

Dr. Jonathan Greer, Archaeology and the Old Testament, Session 5, Cultural Contexts 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 5, Cultural Contexts, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Jonathan Greer's lecture on archaeology and the Old Testament explores the cultural contexts of ancient Israel. **The lecture examines** social structures, daily life (including food production and consumption), and religious practices. **Archaeological findings** are used to support and illuminate biblical accounts, particularly focusing on the nature of Israelite religion and its relationship to the monarchy. **The presentation highlights** the complexities of interpreting archaeological data alongside biblical texts, noting both similarities and differences between Israelite culture and its surrounding cultures. **Key themes** include the role of Yahweh in Israelite worship and the tension between religious and political power.

**2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Greer, Archaeology and the Old Testament, Session 5 –
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_
Session05.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 05.pdf," which is a lecture by Dr. Jonathan Greer on archaeology and the Old Testament, specifically focusing on cultural contexts:

Briefing Document: Archaeology and the Old Testament - Session 5: Cultural Contexts

Overview:

This session explores the cultural context of ancient Israel through archaeological and textual evidence, examining social structure, daily life, and religious practices. Dr. Greer emphasizes that while the biblical text is crucial, archaeological discoveries provide concrete insights into the lived experiences of ancient Israelites, revealing both resonances and complexities in their culture. He advocates for understanding the material culture and religious practices, but with careful consideration of interpretations.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Social Structure: The Patrimonial Household

- **Core Model:** The basic unit of Israelite society was the patrimonial household, consisting of a male head of household, his children, and extended family. This model is supported by biblical descriptions and archaeological evidence.
- *"...a common model is that of the patrimonial household...that looks at the descriptions in the Bible and correlates them to certain patterns of society that we know in traditional societies and also a close correlation with the archeology...the smallest unit this house of the father, this bounded household where we have a central male figure and his children and then extended families."*
- **Hierarchical Structure:** This unit was nested within a hierarchy that extended to the clan, tribe, and ultimately, the deity (Yahweh). The King was in a precarious position between the social structures of the household and the divine.
- *"And you can see, even in the way it's depicted here with a slash mark here, the deity and the king both kind of precariously occupy the same position."*
- **Tension:** There was an ongoing tension regarding the roles of the deity and the king, especially concerning the concept of image-bearing, and how the king fits between human and divine.

- *"Especially to go back to our earlier discussion of image-bearing, if all humans are co-image bearers, where is this king? How does he situate between the social structures of the household and the divine?"*

1. Daily Life: Subsistence Living

- **Food and Water:** Daily life was centered around acquiring and preparing food and water. Water was of primary concern.
- **Water Sources:** Water was collected from cisterns, springs, rivers, and wells, as well as wadis (seasonal water flows). The Bible often uses water metaphors contrasting living water with stagnant cistern water.
- *"We might remember warnings, particularly in Jeremiah, comparing and contrasting living water rushing from a spring to cistern water that would become stagnant well into the year..."*
- **Agriculture:** Primary crops included grapes, dates, wheat, barley, pomegranates, figs, and honey. The source of honey (date vs bee) has been clarified by archaeological finds.
- **Microarchaeology:** Microarchaeology helps to understand diet by studying remains invisible to the naked eye.
- **Livestock and Hunting:** Sheep, goats, and cattle were predominant, with some evidence of hunting (gazelles, deer) and also limited evidence of pigs.
- **Transportation:** Most travel was on foot; donkeys were used as pack animals, and camels for long-distance trade.
- **Bread Production:** Bread was a dietary staple. Greer describes the entire process of bread production from planting to baking, noting its use in biblical metaphors.
- *"And again, you see metaphors for bread baking all throughout scripture. One of my favorite examples of that is from the Book of Amos..."*
- **Olive and Wine Production:** Olives were used for food, cosmetics, and fuel. The process of olive oil and wine production are also evidenced archaeologically.
- **Other Technologies:** Pottery, textiles, leather, and metallurgy were essential technologies. These are discovered through archaeological finds, like loom weights and prills of metal.

- **Resource Management:** Metal was recycled, while stone was primarily used for building walls.

1. Religion: Practice and Belief

- **Polytheism and Monolatry:** Evidence suggests that ancient Israelites worshipped multiple deities, incorporating them with Yahweh, despite the biblical emphasis on monotheism. Greer argues this is not a contradiction, but rather consistent with what the Bible itself describes.
- *"Now, we do find lots and lots of evidence that it was not Yahweh alone that they were worshipping... But one needs to remember, again reading the biblical text, that any kind of allegiance to Yahweh, let alone Yahweh alone, is certainly projected as the minority opinion."*
- **Cult Places:** Greer uses "cult" to mean the practice of religion, not in a negative or sectarian way. Various sites of worship have been found, ranging from small "cult corners" to larger temples.
- *"I'm speaking here purely as cult as the practice of religion, cult as the practice of religion."*
- **Identification of Cult Places:** Cult sites are identified using criteria such as deity images, inscriptions, repeated material culture patterns, figurines, and animal bone concentrations.
- **Specific Cult Sites:** Greer discusses cult corners, temples at Arad, Dan, and Motza, a large altar at Be'er Sheva, a possible shrine on Mount Ebal, the Bull Site, and the Tel Dan altar. He notes the presence of cultic veneration and its connection to bovine imagery found in the bible and other cultures.
- **Tel Dan:** The Tel Dan altar is a prime example of Yahweh worship, with associated animal bone remains fitting with biblical prescriptions for sacrifice. A seal was found with a name containing the element of the divine name, Yahweh, reinforcing the idea that they worshiped Yahweh.
- *"So, as we can put these pieces together, there's lots of evidence here that the God that was being worshipped at Tel Dan was in fact Yahweh..."*
- **Temple of Jerusalem:** There is no archaeological material of the First Temple of Solomon. Biblical descriptions present a composite picture of a temple with many parallels in ancient Near Eastern examples.

- **Material Culture of Worship:** Cult stands, metal bowls, pairs of shovels, and ash pots are common artifacts found at worship sites, and they closely correlate with the descriptions of the Tabernacle or Temple altar kit, as described in the bible. The presence of "Judahite Pillar Figurines" (JPFs), suggests the worship of Asherah or maybe a charm for fertility.
- *"What's amazing about this concentration of artifacts is that when we look in biblical texts of what makes up a tabernacle or a temple altar kit, it has very specific elements."*
- **Onomastic Evidence:** Theophoric names (names containing a deity's name) provide insight into the deities worshipped. Biblical names and names from Samaria ostraca are used as examples. This onomastic evidence helps to indicate the geographical and chronological distribution of the worship of particular deities.
- *"So, by tracking some of the onomastic evidence, we can suggest the deities that were worshipped in specific contexts."*
- **Inscriptions and Iconography:** Inscriptions such as those from Khirbet al-Qom and Qintilat al-Jarud mention Yahweh and his Asherah, and there are debates about the nature of "his Asherah" (an implement, a sacred tree, or a female deity image.) Greer suggests this could represent the reappropriation of a pagan symbol. Ancient Near Eastern iconography such as the Ahiim sarcophagus shows the use of cherubs, and the Tanakh cult stand depicts a calf, a sun disk, trees, and possible Yahweh and Asherah figures, illustrating the blending of religious traditions.
- *"And some have even suggested that the iconography depicted on the Qintilat al-Jarud pithos is supposed to be an illustration of Yahweh and his Asherah."*

1. Ancient Near Eastern Parallels

- **Similarities:** There are similarities between Israelite religion and other ancient Near Eastern practices, including sacrifices, feasting, hymns, temples, priesthood, and implements.
- **Differences:** The central distinction was the worship of Yahweh. Also, unlike other cultures where the king was elevated both politically and religiously, in ancient Israel, the only "rightful" King was Yahweh.

- *"So, in all of these other contexts, with very few exceptions, the high priest is often the king or they're working together in concert. ... It's something very different in ancient Israelite religion and in ancient Israelite culture because the king of Israel rightly understood is none other than Yahweh himself."*
- **Relationship Between God and Humanity:** The speaker explains there is a tension between God's design for humanity and how the Israelites followed (or did not follow) that design. He sees that the purpose of worship was meant to be directed only to Yahweh, and not to political or nationalistic aims.
- *"But that religion as the expression of the worship of Yahweh is to be to Yahweh and Yahweh alone, not to a political figure or a national ideology."*
- **Contemporary Relevance:** Greer concludes that the archaeological record and biblical texts, though ancient, have relevance to contemporary life.

Conclusion:

Dr. Greer's lecture effectively demonstrates how archaeology illuminates and complements the biblical text in understanding the cultural context of ancient Israel. By examining material remains, social structures, religious practices, and ancient Near Eastern parallels, we gain a more nuanced view of the lives and beliefs of ancient Israelites. He cautions against drawing conclusions too quickly, emphasizing that it is essential to carefully examine the evidence in both the biblical record and the material record of the culture.

4. Greer, Archaeology and the Old Testament, Session 5, Cultural Contexts

Archaeology and the Old Testament: Cultural Contexts Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. Describe the patrimonial household model as it relates to ancient Israelite society.
2. What were the primary concerns of daily life for an ancient Israelite?
3. How has the discovery of apiaries at Tel Rehov impacted the interpretation of the phrase "land of milk and honey?"
4. Briefly outline the process of breadmaking in ancient Israel.
5. How were olives utilized in ancient Israel, and how do we know about methods of oil production?
6. What types of evidence do archaeologists use to study ancient textiles?
7. What are some criteria anthropologists use to identify cult places in ancient Israel?
8. What are the key differences between the Israelite monarchy and the religious leadership of other ancient near eastern cultures?
9. Why is the temple of Solomon difficult to understand archaeologically, and how do archaeologists try to mitigate this issue?
10. What is a theophoric name, and what can they tell us about religion in ancient Israel?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The patrimonial household model describes ancient Israelite society as structured with the "house of the father" as the smallest unit, consisting of a central male figure, his children, and extended families. These households are then organized into larger clans and tribes with Yahweh at the top of the social hierarchy.
2. Daily life for an ancient Israelite revolved around subsistence living, with a primary focus on food and water, including gathering, preparing, and storing food

and water. Water sources were a chief concern, whether from cisterns, springs, rivers, or wells.

3. The discovery of industrial-level apiaries suggests that "honey" in the phrase "land of milk and honey" might refer to both date honey and bees' honey, not just date honey as previously thought, challenging earlier interpretations by rabbis.
4. Breadmaking involved planting, harvesting, threshing to separate grain from stalks, winnowing to remove the chaff, and then grinding the grain into flour, mixing it with water, allowing it to ferment using natural yeast, and finally baking the dough in ovens. This process used common agricultural and everyday implements.
5. Olives were used for food, cosmetic purposes (lubricating skin), and fuel for lamps. Archaeological evidence such as grindstones, basins, pressing stones, and weights found at sites help to demonstrate the processes of olive oil production.
6. Archaeologists often use loom weights to understand textile production as well as microarchaeological analysis to discover preserved textiles. These are less common but still informative. Very arid climates have also preserved textiles over time, aiding in study.
7. Anthropologists identify cult places using icons, images, inscriptions, repeated patterns of artifacts, figurines, concentrations of animal bones in a pit, and vessels for burning incense. The identification depends on finding multiple types of evidence in the same area.
8. In ancient Near Eastern cultures, the king was often also the high priest, uniting political and religious authority. In ancient Israel, however, Yahweh held ultimate authority, creating a tension and a distinction between the king's power and his religious role.
9. The first temple of Solomon lacks material remains, making it difficult to understand archaeologically. To mitigate this, archaeologists rely on comparative material from other sites and analyze biblical descriptions to determine its features.
10. A theophoric name includes an element of a deity's name, such as "Yah" (a shortened form of Yahweh) in the name "Jeremiah." These names can indicate which deities were worshipped during certain periods and in specific regions within ancient Israel.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer each of the following questions in essay format.

1. How does the study of material culture, specifically foodways, illuminate aspects of daily life and religious practice in ancient Israel? Use specific examples from the lecture and provide an analysis of their implications.
2. Discuss the complexities of interpreting religious practices in ancient Israel, addressing the challenges posed by polytheistic elements and the absence of physical remains of the first temple. Analyze the relationship between archaeological findings and the biblical texts.
3. Analyze the role of water in the daily life and the religious life of ancient Israel. Compare the concept of living water and cistern water, how this distinction is utilized metaphorically in religious language, and how this metaphor might have resonated with ancient Israelites?
4. Explore the various interpretations of the Judean pillar figurines (JPFs) and their significance for understanding the religious life of women in ancient Israel. How can an archaeological artifact like JPFs offer an insight into complex cultural and religious practices in ancient Israel?
5. Discuss the significance of iconography in understanding the religious beliefs of ancient Israel. Use the examples of the Ahiim sarcophagus and the Tanakh cult stand to illustrate how these artifacts provide valuable insights and complicate understandings of religious and political life.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Patrimonial Household:** A social model where the smallest unit of society is the "house of the father," consisting of a male head, his children, and extended families, with larger units like clans and tribes above.
- **Subsistence Living:** A way of life in which people primarily focus on obtaining food, water, and shelter to meet their basic needs; daily life is dominated by survival.
- **Microarchaeology:** The study of microscopic remains (such as pollen, plant parts, and bone fragments) at archaeological sites to reconstruct ancient environments, dietary habits, and technological processes.
- **Zooarchaeology:** The study of animal remains found at archaeological sites to reconstruct ancient diets, environments, and human-animal relationships.
- **Theophoric Name:** A personal name that contains an element of a deity's name (e.g., Jonathan - *Yo-Natan* or "Yahweh has given").
- **Cistern:** A man-made underground reservoir for storing rainwater.
- **Wadi:** A seasonal area of water flow that is dry for most of the year but fills rapidly with water during the rainy season.
- **Cult:** In this context, refers to the practice of religion, including rituals, worship, and religious sites and objects, not as in the modern meaning of a religious sect.
- **Cult Corner:** Small rooms in ancient Israel with benches, incense burners, or other objects suggestive of religious practice.
- **Judean Pillar Figurines (JPFs):** Clay figurines, often depicting a female, found in ancient Israel and Judah, with their religious significance still under debate.
- **Onomastic Evidence:** Evidence derived from the study of personal names, especially in terms of their relation to religion and cultural practices.
- **Comparandus:** Comparative material, data, or items that provide parallel examples for analysis and better understanding of an object or concept.
- **Aniconic:** The absence of material representations of a deity, often seen in cultures where gods are thought to be immaterial.

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

Frequently Asked Questions: Ancient Israelite Culture and Religion

1. **What was the basic social structure of ancient Israel, and how did the deity fit into this structure?** Ancient Israelite society was structured around the *patrimonial household*, with a central male figure at its core, followed by the clan, then the tribe, and ultimately, the deity (Yahweh). The deity and the king, especially during the monarchy, were somewhat precariously positioned at the top, creating a tension as to how the king, as a human and co-image bearer of God, related to both the social structure and the divine authority.
2. **What were some of the main concerns of daily life for ancient Israelites?** Daily life was largely focused on subsistence. A significant portion of time was dedicated to securing and preparing food, with water being the primary concern. They relied on cisterns, springs, and seasonal water flows (*wadis*). Their diet consisted of produce such as grapes, dates, wheat, barley, pomegranates, figs, and honey, as well as livestock like sheep, goats, and cattle. Bread was a dietary staple, and the process of bread-making, from planting to baking, was central.
3. **How did archaeological discoveries inform our understanding of ancient Israelite food production?** Archaeological finds, such as iron plow tips, sickles with flint or bone blades, threshing sledges, grindstones, and olive presses, provide details of the processes of growing and harvesting wheat and olives. Microarchaeology has revealed plant remains invisible to the naked eye, further informing us about their diet. The discovery of industrial-level apiaries suggests that honey, specifically bee honey, was significant, and challenges the prior assumption that “honey” primarily referred to date honey. Zooarchaeology, the study of animal bones, indicates that sheep, goats, and cattle were the main livestock, with some evidence of wild game.
4. **What kinds of technologies were important in ancient Israelite daily life?** Pottery was essential for cooking, storage, and eating, with the clay tempered based on use and fire exposure. Textile production is evidenced by loom weights and, in some rare cases, preserved textiles. Tanning and leatherwork also were important. Construction was done with stone, with wood being less common. Metallurgy was practiced with smelting and melting installations for metal implements.

5. **How does archaeology contribute to understanding ancient Israelite religion?**

Archaeology helps us to see the material reality of Israelite religious practices as described in the Bible. While the biblical texts often portray the worship of Yahweh alone, archaeological evidence shows a more complex reality in which other deities were worshipped alongside Yahweh, or incorporated with the worship of Yahweh. This echoes biblical depictions of practices that deviated from exclusive Yahweh worship. Archaeology gives us material evidence of cult places, cultic objects, and names that provide a fuller picture of ancient Israelite religious practices.

6. **What are some examples of cult places discovered archaeologically, and what features help to identify them?**

Cult places range from small cult corners with benches, incense burners, figurines, and unusual vessels to larger temples. Anthropologists use criteria like icons of deities, inscriptions, repeated patterns in material culture, buried figurines, concentrations of animal bones with vessels, and other ritual objects to identify cult places. Specific sites like Arad, Dan, Motza, and perhaps Mount Ebal and the Bull Site display features that indicate they were used for religious worship.

7. **What are some significant archaeological finds that illuminate the worship of Yahweh in ancient Israel?**

The temple at Tel Dan is a particularly significant find, showing evidence of Yahweh worship including an altar with four horns, and animal bone remains that match descriptions in the biblical priestly writings, along with a seal bearing a name with the divine element Yahweh. Furthermore, a collection of cultic implements at Tel Dan, including a bowl, pairs of shovels, and a pot of burned animal remains correlates closely with the elements of a tabernacle or temple altar kit described in the Bible. Onomastic evidence from seals and ostraca also includes theophoric names containing Yahweh, as well as other deities, reflecting a range of religious affiliations at different times.

8. **How does the religious practice in ancient Israel differ from that of its surrounding cultures?**

While ancient Israel shared many practices with neighboring cultures like sacrifices, sacred feasting, and temples, the central difference was the worship of Yahweh as the personal God of Israel. Unlike other societies where the king and high priest were often closely linked, the concept of kingship in Israel was distinct, with Yahweh being seen as the ultimate king. This set Israel apart in its relationship between religious practice and political power, where religion was meant to be primarily to Yahweh and not to a national ideology.