

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Genesis, Session 18,

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Welcome to the Deep Dive. You know, today we are going to look at something you don't always see paired together: archaeology and the Bible. Okay.

It's pretty common for people to kind of use archaeology to either prove or debunk the Bible. Right. We've got some great research here from Edwin Yomochi and James Pritchard.

Okay. And we're going to try to help you understand just how complex this relationship really is. Yeah, you've hit the nail on the head there.

I think a lot of people see archaeology as like this definitive tool that can like settle any historical debate, but it's really not that simple. It's important to understand that archaeology, like any field of study, it has its limitations. Yeah.

And I'm seeing that a lot in these sources. Everyone's urging us to be cautious about jumping to conclusions. So how do we avoid those traps? What should we be looking out for? Well, a helpful way to think about it is like, imagine trying to solve a massive jigsaw puzzle, but you only have like a few pieces.

Oh, wow. So you can get like glimpses of the overall picture, but you're missing a lot of crucial information. And that's the challenge that archaeologists face, especially when they're dealing with ancient history.

We're working with a very fragmented record, a tiny fraction of what once existed. Okay. I get that.

Yeah. But how tiny are we really talking here? Yeah. Like, give me a sense of just how much is missing.

Well, Yamauchi, one of the scholars you've provided, he uses this concept of circles of evidence to illustrate this point. Okay. Okay.

So imagine like a series of concentric circles. The outermost circle represents like all the events that occurred in the past. And then the next circle inward represents all the events that were ever recorded in some form.

Okay. Then you have a smaller circle that represents all the records that have survived to our time. And finally, you get to the smallest circle, and that represents the tiny fraction of those records that have actually been discovered and studied by archaeologists.

So we're really only seeing the tip of the iceberg when it comes to ancient history. Pretty much. Yeah.

Wow. Are there any examples that really drive this point home? Absolutely. Think about King Mesha of Moab.

Okay. We have this incredible stone inscription from him. Oh, wow.

Boasting about his victories. Okay. Which is amazing.

But we have nothing similar from the kings of Israel during the same period. Oh, interesting. Does that mean that they didn't erect similar monuments? Not necessarily.

Yeah. It just means that those records, if they existed, haven't survived or haven't been found yet. That makes a lot of sense.

It's like we're missing an entire chapter of the story. Yeah. And we don't even know it.

Exactly. Wow. Are there other examples of this fraction of a fraction problem? Plenty.

We know from historical sources that there were hundreds of synagogues in Palestine during the Roman period. Right. But only one pre-70 AD synagogue has been excavated at Capernaum.

Interesting. So does this mean that there's something unique about Capernaum? Right. Or have we just not found the others yet? So just because we haven't found something doesn't mean it didn't exist.

Exactly. It's a good reminder to stay humble, I think, when we talk about knowing what happened in the past. For sure.

And that brings us to this whole idea of reinterpreting evidence, right? Because if we're constantly finding new things, it stands to reason that our understanding of what we have found could change too. That's a great point. Think about the excavations at Hazor, which was a major city in ancient Israel.

Initially, archaeologists found very little Mycenaean pottery there, which led them to believe that the city had limited contact with the Aegean world. Interesting. However, later excavations unearthed a significant amount of Mycenaean pottery, completely overturning those earlier conclusions.

So even with careful excavation, we can miss crucial pieces of the puzzle. Exactly. And this idea of reinterpreting evidence seems to pop up again and again.

It certainly does. Even the most meticulous archaeological techniques don't guarantee that we'll find everything. An incredible example of this is from the Megiddo excavation.

Despite very careful work, a cuneiform text from the Epic of Gilgamesh was actually missed and found later in discarded debris. It just goes to show you how easy it is for important artifacts to slip through the cracks. This is all fascinating, but it also feels a little overwhelming.

I mean, if we're constantly revising our understanding of the past, how can we ever be sure about anything? That's a valid concern. And it brings us to a really important point about archaeological interpretation. It's not just about finding objects.

It's about understanding what those objects tell us about the past. So it's not enough to just dig things up. We have to figure out what they mean.

Exactly. Which sounds like it can get pretty subjective. Is there an example that shows how this works in practice? Absolutely.

One of the classic examples is the case of Solomon's Stables at Megiddo, which initially seemed like a slam-dunk confirmation of biblical accounts. Okay. So Solomon's Stables.

What's the story there? Well, during excavations at Megiddo, archaeologists uncovered these large structures with rows of stone pillars. And they were initially interpreted as horse stables, which seemed to confirm the biblical description of Solomon's vast chariot force. I bet.

It's one thing to read about these grand structures in the Bible, but to actually see the physical remains, that must have felt like stepping back in time. Yeah. You can see why they made that connection.

But here's where the reinterpretation comes in. Later research suggested that the level these structures were found in likely dates to the reign of King Ahab, not Solomon. Wait, so the whole Solomon's Stables thing might be based on a misinterpretation.

Potentially, yeah. That's pretty wild to think about. It is.

What made them rethink the original idea? A few things. Okay. First, advances in dating techniques allowed archaeologists to more accurately pinpoint the age of the structures.

And second, as more excavations were conducted throughout the region, they found similar buildings in contexts that didn't fit the stable interpretation at all. Oh, interesting. So this broader perspective led to a reassessment of the evidence at Megiddo.

So it's not just about finding individual artifacts. It's about understanding how they fit into the bigger picture. Exactly.

One find might seem to confirm a biblical account, but then you find something else that challenges that interpretation. It's like a constant process of reevaluation. Exactly.

James Pritchard, another scholar whose work you shared, summed it up beautifully when he said, rarely if ever, do historical judgments emerge from the ground. They are deduced. Opinions, assumptions, and even the latest scientific knowledge all play a role in how we interpret the past.

It's like solving a mystery, but the clues keep changing as you go along. Yeah, kind of. And I'm noticing that same pattern with those Solomon's copper mines we mentioned earlier.

What's the story with those? Ah, yes. The copper mines. That's another case where initial interpretations have been re-evaluated in light of new research.

Remember the discovery of those mines and smelting furnaces near Ezion-Geber seemed to line up perfectly with biblical accounts of Solomon's extensive trading network? Right. It was seen as this amazing archaeological confirmation of the Bible's historical accuracy. Exactly.

But as with Solomon's stables, later research cast doubt on some aspects of the initial interpretation. The dating of the mining operations became a topic of debate, with some scholars suggesting that they might actually date to a period after Solomon's reign, potentially aligning with the activities of kings like Jehoshaphat, who also engaged in copper mining and trade, according to the biblical texts. So the question becomes, whose mines are they? Yeah.

That's a pretty big difference. It is. And it reminds us that even when we think we have a clear archaeological match with the Bible, things are often more complicated than they appear.

This is really making me rethink how I approach history. It's not just about memorizing facts and dates, but about understanding the process of how we arrive at those facts and how they can change over time. And that process is constantly evolving.

Think about all those museum collections we mentioned earlier, full of artifacts that haven't been fully analyzed yet. What new discoveries and reinterpretations might emerge from those archives? It's exciting to think about.

It is. But it's also a little humbling. It's like we're only getting glimpses of the past, and we have to be really careful about how we interpret those glimpses.

What does all this mean for someone like me, who's trying to understand the relationship between archaeology and the Bible? Well, it means approaching both the Bible and archaeology with a healthy dose of curiosity and skepticism. Remember, both are complex fields with their own nuances and interpretations. So it's not about using archaeology as a weapon to either prove or disprove the Bible.

It's about adding layers of understanding to the stories and events we read about. So it's seeing those stories in their historical context. Precisely.

Archaeology can illuminate the historical context of biblical events, providing tangible evidence of the cultures, the technologies, and daily life of the people who lived in those times. It can help us visualize the world that the biblical writers inhabited. So instead of looking for a perfect one-to-one match between every detail in the Bible and what we find through archaeology, we should be looking at the bigger picture, trying to get a sense of the world these stories were told in.

Yeah, you've got it. It's about recognizing that both the Bible and archaeology offer valuable insights, but neither one tells the whole story on its own. Think of it as a conversation, not a competition.

That's a great analogy. But I have to admit, it's kind of mind-blowing to realize that some of what we consider settled history might be based on interpretations that are still being debated or could even change with new discoveries. For sure.

Makes you wonder what else we might have gotten wrong. It does. That's the beauty and the challenge of history.

It's an ongoing process of discovery and reinterpretation. As new evidence emerges, our understanding of the past continues to evolve. Okay.

So if I'm trying to be a more informed reader of history, especially when it comes to the Bible and archaeology, what should I keep in mind? What are some good rules of thumb? Well, first off, remember that both archaeology and biblical studies are fields with ongoing debates and evolving interpretations. So don't shy away from those debates. It's by exploring different perspectives and questioning assumptions that we really grow in our understanding.

So it's more about the journey than the destination. Yeah, I like that. It's about embracing the complexity and the ambiguity.

Yeah. Instead of always looking for simple answers. Exactly.

Be open to new discoveries. Okay. Be willing to revise your understanding.

Right. And enjoy the process. I can definitely get behind that.

But before we wrap up- I have to ask about those Solomon's copper mines. Right. We talked about how the dating might be off, but what about the purpose of the mines? Okay.

Did that change too? That's a great question. And yes, the purpose of the mines has also been reinterpreted, while the archaeologists who originally excavated them believed that they were primarily a smelting operation. Later research suggests that the copper ore may have been shipped elsewhere to be processed.

Oh, interesting. Yeah. So maybe instead of being this self-contained copper production center, it was more of a mining outpost, part of a larger, more complex network.

That's the current thinking. And it changes how we view the economic and technological capabilities of ancient Israel during that time. Right.

It's not just about Solomon anymore. It's about understanding the bigger picture of trade, innovation, and regional power dynamics. This one example really brings together all the points we've been talking about.

Yeah. How limited the evidence can be. Right.

How our interpretations can change. For sure. And how important it is to stay open to new information.

You said it. The Solomon's copper mines are like a crash course. Wow.

In the dynamic relationship between archaeology and biblical history. I feel like I've got a whole new set of lenses. I'm glad to hear that.

For looking at the past. Yeah. But the most important lesson is to remember that archaeology is a tool.

Yes. Not a truth detector. Right.

We have to be careful about how we use it and always be ready to revise our understanding as we learn more. Beautifully put. I couldn't have said it better myself.

Well, a huge thank you to you, our expert guide, for this incredible deep dive. Oh, it's been my pleasure. It's been an eye-opening journey, and I feel like I've learned so much.

Good. And to you, dear listener, keep exploring, keep questioning, and who knows? Yeah. Maybe you'll be the one to make the next big discovery that changes our understanding of the past.

That's right. Happy digging.