

DPS Biblical Archeology Study – Teacher’s Guide

1. Introduction

Overview

- a. The Bible and Archeology
- b. Archeological tools
- c. Significant confirmed biblical structures

Discussion Questions

a. The Bible and Archeology

Why So Much Importance Is Attached To Biblical Archeology

Of all the religions and faiths in the world, the Judeo-Christian faith is somewhat unique in its historical component. While all the other religions and faiths "contain" histories, our faith seems to be "based" on history. If the historical content of most other faiths is removed, their basic philosophy or substance is not affected. But this is difficult to do with the bible, as it makes definite historic claims. Remove the historical content, and the Christian faith [and the Jewish faith] is seriously challenged. That’s why biblical archeology is important.

Benefits of Biblical Archeology

1- Insights Into History/Chronology: Most people do not realize that the way history is written, and the way in which chronologies are constructed, vary from culture to culture. Thus the historical and chronological records produced by people of one culture can be understood only if we understand the presuppositions and methodologies of those people.

2- Insights Into Culture/Customs/Manners: Culture, customs, and manners vary from place to place and time to time even within a single country. So much so that what is considered as appropriate and even desirable behavior in one part of a country can be interpreted as undesirable in another part of the same country. Since that is the case, the Biblical history covering a span of 4000 years, having taken place in dozens of countries, contains many things related to these things that might perplex people today. Some of the Biblical statements can even be misinterpreted today.

3- Insights Into Languages/Meanings: Biblical languages are dead today. They are not spoken anywhere. Thus it is difficult for the twentieth century reader to understand all the finer nuances

of these languages when they were used by people for whom it was their native language. Historical investigations, however, have produced tens of thousands of writings of all kinds in these languages, enabling linguists to understand vocabulary, word usage, and idioms of these languages more accurately.

b. Archeological Tools

Archaeological field survey is the methodological process by which archaeologists (often landscape archaeologists) collect information about the location, distribution and organization of past human cultures across a large area.

Surveys:

In a non-intrusive survey, nothing is touched, just recorded. An intrusive survey can mean different things. In some cases, all artifacts of archaeological value are collected. This is often the case if it is a rescue survey, but less common in a regular survey.

Another form of intrusive research is bore holes. Small holes are drilled into the ground, most often with hand-powered bores. The contents are examined to determine the depths at which one might find cultural layers, and where one might expect to strike virgin soil.

Geophysical survey is used for subsurface mapping of archaeological sites. In recent years, there have been great advances in this field, and it is becoming an increasingly useful and cost-effective tool in archaeology. Geophysical instruments can detect buried archaeological features when their electrical or magnetic properties contrast measurably with their surroundings. In some cases individual artifacts, especially metal, may be detected as well.

Analysis

The analysis is the most important phase in archeology; it includes careful examination of all the evidence collected. A method often used to determine its value is to compare it to sites of the same period.

Dating Methods:

An artifact, an inscription, or a mummy can be placed in historical context and interpreted only if one can speak with some certainty about what period it belongs to. The closer an object is to an event, the better one can interpret the event or the object, and the farther it is the less its relation to the given event. A cult object found from the home-town of Abraham, but used only two millennia after the time of the Patriarch, would throw less specific light on his life and more on the culture millennia after him.

Finding the collapsed walls of ancient Jericho is exciting. But this discovery is useless for Biblical archeology unless it can be demonstrated that this even happened within the dates specified by the Biblical historian. If someone can definitely establish that the discovered event happened 500 years before or after the dates demanded by the Bible, it automatically becomes useless for a possible correlation with the conquest mentioned in the Bible.

Pottery Dating: As a result of decades of careful work on pottery, correlated with absolute chronologies, helped by discoveries of modern science of dating, and compared with neighboring countries, Pottery-based Dating has become an important component of dating in Biblical lands.

Other major Relative and Absolute methods of dating used in archeology are as follows:

Relative Dating Techniques

- Cultural Affiliation
- Fluorine Dating
- Patination
- Pollen Analysis
- Rate Of Accumulation

Absolute Dating Techniques

- Archeomagnetism
- Astronomical Dating
- Dendrochronology
- Electron Spin Resonance
- Fission Track
- Opacity Stimulation Luminescence
- Oxidizable Carbon Ratio
- Racemization
- Thermoluminescence
- Radio-Carbon Dating

c. Some Significant Confirmed Biblical Structures:

- Gibeon pool (at el-Jib)
- Hezekiah's tunnel under Jerusalem
- Jericho's walls. John Garstang in the 1930s dated Jericho's destruction to around 1400 BC.
- Lachish siege ramp of Sennacherib
- Pool of Siloam (unearthed in 2004)
- Second Temple pre-Herodian Walls. The outline of the walls of the square platform that predates the Herodian expansion and, therefore, dates either from the reconstruction in the Persian period under Ezra and Nehemiah or is a survival of the pre-exilic first Temple have been located on the surface of the present platform. The northwestern corner was visible (until it was concealed recently) as the lowest step in a flight of stairs that parallels the eastern wall of the Mount, the north eastern corner as a protruding stone, the south eastern corner as a slight alteration in the angle of the eastern wall where the older platform joins the Herodian expansion. The courses of stone that form the center of the eastern wall are also pre-Herodian, and match the stone masonry of the north west corner of the original platform, now a concealed bottom step.
- Second Temple (confirmed by Western/Wailing wall constructed by Herod the Great)
- Shechem temple (spanning the late Bronze Age to the early Iron Age) corresponding to the "House of (the god) Baalberith" in Judges 9
- 19 Tumuli located west of Jerusalem, undoubtedly dating to the Judean monarchy, but possibly representing sites of memorial ceremonies for the kings as mentioned in 2 Chronicles 16:14, 21:19, 32:33, and the book of Jeremiah 34:5
- Gezer Walls and City Gate. Verification of the site comes from Hebrew inscriptions found engraved on rocks, several hundred meters from the tel. These inscriptions from the 1st century BCE read "boundary of Gezer."
- [Nehemiah]'s wall.

Discussion Questions:

1. Could Christianity/Judaism be a valid religion if the historical accounts turned out to be mere sacred stories? What if some accounts turned out to be historical and others not?

2. Biblical archeology uses scientific methods and theory; do you see a conflict in relying on science when it comes to faith issues? Should faith and science not be separated?