

Dr. Jonathan Greer, Archaeology and the Old Testament, Session 1, Introduction Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Greer, Archaeology and the Old Testament, Session 1, Introduction, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture introduces biblical archaeology, exploring its methods and relationship with the Old Testament. **Dr. Greer**, a professor at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary, defines archaeology as the recovery, examination, and interpretation of past material remains, highlighting its evolution from treasure hunting to a sophisticated interdisciplinary field. He discusses the nature of the Bible as both ancient text and sacred scripture, emphasizing its human composition within a specific historical context. The lecture then examines how archaeology and the Bible interact, focusing on three Cs: **complementarity**, **clarity**, and **complication**, illustrating these with various archaeological findings and their interpretations. Finally, Dr. Greer advocates for honest engagement with both textual and archaeological evidence, acknowledging limitations and biases in interpreting the past.

2. 15 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Greer, Archaeology and the Old Testament, Session 1 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Introduction & Languages → Introductory Series → Archaeology).



**Greer_Archaeology_
Session01.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided source, "Greer_Arch_EN_Session 01.pdf," which is a lecture by Dr. Jonathan Greer on Old Testament Archaeology:

Briefing Document: Dr. Jonathan Greer - Introduction to Archaeology and the Old Testament

Overview:

This document summarizes the key points from Dr. Jonathan Greer's introductory lecture on the relationship between archaeology and the Old Testament. Greer emphasizes a nuanced approach to biblical archaeology, moving beyond simplistic notions of "proving" the Bible through material finds. He stresses the importance of understanding both archaeology and the Bible within their respective contexts and highlights the complexities and limitations inherent in both fields.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. What is Archaeology?

- **Not Indiana Jones:** Greer dispels the romanticized view of archaeology as treasure hunting. He describes it as "sophisticated dumpster diving," involving the examination of material remains (broken pottery, animal bones, residues) to reconstruct past human lifeways.
- **Three Elements:** Archaeology involves the recovery, examination, and interpretation of material and biological remains.
- **Interdisciplinary:** Modern archaeology uses sophisticated methods, including GPS, photogrammetry, satellite imagery, residue analysis, isotopic analysis of bones, and soil analysis (phytoliths, minerals).
- **Evolution of the Field:** Archaeology has evolved from a form of treasure hunting in the 1700s and 1800s to a more scientific and rigorous discipline. Early excavations were often funded by wealthy patrons seeking artifacts for their collections, leading to a loss of contextual data.
- **Quote:** *"In fact, we might even call it sophisticated dumpster diving. We work through the material remains of humankind's past, basically going through their trash."*

1. What is the Bible?

- **Collection of Writings:** The Bible is not a single book but a collection of ancient writings preserved in later forms. It is deeply rooted in its ancient Near Eastern context.
- **Canon and Inspiration:** While seen as a unique and inspired text by faith communities, the Bible is also acknowledged as a human composition, reflecting God working through humans in their specific historical and cultural contexts.
- **Complex Formation:** The Bible is the result of a long and complex process involving additions, edits, and updates.
- **Not a History Book:** The Bible is primarily about God and His people, not a historical or scientific manual. "Historical facts" serve to inform the story rather than the story being driven by historical concerns.
- **Example:** The absence of the Battle of Qarqar (a major historical battle where King Ahab played a crucial role) from the Bible demonstrates that the Bible is focused on spiritual and theological matters rather than comprehensive historical reporting.
- **Quote:** *"Ultimately, the Bible is not intended to be some history book or science manual or anything of the sort, but rather it is ultimately about God and his people."*

1. Biblical Archaeology:

- **Baggage of Apologetics:** Greer acknowledges the problematic use of archaeology to "prove" the Bible, often driven by a desire to find "nuggets" that support faith claims. He strongly cautions against this approach.
- **No Conspiracies:** There are no conspiracies to hide "truth"; instead, rigorous accountability is practiced in academic settings to assess claims.
- **Definition:** Biblical archaeology is defined by its chronological focus (Late Bronze Age to the first or second century CE) and geographical focus (the ancient Levant and, for the New Testament, the Mediterranean).
- **Debated Use of the Bible:** How the Bible should be used in biblical archaeology is debated. Positions range from maximalists (believing the Bible contains significant historical information) to minimalists (seeing the Bible as a later Hellenistic composition with minimal historical value). Greer advocates for living in the

tension between these poles and for critically examining both texts and archaeology.

- **Quote:** *"Well, it's archeology that's biblical in its interest. That means we have a particular chronological focus and also a particular geographic focus."*

1. The Relationship between Archaeology and the Bible: The Three C's

- **Complementary:** Archaeology can provide corroborating evidence or additional context for biblical stories. Examples:
 - The Merneptah Stele (c. 1209 BC), which mentions Israel, supports the biblical narrative that Israel existed in that region during that time.
 - Bullae with the names of officials mentioned in the book of Jeremiah, which can be seen as direct corroboration of historical figures found in the Bible.
- **Clarity:** Archaeology can provide insight into cultural practices mentioned in the Bible. Example:
 - Clay liver models, which demonstrate the ancient practice of liver divination. This practice clarifies the Levitical prohibition of divinatory practices by explaining the specific instructions to burn the lobe of the liver as a way to prevent divinatory abuse.
- **Complication:** Archaeological findings can challenge or contradict traditional interpretations of the Bible. Example:
 - The ongoing debate surrounding the dating of the walls of Jericho. This shows the difficulty in determining archaeological evidence which directly relates to Biblical events.
- **Quote:** *"...each of these seas refines and enriches our understanding of the Bible."*

1. Limitations and Interpretations:

- **Partial Evidence:** Archaeological evidence is inherently partial, with much data lost through decomposition, human activity, and biases in excavation and collection.
- **Interpretation is Key:** Both archaeological finds and biblical texts require careful interpretation, and interpreters bring their own biases and perspectives.
- **No Unambiguous Evidence:** Some important biblical events (e.g., the Exodus) lack unambiguous archaeological confirmation.

1. **Responsible Integration:**

- A variety of data sets (textual, archaeological, scientific) must be critically examined and carefully integrated to approach a more complete understanding of the past.
- Greer emphasizes that there is a level of imagination involved in reconstructing the past from the limited material remains that are uncovered through archaeological digs.
- He warns against being overconfident in scientific practices, and that all methods need to be considered as only part of the picture.

1. **The Value of Complication:**

- Acknowledging and engaging with the "complications" created by archaeology can lead to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of both the Bible and faith.
- Honesty about these difficulties provides opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations about faith and its relationship to historical and archaeological findings.
- Acknowledging the limitations of the human perspective helps avoid embarrassment for the faith that one proclaims.

Conclusion:

Dr. Greer's lecture promotes a sophisticated and responsible approach to biblical archaeology. He encourages a move away from using archaeology as a tool to "prove" the Bible, and instead advocates for a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between material remains, historical texts, and individual faith. He stresses the value of careful examination, critical thinking, and humility in the face of the complexities of both the archaeological and biblical records.

4. Greer, Archaeology and the Old Testament, Session 1, Introduction

Old Testament Archaeology: An Introduction

Quiz

1. What is the working definition of archaeology presented by Dr. Greer, and what are its three elements?
2. What are some of the sophisticated, modern technologies used in archaeology, and how do they assist in the examination of materials?
3. How was archaeology initially practiced, and what is the legacy of this approach on modern archaeology?
4. According to the lecture, what is the primary purpose of the Bible, and how does this purpose influence its relationship to history?
5. What is "biblical archaeology," and what are its chronological and geographical focus areas?
6. Describe the "maximalist" and "minimalist" positions on the historicity of the Bible, as discussed in the lecture.
7. According to the lecture, why is archaeological evidence always partial, and what are the different stages of loss for something like an animal bone?
8. What are the "three C's" of the relationship between archaeology and the Bible as defined by Dr. Greer?
9. What are some examples of archaeology complementing and clarifying our understanding of the Bible?
10. How can archaeology "complicate" our understanding of the Bible?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The working definition of archaeology is the recovery, examination, and interpretation of the material and biological remains of humankind's past. These three elements of recovery, examination, and interpretation form the basis of how archaeologists approach their work.

2. Modern archaeology uses technologies such as GPS, photogrammetry, satellite imagery, residue analysis of pottery, isotopic analysis of animal teeth, and radiocarbon dating. These technologies allow for more precise data collection and analysis of materials.
3. Archaeology was initially practiced as a form of treasure hunting, often funded by wealthy patrons who sought to loot ancient sites for artifacts. This has created a legacy of removing objects from their contexts, leading to a loss of historical data.
4. The primary purpose of the Bible is to describe the relationship between God and His people and convey His character, not to serve as a history book or science manual. Historical facts in the Bible inform the story of God and his people rather than the story informing historical reconstruction.
5. Biblical archaeology is archaeology focused on the chronological period and geographical area related to the Bible, specifically the Late Bronze Age to the first or second century CE in the Southern Levant and the Mediterranean, respectively. This is the time and place of the people of Israel.
6. Maximalists believe the Bible contains a significant amount of historical information, with room for genre and nuance. Minimalists argue that the Bible was composed much later than typically believed, mainly in the Hellenistic period, and has minimal historical value.
7. Archaeological evidence is partial because of loss throughout the cycle of use and decomposition; these include the initial discard by the users of the artifact, decomposition due to time, soil and weather, excavation bias in what is collected, and archaeological bias in where to dig. The loss of bone begins with slaughtering and continues through butchering, preparation, consumption, and final discard.
8. The "three C's" are complementary, clarity, and complication. Complementary describes how archaeology can support the biblical narrative. Clarity is how archaeological discoveries help clarify fuzzy details of the Bible. Complication is when archaeological findings seem to conflict with biblical accounts.
9. Examples of archaeology complementing the Bible include the Merneptah Stele mentioning Israel as a people in the 13th century BCE and the discovery of bullae with names of officials mentioned in the book of Jeremiah. An example of clarifying is the discovery of liver models that help clarify why the Old Testament prohibits the study of livers.

10. Archaeology can complicate our understanding of the Bible through the lack of certain archaeological evidence for historical events in the Bible and the interpretations and differing interpretations of found evidence, which can conflict with traditional biblical accounts. This does not invalidate the message of the Bible.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the evolution of archaeology from its early stages as treasure hunting to its current interdisciplinary approach. How has this evolution impacted our understanding of the past?
2. Explain how the lecture presents the complex relationship between the Bible and history. How does the lecture's emphasis on the Bible as a record of God and his people rather than a historical text impact interpretations of biblical accounts?
3. Analyze the different approaches taken by "maximalists" and "minimalists" in using the Bible in archaeological studies. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, and how does the lecture advocate for a responsible use of data from both texts and archaeology?
4. Describe the process of loss in the archaeological record, using animal bones as an example. How does the partiality of archaeological evidence challenge our ability to accurately reconstruct the past, and how can archaeologists mitigate these challenges?
5. Elaborate on the "three C's" framework of the relationship between archaeology and the Bible, as suggested by the lecture. How do complementary, clarifying, and complicating evidence contribute to a more holistic and nuanced view of both the Bible and the archaeological record?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Archaeology:** The study of the past through the material remains of human activity, including recovery, examination, and interpretation.
- **Zooarchaeology:** The study of animal remains, especially bones, found at archaeological sites.
- **Photogrammetry:** The use of photography to measure and create accurate 3D models of objects or sites.

- **Residue Analysis:** The scientific analysis of substances or deposits left behind on or in artifacts, particularly pottery.
- **Isotopic Analysis:** The analysis of the distribution of isotopes (atoms of the same element with different masses) to determine an animal's diet or origins.
- **Phytoliths:** Microscopic mineral structures found in plants that can be identified in soil samples.
- **Radiocarbon Dating:** A method of dating organic material based on the decay of the radioactive isotope carbon-14.
- **Hieroglyphs:** A system of writing using pictorial characters, primarily associated with ancient Egypt.
- **Cuneiform:** A system of writing using wedge-shaped characters, primarily associated with ancient Mesopotamia.
- **Akkadian:** An extinct East Semitic language that was spoken in ancient Mesopotamia.
- **Canon:** A collection of sacred writings accepted as genuine.
- **Omrides:** A royal dynasty of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the 9th century BCE, known for their power and influence.
- **Neo-Assyrian King:** Refers to the kings of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (911-609 BCE), a powerful empire in the ancient Near East.
- **Shalmaneser III:** A powerful Neo-Assyrian king who reigned from 859-824 BCE.
- **Battle of Qarqar:** A major battle in 853 BCE where a coalition of local powers, including Ahab of Israel, fought against Shalmaneser III of Assyria.
- **Apologetics:** In this context, attempts to use archaeology to prove the Bible's historical accuracy.
- **Nephilim:** Mythological giants mentioned in the Bible's early chapters of Genesis.
- **Levant:** A historical geographical term for the eastern Mediterranean region, encompassing modern-day Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan.
- **Southern Levant:** Specifically refers to the southern portion of the Levant including modern-day Israel, Palestine, and Jordan.

- **Maximalists:** Scholars who believe the Bible contains significant historical information.
- **Minimalists:** Scholars who believe the Bible was largely composed much later, mainly during the Hellenistic period, and contains minimal historical information.
- **Hellenistic Period:** The period in the Mediterranean world and the Near East following the death of Alexander the Great, which lasted from about 323-30 BC.
- **Maccabees/Hasmonean Dynasty:** A Jewish dynasty that ruled Judea from 140-37 BC after the Maccabean revolt against the Seleucid Empire.
- **Post-processionalism:** A movement in archaeology which emphasizes the subjectivity of archaeological interpretations and the effects of societal factors on the study of archaeology.
- **Merneptah Stele:** An ancient Egyptian stele dating to around 1209 BCE that mentions the name of Israel, considered one of the oldest extra-biblical references to the people of Israel.
- **Bullae:** Lumps of clay used to seal documents by impressing seals.
- **Tells:** Artificial mounds created over time by the accumulation of the remains of successive settlements.
- **Midden:** A refuse heap or trash deposit containing discarded materials.
- **Divination:** The practice of seeking knowledge of the future or the unknown, typically through omens or supernatural means.
- **Liver Model:** Clay or bronze models of animal livers used in the practice of divination in the ancient Near East.
- **Extrapolating:** The process of inferring or estimating from known data.

5. FAQs on Greer, Archaeology and the Old Testament, Session 1, Introduction, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: Archaeology and the Old Testament

- 1. What is archaeology, and how does it relate to the popular image of treasure hunting?**
2. Archaeology is the systematic recovery, examination, and interpretation of the material and biological remains of humankind's past. While popular culture often portrays it as a glamorous treasure hunt akin to Indiana Jones, in reality, it involves careful, detailed analysis of discarded materials (like pottery shards, animal bones, and soil residues). It's more like "sophisticated dumpster diving," aiming to reconstruct ancient life ways rather than finding valuable artifacts for their own sake. It has evolved from a speculative endeavor to a highly interdisciplinary field that employs sophisticated technologies such as GPS, photogrammetry, and isotope analysis.
- 3. How has archaeology changed since its beginnings?**
4. Early archaeology, particularly in the 1700s and 1800s, was largely driven by treasure hunting, with wealthy patrons funding expeditions to collect artifacts for private or museum collections. This approach often neglected critical contextual information by removing objects from their original settings, resulting in a loss of historical data. The decipherment of hieroglyphs and cuneiform in this era led to further interest in ancient texts and artifacts, but the practice of archaeology lacked the systematic rigor that characterizes it today. Now, with an interdisciplinary approach and the use of hard sciences, archaeologists are able to glean much more detailed information about the past.

5. **What is the primary focus of the Bible, and how should it be approached in relation to historical inquiry?**
6. The Bible, especially the Old Testament, is primarily a collection of ancient writings focused on God and his relationship with his people. While it contains historical elements, it is not intended to be a comprehensive history book or a science manual. In the ancient world, historical facts served to inform the narrative, rather than the narrative serving to inform history. For example, the Bible may omit details about major events of powerful rulers, such as Ahab's strong military showing at the Battle of Qarqar, if those details don't pertain to its central message of allegiance to Yahweh.
7. **What is "biblical archaeology," and what are some common misconceptions?**
8. Biblical archaeology is archaeology with a specific focus on the geographical regions of the ancient Levant (e.g. modern day Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq) and the chronological periods covered by the Bible, especially the Late Bronze and Iron Ages, and then into the New Testament period (roughly 15th century BC to 1st/2nd century CE). It is often mistakenly approached as a means of "proving the Bible right," like seeking out giant skeletons to prove the existence of Nephilim, or Noah's Ark as if archeology can validate faith itself. Instead, biblical archeology focuses on understanding the context of the biblical story within its ancient world.
9. **What are the main viewpoints regarding the use of the Bible in biblical archaeology?**
10. There is a spectrum of views regarding how much the Bible can be relied upon as historical information. In the past, these views were often characterized by "maximalists" who believed the Bible to contain a great deal of accurate historical information, and "minimalists" who believed that most of the Old Testament narratives were composed in the Hellenistic period to form a national charter and had very little historical value. Now, many scholars seek to live in the tension between these positions by carefully examining both the biblical text and the archaeological record. However, it is important to understand that neither text nor archaeology speaks for itself and that interpretation is required for both.

11. How does the partial and complex nature of archaeological evidence affect its interpretation?

12. Archaeological data is partial, as only a small percentage of any site can be excavated, and decomposition, different soil types, and archaeological bias, (such as where and how much to dig) affects preservation and the kind of data that is collected. Also, what is left in the archeological record is far removed from the original events because of the processes involved in the consumption and disposal of materials (such as an animal being butchered, cooked, and the remains discarded at different stages). This, combined with the interpretive biases of the researchers, means that archaeological findings can yield varying, and sometimes contradictory, interpretations.

13. How can archaeology and the Bible relate to each other?

14. The relationship between archaeology and the Bible can be categorized into three "C's": **Complementary**: Archaeology can confirm or provide general support for the biblical record, such as the mention of Israel in the Merneptah Stele. It can also offer more specific confirmations, such as the discovery of bullae with the names of biblical figures like Huchel and Gedaliah. **Clarifying**: Archaeology can shed light on obscure practices or customs mentioned in the Bible, like the liver models used for divination, which helps explain prohibitions against the practice found in biblical texts. **Complication**: Archaeology can sometimes raise questions or contradict traditional interpretations of the biblical narratives, which can require careful reevaluation and open discussions.

15. What is the significance of embracing the "complication" created when archaeological evidence doesn't align with the biblical narrative?

16. Embracing the complications that emerge when archaeological finds don't align with the Bible is important. Instead of inventing evidence or distorting archaeological data to fit pre-conceived notions, a recognition of these complexities is helpful in encouraging humility in recognizing that neither the Bible nor archeology are our own and a more honest engagement with both the text and with other people. This allows for genuine discussions about the nature of faith, its historical context, and the limits of human understanding. It also prevents believers from falling into the trap of dishonest apologetics that only weaken their faith when found to be untrue.