

An Ancient Architectural Feat & Biblical Verification
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1st Place, Dunham Bible Museum

“[Archaeology] is a robust, adventurous science, one which has the manifold task of revealing in three dimensions the works of man’s unconquerable mind, a science which can stimulate the human mind to fresh conquests as few other disciplines can.”¹
- Henry O. Thompson, 1987

In 1880, a young Jacob Eliahu noticed something unusual on the dank wall of an underground waterway. Translation of the ancient Hebrew inscription revealed the excitement of men nearing the completion of the Siloam tunnel, a passageway constructed under the orders of King Hezekiah of ancient Israel. Remaining an intriguing location in itself, the tunnel and its message reveal ancient architectural ability and substantiate the historicity of the biblical record. How workers were able to pick their way through 1,750 feet of rock² from opposite directions and meet in the middle, achieving a zero point seven percent slope throughout, has been a subject of scholarly research. Alluded to by four books of the Bible, the tunnel constitutes one of a growing number of archaeological discoveries that now include evidence for Israel’s early monarchy and even the Patriarchal period.³

The Inscription & its Tunnel

Etched into the tunnel’s walls in 702 B.C., a clear view of the faint inscription was obscured by lime deposits which “accumulated through more than twenty-five centuries of

¹ Thompson, Henry O., *Biblical Archaeology: The World. The Mediterranean. The Bible* (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1987), 35.

² 1,200 cubits, or 530 meters.

³ See 2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:30; Isaiah 22:9-11; and John 9:7, 11. Wright, G. Earnest, “Biblical Archaeology Today,” *The Biblical Archaeologist*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Feb., 1947), 12.

intermittent overflowing of spring water.”¹ Upon discovery of the text, Conrad Shick and Carl Guthe used acids to reveal the following (translated) words:

[W]hile there were yet three cubits to excavate, there was heard the voice of one calling to another, for there was a crevice in the rock... And on the day they completed the boring through, the stone-cutters struck pick against pick, one against the other; and the waters flowed from the spring to the pool, a distance of 1000 cubits. And a hundred cubits was the height of the rock above the heads of the stone-cutters.²

As one writer elucidates, when “the two teams of tunnelers came within about five feet of each other they realized that they had gone slightly off course... The workmen relied on the sound of their pickaxes and their voices to correct the trajectory to join the two parts of the tunnel. The meeting point is visible as a series of irregular cuts near the tunnel’s midpoint.”³

2 Kings 20:20 records that Hezekiah commissioned this waterway that would eventually become the site at which Jesus performed a new kind of miracle: He sent a blind man to wash his eyes in a pool of water at the exit of the watercourse.⁴ Hezekiah’s was the third waterway built in connection to the Gihon spring. The first, now referred to as Warren’s Shaft, provided general access to the tunnel’s waters. The other two, the Siloam Channel and the Siloam Tunnel, were constructed to handle the Gihon’s excess water flow.

Though the Siloam Channel served its purpose effectively, it lay partially unprotected. “[O]nce the threat of war arose, there also arose the urgent need to construct a strategic water supply system designed to capture, store, distribute, and conceal the excess waters of the Gihon.

¹ Owen, G. Frederick, *Archaeology and the Bible* (Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1961), 279.

² As cited in Owen, G. Frederick, *Archaeology and the Bible* (Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1961), 279. Though someone cut this inscription from the wall and broke the stolen tablet in pieces, it was recovered and now resides in the original in Turkey’s Imperial Ottoman Museum.

³ The Center for Online Judaic Studies, “Hezekiah’s (or Siloam) Tunnel Inscription, 701 BCE”; available from [http://cojs.org/cojswiki/Hezekiah's_\(or_Siloam\)_Tunnel_Inscription,_701_BCE](http://cojs.org/cojswiki/Hezekiah's_(or_Siloam)_Tunnel_Inscription,_701_BCE); accessed February 14, 2013.

⁴ John 9:1, 6-7

The Siloam Tunnel answered this need”¹ which may have arisen from Sennacherib’s impending Assyrian military conquest² that prompted the Israelites to stop up the Siloam Channel.³ This type of underground water passage was not uncommon in the ancient world, however, as the Canaanites dug similar passageways for the cities of Gibeon, Megiddo, and Gezer.⁴ Scholars question why the Siloam tunnel follows a circuitous route leading to forty percent more length than a straight shot between the Gihon spring and the tunnel’s exit. Some archaeologists recommend the hypothesis that diggers followed a natural (“Karstic”) crack in the earth or a smaller natural water channel.⁵ Even today, the methods of the tunnel diggers remain unclear.⁶ As Avraham Faust notes, perhaps the reason why the point at which the tunnel teams met was not exactly halfway was because the second team was appointed as an after-thought to speed up the process.⁷

Regardless of the methods tunnel diggers employed, the work remains a specimen of early constructive ability and its inscription’s paleography matches that of the monarchial period. Additionally, the dating of the tunnel corresponds appropriately with the reign of King Hezekiah around the eighth century B.C.⁸

The Weight of Biblical Archaeology

¹ Cahill, Jane M., “A Rejoinder to ‘Was the Tunnel Built by Hezekiah?’” *The Biblical Archaeologist*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (Sep., 1997), 184.

² Faust, Avraham, “A Note on Hezekiah’s Tunnel.” *New Studies on Jerusalem*, Bar-Ilan University, Israel, Nov. 28, 1997. (*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 90, 2000), 3-4.

³ Wright, G. Ernest, *Biblical Archaeology*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), 129.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 129. Megiddo’s “shaft” was “over 80 feet deep” and dug similarly to the one in Jerusalem, with workers starting from opposite ends to save time. At Gezer, the spring tapped lay 130 feet below the surface, and was reached by a stairway angled at “38 or 39 degrees.”

⁵ “Hezekiah’s Tunnel,” BiblePlaces.com. Accessed 14 February 2013. Essay on-line. Available from <http://www.bibleplaces.com/heztunnel.htm>. The founder of the Biblical Archaeological Society, Hershel Shanks, challenges the natural crack theory by pointing out that questions remain regarding “three ‘false’ tunnels near the meeting point that stop after a few feet, indicating that the tunnelers did not know in which direction to dig.” His article is online at http://cojs.org/cojswiki/Rewriting_Jerusalem_History%2C_Hershel_Shanks%2C_BAR_25:06%2C_Nov/Dec_1999.

⁶ Faust, 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸ Cahill, 184.

Josh McDowell states that “Christianity is a historical faith which claims that God has broken into history with many mighty acts.”¹ Unlike misplaced faiths like Mormonism,² the biblical account claims that God acted in real time and space and as a result left evidence of His work in the finite world. The Siloam inscription confirms that a location spoken of multiple times in Scripture actually exists and that the timing of such statements is accurate. Other archaeological finds reveal intriguing evidence of biblical historicity, from Sodom and Gomorrah to the early monarchy, and more.

McDowell notes in *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* that scholars have discovered evidence that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by earthquake activity which caused “various layers of the earth” to be “disrupted and hurled high into the air.” Research at the site of Jericho indicates that the city’s walls fell outwards, evidencing the extraordinary nature of the situation recorded in Joshua 6:20, because city walls normally collapse inwards.³ In Egypt, a small, unusually raided tomb may well have once housed Joseph’s bones. It contains a statue of an important Egyptian with Semitic-style hair wearing a coat of many colors. The tomb was opened carefully, indicating that the Israelites may have carefully removed Joseph’s bones from this site in order to carry them to the Promised Land as Exodus 13:19 records.⁴

¹ McDowell, Josh. “Does Archaeological Evidence Prove the Bible? How Do Archaeological Discoveries Relate to Events in Scripture?” *Josh.org*. <http://www.josh.org/resources/answers-to-skeptics-questions/does-archaeological-evidence-prove-the-bible/> (accessed January 16, 2013).

² Mormon claims regarding Semitic ancestry of American Indians have been scientifically tested and found as yet to be baseless. Archaeological research has similarly failed to provide significant backing for Mormon claims (such as the case of the battle of the Lamanites and Nahathites, for example), and assertions of *The Book of Mormon* regarding the existence of numerous crops in North America prior to the arrival of European settlers in more recent history are ridiculous. Additionally, the *Book of Abraham*, a text that the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints confirms Joseph Smith translated has been re-examined by scholars and found to contain an entirely different message than the one Smith recorded. For more information, see Dr. Mike Licona’s “What to Say to Mormons & Jehovah’s Witnesses When They Knock on Your Door” at <http://risenjesus.com/templates/RisenJesus/Behold.pdf>.

³ McDowell, Josh, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict, Evidence I & II Fully Updated in One Volume to Answer Questions Challenging Christians in the 21st Century* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 95.

⁴ McCall, Thomas S., Th.D. “Has Joseph's Tomb Been Found in Egypt?” Zola Levitt Ministries. <http://www.levitt.com/essays/joseph> (accessed February 14, 2013).

Several recent finds have even substantiated early Israelite monarchs. Archaeologist W.F. Albright goes so far as to claim that “Tell el-Fiul unquestionably represents Gibeah, the residence of Saul who reigned between 1020 and 1000.”¹ An inscription on the Tel Dan Stele, discovered in 1993, mentions the “house of David” explicitly,² and some believe a thickly walled structure in Jerusalem may have been David’s palace.³ *National Geographic* reported in 2010 that Eilat Mazar, an eminent Israeli archaeologist, seems to have unearthed a wall constructed by Solomon.⁴

In *Answers to Tough Questions Skeptics ask about the Christian Faith*, McDowell and Stewart go so far as to state that “So far, the findings of archaeology have verified, and in no case disputed, historical points of the biblical record.”⁵ Though historical findings cannot “prove” the Scriptures per se, they can confirm the historical possibility of particular events.⁶

¹ Albright, W.F. “A New Campaign of Excavation at Gibeah of Saul”, *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 52 (Dec., 1933), 8. Also see Vardaman, Jerry, *Archaeology and the Living Word* (Broadman Press, 1965), 60. Vardaman also speaks of Saul’s capital city of Samaria on 61-62.

² Halpurn, Baruch, “The Stela from Dan: Epigraphic and Historical Considerations,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 296 (Nov., 1994), 63.

³ Mazar, E. (2006). “Did I find king david's palace?” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, 32(1), 16-27+. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/214913405?accountid=7035>.

⁴ Mati, Milstein. "King Solomon's Wall Found--Proof of Bible Tale?." *National Geographic Daily News*. <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2010/02/100226-king-solomon-wall-jerusalem-bible/> (accessed February 14, 2013).

⁵ McDowell, Josh and Don Stewart. *Answers to Tough Questions Skeptics ask about the Christian Faith* (Wheaton: Living Books, 1986), 35.

⁶ *New Evidence*, 92. As Henry Thompson states, “Archaeological data does not ‘prove’ the Bible... right nor prove it wrong” (*Biblical Archaeology*, 279). What he means is that just as a murder weapon and testimony may evince the guilt of the defendant in a court case, a jury can never be unequivocally sure of who killed John Smith. Lacking time machines and dependent on assumptions regarding the validity of our sensory perceptions, however, we may still reach rational conclusions regarding the truth or falsity of particular hypotheses based on archaeological findings. Because pure archaeological data does not dictate the events surrounding their remains, Dr. G.H. Richardson argues that “archaeology is a good servant but a poor master” (“The Value of Biblical Archaeology,” *The Biblical World*, Vol. 47, No. 6, 1916, 381). The question arises, however, *if archaeology cannot prove historical events, what purpose does it serve?* The late Jerry Vardaman, an assistant professor of biblical archaeology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary wrote in *Archaeology and the Living Word* that biblical archaeology serves five purposes: to identify geographical sites mentioned in the biblical account; help date recorded events; reveal cultural details surrounding the narrative; identify extra-biblical sources that inform the text; and shed light on difficult biblical words (Broadman Press, 1965, 10-14).

Conclusion

According to J.A. Thompson in *The Bible and Archaeology*, “Biblical archaeology has done a great deal to correct the impression that was abroad at the close of the last century and in the early part of this century, that Biblical history was of doubtful trustworthiness in many places... the over-all historicity of the Old Testament tradition is admitted.”¹ Whereas in 1962 G. Ernest Wright’s remark was justified that “*not a single discovery has been made in Jerusalem which can be dated with any certainty to the time of David and Solomon,*”² more recent archaeological finds indicate that Israel’s early monarchy *did* exist and have shown evidence for numerous other biblical events.

Though the Siloam inscription now resides in Turkey,³ its facsimile at Houston Baptist University offers attendees of the Dunham Bible Museum a taste of the historical magnitude of what the Bible offers. Critics of the Scriptures can no longer argue with confidence that the biblical account is largely mythical; they now must answer how the recorded phenomena have come about.

¹ Thompson, J.A., *The Bible and Archaeology*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), 5.

² Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, 127.

³ Owen, 279.

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