

Dr. David Schreiner, Pondering the Spade, Session 4, Some Other Important Finds and the Nature of Convergences

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This is Dr. David B. Schreiner in his teaching on Pondering the Spade. This is session 4, Some Other Important Finds and the Nature of Their Convergences.

All right. We're at the end of the road here, folks. Lecture four, and we're going to come at you. I'm going to come at you hot and heavy here, a quick rapid fire, because we've got a lot of other finds that I want to at least inform you of, introduce you to.

In each find, there's a big, huge discussion. These are really, really important finds, but unfortunately, I'm going to give you kind of the high points and kind of wrap all this stuff up. But again, there are going to be some broad convergences here, some narrow convergences here, and we're going to go after it from here.

But we're going to bounce back and forth. But again, this is going to be a little bit more fast-paced, and this is going to be fun. But where I want to begin today is this idea of these pithoi, large jars, if you will, found in a place called Kuntillet Ajrud.

Now, Kuntillet Ajrud, I'll show you a picture on the map here, but in understanding what we have going on here, again, we have to understand the context of this find. Where is this place? Because I think that actually has some important, excuse me, some important implications for how we understand what we are reading. But this is a, what we found in Kuntillet Ajrud is a bunch of things.

I mean, we found a bunch of iconography. I mean, if you like the study of icons, if you like the study of pictures, this site is going to be like the most, this is going to blow your mind, if you will. You're going to love this site because there's a lot of graffiti, there's a lot of imagery, but there's also a lot of texts here.

So, epigraphists and iconographers, people who specialize in the study of Hebrew writing, and people who study and specialize in the study of Hebrew icons, and imagery, they love this place. And there is an interesting conversation about whether or not the pictures go with the inscription. And I won't be able to get into it enough, but I do talk about this a little bit in my chapter on this.

But the consensus has always been the pictures don't really go with the inscription. But there was a very, very interesting argument made recently within recent memory that say, no, no, no, we actually think that the inscriptions go with the

pictures and they're functioning together to create this narrative. So, it's really important to kind of talk about the many aspects of this.

But this site is at the intersection of ancient Near Eastern travel routes located in the corner of the Sinai Peninsula. All right, so here's your Sinai Peninsula. This is modern-day Egypt.

Right up here is modern-day Israel. There's the West Bank right there. There's the Gaza Strip.

But this place is right in here, and it's in the Negev, folks. I mean, it's awful. It's terrible.

It's hot. It's 900 degrees when you show up there. It's not a very big site, but it is, oddly enough, it is at the intersection of some ancient routes that come out of Egypt and up here into Syria-Palestine.

And that's going to become important because how are we supposed to understand these invocations that we'll talk about here in a second? Well, I think the way that you begin to understand them is you acknowledge the fact that this is an ancient truck stop. All right? We'll get into that here in a second. The excavations at the site happened fairly quickly, and it was in the 1970s by a guy named Ze'ev Meshel.

And the site, again, as I mentioned, is a modest site. But at that modest site, there were a couple of installations, and we use the term for installation to talk about a building that we really don't know what it functions as. But there were a couple of installations that had a lot of graffiti and inscriptions associated with them.

Now, there is a debate about whether this was a military location. Basically, was it a fortification site? Was it a cultic site? Or is it a Caravansary? Caravansary. Caravansary.

Yes. Caravansary, which is a fancy word for an ancient truck stop. So, there is a debate.

The cultic implication, the cultic discussion, is associated with what these inscriptions actually say because these inscriptions are invocations. You have an individual invoking the Lord in order to bless someone else. And so, they're known for the votive inscriptions.

This is what this site is known for. It's votive inscriptions. So, what are those votive inscriptions? There are two votive inscriptions on Pythos A and Pythos B that are really, really important.

They are important because they link the Tetragrammaton, the divine name Yahweh, Yod-Heh-Vav-Heh, with a geographic location and the noun Asherah. Okay? So, Yahweh is being invoked for a blessing, and Yahweh is being associated with a noun that has the noun Asherah. Now, again, the debate gets a little bit more complicated because is it Asherah, the pagan deity, or is it Asherah the pillar that symbolizes the pagan deity? And what do we do with the consonantal possessive ending, which we'll get into that in a second.

But here's the content. Here's the content of the inscriptions here, and I'll just read them for you really quick. Utterance of Ash-Yah, the king.

Say to Yahalel, and to Yawash, and to so-and-so, I bless you by Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah. So, the focus phrase there is, I bless you by Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah. So again, you can see how Yahweh is associated with the noun Asherah.

But there is a debate about Asherah. How do we understand the consonants that are often translated as his Asherah? And the second pithos, and again, I'm just going to read this for you just for the issue of discussion. The issue is similar.

Say to my Lord. Again, this is an individual practicing invocation. Say to my Lord, is it well with you? I bless you by Yahweh of Taman and his Asherah.

May he bless you and keep you, and may he be with my Lord. So, you can see the difficulties there. You can see the problems that this thing caused.

All of a sudden, we have an inscription. Oh, look at the handwriting. Look at the images.

But as everybody looks at the handwriting, it's, what? It says, what? Oh, look, the Tetragrammaton. Oh, look at that. That's a nice Yahweh.

But wait, is that Asherah? And it's Asherah with a third-person masculine singular predominant suffix. What's going on there? And then what does this represent? Does this represent syncretism? Does this represent rampant paganism amongst Yahweh worshippers? Was there really monotheism? So you can see where all the conversations go. So, the issues are, essentially, how do we understand this noun, Asherah, and what are the implications of our understanding? So, let's get at how do we understand this noun, Asherah.

So, the issue are the consonants, as I've already alluded to, the consonants that can either represent the proper name, Asherah, or what appears to be a wooden symbol, also called an Asherah, that seems to represent the pagan goddess. All right? We have those consonants that represent one of those two things, and then, in addition, we have the third person masculine singular predominant suffix, okay, which is

adding possession according to the rules of Hebrew grammar. So, if you throw a predominant suffix onto a noun, it shows possession.

Now, the problem is that there is virtually no evidence, linguistic evidence to support the idea that a proper name has a possessive suffix on it, okay? So that's the problem with reading the inscription as Asherah with a capital A, as a proper name for the deity, okay? Proper name for the goddess. It's a grammatical problem, and so that's why many people will read it as his Asherah lowercase a. Now, Rick Hess came along in his book, *Israelite Religions*, and discussed, he republished it, really. It was a discussion that he published earlier, but I first read about it in his book, *Israelite Religions*.

Rick Hess said that, no, this is not a predominant suffix, but rather, that final hey that everybody thinks is a predominant suffix is actually the remnant of an archaic ending, a double feminine ending. So, it's not his Asherah capital A, but just rather Yahweh and Asherah. So, Rick Hess would read it, essentially, I bless you by Yahweh of Timan and Asherah.

So, he's not putting his Asherah on it. So, Rick Hess is reading a proper name, but without the predominant suffix and his argument is interesting.

It's rather formidable. So, those are the issues. Now, honestly, however we understand this now, particularly given the fact that these Asherim are a part of the Deuteronomic Prohibitions, that we do not keep Asherim in our cult sites, we did get rid of them, wherever you land on this, whether you go with a proper name with the double feminine ending, whether you go with a proper name with the predominant suffix, or whether you go with the Asherah lowercase a with the predominant suffix, whichever one you go there, the issue is the same.

You have an inscription where a person is invoking a blessing by two mechanisms, Yahweh, who is associated as either Yahweh of Samaria or Yahweh of Timan, and Asherah, which even if you go with the wooden pole that symbolizes the pagan deity, you are invoking this blessing by the power of a pagan deity. So, you do have what seems to be syncretism going on here. You have somebody invoking a blessing by not just Yahweh, Yahweh and something else.

Given the monotheistic framework of the Old Testament, Deuteronomy, the theology of the prophets, etc., Isaiah, it's monotheism, it's Yahweh alone. So, this is a syncretistic idea. Now, I do not believe that this is grounds to then question whether or not monotheism ever existed.

Because remember, this is an ancient truck stop out in the middle of nowhere. Who knows who this individual is? Who knows what this guy represents? Is he a member

of the priestly clan? I don't know. Is he a member of, does he represent official Yahwism? It's hard to tell.

But what it does speak to, again, is to take what the evidence gives us. The evidence gives us to the presence of syncretism, which is exactly what the prophets, the classical prophets of the 9th, 8th and 7th centuries railed against. Shame on you for not understanding who Yahweh is.

Shame on you; these are the prophets. Shame on you for perverting the worship of Yahweh by X, Y, and Z. Shame on you for this syncretism. What we find at Kuntillet Ajrud should not unsettle us. This is exactly the stuff that the prophets were ranting and railing against.

Okay, so again, take what the evidence gives us. The evidence gives us to a type of syncretism, particularly because the blessing is being invoked by both Yahweh and some type of pagan entity. But this is exactly what we would expect, given the prophetic critique.

Again, this is what I would probably call a, given the fact that specific passages in the Old Testament talk about syncretism, I would probably lean toward calling this a narrow convergence. Okay, but again, I understand that it broadly speaks to the larger popular theological worldview going on. Again, very, very interesting stuff.

Here's a nice picture of one of the Pithoi, bibleodyssey.org. This is all in the public domain. You can, this is a picture of the, there's the inscription right here of one of them. You can see how it goes over there.

And then these are the, these are the icons. And this is all traditional, I'm sorry, this is all traditional, this is all traditional pagan iconography, Canaanite iconography. What's also interesting right here is you have letters here.

These are just random letters. So, is this entire thing a piece of pottery that a scribe who was traveling through the area used as practice? You know, was this a person practicing an invocation on here? So, was it really meant to represent nothing more than just practice? I don't know, it's an interesting conversation. Again, goes into what's the relationship between all of this stuff.

But anyway, it's an interesting, neat thing to look at. Unfortunately, moving on, Ketef Hinnom, the amulets at Ketef Hinnom. Now, these are interesting.

I really like these things based on what they represent. So Ketef Hinnom is an ancient iron tube burial site overlooking the Hinnom Valley right outside of Jerusalem. And it's a very large burial site.

It's a very sophisticated burial site, which suggests that the people who used this burial site were people of a significant socioeconomic level. They had money, they had power, and prestige. This is a very large tomb.

One of the things we have to understand about burial sites in ancient Israel is basically how they bury people. And what they used was something that's called multiple internments. So, when you buried somebody, you put them in a central kind of a central table, and you let their body decompose.

And then once their body decomposed, you gathered up all the bones and everything like that, and you would put them in an ossuary. You would put them someplace else for permanent keeping. That's the second internment.

So, in this burial site, which is again, had multiple caves, and in each of these caves there were multiple rooms. In one of these caves and in one of these rooms, there was obviously a bench where they laid bodies, but underneath one of those benches was a repository because we bury people with stuff. They bury people with stuff.

We buried my grandfather with his Cincinnati Reds gear because he was a Cincinnati Reds season ticket holder. So, people bury people with stuff, and the stuff that we bury people with is significant in the sense that it tells us a little bit about them. And when the people were interred for the second time, they would take the stuff that they were buried with and put it in a repository.

And in one of these repositories, it was chocked full, but they found two little scrolls that essentially looked like cigarette butts. Now, how in the world do you find this? Well, it's easy. You take all the contents of that repository, you throw them through a sifter, and you shake the sifter.

All the dust would fall down, creating this huge dust storm. It's not really huge, but this dust cloud is right around you. And all the valuable stuff, all the hard stuff, would stay on top of the grate.

I mean, you'd look like a guy that just came out of a sandstorm in the middle of the Arabian Desert, but you had all the valuable stuff right there in front of you. And in one of these instances, they went through the sifter, and they found these things that looked like cigarette butts, and they thought, now that looks weird. And they started to look at this thing, and they cleaned it up, and then they realized that those cigarette butts weren't cigarette butts, but tiny scrolls of silver.

Now they're intrigued. Do we have silver scrolls? Do we have silver things? What is this? So they engaged in a very, very complicated chemical process of unrolling these things, which are small, folks.

They are small. I mean, we're talking centimeters. And you can get this, you can get this on, you can get these images, again, in the public domain.

But, I mean, we're talking like 10 centimeters top to bottom here. You know, it's just very, very small. Wait, do I have that down here? Hang on, I may have the actual dimensions.

I don't have the actual dimensions written on the slide, but it's very, very small—we're talking about only centimeters. So, you can imagine how small.

See, these are letters across all of these cracks. And this is the cracking silver here. Hundreds and thousands of years of just doing nothing but sitting in a repository buried in dirt.

And the silver, you can still see the writing. You can see how difficult it was to unroll them. But what was exciting about this is when they subjected these silver scrolls, these little tiny scrolls, to very, very powerful microscopes, very, very sophisticated lighting, they started reading, and they said, oh, this sounds familiar.

Where have I heard this before? Oh yeah, Numbers chapter 6, the Levitical blessing, alright, that we read about, may the Lord bless you and keep you, may He make us, that right there is written on this thing. Okay? These tiny silver scrolls have the first scriptural, the earliest scriptural quotation that we have ever found to this point. Okay? This a scriptural quotation because these things are quoting the Levitical blessing of Numbers chapter 6, verse 24.

I don't think you can question that. Now, what is interesting to discuss is whether or not this Levitical blessing is also being infused with other passages, say from Deuteronomy, because there's evidence to suggest that there's more to it than this. And then, are they using the Levitical priestly blessing in conjunction with other passages in order to create some sort of amulet? Remember, these people were buried with these scrolls around their neck, so what was the function of these scrolls? Some people believe that they were there to ward off evil spirits because there's a lot of comparative evidence to suggest that people would write things down and keep them on them in order to prevent evil spirits from going into the grave.

All right? It's a possibility. It's a possibility. Without a doubt, though, the implications are fascinating because this shows us, again, this is Iron 2. This is pre-exile.

This is around the time of Josiah. It tells us that the priestly traditions were being written down and disseminated enough to be used in popular contexts. Now, that's interesting, because not very long ago, scholarship has revisited this idea of, well, was the Pentateuch actually composed after the exile in the Persian period? You

know, Wellhausen was the first one to say, oh, the priestly literature, everything in Leviticus and all the priestly stuff, oh, that's late.

That's post-exilic. All right? He said this back in the 19th century, and everyone was like, no, you're crazy, but, you know, there's nothing new under the sun, right? We've revisited this with new clothes on, all right? And all of a sudden, we begin to say, well, is the Pentateuch and then, therefore, the priestly material also? No, it wasn't. It was not.

This silences this debate because this thing, as a silver scroll, as a silver amulet that was put on the neck of average Joe or average Jane, used for whatever reason, they were buried with it, it's got a quotation from Numbers. So, the tradition was established enough, it was codified enough to be disseminated outside of priestly circles. Whether or not this was used as an amulet to, quote-unquote, ward off evil spirits, I don't think that's the focus of the conversation.

Probably, that's great, all right? But this is being used by somebody in the populace, not the priestly class, at least as far as we can tell. And it solidifies that the priestly traditions were not post-exilic. They were pre-exilic.

And during Iron II, they were codified enough to have a certain authoritative status associated with it, okay? And it also shows that the priestly traditions were also being used by people outside of the priestly circles. So, these are the implications that we can, these are the implications that we can kind of draw. And for somebody like myself who's interested in the canonical process, how did we get the Old Testament, the way that, you know, we open up our Bible and there's the Old Testament, how did we get that? For somebody who's interested in that, this is really fascinating, because this shows us that this stuff was around, it's being used, it was considered authoritatively, all right? And it's pre-exile, all right? It's pre-exile.

Iron Age. Iron Age is the time of classical Israelite culture, all right? That's when Israel made a name for themselves. And what's the greatest legacy that ancient Israel boasts of? The Old Testament.

It's scripture. That's the thing that has stood for millennia. That's the thing that has impacted the globe.

And all of that is gaining steam during the Iron Age. Iron Age, ancient Israel, fascinating stuff, okay? Mount Ebal. Let's go to Mount Ebal, all right? Mount Ebal is another example of a narrow convergence.

Mount Ebal is a specific site. It's in modern-day West Bank, so it's actually politically very difficult to get up to. It's right across the way from Mount Gerizim.

But, I mean, this, I don't like to talk about, I don't necessarily like to jump, let me put it that way, I don't like to jump at quote-unquote examples where archaeology proves the Bible, but I think this is one of them. I mean, I really do think that what we're staring at, at Mount Ebal, is Joshua's altar, spoken of and discussed in chapter 8, Joshua chapter 8, verses 30 through 35. I really do believe that.

I don't like to say that, but I really do believe that. Adam Zertal started the expedition in the 1980s, and it really kind of, it really kind of took place across the 80s. He first stumbled upon the site, if I remember correctly, in the late 70s, and he started the excavation in the early 80s.

Because what he found was, he found that. He was doing it, he was doing a survey in the Central Highlands in association with a larger research project, and he came across Mount Ebal, and he's like, huh, that looks interesting. That kind of looks like a big, huge altar.

And so, he's like, I have to come, I have to go excavate that. So, he comes back in the 80s and excavates it, and he finds this thing, this installation, and as he digs, and as he excavates it, he finds that this place was used extensively, but it was only used for a very, very short period of time. Based on the pottery chronology, and the dating, and some of the Egyptian scarabs that were found, and those types of things, it was right around the time of Iron I, right around the time of the Israelite settlement.

When Israel would have been coming into the Promised Land, this thing appears to have been functioning. There are two phases of development. Remember, in archaeology, we start a numbering system from the top down.

The first thing that we come to is one; the next thing is two, the next thing is three, and the next thing is four. And as you can tell, because things were built on top of each other, the higher the number actually means, the older that it is. So, level one at this site was very sophisticatedly developed, all right? And I'll show you a drawing of that here in a second, an artist's reconstruction of that.

But it's very significantly developed. It showed this massive structure there with this ramp. It showed some sort of ramp.

There was a courtyard system here. I'll show you a drawing that'll show it a little bit. But there were tons and tons, thousands of animal bones, all right? And thousands of animal bones there.

And each one of these animal bones, without fail, there were no pig bones too, by the way, which is significant because who didn't eat pigs? Supposedly the ancient Israelites, but the Philistines did. So, we can't say that this was, you know, the absence of pig bones is a pretty important variable here to consider. But there were

no pig bones, and of all the animal bones, virtually all of them were considered eligible for cultic sacrifice, all right? So, and all these bones were burnt, they're charred, chiseled.

So, this is what they found here at Stratum 1. Stratum 2, though, was significantly less developed. The site was a lot more modest. So, something happened between Stratum 2 and Stratum 1. Somebody came along and expanded the site, developed the site, and put this thing, all right, into play here.

This is very, very interesting. This is a reconstruction of what Zertal and company thought it looked like. Now, if you think that looks like an altar, yes, because that's eventually where Zertal landed.

Look at this. Zertal showed evidence of a stone wall and demarcation of sacred space, which is exactly what you would expect at a cultic site. Inside the wall, holy, holy ground.

Outside the wall, eh, who cares, all right? Then you have this courtyard, all right? And there are little holes here, and on these little holes, that's where all the bones were found, all right? Ash, there's a ton of ash underneath here, all right? Notice the ramp, the altar, which was basically perfectly square, all right? So, Zertal, for a lot of these things, when he piles up the evidence, eventually comes to the conclusion, I think we got Joshua's altar here. It's an installation that dates to Iron I, when Joshua would have been running around. It seems to suggest a cultic function.

All these animal bones, charred, cut up, all these animals are eligible for cultic sacrifice. You have an installation that has a ramp. It's a perfectly square.

You have ash, and oh, by the way, according to the book of Joshua, this is exactly where one would expect to find Joshua's altar. He was to create it on Mount Ebal. This is the place where, right after the tragedy of Jericho and I, he goes back up and re-ratifies the covenant with the community, okay? So, is this an example? And you can read about the debate.

I talk about the debate. The debate is a lot more sophisticated than that, but again, giving you the general contours of it, but is this an example? Is this Joshua's altar? Do we have Joshua's altar here? And here's why I am, folks. If it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and looks like a duck, is it a duck? I mean, honestly, that's a question we have to ask ourselves.

If it looks like an altar, smells like an altar, seems to function like an altar, is it an altar? And if it's an altar, that dates to this time period, okay? And it's right there on Mount Ebal, and we have textual evidence to suggest that Joshua constructed an altar in response to fulfilling the commands in Deuteronomy chapter 27. I mean, is

this Joshua's altar? I mean, again, what's common sense tell you? You can make your own decision, and you can read about the debate. You can read about the technicalities of the debate, but Ralph Hawkins has written, wrote his dissertation on this thing.

Ralph Hawkins wrote a monograph on that, and it's a really good argument. And Ralph talks about how this is a cultic installation. It's not a watchtower because there was a guy; it's interesting enough that Zertal engaged this dialogue back and forth with a scholar named Aaron Kopenksy back in the 80s when he was first advancing these ideas.

And Kopenksy basically said, Zertal is crazy, he's nuts, it's a watchtower, it's not a cultic site. And so, there's a lot of debate, there was a lot of debate, there's still a lot of debate, but it's really hard for me, it's really hard for me to see this other than a cult site. And if it is a cult site that dates to Iron I, are we dealing with Joshua's altar? And I think, I talk about it as Joshua's altar.

I think this is an example where archaeology and archaeological excavation have proven the Bible. It doesn't happen often. Again, take what the evidence gives us.

And in this instance, excuse me, it very much is an issue of, is it, if it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and looks like a duck, is it a duck? I think it is. Interesting stuff, Mount Ebal. Dead Sea Scrolls, now I'm going to go crazy on you here, because I'm going to start to venture on some things that are outside of the Old Testament.

A lot of people, when you hear the Dead Sea Scrolls, these are New Testament PhD students, they're like, I'm doing some work on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Well, of course you are, because that's what they all do. But anyway, the Dead Sea Scrolls are a very, very interesting, and if you do not know the story about how the Dead Sea Scrolls came to the public's eye, were basically published, oh, you've got to read about it.

I mean, we're talking conspiracy theories, we're talking about governmental interference, and we're talking about PhD students with a professor sitting in their dormitory room with a laptop computer, just blowing things up, if you will. I mean, it's really, I mean, it's interesting. The story is, and I'm not, I mean, the story is that there was a PhD student at HUC up in Cincinnati with his professor.

They sat on their desktop computer, and they released, and this is the internet was just starting, they forced the public publication out from under the Israeli Antiquities Authority by themselves in a room in Cincinnati, Ohio. I mean, it's really interesting. You've got members of the committee, the original committee, going rogue.

It's just really funny. But the Dead Sea Scrolls, thousands upon thousands of manuscript fragments, some full manuscripts, or some full scrolls, like the Isaiah

Scroll, they were found in caves in the late 1940s. The local Bedouin stumbles across the cave, looks and, oh, what's in these jars? Oh, that's a bunch of manuscripts.

Hey, these could be valuable, and they begin to kind of release these. But publication really slowed. After the initial kind of fervor of publication, they really got bogged down in bureaucracy, really got bogged down in political infighting, et cetera.

There was, you know, the transition from the Jordanian government to the Israeli government caused some problems, and you had people on the committee that were being replaced. And so, it was really a sad case to the point where it was just at a snail's pace. And the scholarly community began to get outraged by it because all of a sudden you'd have these random PhD dissertations, and they would be citing these evidence from the desert, and these scroll fragments, and people are scratching their head, and then they'll realize, oh, their dissertation advisor is somebody on the committee.

So, they're akin to this new information that nobody else is. So, you had scholars getting really angry and pushing the envelope, pushing the envelope, and then you had the people at HUC [Hebrew Union College] that just blew everything up, and they said, okay, we'll just force your hand, all right? We'll make you release everything to the public. But eventually they were released in the public domain, again, thanks to graduate students and a desktop computer.

I love this picture. These are little, I don't know if you can see this here, but these are little tiny pictures, and these little dots here, these are textual fragments, and you have people like this guy right here, and this guy right here whose job it was to sit there and stare at these things and try to put them together and try to figure out what they say. Now that's, I mean, that ain't for the faint of heart, folks.

I mean, that's just, I mean, talk about your eyes burning. But anyway, the implications of these fragments are several, and we can talk about, but I want, we can talk about any number of them, but I do want to boil, particularly for the sake of time, I do want to boil them down to a couple things. One of them is more important for New Testament studies, which, you know, hey, what do you know? We'll venture into that for a little bit.

But the other one is more general, and that's the issue of textual criticism. Okay. With respect to the early thought world of, the thought world of early Judaism, what we realized as we began to look at these Dead Sea Scroll fragments and figure out what exactly was on them, we began to realize that Judaism couldn't be defined monolithically, as if there was one Judaism, but rather the description is multiple Judaisms, that Judaism was this umbrella term under which there are a lot of different manifestations.

What seems to be the case is that the Dead Sea Scroll community seemed to be a repository of many ideas, particularly the ideas of a particular community. And their take on things was rather specific. It was very apocalyptic.

They existed on the fringes of Judean society because they were at odds with some of the people in the establishment, some of the establishment priesthods, et cetera. But they also, in the process of secluding themselves in the middle of the Judean wilderness right outside, right near the Dead Sea, also perpetuated many traditions within Judaism. So, we got the Scroll of Isaiah.

Virtually every book, I think the only exception is Esther. I think Esther is the only book of the Old Testament that is not attested to at the Dead Sea Scroll community. So they were in charge of perpetuating many textual traditions, copying textual traditions, ensuring their survival, et cetera.

And that's where the implications of textual criticism come into play. Nevertheless, the Dead Sea Scroll's evidence really allowed us to see the diversity of early Judaism, particularly first-century Palestine Judaism, which is important because that's where Jesus was. I mean, that's the context in which Jesus was running around. Jesus was one voice in the middle of a very, very crowded room.

And so, Jesus, we have to understand that about Jesus. It wasn't just everybody and then Jesus. No, it was everybody and Jesus was in there.

Eventually, obviously, Jesus made himself known, and the rest is history. But the Dead Sea Scroll evidence really allows us to understand that. And we're still understanding that.

We're still trying to figure a lot of this stuff out. Who was Melchizedek, and what was his importance for everything? You're going to end up at the Dead Sea Scroll fragments and evidence because they had a specific idea of who this Melchizedek guy was in the Old Testament. The writer from Hebrews had an idea.

So did the community at the Dead Sea Scrolls that was in charge of the Dead Sea Scrolls. But textual criticism is really kind of where it really kind of comes to when a case of Old Testament studies. I've already alluded to the fact that the Old Testament is the result of a very complicated historical process.

We just didn't get our Old Testament like that. Voila, there it is. No, it was through centuries, events, traditions were developed, they were compiled, they were edited, they were put together.

And what the Dead Sea Scrolls allow us to see is the evidence of concurrent traditions. So, there are multiple editions of the Book of Jeremiah. It's clearly the same Jeremiah.

But there's an example of the Book of Jeremiah at the Qumran community, at the Dead Sea Scroll community, that is organized differently and it's about one-seventh shorter. So, there's a significant deviation there, and it forces us to ask the question, how are literary traditions, how are they developed, how are they perpetuated, and how do changes occur in between communities? So, one community over here is preserving this tradition. Another community over here is preserving this tradition.

It's clearly similar, but it's different. And how do those differences develop and what does that mean? Similarly, we can talk about a different edition of Daniel. This is evidence that tells us that our Old Testament was the process of a very lengthy and complicated process of transmission.

The Dead Sea Scrolls give us a window into that in ways that we did not know previous to the 1940s. So textual criticism is a very, very difficult subject to master. It's a very, very frustrating subject to engage, but it is a subject that has been clarified and advanced in light of the Dead Sea Scroll evidence.

Very interesting stuff. Here's a little graph that I put together. I know it's very sophisticated and top-notch.

No, these are boxes with text that I made in a Word document. So anyway, it proves the point because what we have here is we have the canonical process in a nutshell because what happens is we have texts. We have individual texts.

We have administrative texts. Let's say of David's administrators. So-and-so was in charge of so-and-so.

Who was in charge of so-and-so? We have texts. We have early traditions, oral traditions, other textual traditions. All of these things at some point began to be standardized, began to be compiled, began to be brought together because of some great administrative decision, hence a final text.

And this is where I mentioned the classical age of Israelite culture and the Iron Age. Bingo, bingo. This is where I think all of this begins to happen in earnest.

I begin to think that I believe that Judean culture begins to look around, particularly the latter part of the Iron Age, and say we need to get our stuff together. We need to define ourselves in an increasingly hegemonic context, in an increasingly tense Neo-Assyrian and Babylonian context. So, we are going to begin to take all of these

traditions that have defined us for so long and we're going to begin to put them together.

We're going to come up with a document that says who we are. This is our history. This is where we came from.

This is how we process good and evil, a la Job. This is how we worship, a la Psalms. And we begin to finalize things.

However, remember, this is also before the printing press. So, once we get this final text, we've got to copy it. We can't just run it through the Xerox machine.

We've got to copy it by hand. And when you include human agency in this process, you are bound to get corruption. You are bound to make mistakes for a variety of reasons.

And so, you have geographic and sociopolitical stuff that will affect the process of transmission. You have errors, whether intentional or unintentional. And you have alterations, again, whether unintentional or intentional.

And all of these things are going to be filters that are going to affect this text. And what we have at Qumran is evidence of concurrently existing final texts, a plurality of text is what Immanuel Tov used to describe it. This is important because Qumran shows the evidence right before there was a documented movement towards standardization.

Shortly after Qumran, the Jewish community will say, too many. We've got to standardize things. And there will be a subsequent movement to funnel all of this down again.

So, this is the importance of Qumran because all the textual evidence at Qumran can show us, can point to the existence of a number of potential texts. So, it's complicated. Again, I'm oversimplifying the issue.

It's complicated, but it's important. Ugarit, I should say, and the Ugaritic texts. A broad convergence here in this instance, but a very, very important one because this one has revolutionized the way we understand Canaanite culture and the collapse of the Late Bronze Age.

Ugarit is an ancient site about one kilometer off the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Again, modern-day Syria. This is the general area.

This site was originally found by a local farmer whose plow head struck a stone and broke it. And then he starts looking around. He's like, oh my goodness, this is the entryway to a grave.

It was a royal grave. They soon found out that the royal grave site was associated with a very cosmopolitan, well-developed, and well-advanced urban center that was a funneling point of so much during the Late Bronze Age and Middle Bronze Age periods as well. The architecture of this city has been studied for a very, very long time.

This site, again, was found in the early 20th century. It was excavated systematically and for a very, very long time and the architecture.

Wow, the architecture. The city planning, the streets, where they put the palaces in relationship to everything else, homes, et cetera, where priests lived, and all sorts of things. The development is really something to behold.

If you like ancient architecture, you're probably going to eventually bump up against the city of Ugarit. But the major importance of this site is through the clarification that it offered with respect to Canaanite religion and Israelite religion, poetry, and some of the obscure ideas associated with the Old Testament. In addition to understanding the collapse of the Late Bronze Age before that.

Let me get into that real quick. So, prior to the discovery of Ugarit, all we had when it came to the commentary on the Canaanite religious pantheon was what we had in the Old Testament. We just had Israel's take on all the pagan realities out there.

So, we kind of knew who Baal was. We kind of knew who Asherah was, Dagon, et cetera. But we only had a limited perspective on that.

And it was a very negative perspective. But when the excavators stumbled upon the priest's house and his personal library, we discovered they discovered Baal myths and the Baal cycle. All of these texts began to clarify and, in some cases, obscure the definition of deities, the relationship between deities, et cetera.

And so, we began to realize, okay, Baal is related to El, Asherah is this. And so, we began to put the pieces together. As we put the pieces together, we began to understand the negativity associated with the Israelites' perception of the Canaanite religion.

That it was an agricultural-based religion, that the cycles of the season were largely associated with the livelihood in agriculture and those types of things. So, that was one element that was really, really clarified through the consultation of these texts.

We now had another perspective on these names, which allowed us to kind of, which allowed us to fill in the picture a little bit more clearly.

When it comes to poetry, Mitchell Dahood wrote a very, very influential three-volume commentary on Psalms in the Anchor Bible series. And it really should be subtitled something to the effect of, it's all basically Ugaritic anyway, what do we care? Because in that commentary, he just makes constant reference to Ugaritic parallels. Now, on the one hand, we can chuckle and say, you kind of went overboard, Dahood.

But on the other hand, there's a lot of foundation for what he does. Because of what we found, if there was one thing that allowed us to understand the poetry in the Bible, what defines biblical poetry, how does it function, what is biblical? It was not the Old Testament. It was Ugarit.

Because Ugarit shows and exhibits parallelism in the same way that, parallelism in the same way that we see in biblical Hebrew poetry. So, we know how, we know that parallelism, this idea of statement A and then what's more, statement B, the relationship between a subsequent clause or clauses to a leading clause, that is really what defines biblical Hebrew poetry more than anything else, more than rhyme, rhythm, etc, which is a little bit difficult for us, given our understanding of what really defines poetry in our culture.

But we really began to fine-tune what poetry was in the ancient world, thanks to the Ugarit texts. Now, associated with that also we began to find uncanny similarities between some psalms and some of the Ugaritic psalms. Almost to the point where, okay, if we actually take this word in the Ugaritic and put Yahweh there, that's essentially the same thing.

Which suggests that at certain points, Israelite culture and Judean culture were using some of the poetic ideas that were found in Ugarit, and then they just, they theologized them, if you will. They put in Yahweh instead of Baal. And the best example of this is the image of Yahweh coming riding on the clouds in the book of Daniel and in a couple other locations.

And we all know the chorus, Behold He Comes, riding on the Days of Elijah. Well, congratulations, Days of Elijah, modern chorus. That's a Canaanite, originally a Canaanite hymn to Baal.

But it was taken over by the Israelites, and we now use that, we now use that to describe the Lord in those types of things. So, all of this stuff really kind of begins to bubble to the surface with the text of Ugarit. Some of the obscure ideas, one of the ones that are rather famous is Amos is called a Noqed.

And what is a Noqed? We call him in English translation a shepherd of Tekoa. But what does that mean? I mean, what does that really mean? Well, according to the Ugaritic evidence, a Noqed seems to be a type of herder that was associated with some fairly significant institutions. So, Amos seems to have been a person responsible for some of the royal herds, if you will, that's possible.

Again, that's clarified with some of the Ugaritic evidence. Also, there's a connection between the fig concoction that Hezekiah puts on the back of his neck when he's sick. That actual word shows up in a Ugaritic tablet devoted to horse medicine.

So, it's interestingly enough, so that term that's used in the Old Testament is associated with medicine. Those are the types of things that we see with Ugaritic. Now, one of the things I didn't put on this slide that I think is probably even more important is that Ugarit also gives us a snapshot of how things were operating just before the collapse of the Late Bronze Age.

Remember, again, I mentioned that this is right near the Mediterranean coast. It was a very, very important city that seemed to funnel a lot of cultural influence in the region. So, as trade came through the region across the Mediterranean basin over towards the Mesopotamian region or down south toward Egypt, a lot of it would come through Ugarit.

This is well documented through the textual correspondence. But it gives us a snapshot of what was actually happening right before the Late Bronze Age collapse. Because the Late Bronze Age collapse is going to be very, very significant and it's going to alter the region fundamentally.

The Late Bronze Age is largely defined, Eric Klein has written a lot on this, but the Late Bronze Age is largely defined by the world's first truly global economic network. So, people in Greece, people in Egypt, people in Mesopotamia, people in Syria-Palestine, they were all doing business together. They were trading, they were engaging in commerce, they were fortifying political relationships through marriage, etc.

We have textual evidence for all of this, but it all comes crashing down in a very, very violent way at around 1200 BCE. And when that collapse happens, it's going to collapse violently, and it's going to create a political vacuum to where Egypt is going to retreat and leave Syria-Palestine, leave the promised land, if you will, wide open for the Israelites to come in to settle. So, if you want to understand the Israelites' settlement, you need to understand the significance of the Late Bronze Age collapse.

And we begin to understand the significance of the Late Bronze Age collapse through the evidence of Ugarit. So again, Ugarit is there for historical reasons, it's important,

it's there for linguistic reasons, and it's also there for cultural reasons, particularly pagan religious culture. Very interesting stuff.

A lot more could be said. And where I want to end today is with a modern example of a very controversial site. I alluded to the fact that the Tel Dan Stele was very controversial, and I think Khirbet Qeiyafa, if it hasn't surpassed it yet, it's very close.

This is a site that is very interesting, it's very important, but it's very confusing. And it's a site that appears over the Ela Valley. Remember Ela Valley, this is the place where David faces off against Goliath, and this is where David slays Goliath.

But this is a place that overlooks the Ela Valley in the Shephelah. It is around this region, so expanded here, it's in this general place right in through here. And it's highly, highly controversial, and the debate around the place centers around how do we date it, the Iron Age chronology, what site is it, and then there is an ostrakon there, okay? This is a site that only was inhabited for a very, very short period of time.

There are not a lot of phases of occupation at this site, but the phases of occupation are very distinctive because they demonstrate a very sophisticated fortification system that has two gates around a city. It was a circular city, and it had the casemate wall, which is a mark associated with Israelite culture more than anything else. And two gates, as I mentioned, which is, it's not unprecedented, but it is very odd.

There's evidence to suggest that Shechem during the Bronze Age may have had two gates. But it's certainly during the Iron Ages. It's rather unique. But again, it was a site that wasn't occupied for a very long period of time.

But when it was occupied, it appears to have been occupied very, very intensely. There's evidence of occupation, domestic occupation there, but there's also evidence of a very large central administrative complex. So there's this one installation that seems to take up a variety, a vast majority of the space.

And so, how do we date this? When was this actually occupied? And when we're dating a site, you can date it through relative means, or you can date it through absolute means. Relative means exactly what it sounds like. It's a dating system that is contingent, that's relative to something else.

So, pottery chronology is a relative dating system because the pottery sherds are relative to pot sherds that they find at other sites in order to coordinate things. Absolute dating is a dating system that can largely stand on its own. Carbon-14 dating is probably the most widely understood absolute dating system.

And so, they subjected some evidence to Carbon-14 dating, and they subjected some pottery evidence to relative dating. The excavators, who were probably a little too kind of haughty with some of their evidence, suggested that this was a site that they dated around the time of David, and they suggested that it proved an alternative dating system. So, because they were so flamboyant in their pronouncements, they attracted a lot of criticism, and rightfully so.

I think anytime anybody's overly egotistical, I think we need to be, you know, we need to kind of really look at them and criticize them where they need to be criticized. But they were criticized, and there was a lot of pushback. But essentially, the argument is, is this a Late Bronze site, or is it an Iron Age site? And if it's an Iron Age site, then it may have implications for understanding the reach of the United Monarchy.

Because again, the material culture at this place shows more affinities with what's going on in Jerusalem and the Central Highlands than what's going on the coast with the Philistines. All right, the pots, the pottery, the way they organized their city, the animal remains, they have more affinities with what's going on in Israel than with the Philistines. But if it's a late Bronze Age site, then everything's all up in the air, and we have to reconsider everything.

So, the excavators obviously said this is an Iron Age site, and therefore, it's evidence for a viable United Monarchy in Jerusalem. Okay, so that's essentially the debate about the Iron Age chronology. Is it really the Iron Age, when do we put it, or is it more of a late Bronze Age, early Iron Age transition? The identification of the site is another one that's been a point of controversy.

Khirbet Qeiyafa, what site in the Bible is Khirbet Qeiyafa? So Khirbet Qeiyafa coordinates with the named site in the Bible. The excavators said, well, this is easy, two gates; this is biblical Sha'arayim because biblical Sha'arayim literally means, wait for it, two gates. This is a site that is associated with the Philistine flee in response to David killing Goliath in 1 Samuel chapter 17.

That's where we see biblical, Sha'arayim comes into play. So, the excavators say, look, Elah Valley, a city with two gates, biblical Sha'arayim. Well, there is obviously pushback with that because there's pushback on everything, and there were other options that were presented as viable alternatives.

The excavators have held fast, and they have said, no, no, no, no, no, what we are dealing with here is biblical Sha'arayim. Then there's an ostrakon. Remember, ostrakon are potsherds with writing on them, and there was a potsherd that had writing on it, and the reason why this created a bunch of hubbub is because of the site's earliness.

This is a very, very early site, whether you're dating it to the time of the United Monarchy or whether you're dating it earlier, it's very, very early, and they found evidence of writing. And so, what does this ostrakon say, and then what are the implications that we can raise out of that? And a lot of people have gone in a lot of different ways. Some people have said, oh, it's nothing but a scribal, it's nothing but a scribal, it's nothing but a that the scribe used to practice his words on it.

Other people will say, no, no, this is evidence of an emerging Torah consciousness, and we can really kind of go, we can really kind of develop this out, and we can talk about the development of the scribal class and the development of certain ideologies, et cetera. The problem with all of that is that this ostrakon is really, really hard to read. Honestly, we don't even know what direction the letters go into, all right? Because we, as English speakers, write left to right.

Hebrew goes the opposite way right to left. So Hebrew is the left-handed person's dream. In this ostrakon, we don't know if it goes up or down, left or right.

We don't know, and there's argumentation for all of it. So, it's very, very early. It's very, very difficult to read, and there's a lot of difficulty in reading it.

But again, identification, Sha'arayim, two gates. These, I have circled the two gates. Seems to be fairly legitimate, all right? Seems to be something that is rather plausible based on the material culture there.

Notice this picture right here. This is this massive central installation. Don't really know what it was for sure, but it's big, and it's right there in the middle of the city.

Interestingly enough, Lakish also boasts a very large administrative complex in the middle of the city during later Iron II. So is this a precursor to how later Judean cities will be planned? I don't know. There's still a lot of ambiguity here, but it's very, very interesting.

Here's a picture of the ostrakon, and again, this picture probably will not do justice to you, but you can see letters here. You can see letters here, but by the time you get here, you can't really see anything, all right? And I've already talked about the Iron Age chronology. I've talked about the relative dating and the absolute dating.

Again, absolute dating was done through more than anything carbon-14 dating. Relative dating was pottery chronology and what the pottery assemblage there looked like in comparison to other sites. If this ostrakon is Hebrew, and there is a discussion of whether or not this thing is Hebrew, I think it is Hebrew, but Christopher Ralston has wondered if it's Phoenician based on the word that is used for the verb to be.

I don't think his argument holds completely tight, but I think it's probably Hebrew. If it is Hebrew, what can we infer from it? What can we say about the development of the Hebrew language? What can we say about Hebrew social structure, et cetera? What's interesting about this, and I think where I find myself landing on the implications of Khirbet Qeiyafa is around this idea of developing an accurate profile for the region during early Iron II. Again, I side with the excavator's initial dating of this site.

I think it's probably more of an Iron II site than a Late Bronze Age Iron I site. I think we're dealing with a site that was probably in use during the era of the United Monarchy, and I think based on the material culture, it seems to suggest evidence that the polity in Jerusalem, the United Monarchy in Jerusalem, is trying to extend itself. And I recently read a very interesting article by a guy by the name of Avraham Faust who makes an interesting argument.

And he talks about a colonization effort that is rooted in the central highlands polity, which is right there where Israel and Jerusalem are. And he's saying that there's a documented and observable effort to colonize the Shephelah, which is exactly this region here, that reached its height during Iron II. And he talks about the place of Khirbet Qeiyafa in that.

He makes the argument that Khirbet Qeiyafa was the initial effort to colonize the Shephelah by what has to be the United Monarchy. But it failed. The reason why Khirbet Qeiyafa shows so quick, the reason why Khirbet Qeiyafa's occupation strata are so short, that is it was a city that was only occupied for a short period of time.

The reason why that's the case is because it failed because the Philistines were not yet crippled enough in their power. That the Philistines were still powerful enough and they didn't allow Khirbet Qeiyafa to exist beyond just a few years. That eventually the Philistines were the ones that came in, burnt the city to the ground, and once that happened, the United Monarchy didn't rebuild it.

They just let it sit there in ruins. So, this is a bad investment, if you will. They cut their losses.

They invested a lot of it, they developed it, but then when it was overrun by the Philistines, they realized the Philistines were just going to do it again, so they just cut their losses and redoubled their efforts elsewhere. Later on, this colonization effort, particularly when the Philistines begin to decrease in their power and influence in the region, this is when the colonization effort really takes root in the Shephelah. So, it's an interesting article.

It's an interesting article that kind of may explain why Khirbet Qeiyafa was a site that was very well developed very quickly but didn't last long. It's also a theory that

explains Khirbet Qeiyafa potentially in the context of everything else going on in the region. And it can explain potentially why there's more affinity with the material culture there and the material culture that we see in the Central Highlands among Israel and Judah.

So that's all very, very interesting. And so, Khirbet Qeiyafa is, again, another example of a broad convergence that really begins to illuminate what's going on in Israelite and Judean culture during the early period of Iron II and what does the development of that culture, the expansion of that culture kind of look like. And I think Khirbet Qeiyafa offers us a really, really important picture of that.

Now here's why I want to end with you all on this. Associated with this debate, particularly with Khirbet Qeiyafa, was this idea of let's lump everybody together in one of two categories. And we're going to call these categories either the maximalists or the minimalists.

And if you're a maximalist, then you believe that the Old Testament has, is completely historically accurate. That it's, you can see the polarization here, very black and white. You're either one or you're the other.

So, the maximalists are people who believe that there is a historicity inherent to the Old Testament, that it is always true, and that if there is any concern, we're going to side with the Old Testament. We're going to look to the Old Testament to explain what we see on the ground. On the other hand, there are the minimalists.

The minimalists are those people that are going to say no, the Old Testament, these are the people that are going to be inclined to say no, the Old Testament is an ideological document. It's a theological document. And therefore, it's slanted.

And therefore, its historical presentation is going to be slanted. And so we are going to be inclined to look away from the Old Testament and rather focus in on things like archaeology, focus on things like extra-biblical evidence. What are the Assyrians saying? What are the Philistines saying? What are the Moabites saying? That's where we are going to lean towards.

Of course, you can see the problem with this. It's too black and white, and it's too polarizing. And if you've understood one thing from these lectures, I hope you understand that the conversation has to be nuanced.

And there is no cookie-cutter answer to, well, how does the Old Testament interact with archaeology? And what's the Old Testament's relationship with archaeology? We cannot answer that question in a black-and-white cookie-cutter answer. But rather we have to engage this on a case-by-case basis. So, those two schools of maximalists versus minimalists largely just need to be jettisoned.

We just need to quit talking about things in those terms. Rather, we need to engage this conversation on a case-by-case basis and ask ourselves, okay, what's the evidence here? What's the Bible saying? What's the Bible demanding of us? And what is archaeology saying? What is archaeology telling us anthropologically? What's the material culture telling us about that culture there, about that location? And how do these things converge? And what's the nature of their convergence? Are there specific points where archaeology is speaking to specific claims of the Bible? Or are we kind of doing it in a generic, sweeping Broadway? And so these are the questions that we have to ask ourselves when we try to unpack the relationship of archaeology and the Old Testament. How does archaeology intersect with the Old Testament? Well, it's intersecting in a variety of ways.

We need to understand things again on a case-by-case basis, diligently analyzing the demands of the text and the details and evidence of archaeology.

This is Dr. David B. Schreiner in his teaching on Pondering the Spade. This is session 4, Some Other Important Finds and the Nature of Their Convergences.