

Sifting The Evidence:
Building A Correct Interpretation of Old Testament Archaeology From The
Ruins of Critical Scholarship

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How We Got Here: A More Brief History of Time

We live in a fickle culture that cannot make up its mind about the Bible. Academic elites viscerally assault the Bible as irrelevant and mythical.¹ Yet the Bible is the subject of endless television specials about its history, theological content, and prophetic applications. No matter how materialistic a culture becomes, whether scientifically or socially, there seems to be a nagging sense that the Bible is not a collection of myths, that liberal scholarship is wrong and the supernatural exists. For some reason, the culture can't quite put the headstone on the grave of a literal, historical and grammatical interpretation of Scripture. Even Immanuel Kant, the great contributor to modern agnosticism, admitted, "The existence of the Bible, as a book for the people, is the greatest benefit which the human race has ever experienced. Every attempt to belittle it...is a crime against humanity."

Perhaps the nagging doubt about a liberal evaluation stems from the fact that society, at least subconsciously, knows on some level that western thought is not only at the core of progress in the world today, but the Bible was at the core of western thought. The very scientific method itself is based on the principles and hermeneutics of studying Scripture (cf. Francis Bacon). It was St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century who reconciled the Platonic philosophy that dominated the Middle Ages (where matter is evil and only the spiritual world is good) with theology, effectively unlocking a spree of progress that hasn't

¹ Even Jews, whose origins are tied directly to God, are more of an ethnic affiliation than a religion and have become secularized and bought into the critical scholarship that the Old Testament is myth.

slowed since, from the enlightenment, to the age of science, to the industrial revolution, and the era of technology. This intellectual giant swung the pendulum back to an Aristotelian model with the material world worthy of examination, according with what Scripture said all along, that the material world is good and not evil. A civilization relying more on science today can be said to fall under an Aristotelian rubric.

The term “science” as we know it in a phenomenological sense and not in the older philosophical sense, uses empirical means to understand the world of elements and originally began as another way to understand the varied mysteries of a Creator. The most pioneering of all scientific minds saw a connection between the physical world and a correct metaphysical worldview in Christianity. Copernicus saw harmony with his framework of a heliocentric solar system and the Bible. Kepler drew parallels as to how heavenly bodies represent the Trinity. Galileo, known for his work on the solar system and dynamics, said the Bible cannot err. Blaise Pascal, mathematician, inventor, and physicist established principles in probability theory, geometry, vacuums and air pressure and wrote a masterful defense of Christianity in *Pensees*. Isaac Newton was a mathematical genius, theist and deeply religious man, even if some of his views seemed less than orthodox. Robert Boyle, credited with Boyle’s Law for his work on gasses, said that the study of nature is a religious duty. Lord Kelvin, who helped lay the groundwork for modern physics, was a committed Christian. And Matthew Fontaine Maury’s high regard for Psalm 8:8 inspired him to many discoveries regarding winds and ocean currents, becoming

the “Father of Modern Oceanography” and “Pathfinder of the Seas.”² Not only was theology completely compatible with science, but the Bible fueled an inspiration and possibility thinking not found in other sources, such as that from Ephesians 3:20: “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.”

It wasn't long before man's new occupation, fascination and idolatry with the material world eclipsed God as a social construct, replacing Him with a random, naturalistic and purposeless view of the world as a product of an infinite series of secondary causes. The Bible, as authoritative and relevant literature, went out of fashion in an increasingly materialistic and rationalistic age. The very philosophies descending from the biblical text upon which the western world was built, a world of purpose, design and a priori first things came under assault and lead to a view of a universe characterized by closed system naturalism. If matter is all there is, matter is all that matters. Physicist Stephan Hawking summarized the emphasis of our times: “The scientific account is complete. Theology is unnecessary.” Though academic elites promote reductionism, it is hard to imagine a world that operates on such an intricate and sophisticated level whose foundations are based on myths, legends and without any correspondence to ultimate reality. Inevitably, reductionistic scholars directed their attention towards the biblical text. Though textual criticism was originally utilized by scholars as a useful tool to better understand the authorship, date and origin of the biblical text, these disciplines also attracted liberal

² <http://www.godandscience.org/apologetics/sciencefaith.html>- Accessed 11/27/15

scholars who were influenced by naturalism and a bias against the supernatural to assault the text and discount any claims towards the miraculous. Atypical events were relegated to the category of legends and myths.

The Theory That Underwrites Old Testament Archaeology

One such system of thought descended from critical scholars is the Documentary Hypothesis. Having roots in the 17th century, the Documentary Hypothesis can be traced to political philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes who noted the seeming inconsistencies of verses such as Deuteronomy 34:6 for a Mosaic authorship: “He buried him [Moses] in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but *to this day* no one knows where his grave is.” What does “to this day” mean? How could Moses have written about his death in advance? There must have been later authors who contributed to the text., Hobbes thought. Though good explanations are provided for verses such as these, the apparent inconsistencies were enough to cause serious doubts in some minds about the whole Pentateuch.

Also called the Wellhausen Hypothesis after the German scholar who gave it its modern form, the Documentary Hypothesis holds that Moses was not the author of the Torah or first five books of the Bible. Rather, the five books were assembled by later redactors in the exile or Persian period who compiled parallel accounts that developed hundreds of years after Moses. As the theory goes, liberal scholars believe they observe patterns, genre’s, terms and themes as a way to resolve apparent inconsistencies in the Torah. These patterns form four independent yet complimentary accounts that were assembled in

their final form during the exile or later (600-400 B.C.).

The “J” Source

The first source of the Torah is the “Jahwist” or “J” which is the oldest writing reputedly authored around 950 B.C. just before the split between the northern and southern kingdoms. Though complicated, the method in which a J author is detected in the Torah is done by sifting through the books of Moses and identifying where God has personal visits through the use of God’s personal name “Yahweh”. Apparently, only the J source uses Yahweh before Exodus 3 and relates a theology of history where God is a God of action in the origin of the universe, in the origin of creatures, in language formation and in establishing a people through the patriarchs. God reveals His ways not only to Abraham but through Abraham to all of mankind as a deliver and provider. Other concepts allegedly detected in the J narratives are mortality, the importance of work, the role of the family and mankind’s flight from God.³

Though there is much skepticism with the text in general and scholars vary greatly in assigning which verses come from which source, it is striking how confident their statements can be. The late Harvard archaeologist Frank Moore Cross says dogmatically, “If you read Exodus 15 carefully, it describes a storm at sea. This is the old Yahwistic source. In the retelling of the story in the later Priestly source, it is more miraculous....As you go back in time, oddly enough, the story becomes more historical.”⁴ But this is

³ Genesis 2-11; John Barton, John Mudiman, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press (2001), 26. Sourced in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Documentary_hypothesis. Accessed, 11/28/15.

⁴ Frank Moore Cross, *Bible and Archaeology Legends Interview, Special Issue Biblical Archaeology*

speculative. How does he know? If the original assertion that Moses wrote it cannot be known, why should we trust his revision? He cannot assert that Moses didn't write the Pentateuch without affirming that he knows something. And if there are instances of variation and opinion as to who wrote what, then there is a standard by which to measure instances of variation which is the traditional Mosaic authorship. Mosaic authorship is affirmed by thousands of years of Jewish history and the traditional view realigns all of the confusion and variations.

The "E" Source

When certain scholars see the more impersonal name for God ("Elohim") before Exodus 3, they feel they have identified another source called "E". Elohim is a human-like God who spoke indirectly through dreams or prophets but became more personal after the burning bush incident where He is identified as Yahweh. Though E takes up half of Exodus and a third of Genesis, the uses of "Elohim" and "Yahweh" are interspersed after the burning bush event,⁵ which makes it difficult to detect the difference between the one source and the other.⁶ Herschel Shanks, editor for *Biblical Archaeological Review*, surfaces the confusion of this approach, "I try to look at the texts and say: 'Is there a way that I can find history in the texts and separate it from what may be the mythological elements'? And I don't find rules for that....[one] has to excavate the text in the same way that you would excavate a tell."⁷ Though excavating the text as one would excavate a tell

Review, 2015, 29.

⁵ Harris, Stephen L., *Understanding the Bible*. Palo Alto: Mayfield. 1985. Sourced in Documentary Hypothesis-https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Documentary_hypothesis. Accessed 11/28/15.

⁶ The trick is that after Genesis 12, the text can have some history interwoven with myth which makes it a daunting task in sifting out which is what myth and what is historical.

⁷ Hershel Shanks, *Biblical Archaeology Legends Interviewed, Bar Legends Special Issue*, 2015. 31,44. It

sounds good in a statement, it can lead to cherry picking and superimposing one's one bias onto the text.

With a suggested composition of around 850 B.C., E focuses on prayer, sacrifice, and the covenanted relationship God made with Israel through prophets who received His revelation. While there is duplication of material between E and J, some hold that E emphasizes the northern kingdom of Israel as the alleged literary source for the conflict and competition with the southern kingdom of Judah. As Gary Greenburg speculates, “many of the doublets between E and J reflect the political and religious propaganda wars between Israel and Judah after those two nations split apart.”⁸ Instead of seeing duplicated accounts as a complimentary Hebrew literary device to deliver more information on creation, Noah, Jacob, or Moses, liberal scholars say these are really “contradictory” stories about the same event. The differing accounts in E and J in the doublets, with different names for God, different themes, and varied literary styles automatically means there were two different literary strands woven into the same document, written by an author later than Moses. Though logical past the initial assumption, this ignores the fact that different themes, word usages and styles don't necessarily mean there was a different author.

makes one wonder if Mr. Shanks really has looked everywhere, or considered the fundamentals of interpretation in a literal, historical, grammatical hermeneutic of the text.

⁸ Gary Greenburg, *101 Myths Of The Bible. How Ancient Scribes Invented Biblical History*. (New York: Bristol Parks Books, 2000), XVIII.

The “P” Source

The third literary thread speciously detected in the Torah is called the “Priestly” source. P has Yahweh revealed to the patriarchs before Moses and identifies God as the Creator of the world with a narrowing focus on ritual and formality in the priesthood. Written between 600-400 B.C., the themes of the P source are the Sabbath, dietary laws, genealogies and the dimensions of the tabernacle, all of which contribute to the picture of Yahweh as the center of the universe.⁹ One narrative is that after the northern kingdom collapsed to the Assyrians in 722 B.C., refugees brought the E narrative into the southern kingdom, a narrative which exalted Moses and the Aaronic priesthood as superior to the Levitical priesthood. Instead of seeing the Levitical priesthood as complimentary to the Aaronic duties as a natural reading of the text connotes, a wedge was created between the two priesthoods which seemingly helps explain the sibling rivalry between the north and the south. Therefore, P may have been written as a counter-response by invoking tradition and emphasizing Judah as a “nation of priests.” Large portions of Genesis, Exodus and Numbers along with the complete book of Leviticus are said to be written by the Priestly author.

The “D” Source

The “D” source, named after the book of Deuteronomy, is unique with little apparent overlap to the other three sources. A key verse in the D source theory is 2 Kings 22:8 where Josiah began his reforms after Hilkiah the high priest found the book of the law that

⁹ Genesis 1, Genesis 17, Genesis 9:1-17; Exodus 25-31; Exodus 35-40; John Barton, John Mudiman, The Oxford Bible Commentary, Oxford University Press (2001) p. 28. Sourced in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Documentary_hypothesis.

was hidden for a period of time in the temple. There is speculation as to what “the book of the law” meant, whether it incorporated all of Deuteronomy, a portion such as the song of Moses of Chapter 32, the holiness code of Leviticus 17-26, or all five books of Moses. As to when D was written, the view favored by liberal Old Testament scholars, which cooperates with the assumptions of JEPD proponents is that “expressed by Wellhausen, that the ‘book of the law’ found by Hilkiah had been recently written (seventh-century) by prophets (or a prophet) with the purpose of promoting a religious reform which did indeed occur after Josiah had read the book.”¹⁰ In other words, *a late composed book of the law, written just decades before its discovery, somehow better spurred Josiah into reforms in 622 B.C. than if it were written by Moses much earlier in the 15th century B.C. which resulted in a verified Deuteronomistic history as applied through the monarchs.*

The D influence has tentacles that reach into all of Deuteronomistic history which include Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. The late D source creates a retroactive history where the conditions of the law, such as obedience and blessing or disobedience and cursing, were played out in the monarchies of Israel and Judah. Though there were oracles previously given by which the nations were to live by, much of D is a constructed history by which Judah could better cope with the judgment, captivity and exile. In it’s most extreme position, archaeologists and historians who think all of “ancient Israel is a literary construct forced upon the Iron Age”¹¹ are called “minimalists.” Therefore, there is minimal or no history of early Israel in the Bible. In summary, the identification of duplicated

¹⁰ The Book of Josiah’s Reforms. David Malick, <https://bible.org/article/book-josiahs-reform-> Accessed 12/2/15.

¹¹ William Dever Interview, *Bible and Archaeology Legends Interviewed, BAR Legends Special Issue, 2015*, 39.

material, the different names for God as well as the richness of the J source, the pedestrian tone of E, and the legalistic nature of P, seem to give reason for critical scholars assign different sources for the Torah.

The Real Motive Behind the Documentary Hypothesis

Amateur scholar Mr. Greenburg says, “there is hardly a serious scholar today who doesn’t accept some variation of this proposal”.¹² As we will see, this is far from the truth. But whatever the percentage of the events or people liberal scholars believe were authentic in a JEPD Torah, they all share one thing in common: an anti-supernatural presupposition which is the opposite conclusion a literal reading of the text connotes. Archaeologists may document material changes over a period of time and try to answer the “what” question. But archaeologists are very hesitant to answer the “why” question which a proper philological interpretation of the text can answer. Since materials are the ultimate reality to both liberal scholars and archaeologists, sometimes critical scholars can feel a sense of shame with the supernatural claims in Scripture, demoting the Israelites into the category of a primitive myth bearing culture such as the Native Americans or other tribal groups. Prominent University of Arizona Professor of Near Eastern Archaeology William Dever draws on this argument in his agnosticism about the miracle claims of the biblical text: “The historian cannot deal with....things that seem incredible. We have to deal with the facts as we have them. There are other parallels for ancient peoples who have invented such stories for themselves because it seemed appropriate to them. There are, for instance,

¹² Gary Greenburg, *101 Myths of the Bible, How Ancient Scribes Invented Biblical History*. (New York: Bristol Park Books, 2000) xvii.

Native American Indian tribes who have invented for themselves quite incredible stories for their origins, stories we know not to be true.”¹³

Liberal scholars believe the material emphasis keeps Israelite history rational, relevant and reputable. One JEPD advocate with a bias towards the material, actually superimposes himself over the text and cherry picks his preferences, an option the text doesn't seem to allow: “*I made* a conscious decision to avoid stories of a miraculous nature where the sole argument raised would be a violation of the laws of physics.”¹⁴ One reason the peasant revolt theory for Israel's origins is preferred over the conquest model is because it eliminates the conclusion sprinkled throughout the text that “God did it”, which is unverifiable from a material diagnostic. For example, Joshua 10:31 reads “Then Joshua and all Israel with him moved on from Libnah to Lachish; he took up positions against it and attacked it.” That is fine as far as it goes. But it is verses like 10:32 that drive critical scholars crazy and for which material evidence will not be found, “*The Lord handed Lachish over to Israel, and Joshua took it on the second day.*”

Moderate or minimalist scholars who have ruled out miracles in advance believe the redactors finalized the Torah in the exile to explain Israelite history retroactively. In other words, JEPD was a literary device to cement the cohesion of the people after the traumatic Babylonian captivity, much like other primitive people groups have myths to unify the community. Some critical scholars feel the motive for a late JEPD writing was political, as conservative scholar Eugene Merrill bring out, “The narratives purporting to

¹³ Dever, 44

¹⁴ Greenburg, X.

recount history are no more than political propaganda pamphlets designed to justify Jewish occupation of the land in immediately pre-Christian times.”¹⁵ These scholars hold that most of the accounts were legends that were later put into a book to finalize the identity of Israel in the Persian period. Some proponents of this view say there is history here, but the history is so mixed with myth one can hardly know where one leaves off and the other begins. As Dever observes, “certainly the writers recast the whole story to suit the theological needs of the Exile and the post-Exilic period. But the writers of the Bible were good historians when they meant to be. Often they were not interested in writing history, but they certainly could.”¹⁶ Others say that events in the Torah after Genesis 12 occurred (with some accretions into legends) but that there is no proof that God or a god did them. Still other JEPD advocates say the only “history” here is how the myths in Moses have been interpreted and acted upon in Israelite history, a history of applied myths if you will, and not necessarily about original events.

Ultimately, the goal of liberal scholarship in denying Mosaic authorship through JEPD is an attempt to take the supernatural out of the Pentateuch. “The accounts of the Red Sea crossing, the manna in the wilderness, the provision of water from a solid rock, etc., are considered stories from oral tradition, thus making the miraculous happenings mere products of imaginative storytellers and not events that actually happened and were recorded by eyewitnesses.”¹⁷ In effect, JEPD tries to weaken the Word of God by raising questions on the authorship of the Torah. This seditious attempt to weaken the books of

¹⁵ The Veracity of the Word. Eugene Merrill, [http://www.dts.edu/read/the-veracity-of-the-word-dr-eugene-merrill-Accessed 12/1/15](http://www.dts.edu/read/the-veracity-of-the-word-dr-eugene-merrill-Accessed%2012/1/15)

¹⁶ Dever, 53.

¹⁷ <http://www.gotquestions.org/documentary-hypothesis.html>

Moses also infects the credibility of the New Testament as Jesus himself attributes the author of Exodus 3 to Moses (Mark 12:26). Peter cites Moses in Acts 3:22 as the author of Deuteronomy 18:12. And Paul, in Romans 10:5, references Moses as the source of Leviticus 18:5. Even Jewish tradition throughout the centuries, which was closer in time to the events, cites Mosaic authorship. So casting doubt on Moses as the author of the Pentateuch through JEPD ultimately attacks the work of Christ and the veracity of the New Testament!

The Incestuous Relationship of JEPD and Old Testament Archaeology

The purpose of introducing and refuting the Documentary Hypothesis is to show how liberal Old Testament archaeology and biblical studies cooperate intricately with each other. Though JEPD has been refuted as we will see, liberals still hold it as the general model through which Old Testament data from the field is filtered. It is like the white noise that operates in the background and massages the subconscious of naturalistic archaeologists. Whenever liberal scholars need “textual support” in Scripture for an artifact, they draw upon JEPD. For example, because Moses didn’t write the Pentateuch (which was written hundreds of years after such a figure), and because no archaeological evidence for Moses’ existence has ever been found, “most scholars today believe Yahwism originated somewhere in southern Transjordan among some of the tribal elements that later came to make up early Israel,” says Dever.¹⁸ Here, Genesis 12 is completely dismissed where God initiated contact with Abram, calling him when he was in Haran

¹⁸ Dever, 44.

(modern Turkey). Instead of somewhere within the Transjordan, other JEPD theorists feel Yahwism originated in the brief window of monotheism that occurred under Pharaoh Akhenaten of the Eighteenth dynasty in Egypt, which assumes a liberal late date for the life of Moses (ca. 1350 B.C.). Here, Moses hijacked ideas of monotheism in his service as “chief priest of Akhenaten’s religious cult[,] and the Exodus resulted from a volatile religious feud between Akhenaten’s successors, who reinstated the traditional beliefs [after] his followers lost control of Egypt after his death.”¹⁹

These critical scholars believe the Bible evolved into a monotheistic account from a collection of polytheistic myths, especially Genesis 1-11. The Hebrews derived a “new theology” from Egyptian myths while they were in Egypt, a theology where “the Hebrew scribes had to rework the stories to reflect their own religious viewpoint, and it is in the results that we see some of the great genius of the Hebrew authors. In essence, the Hebrews engaged in a form of reverse-engineering to fashion a coherent cosmogony.”²⁰ For example, the J source stems from the Egyptian city of Heliopolis (“On” in the Bible) which was the center of the monotheistic cult that stirred up much political turmoil. One major difference, however, between Egyptian and Hebrew monotheism is that what existed in Egypt was henotheism, where one god among many took preeminence over the others. This difference is an important refutation of Hebrew dependence on Egyptian mythology, as Alfred Hoerth points out:

Liberal scholarship has long questioned whether the Hebrews really practiced

¹⁹ Greenburg, XII

²⁰ Ibid, 5.

monotheism before the time of Moses. Further, it has tried to find the origins of Moses' monotheism in the religion of Pharaoh Akhenaten...[yet as] Redford ...concludes that 'the essential characteristics of the two monotheisms are so diverse as to exclude the possibility of influence, one upon the other.'....The dissimilarities of the two religions does not warrant the suggestion of Hebrew influence of Egyptian religion.²¹

Another reason archaeologists keep JEPD alive is because there is little chance of archaeology ever finding evidence for the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, etc. As Dr. Dever says, "No archaeologist in his right mind would go searching for the Garden of Eden."²² Affirming the incestuous relationship between liberal scholarship and naturalistic archaeology Herschel Shanks, editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, says, "I think that the first 11 chapters of Genesis would be regarded as myths- the creation stories, the story of Noah and the flood, the Tower of Babel."²³ In fact, the story of Babel was thought to be posited by Jews during the exile who "saw either the ziggurat in Babylon or some rundown ziggurat elsewhere and were so impressed that they composed a fable around it....The conclusion reached here, as at so many points in Old Testament studies, is dependent on one's theological presuppositions."²⁴

With the current state of archaeology in apparent cooperation, the first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis are considered legends. Interestingly, when naturalistic archaeologists approach the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph), they are less agnostic though still skeptical. They don't believe the patriarchs will be vindicated by the material evidence but as Ancient Near Eastern archaeologist William Dever says, "the search for

²¹ Alfred Hoerth. *Archaeology & The Old Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998) 158-159.

²² Dever, 45.

²³ Shanks, 45.

²⁴ Hoerth, 197.

the *historical background* of the patriarchs has been a legitimate quest for a very long time.”²⁵ This means that archaeologists acknowledge the patriarchs may have been real people, or at least their myths are based on some historical figures. But what percentage of their events happened is near impossible to discern.

Distinguished Harvard archaeologist Frank Moore Cross justified JEPD by relegating the patriarchs to the same category of other mythic writings of ancient times and said, “Well. Go over to Greece with the Iliad and Odyssey. These have elements of history, and they have non-historical elements. It’s very difficult to pull them apart. And I think there’s not much reason to.”²⁶ If writings such as the Iliad or Odyssey are Dr. Cross’s frame of reference for ancient texts, then it might be tempting to place the Pentateuch in that genre. But the Scriptures are not that type of writing and needn’t be viewed through that lens. Furthermore, Dr. Cross is committing a fallacy of logic called a non-sequiter. Since this, therefore that. Since the Iliad is mythical, then so must be the Old Testament.

Remarkably, Dr. Dever has a predictive element regarding the patriarchs. “I don’t think archaeologists or Biblical scholars will ever again be much interested in the so-called patriarchal period. It’s true some of the elements of these stories do seem to go back to the Late Bronze Age {1500-1200 B.C.} or the Middle Bronze Age {2000-1500 B.C.} or even earlier. But in their final form, it is very difficult to use them as historical sources.”²⁷

But if archaeology has taught us one thing, it is never to say never.

²⁵ Dever, 45.

²⁶ Cross, 30.

²⁷ Dever, 45.

Deconstructing JEPD

If one wants to dissect liberal secular biblical archaeology, one must *also* attack JEPD since archaeologists are wed to it. Archaeologist William Dever has said, “All scholars would agree that the Biblical texts were edited and put together in their final form quite late-in the Persian and Hellenistic periods.”²⁸ Really *all* scholars? Who is he referring to? Greenburg is just uninitiated when he says, “there is hardly a serious scholar today who doesn’t accept some variation of this proposal.”²⁹ Dr. Eugene Merrill, a world authority in Old Testament studies from Dallas Theological Seminary, refutes these notions. He writes, “the documentary hypothesis and other regnant 20th century methods of accounting for the texts of the Old Testament have become largely abandoned.”³⁰ Though JEPD hangs around as textual support when convenient for archaeologists, the trend has been to move away from JEPD as more scholars apply proper correspondent hermeneutics. Despite refutation, some version of the Documentary Hypothesis still underwrites liberal archaeology because of the implications of where a traditional view might lead. As Dever declares, “I give the latest editors of the Hebrew Bible a great deal of credit. I think they were good historians on occasion.”³¹ Historical “*on occasion*” may be the best a naturalistic archaeologist may give us regarding the Torah.

Before we deconstruct the edifice of naturalistic biblical archaeology, we will first expose the cracks in the foundation of JEPD and see why, at least from an integrity standpoint, it

²⁸ Ibid, 44.

²⁹ Greenburg, xvii.

³⁰ Merrill, <http://www.dts.edu/read/the-veracity-of-the-word-dr-eugene-merrill>

³¹ Dever, 53.

“is largely abandoned.” The following points which many scholars assent to are taken from Eugene Merrill in a journal article titled *Deuteronomy and de Wette: A Fresh Look at a Fallacious Premise*. Here Merrill levels arguments against the Deuteronomistic or D source, the refutation of which creates a domino effect into the other sources of J, E, and P as well.

- 1.) A major problem with a late date for Deuteronomy is that it makes no mention of Jerusalem as the capital nor states the location of the central sanctuary. But an early date for penning Deuteronomy before Jerusalem was captured by David explains the silence of Jerusalem in Deuteronomy quite well. A scribe writing in the 7th century B.C. could never resist the temptation to forsake the mention of Jerusalem as the cultic center if trying to fabricate a Mosaic document. Jerusalem was the capital of Judah well before the rich Deuteronomistic history of the monarchy.
- 2.) Josiah actually destroyed the local shrines before the discovery of the lost “book of the law”, which indicates the violation of idolatry was a well known tradition more than several decades old.
- 3.) Both Hezekiah and Asa performed religious reforms with the *same kind* of shrine cleansing hundreds of years before Josiah (in JEPD, the book of the law was allegedly manufactured just prior to Josiah. 2 Ki. 15:11-15). This indicates the law code template was set in place and well known throughout the monarchy preceding Josiah, with Old Testament history only making sense through that grid.
- 4.) Because Deuteronomy mentions a monarchy, liberals say this proves a late date. But

this is a predictive element in the book. The mention of a monarchy in no way presupposes a monarchy existed at the time the book was written, just as the multiple references of an impending exile does not prove that these prophets were post-exilic.

5.) Throughout Israel's monarchic history, the prophets and historians implored Deuteronomic law to prod the kings (1000 B.C. to 586 B.C.) to obey their covenant responsibilities or suffer the consequences of their disobedience. To say the historical accounts are late fabrications that correlate to a false Mosaic system for some post-exilic political agenda lacks textual and historical foundation.

6.) David and Solomon knew they were both guilty of violating well entrenched Deuteronomic restrictions (2 Sam. 3:2-5; 8:4; 1 Chr. 3:1-9; I Ki. 4:26, 10:26-29; 11:3-4). The events in the references listed here were followed by warnings of impending judgments for violating the word of Yahweh in Deuteronomy 17 (cf. 1 Sam. 12:9-10; 1 Ki. 11:9-11).

7.) In the 11th century, David charged his son Solomon to "observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses" (2 Ki. 2:3). The "decrees" and "commands" refer to a written Deuteronomic code, which means the law is pushed back at least to the 12th century and preceded the monarchy. Merrill says, "to assume that these traditions were only oral is to fly in the face of overwhelming ancient Near Eastern

evidence from the Late Bronze (Mosaic) age and even earlier.”³²

7.) In a related point, Merrill says, “Why and how could pre-Deuteronomic rulers be expected to conform to a non-existent protocol and how could so much time have elapsed before the community did, in fact, produce a document whose intent was to rein in the wickedness of the monarchy of its own time? The notion that restraint of royal excesses first came to mind in the seventh century B.C.E. is absurd on its face.”³³

8.) Deuteronomy is a covenant document consistent with the suzerain treaties of the time it was written in the 2nd millennium which contain lists of curses that would be applied to the vassal party should the terms of the covenant be broken. The literary form and structure of Deuteronomy fits in the same genre of texts from the Late Bronze age, in contrast to the Neo-Assyrian models of the 7th century B.C. (first millennium). The earlier legal models contain historical preludes and a list of blessings of which Deuteronomy also mirrors but which are omitted in the late models. Hoerth says, “Strikingly, the biblical covenant in Sinai, Moab and Shechem (Ex.; Dt.; Jos. 24) agree in content and form with the late 2nd millennium treaties, and not those of the 1st millennium.”³⁴

9.) In Deuteronomy 25:17-19, Yahweh commanded the Israelites to eliminate the Amalekites after they are settled in the land. But archaeologically, the Amalekites no longer existed in the seventh century B.C. making Yahweh’s command unnecessary for a late writing of Deuteronomy.

³² <http://jesot.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/JESOT-1.1-Merrill.pdf>

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Hoerth, 176.

10.) If Deuteronomy's extensive warnings against Canaanite idolatry were written late, they would have no relevance for a post-exilic community who had finally purged idolatry as a result of national judgment.

11.) The prohibitions against cutting oneself in mourning (Deut. 14:1-2), boiling a goat in its mother's milk (Deut. 14:21), and religious prostitution (Deut. 23:17-18) show no trace of persisting in late Southern Kingdom Jewish life. There would be no reason to fabricate these for a later authorship.

12.) When Ezra and Nehemiah were vehement against foreign marriage after the exile (Ezra 9:1-10:44; Neh.13:23-31), they weren't inventive. They were merely reinforcing a well entrenched pre-existing law that goes back to the Exodus (Ex. 34:15-16).

13.) The Ketef Hinnom amulets are an archaeological discovery that contend with JEPD. Found in 1979, the amulets contain a silver scroll with a small inscription of the priestly benediction from Numbers 6:24-26. The alleged P document under which this Numbers passage falls is thought to have originated around 450 B.C., yet the scroll dates to the seventh century B.C., well in advance of the origination of the P document as proposed by critical scholarship. Ketef Hinnom undercuts JEPD in a significant way.³⁵

We are told that Old Testament history through the monarchy, as collaborated by the prophets, is a late reconstruction to give definition for an exiled people group. But when

³⁵ Eugene Merrill, *The Veracity of the Word*, DTS Magazine. <http://www.dts.edu/read/the-veracity-of-the-word-dr-eugene-merrill>- Accessed 12/1/15

probed, it gets tripped up by so many inconsistencies and illogical details. The subsequent Deuteronomic history only makes sense when viewed through a preexisting law code going back at least (as far as liberal archaeology is concerned) to the 12th century B.C. However, solid scholarship holds that Moses and the Exodus took place in the 15th century B.C., which will be addressed shortly when we examine the archaeological component of biblical scholarship.

One element of internal evidence that refutes JEPD is the inspiration process in the historicity of the text. There was a tight, chain link of reliable testimony for the original audience in affirming the assertions under consideration, whether the event was oral for a short period of time or quickly put to writing. Geisler and MacKenzie describe the process:

Common sense and historical experience inform us that the generation alive when an alleged revelation was given is in a much better position to know if it is a true revelation than are succeeding generations, especially those of hundreds of years later. They can apply the tests of propheticity....which no succeeding generation can do directly. But many traditions proclaimed to be divine revelation....were done centuries....after they were allegedly given by God....Those removed in time are greatly handicapped as compared to contemporaries....to know what was truly a revelation from God. The evidence supports the thesis that this was done immediately by the people of God to whom the prophet wrote, not centuries later by those who had no access to him nor any way to verify his prophetic credentials. For example, Moses' books were accepted immediately and were stored in a holy place (Deut. 31:26). Likewise, Joshua's books were immediately accepted and preserved along with Moses' Law (Josh. 24:26). Samuel wrote a book and added it to the collection (1 Sam. 10:25).³⁶

³⁶ Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals, Agreements and Differences*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 195,166.

As Geisler and MacKenzie write, “those removed in time are greatly handicapped compared to contemporaries” in knowing what was historical. This includes those scholars today who are steeped in an egocentric humanism and solipsism as the center’s of their own interpretation worlds. Though we should be skeptical about any assertion from history, modern scholars would do well to revisit the proper historical method that goes all the way back to Aristotle: “the benefit of the doubt is to be given to the document *itself*, not abrogated by the critic to himself. Therefore, one must listen to the claims of the document under analysis and not assume fraud or error unless the author disqualified himself by contradictions of known factual inaccuracies.” Since Scripture is often the only historical record of Old Testament events, it is extremely arrogant to abrogate ourselves as our own self appointed hermeneutical think tanks and say, as Elie Wiesel did regarding Adam and Eve, “For me, it’s a story.”³⁷ These scholars may need to revisit what truth is, which is more than a collection of myths shared in the cultic center for the survival value of a community. Truth is anterior and corresponds to reality. Truth, history, fact, event, and reality are all closely related concepts.

The Bible is a record of God penetrating history and for naturalistic minds to downgrade it to the category of myths or primitive lore is not an option available to us. Since the text is written in a tone of sobriety, to say “I believe this is from the E author or that is the P source” is more than relegating the text to a coagulation of myths interwoven with strands

³⁷ Elie Wiesel, *Bible and Archaeology Legends Interviewed*, 28. To be fair, Wiesel has a high place for the text and a lifelong fascination with it. There are many times he has affirmed the historicity of the Old Testament, such as when he said, “I personally have no doubt that the Exodus occurred.” But then he reveals his anti-supernatural bias when he quickly retorts, “How it occurred, I don’t know”, which the text tells us how.

history. It is a subtle way of calling the text a liar. And if the text is a liar, then we slide down into a vortex of confusion as to what is true and not true. If everything is deemed skeptical as to what is true or not true, then “lying becomes pointless because lying is impossible without the general presumption of truth telling.”³⁸ Harvard’s Frank Moore Cross evidences this confusion in his assessment of Isaac as a sacrifice in Genesis 22:12, “We cannot determine what is historical and what isn’t.”³⁹ He may be right if his only diagnostic is empirical. To be fair to well respected professionals such as Dr. Cross, we could give them an out by saying that a “legend” doesn’t have to be pitted against “fact“, just like a myth doesn’t necessarily imply a person or event is untrue. A real person may have done great things and has taken on *legendary status* such as with the statement, “Michael Jordan is a *legend* in the game of basketball.” However, the smallest of assumptions one makes with the text will lead to vastly different end points, whether confusion or clarity. Ironically, the text that liberals are skeptical about with regards to God says later on, “God is not the author of confusion” (I Cor. 14:33).

The Origins of Israel: Peasant Revolt From Within or Conquest From Without?

Two major questions that arise from JEPD, and which underwrites modern biblical archaeology, are: Did the two nations of Israel and Judah have a fabricated history and religious war concocted by the J and E writers? Or did the split of the two nations reflect the actual process of two nations applying and misapplying a prior law code and covenant

³⁸ J.P. Moreland, <http://www.bethinking.org/is-the-bible-reliable/the-historicity-of-the-new-testament>

³⁹ Cross, *BAR Special Issue*, 31.

from God and written by Moses in the 15th century, as a natural reading of the text indicates? If the former, how then was Israel created? Through the lens of JEPD, liberal scholars and archaeologists complicate the matter unnecessarily and have a difficult time answering how Israel began. The thorny path that current scholarship has chosen to take to explain Israel will be contested at the end by a logical assessment of the evidence from archaeology.

We mentioned the liberal notion that Yahwism originated somewhere in the Transjordan or even in Egypt. In similar fashion, the great debate in Old Testament archaeology today is where the Israelites came from. There are two prevailing theories as to the origins of the Israelites. Cooperating with JEPD and underwritten by a certain interpretation of the material evidence, the first theory holds that the Israelites evolved out of the Canaanite culture in sort of a quiet social revolution or peasant revolt. This framework does accommodate a small invasion of semi-nomadic peoples east of the Jordan in conjunction with the general upwelling in the Levant. With some JEPD infection, scholars who favor the social revolution theory also tend to adhere to a late date for the exodus of Moses (12th century B.C.) if they believe in the exodus at all. However, in this model the existence of an exodus can be seriously questioned. Writes Hoerth, “the liberal focus has presently shifted from the question of date to theorizing over how much, if any, of the exodus and the conquest narrative is to be believed....The low [late] date originated in the 1930’s among scholars who thought extra biblical data should take precedence over biblical data....[and] were willing to change portions of the Bible to fit archaeological

evidence.”⁴⁰

The other theory for the origin of Israel is the traditional view based on a normal reading of the book of Joshua where the Israelites conquered Canaan from Egypt. This orthodox view of the conquest which is based on tradition, archaeological and internal evidence in the text, holds to an earlier view of the Exodus as lead by Moses at around 1447 B.C.

Hoerth articulates the precise nature of the debate:

In recent years many critical scholars have stopped maintaining that the account of Israel’s conquest of the Promised Land recorded in Joshua 1-12 is reflected in the archaeological evidence found in the transition from the Late Bronze Age I in Palestine (approximately 1200). About the only point of agreement among critical scholars now is that the biblical text is little or no historical value for understanding how Israel really made its appearance in Palestine. To accept the biblical account is now said to be naïve and there is lively debate over whether a “peaceful infiltration” (nomadic Israelites entered Palestine in search of new pasturelands and gradually became sedentary) or a “peasant revolt” (the Israelites were actually lower class Canaanites who revolted against their oppressors) is what actually happened. Variations of these two hypothesis have been proposed and some even grant that a portion of the Israelites had been in Egypt.⁴¹

Proponents of the social revolution (and peaceful infiltration) theory use several lines of reasoning for their position. First, they say that the Bible gives *two* accounts of the origins of Israel: one account is in the book of Joshua and the account in Judges. So they feel free to chose one or the other for support, depending on how they see the data. As Dever explains, “The latest editors of the Hebrew Bible thought both accounts were important and therefore we have to struggle with both. But archaeologically, the only one that makes much sense today is the account in Judges, which minimizes a simple military campaign

⁴⁰ Hoerth, 181.

⁴¹ Ibid, 215-216.

and talks instead of a two-century long cultural struggle between early Israel and Canaan.”⁴² He goes on to assert that the purpose of the book of Joshua is to glorify one individual’s military career and “cannot be easily reconciled with the archaeological evidence we have today.”⁴³ Sidelined as myth, Joshua implies a rather quick military conquest while Judges depicts a “two-century long cultural struggle between the early Israelites and the Canaanites.”⁴⁴

The peasant revolt model is not merely supposed from the material evidence. Proponents also use the Bible when convenient and say verses such as Ezekiel 16:3 couldn’t be more clear: “Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem, ‘Your origin and your birth are *from the land* of the Canaanite....’”. This verse is attractive because it comes from a late exilic author in conjunction with the D source. It was from a slow, evolutionary “out of Canaan” model that the Israelites came to know their origins “and distinguish themselves as Israelites.”⁴⁵ In borrowing from other areas of anthropology and archaeology, the social revolutionary advocates emphasize that when cultures develop a sense of ethnicity, they evolve as a slow process. Thus, a people group coming out of Egypt, passing through the Transjordan, and settling in the hill country through military engagements is seen with more skepticism when juxtaposed with other regions. “There is no single point at which you can say the Israelites now began calling themselves Israelites and no longer Canaanites,”⁴⁶ says Dever. Other support for a revolution from within comes from the

⁴² Dever, 42.

⁴³ Ibid, 42.

⁴⁴ Shanks, 41.

⁴⁵ Dever, 48.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 49.

argument that many aspects for a late date Israel, such as language, stem from a Canaanite background. “Modern Semitic linguists have known that Hebrew is a Canaanite variant,” Dever retorts.⁴⁷ The religious aspects are also said to be sourced to the Canaanites such as the agriculture festivals.⁴⁸

Icons to Behold: Lauded Archaeological Evidence for the Peasant Revolt Model

One icon of early Israelite innovation that is said to point to an evolved civilization out of Canaan in the 13th century is the Israeli *four room house*. Since most of the “earliest Israelites were agricultural people who had been farmers and stock breeders elsewhere in Canaan,” the four room house was likely a farmhouse or ancient apartment with a “hillside view.”⁴⁹ An apparently distinctive Israelite invention, the four room house consisted of a long, narrow room on one end of a rectangle, with three rooms separated by two rows of pillars stemming from it. The middle room was an unroofed courtyard that contained an oven. Sometimes the rooms were subdivided further and additional rooms were added along the periphery. Along with the four room house the *collar rim jar*, so named after “the collar-like ridges at the bottom of their short, wide necks,”⁵⁰ is another unique icon that helps identify what is a true ancient Israel settlement that evolved out of Canaan. “Israelite contemporaries were manufacturing undistinguished pots straight of the Canaanite repertoire,”⁵¹ says BAR editor Shanks. These jars were large, utilitarian, and

⁴⁷ Ibid, 51.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 51.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 47.

⁵⁰ Shanks, 86.

⁵¹ Ibid, 49.

unadorned in appearance in contrast to the elegant and brightly colored Philistine pottery. Their primary function was for storing water in the emerging Central Canaanite highlands populations.

Though not the hallmark identifier of Israelite existence as it once was (it has been found in other areas such as Jordan and Edom), the collar rim jar is still used as a pillar to support the notion the Israelites evolved from within as an agrarian society in the hill country. Other types of pottery manufactured by the Israelites are also “indistinguishable” from the bowls, pitchers, juglets and oil lamps from Late Bronze Age Canaanite assemblages (1550-1200 B.C.). Hebrew University archaeologist Trude Dothan agrees, “There is definitely a continuation of local traditions in the pottery....in the Israelite settlements.”⁵² Thus, it appears that the Israelites were an agricultural people and “not urbanites,” says Dever revealing his “emergent from within” interpretation. “They are rural people. They are newcomers to the hill country, though *not*, I think coming from *outside Palestine*. They have previously been farmers and stock breeders *somewhere in Canaan*,” he says.⁵³ Dothan also sees Israel as a unique ethnicity in the 13th century not merely in terms of the material evidence, such as the pottery or the four room house, but because of proximity. The Israelites choose to settle vacuous areas not previously settled, such as in the hill country. They are shown to be well defined by how the communities are dispersed and how small the villages are.⁵⁴

Another argument for the emergence of Israel out of Canaan in the 13th century is that

⁵² Trude Dothan, *Bible and Archaeology Legends Interviewed*, *BAR Special Issue*, 2015. 80.

⁵³ Dever, 49.

⁵⁴ Trude Dothan, 80.

Israel fits into a larger narrative of unrest that took place around the whole region at the time. Israel is not as special as Scripture seems to indicate as this is the same period the Philistines (“Sea Peoples”) conquered the coastal plains in Canaan, the Aramean states emerged in Syria, the Edomite, Moabite and Ammonite states settled in the Transjordan, the Phoenicians were established along the Mediterranean coast, and Israel took root in the Canaanite hill country. Likewise, the Hittite empire was collapsing, Egyptian domination was losing its grip, Ugarit was nearing its end and the Mycenaean palace culture in Greece was terminated all at this time. Even the great maritime trade at the end of the Bronze Age expired.⁵⁵ There was a lot going on in the then known world and, in the Levant, there were upwards of a dozen or more people groups who were “in the process of defining themselves,”⁵⁶ to use Dever’s rather humanistic term. Archaeologist Moshe Dothan generally agrees, “there was an enormous movement of people in the 13th and 12th centuries B.C.....The whole Mediterranean was in an upheaval.”⁵⁷ The tumult in that area of the world at the time contributed to the formation of “several new nation-states and new peoples in the vacuum following the collapse of the Late Bronze Age world.”⁵⁸ Interestingly, archaeologists will allow for the Philistines, or Sea Peoples, to have taken over in conquest before they will allow for an Israelite conquest! Israel’s emergence was perceived to be slow but “for the Philistines, it’s more drastic. You can see the change more easily archaeologically,”⁵⁹ says Philistine expert Trude Dothan. Why we can allow for a Philistine conquest model in the land and not an Israelite one is still unclear by

⁵⁵ Dever, 49.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 49.

⁵⁷ Moshe Dothan, Trude Moshe, 77, 86.

⁵⁸ Dever, 49.

⁵⁹ Trude Dothan, 81.

naturalistic processes, but all of these strands contribute to a portrait that Israel was just part of a bigger emergence of many nations in the turbulence of the 13th century in the ancient Near East.

Still another icon of Old Testament archaeology which is used for the late date revolt theory is the Merneptah Stele from Egypt, which dates to the 13th century. The artifact mentions “Israel” in the second to last line (“Israel is laid waste, his seed is not”). Though the artifact rightfully destroys any minimalist argument for a late fabricated history of early Israel, many scholars don’t take the reading of “Israel” at face value because that would imply a well entrenched early Israel by that time. Moderate scholars such as Dever let a preconceived peasant revolt model affect their interpretation and he comes up with an artful term to deal with the stele. He says “Israel” would be better referred to as a “proto-Israelite” group that was evolving out of Canaan at that time, a term he has coined. A similar artifact found in Egypt at about the same time as the Merneptah Stele is the Medinet Habu inscription which gives reference to a Sea People group called the Philistines, which critical scholars use as support for Israel as just one of many people groups arising in the commotion of the 1200’s.

The last line of evidence critical scholars lay out for the peasant revolt theory is the lack of destruction layers. At sites where Joshua conquered, there is little evidence of a destruction level at cities where there should be. There are a some destruction levels, but they don’t fit the time period for a late date. Destruction at Hazor in Joshua 11:10-11, for example, is “too early” for a 12th century conquest (but not for an early date conquest as we will see). Liberal archaeologists will concede there is some evidence of battle, such as

at Bethel, with a legitimate destruction layer at the late date if the 12th century. But they believe there should be more layers at more sites. Furthermore, where there is confirmation of battle, they explain it away by saying it is logical to assume a certain amount of armed conflict would take place in any social uprising or peasant revolt model, so the biblical stories “have some origin in fact.”⁶⁰ However, archaeologists like Dever would not use the term “‘conquest’ because”, as he says, “an isolated battle here and there does not amount to a conquest of Canaan. The term conquest really ought to be amended. It’s misleading”⁶¹

The material evidence has certainly moved archaeologists away from a minimalist position towards a more moderate stance (where there is some history wrapped in the Old Testament text). Yet those in Dever’s camp are still dogmatic and hold the line in rejecting a Joshua take-over scenario. He says that “all archaeologists” have rejected an Israelite conquest not only based on the material evidence, but because of a philological pre-commitment that “nearly all Biblical scholars today are convinced there is very little history to be written before” [the 12th century].⁶² But is this true that “all scholars” have rejected a conquest model and that no history was written before the 12th century? With the link between JEPD and naturalistic archaeology well established, these statements evidence the materialistic tail wagging the theological dog.

⁶⁰ Dever, 42.

⁶¹ Ibid, 42.

⁶² Ibid, 42, 45.

The Date of the Exodus: Amenhotep II or Ramses II?

Before we get to a correct assessment of the archaeological evidence, we must establish the proper chronological framework for the dating of events. There are two basic options held by scholars today for the exodus, the early date of 1447 B.C. and the late date of around 1290 B.C.⁶³ If Ramses II is the pharaoh of the late date, Amenhotep II is the pharaoh of the early date. Though Charlton Heston did a masterful job in the movie “The Ten Commandments,” Hollywood fed off of the glorified military prowess of Ramses II which was underwritten by liberal scholarship’s late date of the exodus in the 13th century. The notion for an exodus in the 1200’s was first put forward in the 1930’s by Nelson Glueck from the pottery he examined in the Transjordan and the Negev. He surmised that there was a gap in the occupation of these areas from 1900-1300 B.C. and any encounters recorded between the Hebrews and locals from the book of Joshua must have occurred after 1300 since there were no people there! When the text is used for justification, late date proponents will point to Exodus 1:11 where the Hebrew slaves built a storehouse at a city called “Ramses.” They reason that work at Ramses must have occurred during the Nineteenth Dynasty of Ramses II, and therefore, by coincidence of names, date the exodus to the 13th century B.C. The last line of support for a late date exodus comes from the supposed destruction levels found at certain cities Joshua encountered. Though the peasant revolt theory is held by many scholars, if they hold to an exodus at all, any destruction is the result of Joshua’s occasional conquests of towns in Palestine circa 1250

⁶³ Within the early date chronology, there is another option where the exodus occurred under Thutmose III, who was Amenhotep’s II father, because of an alternate chronology of the Eighteenth Dynasty.

B.C.⁶⁴

Several immediate responses can be leveled against the arguments for the late date, lending credence for an early date. First, neither the location nor the name of “Ramses” for the store city prevents an early date for an exodus. Walter Kaiser comments, “Ramses is probably to be identified with Qantir....not Tanis....[which was] another retrospective usage or modernization of an older term....[with the name] not changed until the time of the judges.”⁶⁵ More compelling is that the people who fought Joshua need not be settled but were likely nomads in the Transjordan and the Negev. As nomads or “tent dwellers”, they would leave little material signature for evidence of occupation anyway. Judges 6-7 reveal the Midianites were tent dwellers as documented evidence for a model at this period, and the Edomites were likely Bedouin as well. Also, archaeologists have since questioned Glueck’s analysis, and subsequent excavation in the Negev and Transjordan has revealed occupation in these areas between 1900 and 1300, eliminating the so called gap in the second millennium. Therefore, Joshua’s conquest of people groups could very well have occurred in the 15th century as there were people there to conquer. We only hear about the destruction layers of the 1200’s, which if the exodus is mentioned at all, may be attributed to Joshua. But these archaeologists ignore the destruction levels dated to the 1400’s which can easily point to an early date.⁶⁶

One tenet of accurately interpreting ancient texts is to try to understand what the author

⁶⁴ Hoerth, 180.

⁶⁵ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *Introduction to Exodus, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* Volume 2, Frank E. Gaebelin, General Editor. (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1990), 289.

⁶⁶ Hoerth, 180.

was thinking and see events from his perspective. One of the problems that clouds the matter is that liberal scholars don't see Joshua and Judges as generally sequential but simultaneous. However, we can get a clue as to what the writers of the Old Testament themselves thought as they seem to assume an early date or actually reveal it. First Kings 6:1 clearly posits that the Exodus occurred 480 years before the fourth year of Solomon's reign. We know he became king in 971, which clearly puts the exodus at 1447 B.C. For further support, Judges 11:26 shows Jephthah saying Israel had already existed in the land for 300 years by the time he became a judge or military savior. If we hold to a late date of 1290 B.C. for the exodus, that means Jephthah would have been a judge at the time of David in the united kingdom, a ridiculous statement! But Jephthah's judgeship three hundred years after Israel's occupation of the land fits well with an exodus of about 1447 B.C. Textually and archaeologically, 1290 fits better for the judges period (as opposed to the exodus) where the Israelites, after a period of occupation, *were settling and adjusting their lifestyles from pastoral nomads to an agricultural based society*. 1290 B.C. is a poorer candidate for an exodus and conflicts with the theory that the Israelites were generated out of Canaan in a sort of social revolution.⁶⁷

Further archaeological evidence for the early date of the exodus and conquest in the 1400's comes from the Amarna Letters which are correspondences between Pharaohs Amenhotep III (1416-1377) and Amenhotep IV (1377-1336) with smaller city-state Canaanite rulers in Palestine. These four hundred letters are a collection of cuneiform tablets found at Tell el-Amarna in Egypt and were written near the early date of the

⁶⁷ Ibid, 179

conquest by princes to the throne of Egypt who were pleading for relief but getting little response. They contain an interesting term “Hapiru,” similar to the word “Hebrew,” which was a derogatory term to describe people whose soldiers were confiscating cities and territory. Though Hapiru is a term found before and after the conquest, there were occasions when the term likely applied to the Hebrews. The tablets are important because they show an environment of havoc in Palestine at that time and an Egypt that was distracted, uninvolved and unreliable. These factors not only allow for an environment of an Israelite conquest, but the turmoil evidenced in Palestine at the time was probably caused by Hebrew infiltration.⁶⁸ Interestingly, Egyptian fortifications have been found in Sinai dating to the 13th century in the area traversed by Moses. Late date advocates have yet to propound how the Israelites could have proceeded through these ramparts without dispute.⁶⁹ Since there is no trace in Scripture of an Israeli conflict with Egyptian forces in Palestine, perhaps God coordinated the conquest in the 1400’s when Egypt was distracted and Canaan was in tatters.⁷⁰ Writes, Hoerth “At the very least, the Amarna Letters provide a glimpse of the political picture in Palestine at that time. At most, they might give actual Canaanite reaction to Israelite movements.”⁷¹

One final thought as it relates to the conservative versus liberal date of the Exodus and Israel’s origins. Archaeology has certainly moved Israelite history back in age seven centuries or so from the minimalist position. What critical scholars who reside in Israel

⁶⁸ Ibid, 218.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 180.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 218,219.

⁷¹ Ibid, 218.

may miss is the political ramifications that a liberal date for Israel's origin lead to. In the fierce debate raging with the Palestinians over who was in the land first, liberal scholarship is actually hurting the nation's cause. If Israel was borne out of Canaan in a peasant revolt or a peaceful infiltration model during a time when the Philistines (of which the word "Palestine" is a transliteration) were "conquering" in the 1200's, then Israel not only didn't precede the Palestinians, but the Palestinians have roots in their traditions and cultural identity as warriors. But if we hold to an early date with a conquest model, as a natural reading of Joshua presents, then the Israelites were first and they were mighty warriors! Which would better cement a cultural identity in a nation surrounded by a sea of hostility? A conservative early date means a tougher and earlier Israel. It is interesting how much current politics, even within archaeological circles, determine archaeological thought. It is possible that the softness of our modern world has seeped into the hermeneutic of many contemporary archaeologists.

The 15th Century Destruction Layers That Are Ignored

The destruction levels, or the lack thereof in the 13th century, are a line of evidence critical scholars present for the peasant revolt model conjoined with minor exodus/conquest activities of a late date of the exodus (if they believe in them at all). The logic is such that since there are few locations with a destruction level dated to the 13th century, these scholars reason the peasant revolt hypotheses is more accurate. The text says that Joshua burned the enormous city of Hazor (Jos. 11:10). Hazor, like Bethel, is one of the few cities with a destruction layer at that time and one of the few places where liberal scholars

will allow for a minor conquest by a Joshua like figure co-aligning with a general revolt model. William Dever says, “Even if one sees it only as a peasant revolt or a social revolution, there would inevitably have been a certain amount of conflict, some of it armed conflict. So therefore I think the Biblical stories have some origin in fact....”⁷² For validation, they cite Yigael Yadin’s work at Hazor where he concluded the destruction at level 13 was the result of Joshua’s offensive at around the late date conquest period. However, Amnon Ben-Tor, Yadin’s own student uncovered a “mighty palace” that was destroyed by fire at an earlier date in the Late Bronze Age II, well within the early date period. There appears to be two destruction layers and the evidence is not at odds with an early conquest.⁷³

Jericho has had its share of controversy and scholars today say it cannot be used to support an exodus for either date, one way or the other. Original excavations in the early 20th century reported no occupation in the Late Bronze Age (1500-1200). But then John Garstang in the 1930’s found a collapsed double wall with a suburban area ruined by fire dating to about 1400. In the 1950’s, research from Kathleen Kenyon’s excavations affirmed Garstang’s destruction layer, but she dated it to an earlier time of around 1550, at least 100 years before any conquest by Joshua. Critical scholars today still hold to Kenyon’s conclusions but they ignore the evidences of Bryant Wood, who in the 1990’s affirmed Kenyon’s suppositions that the double wall destruction was early. But Wood also found that Kenyon ignored some of the local pottery and showed from radiocarbon dating,

⁷² Dever, 42.

⁷³ Hoerth, 214.

scarabs, and pottery analysis that the residential area (City IV) from Kenyon's work had been destroyed in 1400, just as Garstang concluded. Kenyon herself later expressed doubts about her conclusions. Jericho, in addition to Hazor, could after all be shown to have a destruction layer around the early date of the exodus.⁷⁴

Jericho was an important initial stronghold for Joshua, the conquest of which gave access to the hill country. The northern passage to these central highlands was guarded by Ai but Joshua's scouts underestimated the strength of the city and were routed in the initial battle. Scripture reveals the real cause of the defeat in that a certain Achan kept some spoils from Jericho that were to be dedicated to the Lord. After Achan was put to death, Joshua mounted another attack and enticed the people of Ai into an ambush, who were completely routed the second time around (Josh. 7-8). Ai has been a problem for conservative scholars since et-Tell, the traditional site for Ai since the 1930's, has produced no evidence for a destruction layer at that time and subsequent excavations have shown the city to be uninhabited for a millennium, ending in 1200 B.C. In other words, there was no one in Ai for Joshua's army to conquer. Other sites have been offered as alternatives but none have produced materials commensurate with the time period.⁷⁵

However, absence of evidence does not mean evidence of absence and further discoveries may prove consistent with the biblical account, as has happened many times. Joshua chapter 10 reports Joshua's southern campaign where six cities were listed and destroyed in staccato like fashion. Israel was for real and their destructions were inevitable (Josh.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 210.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 211-212.

10:28-39). At one of the cities called Lachish, excavations have revealed that the protective boundary of the city was no more than an outer belt of houses, consistent with the possibility of a decisive victory as the Joshua account relays.⁷⁶

The Real Story of the Judges Period

Many scholars have a blind spot when it comes to the data of the 1400's of the Late Bronze Age and much depends on what one wants to see or allow in his or her model. Archaeology has confirmed there was a dropping off in municipal living somewhere in the Late Bronze Age that was juxtaposed with the proliferation of a pastoral people. Critical scholars say this happened in the 1200's but these could as easily point to Israel's arrival into the Levant at an earlier time as well. Instead of 13th century havoc reflecting the *entrance* of the Israelites into Palestine in some kind of peaceful infiltration or peasant revolt model, the tumult of the 1200's, which included a decline in urban centers, could also be the disturbance the book of Judges depicts where Israel was in transition from a pastoral lifestyle in the beginning to a more urban lifestyle toward the end of the judges. Culture wars and paradigm shifts occur in history and archaeologists have documented a rise in small settlement farming villages in the Hill Country (the Israelite preference) from less than 30 in the Late Bronze Age (1550-1200) to more than 200 settlements in Iron Age I (1200-1000 B.C.) at the end of the Judges. What this means for an early or late date is that the data is interpreted according to what one is looking for. "Scholars looking for the arrival of Israel around 1200 see this proliferation of new farming villages as evidence

⁷⁶ Ibid, 214.

that the Israelites were then settling in,” writes Alfred Hoerth. However, he says “it is equally likely that the settlement rise indicates that Israel was leaving a more pastoral lifestyle and finally settling down, heeding Joshua’s directive to Ephraim and Manasseh (Jos. 17:14-18).”⁷⁷

Egypt’s lack of presence in the region in the 15th and 14th centuries allows for an Israelite conquest and a judge’s like atmosphere. Egypt only regained an interest in empire under Pharaoh Seti I (1317-1304), Ramses II, and Merenptah in the 1200’s. The exploits of these pharaohs in extending their influence would have made a conquest or even peasant revolt more difficult for a late date of Israel’s origins. Clues in the Merenptah Stele, mentioned above as the first extra biblical reference to “Israel” (1230 B.C.), confirm that Israel was present but not established in the land, a fact consistent with the picture painted in the book of Judges. We already mentioned that late date advocates have yet to answer how the Israelites could have proceeded through the installations found in Sinai dating to the 13th century without conflict, (there being no trace in Scripture of an Israeli conflict with Egyptian forces in Palestine).

The continuation of pottery from Canaanite to Israelite which critical scholars say is evidence of an “out of Canaan” model can just as easily imply that “no new wave of people entered Palestine around 1200” as well.⁷⁸ That doesn’t mean there weren’t other people groups such as the Sea Peoples finding their home in Palestine at that time or that there wasn’t inter-city warfare. But one would expect in a conquest model of the 15th

⁷⁷ Ibid, 232.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 216.

century a shared material emphasis from Canaanite to Israelite since it isn't uncommon for ancient peoples to share material elements yet have vastly different beliefs or even language stocks. "Consequently," says Hoerth, "it is seldom possible to be sure whether an excavated site had been occupied by Israelites or Canaanites."⁷⁹ Evidence such as the "collar rim jar" or the "four room house" as symbols of Israelite innovations distinct from Canaanite settlements "is highly questionable,"⁸⁰ according to Hoerth. The Israelites adopted the collar rim jar for Hill Country living as water could be transported by donkey and stored in the home. "The Israelites adopted much of the material culture of Palestine, for there was no religious objection for that form of assimilation."⁸¹ Not that overly adorned pottery is wrong, such as we see in the Sea Peoples or Philistine culture a bit later, but it may indicate a more liberal belief system which the Israelites were told to have boundaries against. Interestingly, the separation we read about in Scripture with the Israelites and the Philistines in the period of the judges is also affirmed in the material data, as there is little evidence of Philistine culture or trade coming into the central Hill Country and areas occupied by the Israelites.⁸²

Some of the icons that secular archaeologists interpret for a late date and "out of Canaan" model can be comfortably used to support an early date exodus and conquest. The four room house, the collar rim jar, and the Merneptah Stele (housing the word "Israelite" in the 13th century) do lend credence to Israel being characterized by an agricultural lifestyle.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 232.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 216.

⁸¹ Ibid, 232.

⁸² Shanks, *BAR Special Issue*, 88. He writes, "I don't know of a single Philistine shard found in the hill country."

But it doesn't mean they were born out of Canaan. Rather, they evidence a people group transforming their existence over a period of time from pastoral nomads to a farming lifestyle, consistent with the picture of the Judges in the 1200's B.C. Save the minimalists, no one disputes Israelite history in the 13th century. What conservative archaeologists argue is that we can push the origins of Israel back two more centuries with a conquest in the 15th century, which not only fits the internal dates of the Old Testament but also allows Israel being characterized as an agricultural community in the 13th century, which peasant revolt theorists hold as well. A decline in Canaanite urban living correlates with a previously invasive nomadic pastoral peoples settling and becoming farmers in new territories of the Hill Country, eventually founding new urbanite centers towards the end of the judges.

What Do Critical Scholars Really Think of the Bible?

It's a little disingenuous to criticize so highly the biblical text that shapes so much of archaeological thought in Palestine when no other people on earth (the Israelites) have such a rich textual attestation as to their origins. Even Trude Dothan seems to agree, "Why is this country so important archaeologically? It's not because we have such grandiose finds. It's important only because it speaks to us. It's part of our heritage. It feels great that you can, in a way, read about your finds in the Bible. If you find an inscription, it talks to you straight."⁸³ Even subconsciously, the text defines and shapes the minds of liberal archaeologists more than they may want to admit. For years, many

⁸³ Trude Dothan, 89.

scholars were reluctant to acknowledge how spoiled they are in having the layered Scriptural detail that not only correspond to archaeological discoveries, but shapes their whole paradigm of Syro-Phoenician archaeology. Positive changes have occurred in recent years because archaeological discovery has been at the forefront of moving the chains from a minimalist position (where the Old Testament contains no history) down the field towards a maximalist position (where the whole Old Testament is completely historical). Though not coming full circle to embrace any supernatural elements of Scripture, Philistine specialist Moshe Dothan is one who has seen the value of the text, “As time goes on, we see more and more of the facts mentioned in the Bible can be used in reconstructing what we find in our excavations.”

Should the archaeologist go the field with the Bible in one hand and a trowel in the other? Many would say no but for years critical scholars would not even concede how richly the text has enriched archaeology. Moshe Dothan admits, “The truth is that everybody, even people who are against the Bible, go first to the Bible to see if something there supports what they find. Many Biblical texts have been vindicated. When the Bible gives us a sentence or even a word, we have to use it.”⁸⁴ However, William Dever reveals his material emphasis as a scientist when he cautions, “You don’t start with an exegesis of the text and then go to a site looking for something like that. I start, as an archaeologist, with a discovery....in the context of [its time]”.⁸⁵ That’s fine as far as it goes, taking the evidence as it is presented. But then how do you interpret it? What is the scientist’s lens,

⁸⁴ Moshe Dothan, 89.

⁸⁵ Dever, 53.

worldview or theological presuppositions when he finds evidence? As one archaeologist excavating ancient Gath, Goliath's hometown, acknowledged anyway, "it's all about interpretation, interpretation, interpretation." Atheism is just as much of a philosophical construct as theism and far from an established fact. If one needs evidence that this is a theistic universe, which was the worldview of the Old Testament writers, then we can argue that on other grounds. But to interpret the material evidence of a theistic culture without a theistic worldview seems not only arrogant, but disingenuous and inaccurate. Why is our atheistic and secular worldview superior to theirs? Perhaps there is an arrogance of contemporariness that has invaded our minds, that because we are the most advanced society the world has known in terms of innovation and technology, then we are a superior people (all this despite not having come close to solving the problems of age and mortality!). Ironically, these are the issues the very text that archaeologists consult also address. When artifacts of a past people are found, archaeology should produce a humility and a self examination as to the purpose of life and death and not so easily discount all the beliefs of ancient people as being primitive and mythical.

This leads to important questions in Old Testament archaeology. What did the average ancient Israelite believe and can we know what they believed? What is information and what role does information play? Is an adorned juglet considered information where we can make a moral assessment of a culture's lifestyle?⁸⁶ Should the Bible be considered as a source of information and be treated as an artifact, or are inscriptions uncovered from the

⁸⁶ William Albright made some kind of moral or ideological assessment or from the material record when he analyzed small two-handed Philistine bowl and concluded that they were probably "wine craters and beer jugs", and that the Philistines were "mighty carousers." William F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*. Gloucester: Peter Smith, as quoted in Hoerth, 234.

ground the only information source we should consider? Again, it all starts with one's assumptions, interpretation and the kind of data he or she allows. Dever answers it this way, "As an archaeologist, I deal with material-culture remains. I am very cautious in trying to reconstruct ancient ideologies. I don't know what these so-called proto-Israelites thought. I don't think we do know until we have some texts from later periods.... We don't know what they believed, except where they expressed it in some sort of behavior that leaves a trace in material remains."⁸⁷

The problem is that we do have a text that tells us what the Israelites believed. And this is where philology should supersede and correct archaeology. The order in the universe is that information always precedes material design (cf. DNA and the cell). Every artifact has a purpose or idea from the mind from a designer, and Scripture has been proven to be a respectable source of philology. If the Bible is a living book, perhaps what the angels said to the women who were looking for Jesus in a lifeless context might apply here: "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:5). It is ironic that the Old Testament, from a liberal JEPD interpretation, cooperates with archaeology in a negative way when convenient as though much of the Bible is just myth. But why can't the Bible be used to support archaeology from a classical perspective if JEPD has been deconstructed by archaeology and the science of biblical criticism? Is critical Old Testament scholarship worthy of dependence only if the supernatural components are removed, even though the Old Testament has proven historical and forced archaeology into a more maximalist position?

⁸⁷ Dever, 48, 51.

The information in the Old Testament text is harmonious with archaeology. Though liberal scholars have not come full circle to embrace any history earlier than the 13th century such as the patriarchs, the first 12 chapters of Genesis or even the supernatural, they increasingly acknowledge the reliability of Scripture thanks in part to some stunning archaeological finds. For example, there was a time when scholars were skeptical that a sophisticated and grandiose temple such as Solomon's could have been constructed in the 10th century B.C., since nothing analogous had been found in the ancient Near East. But in 1980 at 'Ain Dara, Syria, a temple was discovered with a similar layout, size, and a Most Holy Place similar to Solomon's temple as illustrated in the Bible. That Israel had a temple in the tenth century stands uncontested.⁸⁸ At Tel Dan, an Aramaic inscription on a rock was found with the words "house of David". The inscription dates to about 830 B.C. and is decisive in showing that not only was David a real historical figure, but all of Judah's history was built and sequenced around him.⁸⁹ Even Dever admits, "there are hundreds of places in the Hebrew Bible where there are little descriptions like that of a past reality that could not have been invented later."⁹⁰ The Wadi el-Hol inscription in southern Egypt, which is a proto-Egyptian or Canaanite script dating upwards of 1850 B.C., silences the critics who say Moses couldn't have written the Torah because the alphabet wasn't invented yet.⁹¹

And then there is the highly regarded pym weight. Though not directly tied to our

⁸⁸ Eugene Merrill, *The Veracity of the Word*, DTS Magazine. <http://www.dts.edu/read/the-veracity-of-the-word-dr-eugene-merrill>- Accessed 12/1/15

⁸⁹ Merrill, *Veracity*.

⁹⁰ Dever, 52.

⁹¹ Merrill, *Veracity*.

discussion of the conquest and early Israel, the pym weight is an important discovery for the reliability of the Old Testament. The Philistines were the metallurgy experts in the area and had a monopoly on iron working in the Iron Age. Until recently, the Hebrew word “pym” in 1 Samuel 13:19-21 was thought to mean “file” when the Israelites went into Philistine territory to have their weapons sharpened. The older King James is the only translation that retains the old word “file” because archaeology has corrected all subsequent versions with the word “pym”. The King James reads, “all the Israelites went down to the Philistines, to sharpen every man his share, and his coulter, and his axe, and his mattock. Yet they had a *file* for the mattocks, and for the coulters, and for the forks, and for the axes, and to sharpen the goads” (v. 20-12). For years, scholars thought the word “pym” meant “file.” But we now know the pym is a weight which is the size of a musket ball with a Hebrew reference inscribed on it; it weighs in at a third of a shekel and was used to weigh out scraps of silver. This was the fee a smith charged the Hebrews for his filing services! From this, archaeologists can draw a moral or ideological conclusion from the material data “that the Philistines were charging an exorbitant price for blacksmithing.”⁹² Not only were the Philistines perhaps greedy, but the pym weight argues for the classical view of the text and against a late date for the composition of the Old Testament. William Dever acknowledges the blow to the Documentary Hypothesis, “Is it possible that a writer in the second century B.C.E. could have known of the existence of these pym weights, which occur only in the ninth to the seventh century B.C.E. and would

⁹² Hoerth, 249-250.

have disappeared for five centuries before his time? It is not possible.”⁹³ Regarding finds such as the pym weights, Moshe Dothan says, “We are lucky to have the Bible, and the Bible tells us about the Philistines. I stress this again and again. The Bible is really the source of so much of our knowledge....The Bible tells us where these people lived. In exactly those places, we find this culture we call Philistine.”⁹⁴

But the Bible is written to tell us more than where the Philistines lived. The question is, if the Old Testament has proven so reliable archaeologically in the many characters and place names that are incidental to its events, why can't it be trusted for the greater motivation of its writing, that there is a God who penetrated time, space, and history? For some reason it is still a huge jump for atheistic archaeologists, who finally admit that David was a real figure, to humble themselves and acknowledge God was his inspiration for living and empowered him to do many great things. They don't realize they too can have the relationship with God that David had, which is the real motivation for the writings. David himself said, “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him” (Palm 103:11). History, truth, facts, and reality are all closely related concepts. Perhaps they are using the wrong diagnostic and need a logical proof for the existence of God.

Conclusion

It is no secret that archaeology and the study of past cultures is a legitimate pursuit of

⁹³ Dever, 53.

⁹⁴ Moshe Dothan, 82.

science and guided by the empirical method. As one scholar notes, “the first stirrings of archaeological research in the Middle East were concomitant with the rise of the so called ‘historical critical’ method.”⁹⁵ But of all the fields of science, biblical archaeology should be the one discipline where its practitioners have no excuse to know God if one is on authentic pursuit of truth. There will always be alternate atheistic and naturalistic spins on the evidence as to Israel’s origins. But a discovery which causes the analyst to consult the text and is verified by the text is its own witness to the veracity of biblical text. Of course, the right worldview such as this being a theistic universe may be a necessary first step to interpret a find correctly. But some finds are so paradigm changing that we adjust to them, we don’t make them adjust to us. Biblical archaeologists are spoiled in having such a rich ethnological, philological and textual tradition to consult and build a correct framework by which to interpret the data they uncover.

If the Word of God has power in pointing people to the correct metaphysical reality, and secular professionals consult the text but don’t ascent to it, there reveals another dynamic going on here besides mere evidence, reason, and materials. Perhaps there is a moral component involved as well. Let us say we find an artifact related to some event listed only in Scripture, and the biblical author who was closer to the action of the event said God was involved in that occurrence. Is the option really open to us to say about a text, “no I think I know better as to what happened?” Herschel Shanks commented as such regarding Abraham in the book of Genesis, “I think of Abraham, who exists *for me* in a

⁹⁵ Eugene Merrill, *The Veracity of the Word*.

special way.”⁹⁶ Though there is application of the text, is it really an option on a hermeneutical level to say that “for me Abraham exists in a special way”? Of course he is special. But all the verses are special. It seems disingenuous to the text, which we consult to build a great framework to interpret archaeological finds, to then supersede it with a hermeneutical humanism that discards the supernatural aspects and allows for cherry picking as to what we feel is important. In the egocentric humanism of our age, we think too highly of our roles in interpretation and forsake external corresponding reality. Traced back to Spinoza and Kant, this approach is guilty of starting with ourselves and our minds as the most important element of reality instead of first things in the data.

A good case can be made that the Old Testament is in harmony with modern biblical archaeology with its material emphasis in determining the physical parameters of how people lived in the Levant. But the major purpose of the text is not as a text book per se. What inspired the authors, whose works we benefit from archaeologically, is the resolve to preserve how God acted in history in specific contexts, persons and places. If scholars are egocentric and archaeologists are terracentric, the biblical authors were theocentric. A precise interpretation of the data, whether textually or archaeologically, would be to arrive at how the biblical authors thought when they lived in ancient Israel and embrace the perspectives they had of the events they wrote about. A true interpretation of the data is to think as the biblical authors thought.

Though archaeologists are “cautious in trying to reconstruct ancient ideologies” [since

⁹⁶ Shanks, 31.

they only] “deal with material culture remains”⁹⁷ to borrow Dever’s words, God is not at odds with science. He is ahead of it. If God exists, which can be argued by other disciplines if needed, then He invented science as another way to get to know Him. The Scriptures are perfectly compatible with the chief ends of science in that they both present the origins and destinations of people. Though there are principles that can guide the scientific mind to maximize achievement, the biblical text doesn’t contain the inner workings of scientific discoveries because the emphasis of the Bible is to relay details about greater realities such as mortality, morality, and cosmic authority. If the supernatural exists, it may be more important than the material. Life itself cannot produce the answers to the questions of it’s own meaning.

The Scriptures were deposited into cultures whose worldviews already encompassed the spiritual realm, for the purpose of correcting natural man’s deviations from an original design. Contrary to the evolutionary model, where man is evolving, progressing and getting upgrades as he passes through time, Scripture is the sine quo non of ancient literature that tells us that man was created with intelligence from the beginning and that the spiritual realm is more important in preceding the physical in that sequence. When “biblical” archaeologists need to understand materials, they often turn to the immaterial- the information laden biblical text, which archaeologists in other areas of the world don’t have the luxury of. The immaterial, information, and intelligence are all closely related concepts and shows the preeminence of the immaterial over the material, which is what Scripture said all along (cf. “God is spirit” in John 4:24 or “God is not human” in Numbers

⁹⁷ Dever, 48.

23:19). It is no accident that by the time the enlightenment hit, with the age of science, the industrial revolution, and the age of technology following, the world had a well developed metaphysic in place, with its philosophy and Judeo/Christian theology at its core. One can only imagine the chaos in the world if it were possible to reverse that order, where the advanced material world we live in preceded a belief in the spiritual world and the more accurate metaphysical realm in Christian theology.

Biblical archaeology has moved the chains in recent decades from a predominantly minimalist position in the early 1900's (where the Torah and Deuteronomistic history were written during the exile or Persian period of around 450 B.C.), to accepting a more maximalist stance of Israeli history dated to at least the 12 century B.C. As positive as this trend has been, current secular biblical archaeology still won't acknowledge the supernatural elements of Old Testament history or anything before Genesis 12. It may ascent to the origins of Israel being pushed further back in time, but that doesn't mean God did it. The problem is the lens or praxis the archaeologist uses is uniformly constrained. Archaeologist can be so heavily trained in a reductionistic framework, and so absorbed in the empirical method as the only way of determining reality, that the heart has become seared. One man writes, "not all truths help us descend with the mind into the heart. There is a way of talking about truth that can actually deaden our hearts...Western culture rejected the mystery and transcendence of the Middle Ages and places it's confidence in pragmatism and progress, the pillars of the Modern Era. But once we rid

ourselves of the Author, it didn't take long to lose the larger story."⁹⁸ Even though William Dever has acknowledged that "the Bible is....about His Story,"⁹⁹ reason and empiricism as the only determinants of reality are where modern science, including archaeology, hangs its hat. Perhaps archaeologists might be wise to consider the other side of a purely scientific and material pursuit, a side one doesn't hear very often. Conditioned by the scientific method, Charles Darwin's theory so atrophied his mind to beauty and wonder that he penned these words:

Up to the age of 30 or beyond it, poetry of many kinds ... gave me great pleasure, and even as a schoolboy I took intense delight in Shakespeare.... Formerly pictures gave me considerable joy, and music very great, delight. But now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry: I have tried to read Shakespeare, and found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me. I have also almost lost any taste for pictures or music... I retain some taste for fine scenery, but it does not cause me the exquisite delight which it formerly did... My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts, but why this should have caused the atrophy of that part of the brain alone, on which the higher tastes depend, I cannot conceive....The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Brent Curtis, John Eldredge. *The Sacred Romance, Drawing Closer To The Heart of God*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 40.

⁹⁹ Dever, 53.

¹⁰⁰ The Autobiography of Charles Darwin

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