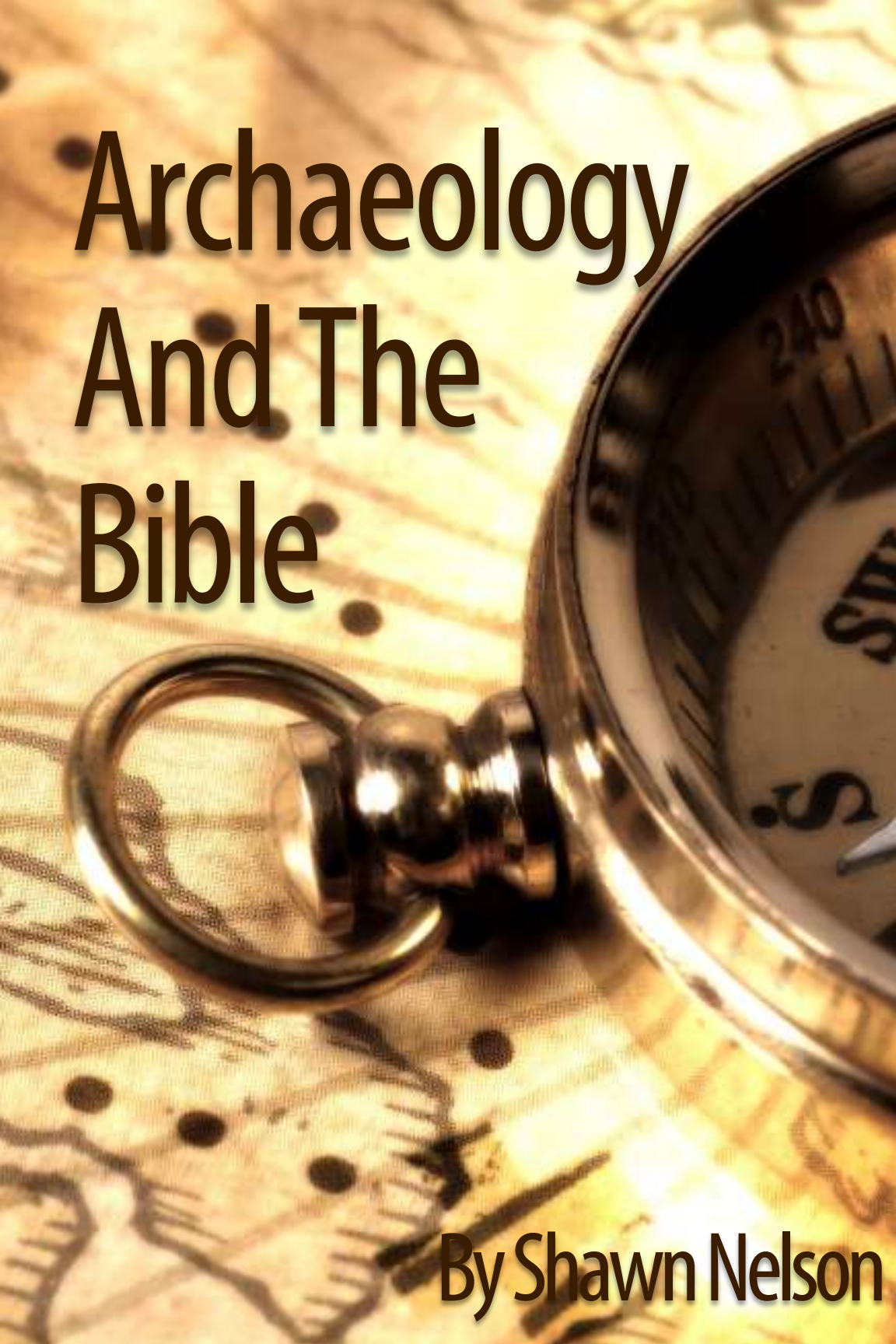


# Archaeology And The Bible



By Shawn Nelson

© 2014 by Shawn Nelson

Published by Geeky Christian  
Temecula, CA  
[www.geekychristian.com](http://www.geekychristian.com)

Printed in the United States of America

*Archaeology And The Bible* by Shawn Nelson is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.

You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor. The licensor permits others to copy, distribute and transmit the work. In return, licensees may not use the work for commercial purposes—unless they get the licensor's permission. The licensor permits others to copy, distribute and transmit only unaltered copies of the work—not derivative works based on it.



## **Special Book Preview**

**This is a special book preview containing chapter 3 only.**

---

## Chapter 3

---

# Evidence of Authenticity

**What are "cultural specificity" and "historical synchronisms" and how do they bolster confidence in the Bible?**

Higher critical theory says that the Pentateuch was produced in the period after the Divided Monarchy, in the time of captivity or post-exilic period. If this were true then it would have been very difficult for Judahite priests to accurately depict culturally specific items and customs in the text.

At any geographical location in the Near East, the way people live and think, their use of economics, concepts of living, these change over time, even in the same location. What's happening on a

## 5 EVIDENCE OF AUTHENTICITY

given piece of real-estate in 2000 BC is very different than 1000 BC. We can see such changes clearly and distinctly and they are not repeated but become cultural time markers.

We call these cultural time markers “cultural specificity.” Cultural specificity is defined as those elements of culture that appear in isolated time-space contexts. This would include things like pottery forms, weaponry, and language dialects. It is possible to analyze the biblical text and identify such items to determine which historical space-time context they belong to. By looking at these markers, it can be determined with a great deal of certainty whether a given text belongs within a particular historical timeframe or not. The fact that the Pentateuch is replete with elements of culture belonging exclusively to the time in which it claims to have occurred is proof that it could not have been written long after those events took place.

If the bulk of the Old Testament were invented after 1000 BC we would expect scripture to be full of Iron Age anachronisms because the physical culture of the people in the Iron Age is categorically different from that which occurred

in the time of Abraham. We would predict that everything about those tales would be Iron Age. Because language changes over time, they would not even be able to read texts from those periods to see how to forge something.

Furthermore, “historical synchronisms” can be used to correlate biblical narrative with the larger ancient Near Eastern history. A historical synchronism is a point of correspondence between two or more parallel histories. It is an attempt to discover shared events within the same chronological time period in order to identify the probability of those events actually occurring, as well as to discover insights that would otherwise not be available if one were to simply engage a single record.

In the case of a controversial topic like the historicity of the Bible, in particular the Flood, Tower of Babel, events from the lives of the patriarchs, and the Exodus we would expect to see a relationship between the biblical historical records and those outside biblical history. In other words, if the events described in the Bible coincide with a good portion of Egyptian, Mesopotamian and other historical records

found in the Levant and Asia Minor, then the factuality of those Biblical events is raised to a certain level of probability.

Here are examples of cultural specificity and historical synchronisms.

## **Ancient Kings Lists**

There are several ancient kings list which show striking similarity to the Genesis list of the patriarchs. These lists not only mention a flood, but indicate a much longer length of reign for the kings before the flood. Some were shown to have lived 10,800 to 64,800 years, which is common for ancient records. As discussed elsewhere in this paper, these numbers are not meant to be taken literally, but they likely employed some kind of “honorific multiplier” to the reign lengths. How could Judahite priests have known about this practice a few millennia before their time?

## Origin of Civilization

The Bible accurately depicts the center of population explosion. We know from modern anthropology that the further we get from Ararat, the later civilization develops. Civilizations in the Indus Valley developed later than civilizations in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Civilizations in China developed later than India. In the fifteenth century A.D., the Aztecs and Incaas were doing what the Egyptians and Mesopotamians were doing in 3000 BC. The farther we get from the Ark, the later civilizations arise. The level of sophistication development is a function of distance from Ararat. How could the Bible which was written thousands of years ago precisely predict the epicenter of civilization, especially since this knowledge has only been known to us since the rise of modern anthropology? It must have been recorded by people who were close to those events.

Furthermore, every other ancient culture has a creation story which centers with its own geographical boundary. Clearly there is a political advantage to making one's kingdom the



center of creation! Yet, the Genesis account is unique in that it places the mountains of Ararat as the center of creation and the original of civilization after the Flood. This is far outside Israel's geo-political boundary, but is, in fact, exactly where we have just recently discovered it had begun.

## **Tower of Babel and Walled Cities**

The rise of urbanism after 3000 BC coincides nicely with the Tower of Babel, at which time we see the rise of walled cities. Archeology confirms the Semitic domination of Mesopotamia toward the end of the third millennium and into the mid-second millennium, which is consistent with the migration of Shem mentioned in Genesis 11. When Abraham arrived into Canaan he was able to dwell near uninhabited ruins of formerly great cities like Bethel. This is consistent with what we know from archeology—that by the end of the third millennium BC all the great walled cities of the Early Bronze Age had been destroyed.

## **Patriarchal Names**

The names of ancient patriarchs have been shown to be popular during the time of the Middle Bronze Age (names starting with ya/ja/ia such as Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph). Archeologists have also confirmed the Canaanite religious worship practices on hilltops and high places. The famine has been identified which forced Jacob and his family to move to Egypt, as well as the general migration of other Asiatic Semites into the Nile Delta region (1700 BC). The statement that Pharaoh had Joseph introduced by a chariot procession (Genesis 12:43) is consistent with the Hyksos introduction of the horse and chariot into Egypt after taking control of Lower Egypt in the latter part of the Middle Bronze age.

## **Patriarchal Lifestyles**

The Bible also accurately depicts the lifestyles of the semi-nomadic people, as well as the mass migration of Semites like Abraham's father, Terah, during the Intermediate Bronze and Middle Bronze Ages. Abraham's ability to freely

speaking to the Pharaoh of Egypt is consistent with what is known of nomadic travelers at the time. The dominant language of the region was Akkadian, and nomadic travelers who frequently traveled through the Near Eastern region would need to speak Akkadian for international correspondence, something which the Egyptians did as well.

## **Finding a Wife for Jacob**

Regarding the story of Abraham sending a servant on a long distance journey back home to find a wife for his son Jacob, we find similar stories of family heads sending out to find brides over long distances from among their relatives during that same time period (e.g., Shamsi-Adad I and Yashmah-Adad). Travel back and forth into Egypt such as that done by Abraham because of a famine is well attested during the second millennium.

## **Political Alliances**

We find that political alliances like the one mentioned in Genesis 14 between Bera king of

Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboyim, and the king of Bela were common during that time, and that it was only during the narrow window from 2000 to 1700 BC that there could be a four-king alliance invading from the realm of Elam (as mentioned also in Genesis 14). It was said that Abraham attacked by night and victory was followed with a ceremonial blessing involving Melchizedek. Both of these practices are well attested during that time period (e.g. Yakhdunlim).

## **Treaties and Covenants**

We also know that the covenants and treaties of the Early Bronze, Intermediate Bronze, Middle Bronze, Late Bronze, and Iron Ages are each structured differently. They each have their particular components and order, such as preamble, prologue, stipulations, blessing and curses, and so forth. When we analyze the covenants of Abraham, we find that they are structured exactly after the manner of other covenants during that exact same time period. We also find that the covenants of Moses follow

the Hittite covenants and treaties of the same time period. If Judahite priests were writing a fictitious account in the fifth and six centuries, we would expect that the Mosaic covenant structure would reflect a late Iron Age covenantal structure, because they simply would not be aware of, or even care about reflecting that kind of precision.

## **The Exodus**

The saying that a king eventually arose “who did not know Joseph” (Exodus 1:8) is supported by the archeological and historical records of the Late Bronze Age, when Amosis I, founder of Egypt’s Eighteenth Dynasty, ousted the Hyksos from Lower Egypt and unified the land. It also explains subsequent paranoia over the Hebrew people as he and future kings would want to prevent the reoccurrence of another “Hyksos-like” invasion.

There is a stark decline in Egypt’s power and prestige immediately following the short reign of Tuthmosis IV. Something considerable must have occurred to begin the decline and collapse of

Egypt's mighty Eighteenth Dynasty. The plagues, plundering of wealth, loss of labor force, loss of military force, and death of the Pharaoh himself into the Red Sea would certainly be sufficient to explain such an untimely collapse. Perhaps the most bizarre scenario in the history of the Ancient Near east occurs during this time when Ankhesenamun, Tuthmosis' widow, writes to Suppiliuma, the Hittite king (who previously was a sworn enemy), pleading with him to send her a son to sit on the throne of Egypt, and that she was very afraid, indicating that some event had caused the country to be in tremendous disarray (the events of the Exodus).

We know that many types of Semitic semi-nomadic people were present in the Sinai Peninsula, which makes Israel's defeat of the Semitic Amalekites on their way to Sinai perfectly reasonable.

## **Development of Writing**

In terms of writing, we read that Moses was commanded to write the law and put it on public display. This had just become possible, since the

alphabet used to write northwestern Semitic languages such as Hebrew first appeared in Egypt in the eighteenth to seventeenth centuries BC. Even the practice of writing on plastered stelae or stones was common, which Joshua commanded the Israelites to do immediately after crossing into the land.

## **Desert Wanderings**

There is even evidence that God, in his divine providence, was using the time of the desert wandering to completely allow for the demise of Egypt's Eighteenth Dynasty. Ruling for 38 years, the son Tuthmosis IV, Amenhotep II, was self-indulgent and completely lost control over Canaan and Syria, which is why we do not read about Egypt being a problem for the Israelites by the time they are ready to occupy the land.

## **The Conquest**

The depiction of large cities with fortified walls is an accurate assessment of the cities in the Transjordan area at this time. There is archeological support for the city of Jericho with

the discovery of a great double walled city in this exact location dated around 1400 BC whose walls collapsed outward, and whose destruction resulted in an ash layer one meter thick in some places. Even the city of Ai, once thought to be mythical, has now been identified with the site of Khirbet el-Maqatir and its geography and topography are perfectly suited for the tactical requirements of the detailed biblical account.

There is also evidence of the peaceful relationship between Israel and the cities of Shechem as Israel dwelt between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. There is much correspondence in the Amarna Letters to indicate that the king of Shechem favored the *Harbiru* (Hebrew) people, even giving them land.

## **Time of the Judges**

According to the Bible, the period of the Judges was a time where Israel had a general occupation of the land, but it was still dominated by local people groups. This is consistent with archeology, where we simply cannot distinguish between Israelite and Canaanite culture until



about 1200 BC. Around 1210 BC we see that Israel had become a formidable presence, as it is mentioned on Egypt's Nine Bows "Who's-who" list, being mentioned elsewhere during that same time as a nation without a king.

There is archeological evidence for the Philistine domination along the coast through excavations at Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron. Excavations have clarified that there was a king named Belshazzar, mentioned in the book of Daniel, and that he was not only the son of Nabonidus, but also the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar through a likely marriage between Nabonidus and one of Nebuchadnezzar's daughters, all of which fits perfectly into the biblical account.

## **Prices of Slaves**

Postexilic Jews wouldn't be aware of slave prices throughout antiquity. Recall that Joseph was sold for twenty shekels. Mosaic Law required that if somebody kills a slave they were required to pay thirty shekels. Later the price of slaves went up to over one-hundred shekels. When we check all

the known trade documents of ancient world and assess the price of slaves, we find that Joseph is sold at a price which just happens to be going price in Middle Bronze Age. And Moses depiction of thirty shekels is the going price in the Late Bronze Age.

## **Sickle Swords**

The Old Testament's use of the sickle sword could not have been written later. Thirty five times in the Old Testament it is said that "they smote them with the edge of the sword". The word "edge" is singular. This was an idiom in the late Bronze Age period. It did not say that they smote or thrust with the point because with the sickle sword evolved from the battle axe, and therefore it would just bruise. The sickle is made as a hacking blade with one edge. By the time we get to Iron Age I, half way through Judges, the idiom "smite with edge of the sword" disappears. This is because sickle sword had been replaced with double edge thrusting swords. Biblical usage is meticulously consistent within the timeframe the events occurred suggesting the

author was writing very near the time of the events themselves.

## **Philistine Temples**

Samson's account shows that it must have been written during its time. He is described as knocking over a Philistine temple with two pillars. Today we have excavated a Philistine city north of Gaza (Tell Qasile) where there was a temple similar to the one described in Judges 16, with a roof supported by two pillars resting on limestone bases. But how could post-exilic writers know what the middle of an Iron Age I temple looked like?

## **Egyptian Maps**

We also have discovered Egyptian "map lists" which had confirmed the cities and locations in the book of Numbers and Joshua. In fact, it lists the locations of the cities in the exact same order that the children of Israel would have needed to walk to get from Egypt to Canaan. Some scholars have cast doubts on whether some of these cities existed at all during Joshua's time. Yet, these

map lists confirm that not only did these cities exist, but that the very route the Israelites took perfectly followed the maps.

## **Pagan Practices**

The account of Canaanite pagan practices is impressively accurate. We see many prohibitions in the Mosaic law forbidding the Israelites to engage in the pagan practices of the surrounding nations, including Baal worship. Not only were the Israelite's forbidden to offer grain, oil and burnt offerings to Baal, but they were also forbidden to engage in the cultic sexual practices of joining themselves to the male and female temple prostitutes (Numbers 25:5). Nor were they to pass their children through the fires of Molech (Leviticus 18:21), which archeology has confirmed was a popular practice of that day. The Bible even shows its awareness that Baal worship was localized to each city, for we see mention of Baal-gad, Baal-hazor, Baal-zephon, and so forth (Joshua 11:17; 2 Samuel 13:23; Numbers 33:7). Why would Judahite priests go to such trouble to describe such prohibitions if they

were writing during a time when the Israelites were not engaging in such practices?

## **Geographical Descriptions**

The Israelite descriptions of the locations of the cities around Canaan are precisely accurate: "The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan." (Numbers 13:29) Yet the conquest was between late fifteenth to early fourteenth centuries BC. That would mean that Judahite priests writing during the Babylonian captivity were describing cities that existed one thousand years in antiquity. How could they know the precise locations and details of cities outside of Babylon where they lived which were one thousand years before their time?

## **Philistine's Return of the Ark**

There is also the interesting account of the capture of the Ark by the Philistines. In the biblical narrative, the Lord afflicted the Philistines with tumors. The Philistines, inquire of their

priests how they might return the Ark back to the Israelites. They were told by their priests that the proper way to return it was to fashion tumors and mice out of gold, place it and the Ark on a cart pulled by oxen, and let the oxen carry it back. Once the oxen arrived, they were slaughtered as a sacrifice.

Where did the Philistine priests come up with such a plan? The *Illiad* (written in 1260 BC) describes how Apollo (or "Smintheus" the mouse god) inflicted the Achaeans with a deadly plague because they had captured Cryses, one of Apollo's holy priests. They were able to stop the plague by putting the captured priest onboard a ship, along with some holy items, and letting the ship sail back to Cryses' home island. Upon arrival, the *Illiad* describes how the oxen were sacrificed. This gives us insight as to the Philistine priests' counsel to their people on how to return the Ark. These are details that Judahite priests simply could not have invented.

There are simply too many of these elements of cultural specificity to believe that the text could have been written in the fifth or sixth centuries. We can have tremendous confidence that the

narratives were written by people living within or near the time periods the stories claimed to have taken place. There is a high degree of correlation between biblical history and the known histories of the ancient Near East.

It would require more faith to believe that priests living in a foreign land could come up with a story that was so cohesive, replete with all of the culturally specific elements, than to believe that the events of the Bible happened exactly the way it so precisely describes.

Collins, S. *Let My People Go: Using Historical Synchronisms to Identify the Pharaoh of the Exodus*. Albuquerque, NM: Trinity Southwest University Press, 2005, 1-8.

—. *The Defendable Faith: Lessons in Christian Apologetics*. Albuquerque, NM: Trinity Southwest University Press, 2012, 229-246.

Collins, S., and C. Latayne. *Discovering the City of Sodom: The Fascinating, True Account of the Discovery of the Old Testament's Most*

*Infamous City*. New York: Howard Books, 2013, 251-255.

Kitchen, K. A. *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, 313-372.