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Messianic Perspectives®

God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.

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The Great Debate on Israelite History

By Tim M. Sigler, Ph.D.

I have a friend who's especially amused by YouTube videos featuring the “experiments” of Blendtec founder Tom Dickson, who places such items as iPads, iPhones, watches, or liquid nitrogen into one of his blenders and asks one question: “Will it blend?”

Sticking to this one question has proven to be a brilliantly successful advertising move—significantly boosting sales for Blendtec products. The videos themselves are deemed so entertaining that a massive Internet following has turned the ads into a craze of their own—as of 2009, the series had accumulated more than 83 million hits!

Have the Archaeological Giants Killed King David?

In the world of Bible history, many scholars (ranging from Bible-believers to über-critical anti-believers) have become fixated on a single question: “Will it blend?” Does the archaeolog-

ical evidence blend with the biblical account? To put it another way, does archaeology confirm the Bible? While focusing on one question can be successful in an advertising campaign, it isn't a good approach to understanding archaeology's complex issues.



Denial—Not Just a River in Egypt!

Challenging society's cherished beliefs and disparaging traditional values is a trend in the academic arena. It is common to assume that the Bible is merely a spiritual book for the religiously inclined, proven unreliable long ago by archaeologists and historians. Discoveries of early extra-biblical creation accounts from the ancient Near East have caused many to view the stories of Adam and Eve as the handiwork of myth-makers. Ancient flood accounts similarly caused faith in the existence of a biblical Noah to sink. These concessions gave way to the rejection of the patriarchal narratives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. The lack of evidence for Israelites in Egypt plagued scholars enough to make them harden their hearts toward the biblical notion of the Exodus. Further, when Late Bronze and Early Iron Age site excavations in Israel did not exhibit the destruction layers that archaeologists expected to find, belief in Joshua's conquest of Jericho came tumbling down.

Some (often anti-Semitic) conspiracy theorists even claim that there was never an Israel at all, or that modern Jews are merely European imports to Israel with no ancient connection to the land—an impossible notion, though some hold it dogmatically.

The United Monarchy

A hot topic of archaeological debate is the emergence of Israel as a political state—something Bible students have called the United Monarchy. Some archaeologists and biblical scholars now reject the biblical stories of Israel's early kings (Saul, David, and Solomon) as biblically unreliable. Yes, many will agree that these are historical personages, but they deny that Israel existed as a major state united under a strong central government—they believe it was a small tribal kingdom.

It has become fashionable for skeptics to distinguish between the more mythical part of the biblical storyline and the more historical. The skeptics' wedge is driven precisely between the eras of the United Monarchy (under Saul, David, and Solomon) and the Divided Monarchy (beginning with Rehoboam in the South and Jeroboam in the North).²

A mere 40 years ago, scholars viewed Israel's early kingdom as one of the most thoroughly documented periods of the Hebrew Bible—and very helpful for understanding what was happening in Israel's history.³ The United Monarchy was safe! Even in secular and theologically liberal circles it was commonly held that Israel's history began with David. But a strong tide of doubt and skepticism has swept across this once unshakeable period of early Israel's past. Severe "bibliophobia" among historians has been so widely diagnosed that even unbelieving critical scholars must plead with their colleagues to at least "treat the Hebrew Bible in a similar way as we treat other ancient literature"⁴ when attempting to write about Israel's history.

Emphasizing the improbability that David could have been everything the Bible makes him out to be is common today. How could one man be a shepherd, a great warrior, a singer/songwriter/musician/poet, a fugitive, a sinner, a saint, and a crowned king (although the youngest of a large family)? To some, these disparate descriptions sound more like the makings of an ancient legend than a historical account of a king's rise to power. Now, new archaeologically remixed versions of David and Solomon have emerged that bear little resemblance to the biblical versions of their lives. These extreme denials suggest, "David and Solomon, the united monarchy of Israel, and indeed the entire biblical description of the history of Israel are no more than elaborate, skillful ideological constructs produced by priestly circles in Jerusalem in post-exilic or even Hellenistic times."⁵

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A “Not Unless I Have To Agree” Attitude

How could confidence in the biblical history of the United Monarchy erode in only 40 years? The simple answer is that archaeological methods and attitudes have changed. It's not that newly found hard evidence squarely debunking previous understandings has been found, but rather new conflicting interpretations of previous excavations have come into vogue. The tendency across most academic disciplines, within a culture of increased skepticism (known as postmodernism), has been to challenge all past beliefs in order to overturn dominating power structures and belief systems. Archaeologists and historians of this new-school approach will only accept a traditional view of past events if the evidence is absolutely undeniable. Their attitude toward agreeing with the Bible's version of historical events is, “Not unless I have to agree!”

These scholars quote one another in the attempt to demonstrate, “the ‘ancient Israel’ of biblical studies is a scholarly construct [i.e., ‘fiction’] based upon a misreading of the biblical traditions and divorced from historical reality.”⁶ Such a starting point means they are only reluctantly⁷ willing to accept biblical claims as historical when such items cannot be explained otherwise.

No Smoking Gun

Archaeology is fascinating because there is always the possibility that a new find will confirm the biblical record. Many biblical personalities are mentioned outside the Bible. Kings Ahab, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Hoshea, Jehoiah, Jehu, Josiah, Jotham, Manasseh, Omri, Pekah, Uzziah, Zedekiah, and others are all named in extra-biblical literature from the ancient world—not to mention various pharaohs and Mesopotamian rulers. The once dubious figure called Pontius Pilate was unknown outside the New Testament, but a monumental inscription was found bearing his name (and title) in 1961 and previous doubts had to be “reevaluated.”

When it comes to David and the United Monarchy, there is no smoking gun (or sling for that matter) found amidst the archaeological remains to “prove” the biblical narrative to the satisfaction of every skeptic. To date, archaeologists have not unearthed any monumental inscription claiming, “King David the Israelite ruled in Jerusalem in the tenth century BC.” Since the biblical books of 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 1 Chronicles are the only written record

of David's rule, the basic assumption is that the kingdoms of David and Solomon must be religious myths—developed later as Israelite folklore.

As archaeologist Steven Ortiz (an evangelical) has warned, “These issues are no longer discussed among a small isolated group of scholars, but are becoming the dominant paradigm in the public arena. Anyone who teaches or preaches from the Bible will encounter this trend and must be able to offer a

prepared to “give a defense” to those who ask (1 Peter 3:15). It is appropriate to provide answers to the sincere questions of those who wonder why we believe the message of Scripture—and exploring these issues can also encourage our own faith. Archaeology can be part of this defense.

Rather than asking if archaeology can prove the biblical record, a more modest question can be even more effective. Does the archaeological record

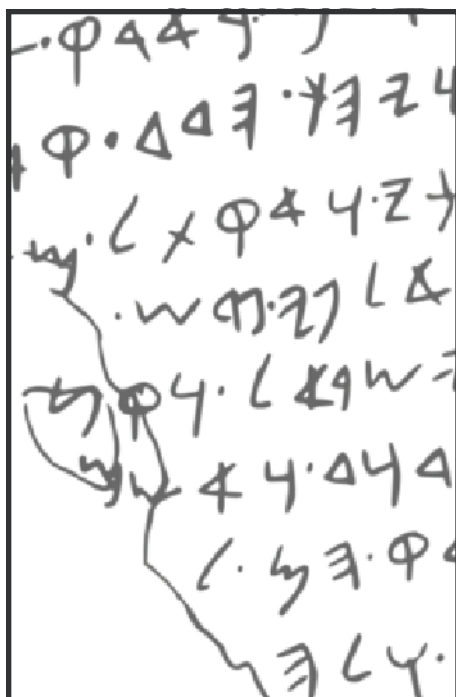


response and defense of the historicity of the biblical narratives.”⁸ Believers cannot simply bury their heads in the sand, leaving them to be excavated by future archaeologists looking for people who once believed in the Bible.

On the other hand, we cannot—and should not feel the need to—prove the Bible to unbelieving skeptics, especially its religious and theological truth claims. The Scriptures certainly do not ask believers to pressure skeptics to believe. Rather, early believers were simply told to “bear witness” to the truth (John 15:27; Acts 1:8) and to be

suggest that the biblical record is probable? Asking for probability instead of proof demonstrates the need for faith to fill-in the gaps archaeology cannot provide when reconstructing the specifics of Israelite history.

A number of key finds suggest that the Bible provides an accurate historical account of David and his kingdom. Even apart from sincere faith in the Bible, the following archaeological discoveries lend support to the claim that it is indeed probable (and not unreasonable) to believe that the David of the Bible is the David of history.⁹



Tel Dan Inscription: Schreiber



The Mesha Stele/Moabite Stone: Encyclopaedia Biblica



Karnak Shoshenq I: Neithsabes

The Tel Dan (House of David) Inscription

From 1993 to 1995, archaeologists began to find fragments of an Old Aramaic monumental inscription at Tel Dan in northern Israel. King Hazael of Aram (Syria) appears to have commissioned the writing in 841 BC in honor of his victory over local enemies including Israelite kings. Lines 8-9 read, “I killed [Ahaz]iahu son of [Jehoram kin]g of the House of David.” This reference to the “House of David” is one of the earliest extra-biblical reference to King David, and demonstrates that within 150 years of his reign there was an internationally recognized dynasty (house) of Davidic kings. This discovery provides an overwhelming extra-biblical confirmation of David’s kingdom since this recognition comes from a boastful foreign king.

The Mesha Stele/Moabite Stone

Discovered in 1868 in Dhiban, Jordan, this arch-shaped, black basalt stele (a stone monument) dates to c. 830 BC. The piece was damaged by local Bedouin who, using fire and cold water, cracked it into pieces when negotiations for its purchase broke down. Thankfully, a paper copy was made by an examiner before the artifact was dismembered.

The inscription recounts the successful revolt of King Mesha of Moab against the neighboring “Omri King of Israel” and his son—an event also recorded in 2 Kings 3. While the stone mentions numerous items that are interesting to biblical scholars (e.g., the name of YHWH, the Moabite deity Chemosh, devoting the town of Nebo to destruction under “the ban,” and numerous biblical locations), the most intriguing find came years after its initial discovery.

French epigrapher André Lemaire reexamined the artifact and the paper copy and concluded that, like the Tel Dan Inscription from the same time period, the Mesha Stele also contains a reference to the House of David. He supplied one missing letter to Line 31 to complete the previously ambiguous phrase, “As for Horonen, there lived in it the House of [D]avid,” or “And the house [of Da]vid dwelt in Horonên.”¹⁰ The phrase suggests that the Judahites (House of David) occupied the site of Horonen in southern Moab. To date, no expert has offered a solution that has gained more support from the scholarly community. This text provides further historical probability for the existence of David’s kingdom and dynasty.

The Shoshenq Relief

Shoshenq I of Egypt (ruler from c. 945-924 BC) is thought to be identified as Shishak in the Bible. In the fifth year of Rehoboam’s wicked reign, the prophet Shemaiah announced that Shoshenq would bring God’s judgment. He invaded the kingdom of Judah and looted the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 14:25-27; 2 Chron. 12:1-9). The Temple of Amun’s famous entryway in Karnak, Egypt, is known as the Bubastite Portal. A commemorative relief on a portal wall displays Shoshenq’s military exploits against Israel and Judah, and a long list of conquered cities shown in cartouches (oval shapes within the hieroglyphs). Among these, “It is possible that the inscription also mentions the ‘highlands of David’ in its reference to Israel. If so, it is the earliest extra-biblical reference to David in existence and as such affords powerful evidence that he was in fact the great king the Bible portrays him to be.”¹¹

Stay Tuned for More

To date, the previous inscriptions provide the only known possible extra-biblical references to David. But a few documents may prove to be valuable in the discussion of ancient Israelite history related to the world of David in the tenth century BC.

The Merneptah Stele is an Egyptian victory stele from c. 1220 BC. It provides the earliest indisputable reference to “Israel” outside the Bible. The specific hieroglyphic markings indicate that Israel was already established in the land as a people group, but not yet a kingdom, well before David’s time.

The Khirbet Qeiyafa Ostrakon (discovered in 2008 and dated to c. 1050-970 BC) is a broken potsherd inscribed

The City of David excavations, though controversial, are ongoing and worthy of continued interest. One archaeologist, Eilat Mazar, has found a large building and claims that it is David’s palace—but by nearly all accounts she “has overstated her case.”¹³ Thankfully, archaeological inquiry always offers the potential for more finds, and technology holds out the hope of deciphering previously illegible texts.

Archaeology: As Seen On TV!

The folks at Blendtec often warn their viewers, “Don’t try this at home!” Similar subtitles should perhaps warn viewers of the Bible-related programming on the History Channel, PBS, and National Geographic. Expert opinions are often announced prematurely—directly from the dig site without peer

together select quotes from scholars who are not attempting to be as sensational as they are made to sound. Nevertheless, every extreme view has its poster scholar who can produce the necessary sound bite. Thankfully, in our age of instant communication, researching such claims becomes a little easier, and fact checking on the web may provide perspective.

The Hype and Hope of David

Why all this hype about David? Should it really bother some scholars that thinking people (even other scholars) believe King David was a real historical figure? For the anti-Zionists, anti-Semites, and anti-Jesus crowd, David is simply too nationalistic, too Jewish, and too messianic. If there really was a Jewish King David, perhaps there could really be a Jewish Messiah—and we can’t have that!

David is mentioned more than a thousand times in Scripture and plays a critical role in the progression of God’s redemptive plan. He demonstrated



with five partial lines written in ink that was discovered in the Elah Valley—where David fought Goliath. It appears to be a brief text expressing concern for the just treatment of various people in society. Since it contains the word *king*, and dates to the time and location of David, the inscription may be evidence of an early Israelite kingdom—but the jury is definitely still out on this one.

The Goliath Shard/Inscription, found in 2005 at Philistine Gath (Tell es-Safi), is not a reference to the biblical Goliath. According to archaeologist Aren Maeir, the inscription demonstrates that “names very similar to Goliath were in use at Philistine Gath” around the biblical dates for David. The find “provide(s) some cultural background for the David/Goliath story.”¹²

review—to media outlets in search of the next captivating headline. When the next archaeological discovery is purported to prove or disprove the Bible, it is a good idea to remember that there are likely multiple interpretations of the evidence.

Watching television is probably not the best way to make an informed decision about archaeology and the Bible. These programs seldom encourage a careful reading of the biblical text or understanding of the archaeological data’s complexities. Sensational claims are often designed by producers who splice

childlike faith in facing Goliath as evidenced by his daring declaration, “You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied” (1 Sam. 17:45).

David showed humility and faith in God’s sovereign plan by not seeking revenge against King Saul, “The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD’S anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD” (1 Sam. 24:6).





He received God's promise of a dynasty of kings who would sit on his throne: "He will make you a house" and "I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Sam. 7:11-13). Though he became ensnared and haunted by his sin, he knew the joy of restoration, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven" (Psalm 32:1).

In the New Testament, Matthew introduces Jesus' messianic credentials with the words, "Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). Those who recognized Jesus' messiahship cried out, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David" (Matt. 20:30). Peter reasons about the resurrection with the holiday crowd gathered in Jerusalem, "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David" (Acts 2:29). Paul explained to the Roman believers that the Gospel was the message "concerning God's Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David" (Rom. 1:3). And Paul urged Timothy to, "*Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel*" (2 Tim. 2:8). Jesus describes Himself to the church at Philadelphia as the One with unique access and authority, "who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens" (Rev. 3:7). A lot is at stake if David didn't exist.

As it turns out, some of the same scholars who deny the existence of ancient Israel and the United Monarchy are on a mission to de-evangelize a believing public and dissuade them from trusting the Bible's message of a past, present, or future Messiah. The fact that this campaign goes far beyond the circles of mere scholarly discussion to attempts at public disinformation is seen in the use of titles and mainstream publications such as *The Messiah Myth* or *The Invention of Ancient Israel*.¹⁴

Asking Better Questions

Instead of focusing on only one question (Does archaeology prove or disprove the Bible?), the following questions are more helpful for understanding the relationship between archaeological investigation and the biblical text.

How does this discovery help fill in the gaps where the Bible is silent? The authors of the Bible often reported only items that were important to the overall point of their messages. But archaeological discoveries can tell us intriguing facts and fill in the details.

For instance, only a few biblical verses discuss the reign of Omri, and it

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would seem that he was a rather unimportant Israelite king. But excavations of his capital at Samaria demonstrate that his fortifications were some of the most impressive architectural remains of Iron Age Israel. Further, his name appears in multiple extra-biblical written sources that speak of him or his dynasty as a powerful force on the international military scene. His name appears on the Mesha Stele and the Black Obelisk, and his dynasty is mentioned in annalistic records of the Assyrian Kings Shalmanesar III, Tiglath-Pileser III, and Sargon II.¹⁵ The fact that Omri was so powerful and important in the estimation of his peers gives even greater significance to the Bible's dismissal of his accomplishments with the simple evaluation that, "Omri did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than all who were before him" (1 Kings 16:25). While the Bible is nearly silent on the life of Omri, archaeology fills in the gaps.

Does this discovery illustrate how people lived in Bible times? When key artifacts are discovered in Bible lands, it is as if modern readers are able to look into a time capsule and imagine how biblical personages conducted various aspects of everyday life—how they worked, conducted business, governed, fought wars, ate, dressed, worshiped, celebrated, mourned, built homes and temples, and observed various customs throughout their lives.

Archaeology can often illustrate these and many other aspects of everyday life. The David and Goliath account (1 Sam. 17) may seem like a strange way to determine a victory by modern military standards, but choosing a representative warrior to engage in battle on behalf of an army is well attested in ancient Greek, Egyptian, and Babylonian texts. Such ancient accounts illustrate how the warriors merely represented the gods who empowered them.

David expressed this same belief, "the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD'S, and He will give you into our hands" (1 Sam. 17:47).

Does this discovery correct a misunderstanding about the biblical text? Our modern assumptions often interfere with an accurate understanding of the biblical text. David offered the chief and captain position to the person who climbed up the water shaft (Heb. *tsinnor*) and helped him defeat the Jebusites who controlled the city of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:8). Another text states, "Joab the son of Zeruiah went up first, and became chief" (1 Chron. 11:6). In 1867, British explorer Charles Warren discovered a large, hand-cut tunnel in the ancient water system on the eastern slope of the City of David that many believed was Joab's *tsinnor*—a large man-made, horizontal tunnel and a 52-foot deep natural vertical fissure.

Where There's a Will, There's a Way

We understand, as you do, that while we're here, there are no shortages of needs that take our time and resources. And though our intention is to remember the Lord's work with a financial gift someday, more immediate needs divert our attention. To our regret, that day of remembrance never comes, which is why including CJF Ministries in your will is an excellent way—without disturbing your current priorities—to ensure that your hard-earned assets will continue supporting the Lord's work even after you're gone. If you've never considered such a method of assisting, we'd be most grateful if you'd make it a matter of prayer. Should you require additional information, we'd be happy to provide helpful instructions.



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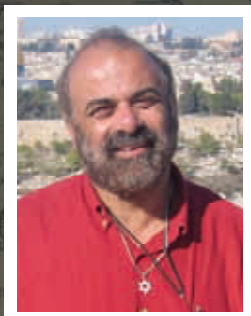
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Gideon Levytam is an Israeli believer in Yeshua (Jesus). He was born in Jerusalem on May 14, 1955, seven years to the day after the founding of the modern state of Israel. According to tradition, Gideon's ancestors were from the tribe of Levi and fled to Yemen when Solomon's Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. Gideon was in the 1973 Yom Kippur War and later came to faith in Yeshua as a result of his study of the *Berit HaChadashah* (Hebrew New Testament). He now lives in Canada and serves as CJFM's director of international ministries.

Faith provides us with “the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1)

Later archaeologists dated the horizontal tunnel to the Iron Age, well after David’s time, because the Megiddo and Hazor water systems from the time of Ahab in the ninth century were better parallels. However, recent excavations by Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron have revealed an enormous spring water pool within the Jebusite/Canaanite walls that connect to Warren’s horizontal tunnel. This pushes the date of the tunnel back to Canaanite times (Middle Bronze Age, c. 1800-1700 BC), and demonstrates that various water systems existed long before David.

It is now clear that Warren’s Shaft is a direct, convenient connection between the Gihon Spring and the city. Joab may well have entered through one of these subterranean shafts in the water system near the pool and Spring Towers by the Gihon Spring—though he probably didn’t enter through the deep vertical shaft.¹⁶ The word *tsinnor* had its meaning debated since it is used only twice in the Hebrew Scriptures, but it now seems clear that Joab entered via some type of water shaft.

Does this discovery encourage our faith? Occasionally, artifacts and inscriptions provide an extra-biblical confirmation of biblical text. We can be grateful when such encouragement comes, but these amazing

finds cannot be the basis of our faith. Artifacts as amazing as the Tel Dan Inscription or the Mesha Stele don’t turn up during every season of excavation, but such items are certainly encouraging.

Archaeology and Faith

Archaeology is not a substitute for faith. Faith provides us with “the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1), and faith only comes as a gift from God (Eph. 2:8-9). Excavators may unearth ancient artifacts from biblical times. Extra-biblical accounts may provide outside confirmation of biblical narratives. But archaeology cannot prove the Bible’s historicity. Science cannot demonstrate what must be believed by faith. Archaeology should not be used to verify God’s call of Abraham, the predictions of Daniel, or the resurrection of Jesus. These things must be accepted by faith—a faith that should be not grounded “in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:5). *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”* (Heb. 11:6).

Tim M. Sigler, PhD is a scholar-in-residence with CJF Ministries, and associate professor of Hebrew and Biblical Studies at Moody Bible Institute.



Suggested Websites (from a variety of perspectives):

- blog.bibleplaces.com
- biblearchaeology.org
- bibarch.com
- ritmeyer.com
- neasweb.org
- bibleartifax.com
- christiananswers.net/archaeology
- antiquities.org.il
- english.imjnet.org.il
- bib-arch.org
- cityofdavid.org.il
- bibleinterp.com

*Links to other sites do not necessarily imply endorsement by CJF Ministries.

¹ According to Wikipedia, accessed March 16, 2010. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Will_It_Blend.

² See Philip R. Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 149.

³ Gary N. Knoppers, “The Vanishing Solomon: The Disappearance of the United Monarchy from Recent Histories of Ancient Israel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116 (1997): 19.

⁴ Hans M. Barstad, “The Strange Fear of the Bible: Some Reflections on the ‘Bibliophobia’ in Recent Ancient Israelite Historiography,” in Lester L. Grabbe, ed., *Leading Captivity Captive: ‘The Exile’ as History and Ideology* (European Seminar on Historical Methodology 2; JSOTsup 278; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 122.

⁵ Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology’s New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 128, 234.

⁶ Keith Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (New York: Routledge, 1996). For a similar view, see Thomas L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written & Archaeological Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 2000). For a critique by evangelical scholars, see V. Philips Long, David Weston Baker, Gordon J. Wenham, eds. *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of “Biblical Israel”* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

⁷ See for instance, Niels Peter Lemche, “‘House of David’: The Tel Dan Inscription(s),” in *Jerusalem in Ancient History and Tradition* (ed. Thomas L. Thompson; Copenhagen International Seminar 13; JSOTsup 381; New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 46-67.

⁸ Steven M. Ortiz, “Deconstructing David: Current Trends in Biblical and Archaeological Studies,” Ola Farmer Lenaz Lecture, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, May 2001, 2.

⁹ See Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 92-93, 98-102.

¹⁰ André Lemaire, “‘House of David’ Restored in Moabite Inscription,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* (May/June 1994): 30-34, 36-37.

¹¹ Walter C. Kaiser, ed. *The Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 635. See Kitchen, p. 93, for an explanation of the inscription and its difficulties.

¹² Aren Maeir, “Comment on the news item in BAR on the ‘Goliath Inscription’” from The Tell Es-Safi/Gath Excavations Official (and Unofficial) Weblog. Accessed March 16, 2010. <http://gath.wordpress.com/2006/02/16/comment-on-the-news-item-in-bar-on-the-goliath-inscription>.

¹³ “‘David’s Palace’ And Contrary Opinions,” accessed March 16, 2010. <http://blog.bibleplaces.com/2008/01/palace-and-contrary-opinions.html>.

¹⁴ See for example, Thomas L. Thompson, *The Messiah Myth: The Near Eastern Roots of Jesus and David*, (New York: Basic Books, 2005; London: Jonathan Cape, 2006; London: Pimlico, 2007); also available in Arabic (Damascus, 2007) and Greek (Athens, 2007).

¹⁵ Bryant Wood, “Omri, King of Israel,” *Bible and Spade* (1998). Accessed online at www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2005/10/10/Omri-King-of-Israel.aspx.

¹⁶ Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron, “Light at the End of the Tunnel: Warren’s Shaft Theory of David’s Conquest Shattered,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* (Jan/Feb 1999): 22-25, 27, 30-33, 72.

Bible Questions AND Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

QUESTION: *You've said on the radio that water baptism is purely symbolic and doesn't save anyone. But doesn't this conflict with God's word in 1 Peter 3:21 (KJV)? "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." How could it be any clearer?*

ANSWER: Since you're a regular listener to our radio program, you know that another one of my sayings is that a text taken out of its context often becomes a pretext—and that's the case here. Some people teach that no one can be saved without being baptized. I've heard it said that when they pull the plug in the baptistery, the sins go swirling right down the drain! This is not only unbiblical—it's just plain silly. Nowhere in the Bible is it stated that the literal act of being immersed in water saves anyone.

The verse you quoted from the 1769 revision of the 1611 King James Version reads like this in the updated 1982 New King James Version: *"There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus [the Messiah]"* (1 Peter 3:21).

Look at the context; Verses 20 and 21 go together because they are part of the same discussion about the Noahic flood. Verse 21 refers to an "antitype" (that is, baptism); wherever there's an *antitype* (a NT fulfillment), there's always a corresponding *type* (an OT symbol).

Sometimes we forget that the Bible is arguably the most sophisticated collection of literary works ever written. Its divinely guided writers utilized a variety of styles (poetry, prose, narrative) and incorporated many literary devices—like metaphor, simile, metonymy, synecdoche, personification, and others. In this instance, Peter, the Jewish fisherman, is employing a figure of speech known as *irony* (that is, an apparent contradiction) to make his point.

Of course, the real means of salvation in Noah's day was the Ark itself (which corresponds typically to the Lord Jesus)—not the water. So when Peter says that baptism now saves us, it's definitely an attention-getter. It's as if I said, "Air transports our tour groups to the Middle East." That would certainly get your attention, wouldn't it? How could something as common

and simple as air do such a thing? But it's true—a huge Boeing aircraft applies the laws of aerodynamics to fly us through the air at roughly 600 miles per hour, and that's how we reach our destination. Without air, the airplane wouldn't fly. And in a similar way, the Ark used the Flood waters to float Noah and his family to safety. The irony is that the waters of judgment became, in a certain sense, waters of deliverance. That's the point Peter is making here.

Notice, too, that Peter adds two qualifiers. First, he says, "Not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a clear conscience toward God" (v. 21). Peter was Jewish and knew very well that one purpose of the ancient *mikvah* (Jewish baptism) was physical purification and cleansing, so he wants to emphasize that he's not talking about anything that can be accomplished by literal H₂O.

It's as though Peter was anticipating that someone might come along someday and say, "See? Peter says here that water baptism saves us!" So, he makes it clear that he's not talking about literal water or physical cleansing, but rather something that takes place in our hearts.

The second qualifier is "by the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah" (v. 21). Baptism only saves us in the same ironic and symbolic sense as the Flood waters saved Noah and his family. The Flood swept away the old world and ushered in a new one. Likewise, the waters of baptism point us to the believer's identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus the Messiah (Rom. 6:1-7). An old life has been swept away, symbolically, in the waters of baptism and a new life has arisen, like the legendary Phoenix, from its ashes: *"Therefore, if anyone is in [Messiah], he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new"* (2 Cor. 5:17).

We are saved by believing the Good News of Yeshua the Messiah (Rom. 10:9-10; 1 Cor. 15:1-8) and by receiving salvation as a free gift apart from anything we can do (Eph. 2:8-9). Salvation comes first, followed by baptism. If we reverse that order, then we've departed from the biblical model and its cause-and-effect relationship. Salvation is the cause and baptism is the effect, not vice versa. Can you be a believer and not be baptized? Yes, absolutely (the thief on the cross is one example that comes to mind). But in most cases, you can't be an *obedient* believer without being baptized (Matt. 28:19).



by Violette Berger

Fruit from the Harvest



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Since *Messianic Perspectives* is a bimonthly publication, we have to take a retrospective look at times and report accounts/events that occurred subsequent to its printing. Such is the case with Passover this year.

For CJFM workers, the Passover Seder/presentation is the greatest evangelistic outreach because Passover is celebrated by almost every Jewish person. Presenting the Gospel through “Messiah in the Passover” Seders or demonstrations creates a dialogue with Jewish people and enlightens Gentiles’ understanding of the Jewish roots of Christianity. In John 10:16 Jesus said, “*And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.*”

From the Valley to the Mountaintop

Barry Berger, CJFM director of missions, emeritus (Phoenix), leads a monthly fellowship, *Tikvah BaMidbar* (Hope in the Desert), that presented its sixteenth-annual citywide messianic Passover Seder this year. Once again, it was a blessing that 450 people attended. However, the greatest blessing is that 16 people, three of whom are Jewish, prayed with Barry to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Messianic Passover Seders— Then and Now

Richard Hill, CJFM missionary and pastor of Beth Messiah congregation (Las Vegas), also conducts an annual messianic Passover Seder; 140 people participated this year. At the end of the observance, eight people responded to Richard’s invitation for salvation. He was also able to engage in meaningful conversations with the unsaved Jewish people who attended.

Richard was blessed to hear from a Jewish believer who attended the 2009 Passover Seder with her unsaved Jewish husband. She called to let Richard know that her husband had been seriously considering the Gospel message he heard at last

year’s Seder; this year, he prayed to receive Yeshua during a Resurrection Day service at her church.

Richard had the unique opportunity of leading an abbreviated presentation of a messianic Passover Seder at a veterans’ home in Boulder City; 50 veterans attended, including six unsaved Jewish veterans. Richard is grateful for the privilege of sharing the Good News, planting seeds, and for the positive feedback from the Jewish and Gentile veterans.

Note: Richard successfully completed the dissertation for his PhD, and recently graduated from Antioch Baptist Bible College (Antioch, GA). Congratulations, Dr. Hill!

“Where is the Lamb?”

This question, posed by Harry Ironside to a Jewish rabbi, has profoundly affected the ministry of **CJFM missionary Michael Campo (Chicago)**—especially during the Passover season. Michael writes: “Jewish people were to celebrate the Passover without interruption. It was to be a perpetual ordinance. But without a priest, a temple, and a lamb, how can they celebrate? Harry asked the same question. As did Isaac to his father, when he wondered, ‘Where is the lamb?’ Perhaps two of the greatest questions ever asked in the Bible were, ‘Who do you say that I am?’ and ‘Where is the lamb?’”

A Jewish man, who had been attending a congregation that Michael was leading, recently attended a Passover Seder and announced that he was now a believer in Jesus. Michael told him that there was no better place to make such a profession of faith. “This man *believed* John the Baptist who said, ‘Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.’”

Passover also holds a special place in the hearts of Michael and his wife, Sandra, because God used the observance of their first messianic Passover Seder to call them into a ministry with Jewish missions. Michael adds, “God has continued to use it in my ministry as a means to an end. I have seen many Jewish and Gentile individuals come to faith—because this Lamb is meant for both!”



In Memory of Harry

Michelle Beadle, CJFM missionary (New Orleans), writes about her special memories of “Harry.” He was born in Poland, and emigrated as an infant to the United States with his parents who were seeking sanctuary from the pogroms. At the age of 87, Harry came to know Yeshua as his Messiah through Michelle’s ministry. He continued to work as a dental technician until he recently succumbed to illness.

Michelle shares a conversation she had with Harry’s step-daughter following his funeral service: “I was amazed to hear that our ministry to her father was an answer to the prayers she began to pray for him at the age of eight. As a child, she had been very concerned for his eternal destiny and prayed daily that he would come to faith. She was thrilled to hear of his immersion in 2008, and was very supportive of his involvement in the messianic Jewish movement. We thank God that Harry is now in Heaven rejoicing with his Messiah!”

The Great Debate

Eric Chabot, CJFM missionary (Columbus), had the privilege of cosponsoring one of the biggest outreach events ever done on the Ohio State University (OSU) campus. His ministries *Ratio Christi* (The Reason of Christ—an apologetics club) and *Shoresh* (Root—a messianic Jewish outreach) helped host a debate between Dr. Michael Brown, a messianic Jewish apologist, and Dr. Bart Ehrman, a New Testament scholar and professing agnostic.

The debate was entitled, “Does the Bible Provide an Adequate Answer to the Problem of Suffering?” The debate received positive responses and turnout—500 people, including a fair amount of Jewish persons, attended. A DVD of the debate can be ordered at www.thegreatdebate.me.

Through lectures, campus evangelism, and the debate, God has given Eric many opportunities to share the Gospel. He recently engaged in a conversation with “Josh,” a Jewish

student from a Conservative Jewish background. After Eric shared the Gospel in a Jewish context, Josh had several objections concerning the messiahship of Jesus. Eric took the time to answer each one, and said one issue had the greatest impact on Josh: “The purpose of Israel was not to be a blessing to *herself*. Rather, through her witness, the world will either be attracted to or repelled by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is why, just as Israel is called to be a light to the entire world (Gen. 12:3), the Messiah’s mission is also to be a ‘light to the nations’ (Isaiah 49:6).”

Eric adds, “Josh had never thought of the Messiah’s mission to Israel and the entire world, but only to Israel itself. I also challenged Josh to ask himself if he truly had the ‘shalom of God.’ It was a great opportunity for a seed to be planted.”

The Greatest Stories

On a recent trip to Israel, God used 2nd Adam—the performing arts ministry of **Rob Styler, CJFM director of missions**—to minister during a Bible study. People from many diverse backgrounds watched as Rob performed the story of the paralytic (Mark 2:1-12). Rob writes, “As I told the story, I had to wait for translations into Hebrew, Spanish, Russian, and—for the first time—Arabic. In the audience were people from South America and the former Soviet Union, a Holocaust survivor, and a Palestinian.”

Several people who spoke to Rob afterward had been moved to tears by the message of God’s mercy and power. One man told Rob, “It was difficult to continue translating because the story deeply touched him.” In turn, Rob said it blessed him “to be used by God to speak to people from so many different countries and cultures. That is the reason I began the ministry of 2nd Adam 15 years ago—to tell the stories of the Bible and let God work through His word.”

“*And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!’*” (Rom. 10:15).

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