the time of Jephthah. But the Canaanites took no such action. That's because the Canaanites were divided into mutually suspicious city-states. They were not in the habit of taking joint action.

We also find that the Israelites conquered the hill

country first; they did not conquer the lands where chariots could be used (Joshua 17:16, Judges 1:19). If the account had been written hundreds of years later, when Israel had already conquered those areas, it never would have occurred to the writer that they had ever had such a difficulty; thus, the account reflects historical reality.

Notice also the importance of Gilgal, where the Israelites camped after crossing the Jordan (Joshua 4:19). After defending Gibeon, they returned to Gilgal (Joshua 10:15). After conquering the southern cities, they returned to the camp at Gilgal (verse 43). Gilgal is a logical place for a base camp — near the Jordan, near the women and children who lived in the areas the Israelites had conquered east of the Jordan.

The Bible also mentions military stratagems. For example, the use of spies for the whole land (Numbers 13), for Jazer (Numbers 21:32), Jericho (Joshua 2:1) and Ai (Joshua 7:2). "Even if Israel was not unique in its employment of stratagems in warfare, no other literature of the ancient Near East equals the books of Joshua and Judges in the number and variety of battle stratagems described."

There are only two cases where Israel directly faced a large number of Canaanites. Other cities either had no troops left to defend them or a stratagem was used. For example, in the case of Ai the Israelites fled, pretending to be afraid. The men of Ai chased the Israelites down a narrow valley, leaving Ai defenseless. A small force destroyed the city. Then the Israelites who were pretending to flee stopped running away and began to fight; so the men of Ai ended up being trapped in the valley between the two Israelite forces.

However, when Israel defended Gibeon against its Canaanite neighbors, the Israelites faced a numerically superior force. They won largely because they used a surprise attack. "Joshua therefore came upon them suddenly, having marched all night from Gilgal" (Joshua 10:9). This was about 20 miles and about 3,000 feet higher in elevation. They arrived near daybreak. Verse 12 tells us that the sun was over Gibeon, to their east. The Canaanites, not mentally prepared for this, panicked and fled.

They were helpless as long as they were in a state of panic. God not only lengthened the day, he also sent down huge hailstones to kill the fleeing Canaanites. Success came through the combination of valid military tactics and divine intervention.

Another frontal assault against a larger Canaanite force took place at the waters of Merom in northern Canaan (Joshua 11). Again, the account mentions the matter of surprise. "Joshua and all the people of war with him came against them suddenly by the waters of Merom, and they attacked them" (verse 7). Again, the Israelites pursued the panic-stricken enemy relentlessly. The numerically superior Canaanite force was defeated — in a state of panic, even a large army is helpless. □

Thutmose III tried to destroy every mention of Hatshepsut on the monuments of Egypt (you can still see where he ordered her names erased on many of them today), we wouldn't expect to find any records of her adopted son.

The Amarna tablets don't support either date, since the *Apiru* could have been any group. If we, for other good reasons, know that the Israelites invaded Canaan about 1400 B.C., then the *Apiru* mentioned in the letters would probably refer to them. But by themselves the letters are not proof.

What about the capital of the 18th dynasty being 400 miles away? Though the capital may have been so far away, the pharaohs of the 18th dynasty did spend time in Lower Egypt, and began construction projects there. Thutmose III appointed a vizier for his capital at Thebes and one for the Delta, at the old northern capital, Memphis. So he could have been the pharaoh who put the Israelites to hard labor. Amenhotep II, whom various of us believe to be the Pharaoh of the Exodus, was born in Memphis, and seems to have had extensive estates there. The pharaoh could have been close to Goshen occasionally, making Moses' communication job possible.

What about the fact that Seti I (1300 B.C.) and Rameses (1290) don't mention Israel even though they campaigned in Canaan? And that the Bible doesn't mention either of these campaigns? Well, the Bible doesn't mention Merneptah's campaign in the year 1225, either. The pharaohs didn't go into the hill country where the Israelites lived. The Book of Judges is a record of how God punished the Israelites when they forsook God. The pharaohs' campaigns were not mentioned by the author(s) of the Book of Judges because the Egyptians were not used by God as an instrument to punish Israel.

### The land of Rameses

What about the lack of remains from the 15th century B.C. under the city built by Rameses II? It is true that there are no earlier remains under Rameses' city (modern Qantir). In the 17th century B.C., it was the capital of the Hyksos. They were thrown out of Egypt about 1550 by the pharaoh who may have begun the enslavement of the Israelites. The city then remained uninhabited from 1550 to the 1200s.

However, just south of Rameses' later city (at Tel el-Daba), there are remains from the 18th dynasty, the 15th century. The people who lived there were apparently Semitic and thus *could have been* Israelites. It would not be surprising that the area the Israelites had lived in would be referred to by the better-known name Rameses even if the new city wasn't built exactly on top of the old.

Genesis 47:11 says that Joseph situated his family "in the land of Rameses." Joseph lived much earlier than the 13th century. So how could he mention the name of Rameses? Scholars agree that Joseph probably used

another name, but the old name had fallen out of use after Rameses made the area famous with his own name. So an editor used the name that would have been understood. Another example of such editorial updating is the mention of Dan in Genesis 14.

The attempt to associate the period of Israelite slavery in Egypt with the pharaohs of the 19th dynasty (13th century B.C.) presents other difficulties. The 13th century B.C. city of Rameses was a capital, not a store city (Exodus 1:11). Also, if Rameses II was the Pharaoh of the Oppression (the one who put the Israelites to forced labor on his building projects), the Pharaoh of the Exodus would have to have been his successor, Merneptah — but Merneptah found the Israelites living in Canaan in the fifth year of his reign! Thus there are serious problems if one tries to associate the 13th century pharaohs and the biblical record.

### Edom, Moab, Heshbon and Dibon

Let's look at the evidence presented by Nelson Glueck in his survey in Edom and Moab. Glueck wrote that the biblical account could not represent a 15th century reality because Edom and Moab were uninhabited at that time. While this conclusion still appears in the literature dealing with the question of the date of the Exodus (even in articles written in the 1980s by authors who chose not to include the latest evidence), Glueck himself wrote in 1974 that his conclusion had been wrong.

Glueck examined surface finds; he did not excavate. You cannot prove *lack* of population from a survey. Many periods of occupation may be overlooked. In the 1960s and 1970s a number of other surveys, more thorough than Glueck's, were done in Edom and Moab. They found that *there was* a settled population there in the 15th century, although it was not a large one. Now modern-critical scholars write that the 15th-century population was too small to have forced Israel to have gone around their national territories as is described in the biblical accounts.

However, the Bible doesn't say that Israel went around because Edom and Moab were more populous. In fact, Deuteronomy 2:4 comments that Edom and Moab would be afraid of Israel. God told the Israelites to go around them because the land belonged to Edom and Moab (verses 5, 9, 19). The implication is that the Israelites could have overwhelmed the people of Edom and Moab. So the archaeological evidence does not contradict the Bible.

Numbers 21:21-30 mentions that the Israelites conquered the cities of Heshbon and Dibon. Archaeologists excavated at the villages of Diban and Hesban and found the ancient capital cities of Heshbon and Dibon. But those cities were founded on virgin soil in the ninth century B.C.; there was nothing there in the 15th century B.C. So the modern-critical scholars say the biblical text is wrong.

What I find very interesting is that when these same scholars find evidence in secular historical records that seems to contradict the archaeological evidence, they don't say the historical records are wrong. They just say we don't have a complete archaeological picture yet.

The city of Diban, as it turns out, is mentioned in secular history — in the 15th century and in the 13th. Thutmose III and Rameses II both recorded conquests of the city of Diban. So archaeologists say the city, though not at the exact site of the modern Arab village of Diban, was nearby. Why can't we use the same standard when we are dealing with the biblical text? Why is it unacceptable to state that the sites of the 15th-century cities of Diban and Heshbon haven't been found yet?

The general point is this: There is nothing in the archaeological picture in Egypt or east of the Jordan that would forbid a 15th-century date. The evidence is not as damaging to the biblical account as it first seemed.

### The problem of Ai

Now let's look at the cities that Joshua conquered and destroyed. How can we explain the archaeological evidence that says the cities were not destroyed in the 15th century? What about the non-existence of Ai? Ai is thought to be at a site known as et-Tell, which means "the ruin." It is near a site known as Beitin, which is presumed by most to be the site of Bethel.

Geographically, this makes very little sense. David Livingston has shown that the geographical information provided in the Bible about Ai and Bethel do not match the geographical factors of et-Tell and Beitin. Though most people still do not accept his conclusion, I think it is very well founded.

The Bible indicates that Bethel and Ai were quite close, but Beitin and et-Tell are not that close. Eusebius mentions that Bethel was almost exactly at the 12th mile marker north of Jerusalem. But Beitin isn't 12 miles north of Jerusalem. Other geographical information seems to indicate that Bethel was on the main north-south route from Jerusalem to Shechem. Beitin is not. The Bible says that Bethel was on the border between Judah and Israel. But Beitin is north of the other border areas. Also, Abraham camped on a mountain between Bethel and Ai. There is no mountain between Beitin and et-Tell. The Bible says that Ai and Bethel were west of Michmash (not necessarily due west, since Hebrew has no word for northwest). Et-Tell is almost due north, only slightly west.

Bireh, though, does lie on the natural geographic border between Benjamin and Ephraim. It's on the main highway about 12 miles north of Jerusalem. There's a mountain near Bireh; on the other side of the mountain, 1 1/2 kilometers southeast, is a ruin at Khirbet Nisya. Khirbet Nisya is west, and only slightly north, of Michmash. The geography near Khirbet Nisya matches the

details given in the battle of Ai, unlike et-Tell (though some scholars would make the claim that et-Tell does match satisfactorily).

Livingston is excavating at Khirbet Nisya. So far the evidence is encouraging but it is not yet conclusive. Even if Khirbet Nisya is not the correct site for Ai, it is clear that et-Tell is not.

### What about the cultural break?

One of the most-often-used arguments in favor of a 13th-century Conquest is the cultural break between the Late Bronze II and the Iron Age. The cultural break is presumed to have come from a destruction of one people by the invasion of another. It is assumed that the Conquest would create a cultural break. However, it's becoming known that the cultural break was not abrupt — the Late Bronze culture simply tapered off and the Iron Age culture gradually replaced it, with some overlap between the two. This violates the concept of archaeological periods, that one ends and the next begins. The idea of overlap in the archaeological sequence has not been admitted before. But it is becoming apparent that it took place.

Moreover, just because a new culture is introduced does not mean that it was introduced by new ethnic groups. Most Iron Age forms are actually developments of Late Bronze ones — it was an evolutionary change, not a revolutionary one.

The Iron Age inhabitants of Canaan are clearly Israelite. But they could have been there earlier and participated in the transition from Late Bronze to Iron Age. After all, the change to Iron Age happened throughout the eastern Mediterranean coast. "The shift from the richness of the Late Bronze Age to the apparent [notice the qualification] poverty of early Iron I is a phenomenon which extends into the whole of Canaanite and Eastern Mediterranean culture and not just that section affected by the Hebrews" (Tricia Bikai, *Orientalia*, volume 49, 1980, page 214).

Israel wasn't responsible for all the changes, so we can't presume they were uniquely responsible for it in Canaan. It makes more sense to view Israel as just one of many peoples in the area going through a cultural change. In fact, the Bible suggests that the Israelites were culturally behind the times — for a while, the only smiths were the Philistines (Joshua 17:16, I Samuel 14:19-20).

### What about the non-existent cities?

The Bible says many cities were destroyed in the Conquest; archaeology says most were not destroyed in the 13th or the 15th centuries. In many cases, the cities were uninhabited during the Late Bronze Age.

Perhaps, then, we are looking in the wrong time period. Let's look at the end of the Middle Bronze Age. Did Jericho exist? Yes. Gibeon yes, Hebron yes. Hormah yes,

the smaller Arad yes. Debir, Lachish, Hazor, Beitin and Bireh all yes. Et-Tell, no, but Khirbet Nisya, yes.

Were these Middle Bronze cities surrounded by a wall? Yes for Jericho, Hebron, H̄ormah, the smaller Arad, Lachish and Hazor. We don't know yet for Bireh and Khirbet Nisya. At Gibeon none was discovered. Were these cities destroyed at the end of the Middle Bronze? Yes, most were. Again, there's generally a good match.

Now, why are we looking at the end of the *Middle Bronze Age* — isn't that too early for the Exodus? Isn't the 15th century in the *Late Bronze Age*? Perhaps the picture is more complicated than it appears.

#### Canaanite cities destroyed at end of Middle Bronze Age?

Much of the chronological framework depends on the dating of various pottery forms. Some types of pottery are associated with a particular date based on an early excavation. Other researchers then applied that date to their own excavations. Even though the original work may have been faulty, the date has become widely used. [The assumptions involved in dating pottery are noted in *Reviews You Can Use*, September-October 1988.]

Kathleen Kenyon had concluded that Jericho was destroyed about 1550 (the end of the Middle Bronze Age), based on the absence of bichrome pottery in the destruction. John Bimson, an English scholar (author of *Redating the Exodus and Conquest*), notes that bichromeware "was quite limited. It does not seem to have spread appreciably into the highland regions of central Palestine, let alone as far as the Jordan Valley.... If its use never extended appreciably beyond the coastal plain, then its non-appearance at Jericho can obviously not be taken to imply abandonment of the city.... I submit, therefore, that MBA Jericho actually came to an end in the second half of the 15th century BC, and that its attackers were the Israelites as recorded in Joshua 6" (pages 133-135, second edition).

He notes that the city labeled by Kathleen Kenyon as Middle Bronze was heavily fortified, and destroyed by fire. "Kenyon writes: '...All the Middle Bronze Age buildings were violently destroyed by fire.... This destruction covers the whole area.... Walls and floors are hardened and blackened, burnt debris and beams from the upper storeys fill the rooms, and the whole is covered by a wash from burnt walls.'... We are forcibly reminded of the fact that Joshua had Jericho burnt to the ground after he had taken it (Joshua 6:24)" (pages 120-121).

Although Bimson is almost certainly right about these matters, he does err (as far as I can see) by attempting to move the date for the end of the Middle Bronze Age down to the last part of the 15th century B.C. in order that it will more closely accord with the biblical chronology suggested by I Kings 6:1 and Judges 11:26. The answer,

I believe, does not lie in this direction. Rather, I believe the work done by Bryant Wood (who received his Ph.D. from the University of Toronto) is more likely to have shown the correct answer to the problem.

Dr. Wood has (in my opinion) convincingly demonstrated at two conferences I have attended ("Who was the Pharaoh of the Exodus?" — Memphis, Tennessee, spring 1987, and the Society of Biblical Literature/American Schools of Oriental Research annual meeting, Boston, November 1988) that Kathleen Kenyon erred in her conclusions and that John Garstang (who excavated at Jericho in the 1930s) was correct. The occupation level with the massive walls (so thoroughly destroyed that nothing but the stumps of the walls were left) that was subjected to the tremendous fire noted by Kenyon should be dated to about 1400 B.C. (the end of Late Bronze I) and not 1550 B.C. (the end of the Middle Bronze Age).

Dr. Wood demonstrated that with the exception of imported bichromeware, all the major pottery forms found in this massive destruction of Jericho were *identical* to forms found in the 15th century B.C. destruction level of Hazor! This destruction level of Hazor is well documented and its date (about 1400 B.C.) is accepted by all scholars. Since all local pottery forms were identical, it follows that the two cities were destroyed at the same time — the end of the Late Bronze I (about 1400 B.C.).

#### Conclusion

It's quite possible that when the Israelites came into Canaan, some cities were using only pottery typical of the end of the Middle Bronze Age while a few "trendsetters," especially cities on trade routes, were introducing the new imported bichromeware, which is currently still accepted as the hallmark of the Late Bronze Age.

Scholars have already admitted that the transition from Late Bronze to Iron had some overlap. And they've been forced to admit that eighth-century Samaria used a different kind of pottery than eighth-century Lachish. [See *Reviews You Can Use*, September-October 1988.]

In the time of Joshua, then, some cities may have been using pottery generally characterized as belonging to the Middle Bronze (since bichromeware is missing) at the same time other cities may have been using pottery characteristic of the Late Bronze Age. Archaeological dating methods are not as precise as scholars sometimes assume them to be. The evidence isn't conclusive enough; the scholars' conclusions aren't so airtight that they prove the biblical account wrong.

On the other hand, however, *we cannot prove the Bible by archaeology* — we don't have enough evidence. We can explain the evidence if we assume the Bible to be true, but we can't use the evidence to prove the Bible. Nor do we need to.

*Richard Paige*