



Recent Archaeological Discoveries That Lend Credence to the **HISTORICITY** of the *Scriptures*

By **Michael A. Grisanti**

Introduction

For one who loves biblical studies and is intensely interested in its intersection with history and archaeology, the potential impact of the latter on the former deserves attention. In various academic and popular settings, numerous scholars in these fields make sweeping statements about the disjuncture between archaeology and/or history and the Bible. Those statements are made with authority and have widespread impact, even on an evangelical audience. How do the plain statements of Scripture fare when related to what seem to be the objective facts of archaeology and history? According to Ron Hendel,

Archaeology did not illumine the times and events of Abraham, Moses and Joshua. Rather, it helped to show that these times and events are largely unhistorical. The more we know about the Bronze and early Iron Ages, the more the Biblical portrayals of events in this era appear to be a blend of folklore and cultural memory, in which the details of historical events have either disappeared or been radically reshaped. The stories are deeply meaningful, but only occasionally historical. Archaeological research has—against the intentions of most of its practitioners—secured the non-historicity of much of the Bible before the era of the kings.¹

In this paper I hope to consider a few examples of intersections between the Bible and archaeological excavations. My primary intended audience is the evangelical world. This paper has a clear apologetic function. It offers a different “take” on the intersection of the Bible and archaeology than one often hears in academic and popular settings. Although this paper has a clear apologetic core, let me make this important point very clear. The archaeological evidence cited below and in any similar study never provides certifiable proof that a given individual lived or that a certain event took place. Our confidence in the accuracy and historicity of the people and events referred to in God’s Word draws on other evidence, primarily theological statements the Bible makes about itself. Regardless, one should recognize that the archaeological evidence does not rule out the people or events described in the Bible. As a matter of fact, archaeology provides a “picture” that points to the feasibility or plausibility that the people and events described in the Bible lived and occurred just as they are described.²

As you can imagine, a brief study like this paper that draws on archaeological data drawn from various sites has built-in

challenges. (1) Anyone who has worked in archaeology to any degree understands that the collection of data from a dig site is very scientific and objective, while the interpretation of that data is much more subjective. All archaeologists bring numerous presuppositions to their work and that affects what evidence they emphasize and how they interpret what they find and do not find. Consequently, I fully understand that my overview of various archaeological discoveries below will not satisfy everyone. (2) I have chosen certain archaeological discoveries to make my point, omitting some other very important examples that deserve mention. Not all will agree with my choices for consideration. (3) I also understand my limitations as a biblical scholar rather than a trained archaeologist. Regardless, I argue below that numerous discoveries made in the last 15–20 years demonstrate that biblical narratives have a “ring of truth” to them when compared with significant and somewhat insignificant finds “from the dirt.”

Out of all the areas that could have received attention, I have narrowed my focus on two chronological periods: the Conquest of Canaan and the United Monarchy. For both I summarize the consensus of critical scholars and then consider the evidence that has been found. With regard to the Conquest of Canaan, the paper considers the recent discussion of an Egyptian pedestal with three name-rings on it as well as the destruction of Jericho and the location and destruction of Ai. After surveying the heated debate concerning the United Monarchy with a focus on David and Solomon, the paper considers key archaeological discoveries found at Jerusalem, Khirbet Qeiyafa and the copper mines in southern Jordan. With each example I argue that the discoveries made at least allow for the historicity and accuracy of the biblical narratives describing those people and events.

Conquest of Canaan (Late Bronze I Period)

Most critical biblical scholars and almost all archaeologists dismiss the historicity of the biblical descriptions of the Israelite conquest of Jericho and Ai.³ The scholarly consensus is that Israel did not begin to exist as a nation (i.e. their ethnogenesis) until sometime after 1200 BC at the earliest. Most conclude that no real “conquest” of Canaan by twelve Israelite tribes ever took place. For example, John van Seters affirms that

there is no justification for trying to associate archaeological ruins of the end of the Late Bronze Age with a conquest narrative written six hundred to seven hundred years later. [The Deuteronomistic Historian] did not have any records from Israel’s earliest period, nor did he follow old oral

traditions. The invasion of the land of Canaan by Israel under Joshua was an invention of [the Deuteronomistic Historian]. The conquest narrative is a good example of ancient historiography but it cannot pass for historical by any modern criteria of historical evaluation.⁴

The below section first considers a relatively recent discovery that may push back the feasibility of Israel's ethnogenesis to the 15th century and then considers the debate over Jericho and Ai.

Recent* discovery made by Berlin scholars



Steven Rudd, www.bible.ca

A broken stone pedestal, now in the Egyptian Museum of Berlin, includes three name-rings. According to some scholars, the partly destroyed name ring at the right is best read as "Israel."

A recent* publication by Egyptologists and biblical scholars Manfred Görg, Peter van der Veen, and Christoffer Theis suggests that there may be an even earlier reference to Israel in the Egyptian record than that found on the Merneptah Stela. Manfred Görg discovered a broken statue pedestal (c. 18



Greg Gulbrandsen

The Merneptah Stele is presently the earliest accepted inscription with the name "Israel" on it. If the Berlin pedestal inscription stands up to scholarly examination, it will antedate this stele by two centuries.

inches high by 15.5 inches wide) containing three hieroglyphic name-rings in the Egyptian Museum of Berlin (i.e. Ashkelon, Canaan, and Israel). After studying it with colleagues Peter van der Veen, and Christoffer Theis, they suggest that the last name-ring, partially destroyed, should be read as "Israel."⁵ Not all scholars agree with their reading because of slight differences in spelling,⁶ but Görg, van der Veen, and Theis offer strong arguments, including supportive parallels in the Merneptah Stele itself. This recently rediscovered inscription is

dated to the 18th Egyptian dynasty (c. 1400 BC)—about 200 years earlier than the Merneptah Stele. If Görg, van der Veen, and Theis are right, their discovery will shed important light on the beginnings of ancient Israel. It would also allow for an early date of the Exodus.⁷ Debate concerning the best way to understand this pedestal is still ongoing.

The date of the destruction of Jericho

DeVries writes, "Jericho could be called 'the big disappointment of biblical archaeology' because excavations at the site have failed to produce the kind of evidence described in the biblical account of the conquest of Jericho in Joshua 6."⁸ Coogan affirms that "Archaeology does not allow this passage (Jos 6:1–14) to be read as a factual account of events connected with the entrance of Israelites tribes into Canaan."⁹ John Strange states that "[i]t goes without saying that the book [of Joshua] as such does not relate any actual conquest and division of the promised land to Joshua. Everybody agrees on that."¹⁰

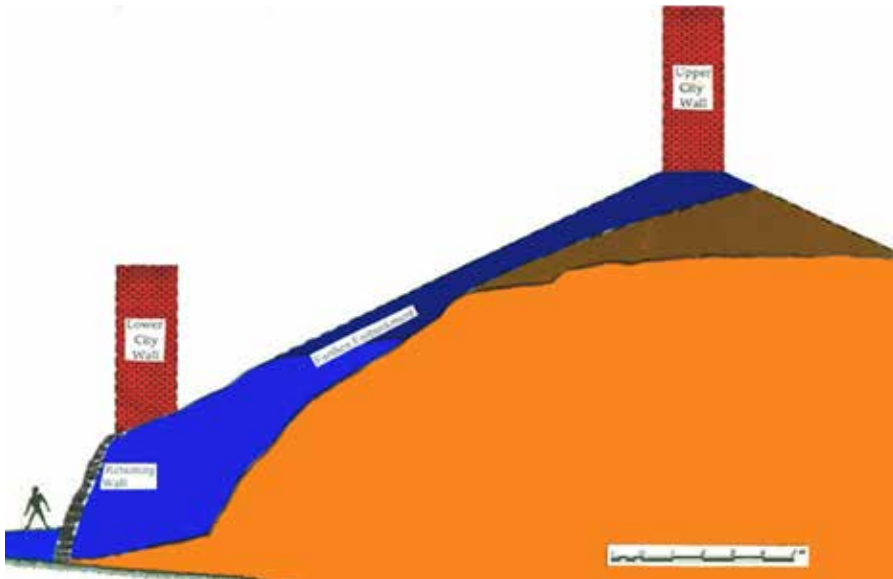
At least five teams of archaeologists have excavated at Jericho.¹¹ More recently, Italian archaeologists have uncovered remains dating to the Early and Middle Bronze periods.¹² The two most significant excavations were conducted by John Garstang (1930–36) and Kathleen Kenyon (1952–58). Garstang dug in a residential area and concluded that the destruction and wall collapse occurred in about 1400 BC.¹³ Kenyon concluded that this destruction occurred 150 years earlier, in ca. 1550 BC. According to her view, when the Israelites appeared on the scene, there was no walled city at Jericho.¹⁴



Michael Luddeni

Aerial view of Tell es-Sultan, ancient Jericho, looking south. The trenches and squares visible today are from Kathleen Kenyon's excavations in the 1950s and the more recent Italian-Palestinian excavation which began in 1997.

Even though archaeologists disagree with each other on various details concerning the evidence at Jericho, they seem to agree on these fundamental issues. (1) At some point in time,



Bryant G. Wood

The double walls of Jericho. A retaining wall (revetment wall) stood at the lowest level where the figure of a man is, followed by the lower city wall, an earthen embankment, and the upper city wall at the top.

the city of Jericho had two walls made of mud brick, an upper wall around the central part of the city and a second wall lower down the slope of the hill. The area between the two walls was occupied by Canaanites (“low rent district”). (2) Jericho was destroyed. A wall made of mud bricks that was built at the top of the stone revetment wall collapsed and contributed to the destruction of the city.¹⁵ Both Garstang and Kenyon found a massive destruction layer that included indication of widespread burning. The debris layer was over a yard thick in all of Kenyon’s excavation area.¹⁶ (3) They found many jars full of grain in various storage rooms in Jericho.¹⁷



Palestine Exploration Fund

Jars full of grain found by John Garstang at Jericho. They were charred in the fire that the Israelites set to destroy the Canaanite city.

Their fundamental disagreement concerns when this destruction occurred. Most scholars hold to Kenyon’s conclusions that Jericho fell in the mid-16th century BC, and that no city even existed when Joshua and the Israelites showed

up. In 1990, Bryant Wood began publishing various articles that point out at least two important flaws in Kenyon’s methodology regarding the date of Jericho’s massive destruction.¹⁸

The first flaw is that a major factor in Kenyon’s decision about the date of this destruction involved the absence of Cypriot bichrome pottery.¹⁹ Kenyon’s understanding of pottery at Jericho seemed to follow these steps. (1) Since the pottery typology at Megiddo was relatively uninterrupted, that typology determines the dating for smaller sites like Jericho.²⁰ (2) The Middle Bronze pottery in Jericho is compared to that found at Megiddo for the same period.²¹ Based exclusively on the pottery typology at Megiddo, Kenyon posits a chronological gap in occupation at Jericho, between c. 1580 and 1400 BC.²² (3) One of the distinctive aspects of LBI pottery is the introduction of Cypriot bichrome pottery.²³

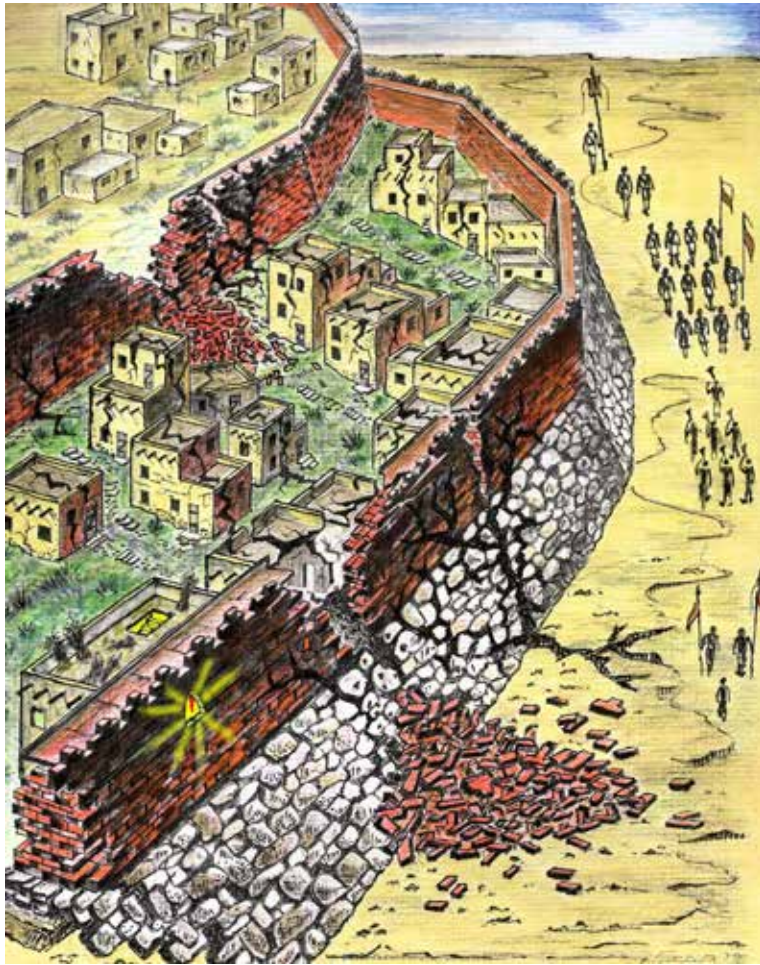


Holylandphotos.org

The revetment wall of Jericho, looking west.

This evidences the opening up of the Syrian coast to trade with the eastern Mediterranean, primarily Cyprus. The absence of this kind of pottery at Jericho is an important indicator of the date of Jericho’s destruction for Kenyon. Because she did not find evidence of this bichrome pottery in her excavation areas, the destruction of Jericho must have predated the Late Bronze I period.

Here are at least several problems with that argument. (1) Most importantly, to make a far-reaching conclusion based on what you do not find represents questionable logic. Evidence that is not found bears consideration, but one should never make absence of evidence the foundation for an important assertion. (2) The very fact that Jericho has no imported Cypriot bichrome pottery should not be surprising since Jericho is not on a major trade route. Kenyon herself wrote about Jericho: “The picture given...is that of simple villagers. There is no suggestion at all of luxury...It was quite probable that Jericho at this time was something of a backwater, away from the contacts with richer areas provided by the coastal route.”²⁴ Kenyon fails to connect her knowledge of Jericho’s relative obscurity with the absence of this expensive, imported pottery that was found in larger cities located on key trade routes. (3) Kenyon paid no attention to low



Gene Fackler

Artist's rendering of the collapse of Jericho's walls, which allowed the Israelites to go "up into the city" (Jos 7:20).

grade imitations of this bichrome pottery that were relatively abundant in the excavations done by Garstang and Kenyon.²⁵ Finally, her focus on pottery that was not found at Jericho in this period overshadows the presence of abundant pottery examples that clearly belong to LBI.²⁶

The second flaw in Kenyon's argument about the dating of Jericho's destruction relates to the relatively small amount of the tell that Kenyon was able to excavate—two 26 by 26-foot squares. On the one hand, no archaeologist is able to dig up an entire site. Time, energy, and resources make this impossible for all archaeological digs. That said, the far-reaching nature of Kenyon's conclusions concerning the date of Jericho's destruction almost implies evidence on a much larger scale. What she found and did not find is based on two large excavation squares. Are we willing to reject what the Bible clearly states based on what was not found in two excavation squares?

In addition to the archaeological evidence summarized above,²⁷ Bryant Wood, among others, has correctly pointed out several clear parallels between the biblical narrative of Jericho's destruction and the archaeological evidence:²⁸

- The city was strongly fortified (Jos 2:5, 7, 15; 6:5, 20)
- Israel's attack of Jericho occurred just after harvest time in the spring (Jos 2:6; 3:15; 5:10)

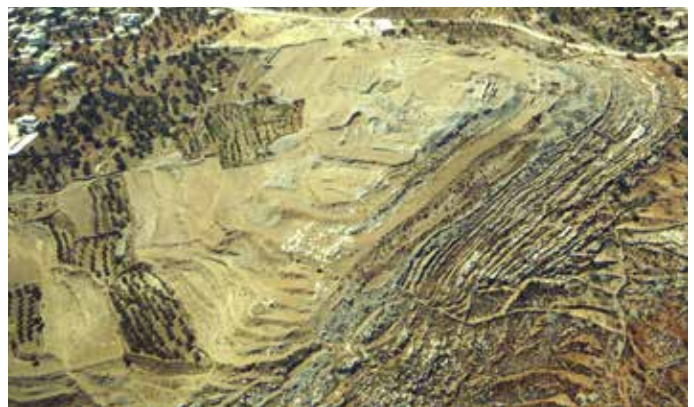
- The inhabitants had no opportunity to flee with their food supplies (Jos 6:1)
- The siege of the city was brief (Jos 6:15)
- The walls of the city were leveled as part of the city's destruction (Jos 6:20)
- The city was not plundered (Jos 6:17–18)
- The city was burned (Jos 6:24)

Since the 1960s, the scholarly consensus has affirmed that the destruction at Jericho was totally unrelated to any Israelite conquest of the land of Canaan. Skilled archaeologists and significant biblical scholars embrace this conclusion for various reasons. It would seem that the flaws involved in Kenyon's dating decision about the destruction of Jericho demand that scholars at least remain open to the clear possibility that this destruction was caused by the Israelite army as part of their conquest of the land of promise.

The location for biblical Ai

Scholars have traditionally identified et-Tell as the site for biblical Ai. Excavations conducted there have demonstrated that there was no occupation from 2400 BC–1230 BC, i.e. during the Late Bronze Age, as well as no evidence of destruction that would support either the early (c. 1446 BC) or late date (c. 1260 BC) for the exodus from Egypt.²⁹ In the words of Joseph Callaway, the most recent excavator of et-Tell (1964–70): "Ai is simply an embarrassment to every view of the conquest that takes the biblical and archaeological evidence seriously."³⁰

In a later article, Callaway agrees with another scholar "that archaeology has wiped out the historical credibility of the conquest of Ai as reported in Joshua 7–8."³¹ More recently, Amihai Mazar wrote: "There is no evidence of a second millennium Canaanite city at this spot [referring to et-Tell] or at any other site in the region. This constitutes unequivocal archaeological evidence for the lack of correlation between the story in Joshua 8, with all its topographic details, and a historical reality corresponding to the period of the conquest."³² The scholarly consensus about the biblical account of Ai is that those events never happened.



Michael Luddeni

Et-Tell, the traditional site of Ai. Since no evidence of habitation at the time of the Israelite conquest can be found here, many have falsely assumed the biblical account is untrustworthy.



Michael Luddeni

Summary

As it relates to the time of Israel's ethnogenesis, or beginning as a nation, as well as the possibility that Israel's conquest took place as it is described in the biblical narratives, the scholarly consensus has generally rejected the accuracy and historicity of the biblical accounts. The discovery of the broken statue pedestal may indicate that Israel existed as an identifiable people or nation much earlier than most scholars have argued (15th century BC). Evidence that Garstang uncovered but Kenyon overlooked or did not emphasize seems to argue for a possibility that the Israelites destroyed the city in the Late Bronze period. Finally, the recent excavation at Khirbet el-Maqatir provides evidence that, at the very least, requires that site to receive serious consideration as the biblical site of Ai. All of these sets of evidence

A 1998 aerial view of Khirbet el-Maqatir. At the time this photo was taken only a few areas had been uncovered. Many significant finds over the years indicate this is the true site of Ai.

In a recent essay, Bryant Wood listed the topographical and archaeological features one should expect at the site of Ai in light of Joshua 7–8. He concludes that et-Tell does not measure up to the biblical parameters for the site of Ai.³³ After ruling out some other possible sites, he argues that Khirbet el-Maqatir possesses all the topographical and archaeological features that relate to biblical Ai.³⁴ Here are just a few of those features that are evidenced at el-Maqatir.

(1) It was occupied in the Late Bronze age (the date for the early date of the conquest, c. 1406 BC). Abundant pottery from the 15th century BC has been found at Khirbet el-Maqatir.³⁵ (2) Biblical Ai was fortified at the time of the conquest (Jos 7:5, 8:29). A small fortress dating to the Late Bronze I period has been found at Khirbet el-Maqatir, with walls four meters thick.³⁶ (3) Ai had a gate on the north side of the site (Jos 8:11). The gate of the Late Bronze I fortress at Khirbet el-Maqatir is also on the north side. (4) Biblical Ai was destroyed by fire at the time of the conquest (Jos 8:19, 28). Abundant evidence for destruction by fire has been found at Khirbet el-Maqatir in the form of ash, refired pottery, burned building stones, and calcined bedrock.³⁷

The ongoing dig at Khirbet el-Maqatir has not "proven" that it is the site of biblical Ai, but it has demonstrated that it is a fortified site that existed in the Late Bronze I period, that was destroyed by fire, and is located precisely in the area where the Israelites' conquest of Ai took place. The evidence found at el-Maqatir clearly suggests that the sweeping statements made by scholars, that et-Tell provides clear evidence that the biblical narrative of Joshua 7–8 is not historical, should be rejected. The work being done at Khirbet el-Maqatir at least offers one site that offers a potential location for Ai and affirms the credibility of the biblical narrative of the conquest of Canaan.

support the general credibility of the biblical narratives and argue against their casual dismissal that is so common in the larger world of biblical scholarship.

United Monarchy Period (Iron Age)

Introduction to the debate about David and Solomon

The biblical narratives present a fairly clear picture of the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon. While the bureaucracy of centralized government grew from almost nothing under Saul to a much more developed structure under Solomon, there is much we do not know. The biblical narratives affirm that David and Solomon enjoyed a widening regional influence, either through military conquest or peace treaties. It is appropriate to ask whether the archaeological record reflects the existence of a mighty kingdom like that described in the biblical sources. Can archaeology shed light on the transition from a somewhat decentralized tribal society to the centralized rule of a king from a capital city?³⁸

In that regard, one of the most controversial issues at the intersection of biblical studies and archaeology involves the status of the city of Jerusalem and the reigns of David and Solomon in the tenth century BC. Although over 120 excavations have been conducted in some part of Jerusalem between 1853 and 1992,³⁹ archaeologists have uncovered relatively few artifacts that clearly relate to Iron Age I (1200–1000 BC) or Iron Age IIA (1000–900 BC). The fundamental issue that must be addressed is whether or not there was an established Israelite kingdom in the tenth century BC. More specifically, is there archaeological evidence for some kind of centralized authority?⁴⁰

The following section considers the views of the minimalists, Israel Finkelstein and his Low Chronology, as well as Israeli archaeologists who accept centralized government in the time of David and Solomon.

Minimalism

a. General beliefs. In the 1970s, a reaction to the biblical archaeology movement (Albright and his followers) emerged on the academic scene that rejected the OT entirely as a legitimate source for historical reconstruction.⁴¹ They dated the composition of the books of the OT to the Exile or later.⁴² Scholars gave them various titles: “nihilists,”⁴³ “deconstructionists,”⁴⁴ and “minimalists.”⁴⁵ Minimalists attempt to redate the entire history of Israel to the third and second centuries BC. According to Lemche, the Bible presents a situation “where Israel is not Israel, Jerusalem is not Jerusalem, and David not David. No matter how we twist the factual remains from ancient Palestine, we cannot have a biblical Israel that is at the same time the Israel of the Iron Age.”⁴⁶ Some of the scholars who are commonly included in this grouping are Philip R. Davies,⁴⁷ G. Garbini,⁴⁸ Niels P. Lemche,⁴⁹ John Van Seters,⁵⁰ and Thomas Thompson.⁵¹

Minimalists also argue that the biblical accounts were often written long after the actual events—often centuries later—resulting in their diminished value as historical witnesses. Consequently, such documents always reflect the bias of the author or editor—the self-identity or self-understanding of Israel in the time of the narrative’s final composition—rather than the time of the events themselves. The purpose of these narratives was entirely theological rather than historiographical, providing reliable evidence only for what was believed during the period in which it was written.⁵² Consequently, the biblical narratives in this period contain only vague and quite unreliable information about the early history of Israel.⁵³

b. Minimalist view of the United Monarchy (esp. David and Solomon). These scholars believe that all traditional theories of the united monarchy are unfounded. For them, Saul, David, and Solomon are the stuff of legends, like King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.⁵⁴ Concerning the biblical description of the city of Jerusalem, David Ussishkin writes: “I am afraid that evidence regarding the magnificent Solomonic capital was not discovered because it is nonexistent, not because it is still hidden in the ground.”⁵⁵ Steiner affirms that the “United Monarchy...is not a historical fact”⁵⁶ and also suggests that “negative evidence is sometimes just that: evidence that there was no settlement.”⁵⁷ The biblical accounts of David and Solomon and a United Monarchy at that time are fictitious. Post-exilic (or later) writers composed a non-historical glorious past in order to legitimize the nation of Israel, which in fact did not come into existence until the eighth century BC.⁵⁸

Of course, the discovery of the Tel Dan Stela in 1995 presented a major obstacle for their conclusions.⁵⁹ The phrase “House of David” occurs as part of that inscription. The consensus view among biblical scholars is that the expression, “House of David,” refers to “the dynastic name of the kingdom of Judah.”⁶⁰ This expression may refer specifically to the Davidic dynasty. Knoppers suggests that since the inscription comes from an Aramaic context, it more likely refers to “the state of Judah

headed by the Davidic dynasty.”⁶¹ Even after the discovery of the “House of David” phrase in the Tel Dan Stela, however, minimalist scholars are still unwilling to accept the historicity of David.⁶²

Maximalism

It is important to understand that maximalism can broadly describe anyone, theologically conservative or liberal, who believes that the biblical narratives have some historical value. Maximalism and evangelicalism are not synonymous terms. In general, maximalists presume that the historical narratives of the OT may be used to reconstruct the history of ancient Israel. At the very least, most maximalists also acknowledge various discrepancies and problems in biblical narratives. They believe that the historical narratives preserve genuine factual memories, while granting that the actual events may have been obscured by the long process of telling and retelling the stories before they achieved their final written form.⁶³ Most of the non-evangelical scholars summarized in this overview section regard themselves as maximalists. For example, William Dever believes there was a historical David but does not view the Davidic narratives as credible history.⁶⁴

Israel Finkelstein and “Low Chronology”

Finkelstein regards himself occupying a center position, far away from the polar position of the “conservatives” and minimalists.⁶⁵ In the mid-1990s, Israel Finkelstein proposed a “Low Chronology,” which basically redated all the artifactual evidence from the tenth century (the time of David and Solomon) and gave it a ninth-century date.⁶⁶ He and his followers also moved the limited archaeological evidence that had been dated to the 11th century to the tenth century. Consequently, impressive building evidence that had been credited to Solomon now belonged to the ninth century (the reign of King Omri of Israel).

Here are some of the affirmations made by Finkelstein and Silberman in their volume on David and Solomon:

- No sign of monumental architecture in Jerusalem in the tenth century⁶⁷
- In the tenth century, Jerusalem was no more than a small, poor highland village⁶⁸
- No evidence for widespread literacy that would accompany a widespread monarchy until the end of the eighth century⁶⁹
- No evidence for David’s conquests⁷⁰
- No sign of grand scale building at Megiddo, Hazor, and Gezer⁷¹
- Solomonic mining of copper proved to be a fantasy⁷²

Finkelstein does not contest that David was a historical figure who lived in the tenth century BC. He accepts “the descriptions of David as some sort of leader of an upheaval group, troublemakers who lived on the margins of society. But not the golden city of Jerusalem, not the description of a great empire in the time of Solomon. When the authors of the text describe that, they have in their eyes the reality of their own time, the Assyrian

empire.⁷⁷³ According to Finkelstein, David made a transition from a regional bandit to a regional chieftain, exercising control over a small area of Israel.⁷⁴ The accomplishments that the Bible attributes to David were really accomplished by a later Israelite king, Omri.⁷⁵ Finkelstein and Silberman write: “The ‘Court History’ of David thus offers a whole series of historical retrojections in which the founder of the dynasty of Judah in the tenth century is credited with the victories and the acquisitions of territory that were in fact accomplished by the ninth-century Omrides.”⁷⁶

Finkelstein distinguishes between the culture of David and the historical David. He sees the culture of David expressed in the best kings of Israel (Hezekiah and Josiah), but rejects the biblical description of that David.⁷⁷ Finkelstein also affirms that the “world behind Solomon is the world of the Assyrian century.”⁷⁸ As with David, he sees the glorious descriptions of Solomon’s reign as a retrojection of the international accomplishments of a later Israelite king, this time Manasseh.⁷⁹ The biblical descriptions of these two important kings of Israel form the basis for the legendary tradition that describes David’s rule in the impressive city of Jerusalem and over various regional peoples. Finkelstein concludes that, archaeologically, “we can say no more about David and Solomon except that they existed—and that their legend endured.”⁸⁰

Archaeologists who view the biblical historical accounts as being historical in general

In the early 1900s, William Albright became convinced of the general historical reliability of the biblical narratives. He impacted a generation of students who viewed themselves as practitioners of biblical archaeology. Albright became known as the “Father of Biblical Archaeology.”⁸¹ That recognition of accurate historical remembrances in biblical narratives has also characterized several Israeli archaeologists.⁸²

Y. Yadin⁸³ was the Israeli counterpart to Albright. He excavated numerous sites, including Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer. He concluded that the six-chambered gates found at those three sites were most likely built by Solomon (1 Kgs 9:17–19) and indicate a common architect as well as a centralized ruling authority.⁸⁴ Amihai Mazar has become the sparring partner for Israel Finkelstein and proponents of “Low Chronology.” He rejects the total deconstruction of the United Monarchy by the minimalists and suggests that the biblical text may have preserved valuable historical information based on early written documents or oral tradition.⁸⁵

Basic issues relating to Iron Age Jerusalem

The archaeological evidence found in the City of David area that relates to the time of David and Solomon is meager compared to that found in many other excavation sites. The complexities of the archaeological record exceed the limitations of this paper.⁸⁶ For some, the limited evidence of significant construction in the Iron Age causes them to conclude that Jerusalem did not exist as a city or was just a small village during the time of the United Monarchy.⁸⁷ However, even non-evangelical archaeologists point out potential factors behind this relative paucity of

archaeological evidence.⁸⁸ (1) It is essential to remember that the City of David was continuously occupied from the eleventh to the sixth centuries BC. (2) The ridge on which Jerusalem was built is made of stone. Later builders quarried at various spots to secure building material for other new buildings. These would destroy any evidence left behind in the quarried parts of the city. (3) The building of new structures in the City of David generally involved reusing the old stone blocks and clearing the area down to bedrock in order to provide a solid foundation for the new building. Of course, this would also destroy any evidence of previous structures. (4) Many of Jerusalem’s administrative buildings and major monuments are located under the current Temple Mount and cannot be investigated for political reasons. (5) The paucity of inscriptional evidence for ruling kings is not at all exceptional. Millard points out that at most only 20 out of about 120 kings who ruled in the Levant in the Iron Age left inscriptional evidence that has been uncovered and published today.⁸⁹

Beyond that, all the major excavators of Jerusalem—Kenyon, Shiloh, and Eilat Mazar—have concluded that Jerusalem was a significant city in the tenth century BC.⁹⁰ Cahill adds that “virtually every archaeologist to have excavated in the City of David claims to have found architecture and artifacts dating to these periods.”⁹¹ Cahill also contends that “archaeological evidence demonstrates that during the time of Israel’s United Monarchy, Jerusalem was fortified, was served by two complex water-supply systems and was populated by a socially stratified society that constructed at least two new residential quarters—one located inside and the other located outside the city’s fortification wall.”⁹²

Stepped Stone Structure and Large Stone Structure

Archaeologists have identified two important structures located at the top and east side of the eastern hill of the City of David. Of course, the relationship of these structures to the presence of some kind of centralized government in Jerusalem has been hotly debated.

a. Stepped Stone Structure. On the eastern slope of the eastern hill of the City of David exists a curved, narrow stone structure



Bibleplaces.com

The Stepped Stone Structure of the City of David.

that is about 60 feet high and was built over the top of a series of terraces (hence, the name “Stepped Stone Structure”—commonly called “Area G”). Various parts of the “Stepped Stone Structure” in the City of David were exposed by MacAlister (1920s), Kenyon (1960s), and Shiloh (1970s–1980s) before Eilat Mazar uncovered the “Large Stone Structure” in 2005.⁹³ All of these archaeologists (and numerous others) date the Stepped Stone Structure to the tenth century BC, that is, the time of Solomon or earlier. They generally suggest that this structure provided support for a significant building at the crest of the eastern hill of the City of David.⁹⁴

Kenyon discovered at least two categories of evidence that support the conclusion that the structure located above the Stepped Stone Structure was a public or royal building: ashlar stones and a Proto-Aeolic capital. Just to the north of Area G, right below what E. Mazar would call the “Large Stone Structure,” Kenyon discovered a significant pile of ashlars, i.e. rectangular stones that have been well dressed, commonly used in royal construction. She also found a capital (broken into two pieces) among the rubble of ashlar stones.⁹⁵ According to Shiloh, “Ashlar masonry and this type of capital are the outstanding characteristics of royal architecture at Israelite centers.”⁹⁶ This suggests that the structure located where Mazar found the Large Stone Structure was a significant royal or public building.

b. Large Stone Structure.

In the area to the north of the Stepped Stone Structure, Eilat Mazar conducted a dig at the top of the eastern hill, near the eastern slope. After digging through Byzantine and Second Temple remains, they uncovered what they called the Large Stone Structure. Part of it had been uncovered by MacAlister and Duncan in the 1920s. They had regarded what they found as a Jebusite wall that David destroyed and left in ruins. Consequently, they did not “peel back” the large stones in that area. Some stones over six feet in length compose the northern side of the structure. The pottery E. Mazar found in various parts of the structure indicate that the structure first came into use in the middle of the tenth century BC.⁹⁷ Whether or not E. Mazar’s identification of this structure as David’s palace is correct,⁹⁸ the dimensions of the structure demonstrate significant public or royal construction during the time of David and/or Solomon.



Israel Antiquities Authority via Biblicalarchaeologytruth.com
Proto-Aeolic capital found by Kenyon amongst the rubble below the Large Stone Structure. It indicates the former presence of a royal building consistent with the Davidic period.

Amihai Mazar contends that the Stepped Stone Structure and the Large Stone Structure should be regarded as “one large and substantial architectural complex.” The former must be explained as a support structure of the latter, which stood on the summit of the ridge to the west, on the narrowest part of the City of David spur, which was naturally bound by an almost vertical rock cliff on the east. A. Mazar also points out that the “magnitude and uniqueness of the combined ‘Stepped Structure’ and the ‘Large Stone Structure’ are unparalleled anywhere in the Levant between the twelfth and ninth centuries B.C.E.”⁹⁹ In

light of the clear connection of these two structures, Avraham Faust suggests that the Large Stone Structure was built before the time of David and very likely found later use as David’s fortress or palace.¹⁰⁰ Regardless of whether David commissioned the building of this structure, its presence in the Iron Age indicates that Jerusalem existed as a significant city in the time of David.

Summary of debate concerning Jerusalem in the Iron Age

Scholars have correctly pointed to the relative paucity of clear evidence for royal building construction on the City of David during the early Iron Age, the time of David and Solomon. Some dismiss the possibility that David and Solomon led a centralized government that made Jerusalem its capital, as the biblical narratives describe. Many archaeologists point to numerous discoveries found at Jerusalem, the Stepped Stone and Large Stone Structures in particular, that support some kind of significant royal and public building activity during the United Monarchy. The perpetual occupation of the eastern hill and the use of part of the city as a rock quarry in the Roman period has contributed to the relative scarcity of evidence pointing to the United Monarchy’s presence in Jerusalem.

As is true in other areas where biblical and archaeological studies intersect, some scholars heavily depend on what is not found when framing their conclusions. The prominent use of “negative evidence” as a primary foundation for conclusions that sweep aside the credibility of biblical narratives is highly questionable. In that regard, Jane Cahill and David Tarler provide this warning: “Beware of historical conclusions based on negative or scanty evidence from small-scale excavations



Michael Luddeni
Some remains of the Large Stone Structure.

conducted at hill country sites such as Jerusalem. All too often, such negative or scanty evidence reflects more on a site's present state of preservation than on its historical development.¹⁰¹ In another place, Cahill affirms that "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence."¹⁰² Historian David Fischer correctly points out: "Negative evidence is a contradiction in terms—it is no evidence at all."¹⁰³ Negative evidence, what is not found, bears some consideration in any scientific study. However, it is dangerous when it becomes a significant part of a set of conclusions.

Discoveries that relate to the United Monarchy have also been made outside of the city of Jerusalem. Two of those sites bear mention here: Khirbet Qeiyafa in the Shephelah and the copper mines at Khirbet en-Nahas.

Khirbet Qeiyafa

Khirbet Qeiyafa is a relatively small site (2.3 hectares) located over a mile east of Azekah and about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem. It is on the summit of a hill that borders the Elah Valley on the north. It is also on a main route that would have connected Philistia and the Coastal Plain with Jerusalem and Hebron in the hill country. The city was constructed on bedrock, 2.3 hectares in area. Yossi Garfinkel and Michael Hasel have directed six seasons of excavations (2007–12) and have demonstrated that Qeiyafa was predominantly a one-period site. Numerous pottery sherds all date to the same period—Iron Age IIA (c. 1000–900 BC), the time of David and Solomon (First Temple period).¹⁰⁴

The layout of the city involved a casemate wall, two four-chambered gates, houses that attached to the wall (using a casemate room as an inner room for the house), and a circular street that ran parallel to the wall beyond this outer belt of houses. If dated correctly, Qeiyafa would be the earliest of

several Israelite cities in Iron Age II that utilized this kind of town plan (e.g. Tell en-Nasbeh, Tell Beit Mirsim, Beth Shemesh, and Beer Sheba).¹⁰⁵ This kind of urban plan suggests that Qeiyafa is a Judean city rather than Philistine or Canaanite.¹⁰⁶ Out of the various contributions that the discoveries at Qeiyafa have made to biblical studies, here are four examples.¹⁰⁷

a. Pottery and carbon dating evidence. Because Khirbet Qeiyafa was abandoned suddenly, "large quantities of restorable Iron Age IIA pottery vessels are found on the floors of each excavated room."¹⁰⁸ Although the initial survey affirmed that they had found pottery from Iron Age I and IIB, but not from Iron Age IIA, the excavation revealed the opposite conclusion.¹⁰⁹ Six radiocarbon samples (olive pits) from the same strata were sent for analysis to Oxford University and yielded an average date of 1021–975 BC (59.2 percent probability) or 1050–971 BC (78.1 percent probability).¹¹⁰ This indicates that Khirbet Qeiyafa was constructed sometime before the middle of the eleventh century BC, the time of David and Solomon.

b. Massive fortifications. The casemate walls that surround Khirbet Qeiyafa are about 12 feet apart and the base of the Iron Age city wall is composed of cyclopean stones, some weighing 4–8 tons apiece, while its upper part consists of medium sized stones.¹¹¹ This massive fortification system involved an estimated two hundred thousand tons of stone.¹¹² Construction of this magnitude suggests the existence of a central administration that could conduct a project like this at some distance from Jerusalem.

c. Consumption of food. Some scholars have sought to identify Khirbet Qeiyafa as a non-Judean city and, consequently, as irrelevant to any discussion of the situation in Israel in the tenth century BC. However, the city is quite different from the nearby Philistine centers of Tel Miqne-Ekron and Tell es-Safi-Gath in their diet. Having excavated 20 percent of the site (as of 2012), pig bones are non-existent at Khirbet Qeiyafa, while pork was a regular part of the Philistine diet.¹¹³

d. Qeiyafa's role as a border city. In conjunction with archaeological digs being conducted at Tell Burna and Beth Shemesh, which have early Iron Age occupation layers, it seems that Khirbet Qeiyafa belonged to a series of border fortresses that stood between Philistia and Israel during the reigns of David and Solomon. The evidence above presents Khirbet Qeiyafa as a Judean city that was built and occupied in the early Iron Age, during the time of David and Solomon. The size of its fortifications implies a strong, centralized government in Jerusalem that would want to establish a fortification at Israel's border with the Philistines and that could fund a project of this magnitude as well as provide the labor to bring it into existence.

e. The Qeiyafa Inscription. The inscription found at Khirbet Qeiyafa found in 2008 involves five lines of writing on a six inch by six inch piece of pottery and raises a number of linguistic issues this paper will not address.¹¹⁴ Regardless, as it relates to the theme of this paper, the existence of this ostrakon, which is



Wikimedia Commons

Aerial view of Khirbet Qeiyafa. The massive fortifications encompassing this site, dated by pottery and radiocarbon testing to the time of David and Solomon, are clearly visible.



Wikimedia Commons

The Qeiyafa Inscription testifies to the fact that writing was well-established by the time David and Solomon ruled.

clearly from Iron Age IIA, or the time of David and Solomon, demonstrates that writing was well-established in tenth-century BC Israel. According to Gary Rendsburg, “Taken together, the Tel Zayit abecedary, the Khirbet Qeiyafa inscription and the Gezer calendar demonstrate that writing was well established in tenth-century Israel—certainly sufficiently so for many of the works later incorporated into the Hebrew Bible to have been composed at this time.”¹¹⁵ Consequently, in contrast to the affirmation by Finkelstein and the minimalists that literacy was generally nonexistent in the tenth century BC, the Khirbet Qeiyafa inscription (along with others from the same period) indicates that writing extended outside the major city of the region (Jerusalem).

f. Summary. Not all are convinced that the evidence found at Khirbet Qeiyafa demonstrates the existence of a centralized government in Jerusalem. Yigal Levin places the settlement in the time of Saul,¹¹⁶ while Finkelstein and others at Tel Aviv University date the finds to a time after David and Solomon.¹¹⁷ Nadav Na’aman regards Qeiyafa as a Canaanite city. The Canaanites of these and other cities in the region eventually morph into what became called Israel.¹¹⁸ However, as A. Mazar points out, “The magnitude of the fortifications is unrivalled in the later Judean towns and clearly indicates a central administration that enabled such immense public works and technological knowledge.”¹¹⁹

Copper Mines in Southern Jordan—Khirbet en-Nahas¹²⁰

These copper mines are about 35 miles south of the Dead Sea.¹²¹ Evidence demonstrates that they are the largest copper mines (c. 25 acres) dating to the Iron Age (1200–586 BC). As with several other locations in Israel, various scholars have confidently affirmed that Edom did not reach statehood until the seventh century BC under Assyrian influence. Prior to that, Edom was a sparsely settled fringe area occupied primarily by pastoral nomads.¹²² Finkelstein and Silberman also affirm that

there was no real state or king in Edom until the late eighth century BC and that large fortresses and large settlements may have started to develop at the same time.¹²³ Consequently, Saul’s, David’s, and Solomon’s battles with the Edomites (1 Sam 14:47; 2 Sam 8:13–15; 1 Kgs 11:14) were fictional if the Edomites were not an established society/nation that early. This view of Edom is part of a larger conclusion about David and Solomon, that is, that Israel did not develop into a nation until at least a century after David. They affirm that Israel, as well as Ammon, Moab, and Edom, were not organized nations with standing armies, nor did they have a king ruling over them. David was not a king over Israel but a chieftain over a handful of tribes.

When Levy and Najjar decided to conduct a dig in the lowlands of Edom, they envisioned an anthropological archaeology expedition to explore the role of early mining and metallurgy on social evolution from the Neolithic period (c. 8500 BC) to the Iron Age (1200–586 BC).¹²⁴ Their project represents the first attempt to apply radiocarbon dating methods on a large scale to Edomite sites relevant to debates in biblical archaeology.¹²⁵ They had no interest in becoming involved with discussions concerning the historicity of biblical passages about David and Solomon.

Between 1932 and 1947, Nelson Glueck conducted extensive archaeological surveys in Ammon, Moab, and Edom. Although not all of his conclusions have stood the test of time, he made a number of astute observations more recent archaeologists have confirmed. Based on pottery sherds collected from the surface, he identified Khirbet en-Nahas as the central Iron Age mining and smelting site in the region and dated its major period of activity to the tenth century BC (time of David and Solomon).¹²⁶

The eighth- to seventh-century BC dating of Edom as an organized society by most scholars has been based on a single Edomite seal impression found at Umm el-Biyara, in the highlands of Edom, found on a small mesa overlooking Petra. The name inscribed on the seal is “Qos-Gabr King of Edom.”¹²⁷ Bienkowski suggests that this Edomite king is mentioned twice in Assyrian inscriptions from the first half of the seventh century BC.¹²⁸ Levy and Najjar point out several problems with this sweeping conclusion based on a single Edomite seal. Regardless, they point out that they have uncovered almost 90 mining sites in the area of Khirbet en-Nahas, most of which contained Iron Age pottery. Also, the impressive fortress structure located at Khirbet en-Nahas had a four-chambered gate (common in the time of David and Solomon) as well as abundant Iron Age pottery.¹²⁹

Since the Iron Age spans over 400 years, one justly wonders what part of the Iron Age is indicated by the evidence found at Khirbet en-Nahas. Levy and Najjar applied “objective, high-precision radiocarbon dating” to organic material found at different levels of the gatehouse, other structures, and smelting areas on the site, which included large amounts of charcoal. They sent samples to two European labs and both gave similar dates for the material they processed: twelfth to the late ninth centuries BC.¹³⁰ The four-chambered gate structure that was part of the fortress dates to the early tenth century BC.¹³¹ They also found a leaf-shaped metal arrowhead, two Egyptian scarabs, and Cypriot bichrome pottery that are best dated to the twelfth century BC.¹³²

Levy and Najjar discovered what they call a “disruption layer”



Steven Rudd - www.bible.ca

This copper mine at Khirbet en-Nahas is the largest in the entire Arabah valley. The true-color image above shows the piles of black copper slag stacked all around the site.

at which time most work in the mines appeared to have ceased. In this layer they found 22 date pits that date to the tenth century BC as well as two Egyptian artifacts, a lion-headed amulet and a scarab, that date to the last half of the ninth century BC. Both artifacts date to the reign of Shoshenq I/Shishak, the ruler who invaded the region shortly after the death of Solomon.¹³³

What do Levy and Najjar conclude from their discoveries? (1) They write that they “have discovered a degree of social complexity in the land of Edom that demonstrates the weak reed on the basis of which a number of scholars have scoffed at the idea of a state or complex chiefdom in Edom at this early period—and, by extension, a state in Judah.”¹³⁴ (2) Since Edom was a complex society¹³⁵ at the beginning of the Iron Age, the biblical references to David’s conflicts with Edom “garner a new plausibility.”¹³⁶ Levy and Najjar’s discoveries at Khirbet en-Nahas do not prove that these were, in fact, the copper mines of Solomon. They do demonstrate the copper mining was taking place during the time of Solomon’s reign in the region.¹³⁷ The fact that the mines found in the region of Edom were the closest copper mines to Jerusalem and because Solomon subjugated the Edomites during his reign allow for the possibility that they were in fact mines operated by Solomon’s kingdom during his reign. Finally, Levy and Najjar’s work demonstrates the fallacy of casually dismissing the possibility that Solomon had a substantive enough kingdom to control this region.¹³⁸

Summary

On the one hand, one must recognize that archaeology cannot prove that the monarchy described in the biblical narratives of David and Solomon took place exactly as described. On the other hand, what we do find in the archaeological record demonstrates the historical plausibility that David and Solomon ruled from Jerusalem (i.e. there is evidence for centralized authority during their reigns). The pottery found in conjunction with the Stepped Stone and Large Stone Structures on the City of David point to an early Iron Age occupation, a time that matches the reigns of David and Solomon. Although the dust has not totally settled concerning the discoveries at Khirbet Qeiyafa and the copper

mines south of the Dead Sea, at the very least they clearly demonstrate the feasibility of centralized government, somewhat widespread literacy, and an active copper mining industry at the time of David and Solomon. Those features can no longer be dismissed so glibly.

Conclusion

The preceding consideration of certain somewhat recent intersections of biblical and archaeological studies does not absolutely prove the accuracy and historicity of the biblical narratives that address those intersections. DeVries is correct when he affirms that in “the final analysis, archaeological evidence is always a silent or mute kind of evidence.”¹³⁹ The point of this paper is to demonstrate that a careful consideration of these intersections of biblical and archaeological studies lends credence to the history described by the biblical narratives. Beyond that, archaeology should limit the sweeping statements often made by critical scholars by which biblical narrative descriptions of various people or events are viewed as purely legendary. In many cases, the sweeping statements made with great academic authority are actually based on what has not been found or the slimmest thread of evidence. It is interesting that even the interviewers from National Geographic Society understand the significance of discoveries made at Khirbet Qeiyafa, Khirbet en-Nahas, and the City of David when they write: “The proposition that a complex tenth-century BC society may have existed on either side of the Jordan River has thrown Finkelstein’s vision of David and Solomon squarely on the defensive.”¹⁴⁰

Instead of focusing on what might not have been found, we need to realize that many excavations demonstrate that biblical narratives carry a “ring of truth,” that is, a plausibility that is supported by what has been found “in the dirt.” While all scholars must be cautious about what we prove or disprove through what is found through archaeological excavations, we can be encouraged that many archaeological discoveries are totally compatible with a high view of Scripture.

(Reprinted by permission from the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56/3 (2013) 475–97. Endnotes are on the ABR website at <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/file.axd?file=2014/3/Grisanti+Recent+Archaeological+Discoveries+endnotes.pdf>.)

Note

*Edited “new” to “recent” to reflect the passage of time since the article was first published in the *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections*, Vol 2, No 4, November 2010.

Michael Grisanti is Professor of Old Testament at The Master’s Seminary, where his scholarly interests include Deuteronomy, Old Testament theology, biblical ethics, the prophets, and the history of Israel. He has written numerous articles on Old Testament topics.

