

# Genesis: Relation of Archaeology to Bible History

*Author: Dr. Robert Vannoy*

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## Abstract

This lecture examines the methodological relationship between archaeological research and biblical history, focusing on what archaeology can and cannot accomplish in biblical studies. It outlines two major principles: first, that archaeological evidence is inherently fragmentary because only a small fraction of materials survive, are surveyed, excavated, examined, and published; and second, that interpretations of archaeological data are often tentative and subject to revision as more evidence emerges. To illustrate these concepts, the lecture discusses the 'circles of evidence' model and analyzes historical reinterpretations of Solomon's stables at Megiddo and his copper mines near Ezion-geber.

## Outline

### I. Introduction to the Relation of Archaeology to Bible History

- A. Contextual Placement: Between Genesis 11 and Genesis 12 (Abraham's era)
- B. Transition to historical periods where extra-biblical data is available
- C. Survey of Biblical Archaeology: Reference to Dr. Allan MacRae's booklet (history and methods)
- D. The Role of Archaeology in Assessing the Historical Statements of the Bible (Methodology)

### II. Perspectives on the Role of Archaeology

- A. Critical Scholars' Approach: Using lack of archaeological confirmation to cast doubt on biblical historical trustworthiness
- B. Conservative Scholars' Approach: Claiming archaeology "proves" the Bible, which can lead to issues if interpretations change
- C. Need for a Critical Balance: Avoid letting "scientific results" rule over Scripture, and recognize that archaeologists do not speak with unanimity

### III. Principle 1: Archaeological Evidence is Very Fragmentary in Nature

#### A. The Fragmentary Nature of Archaeological Evidence

- 1. Edwin Yamauchi's line of reasoning ("The Stone, Scripts and Scholars"; "The Stones and the Scriptures")

2. Implication: Lack of archaeological confirmation does not make a biblical statement suspect

## **B. The Five Fractions of Archaeological Evidence (Yamauchi's analysis)**

### **1. Only a fraction of what is made or written survives**

- a. Perishable materials (papyri) disintegrate and disappear
- b. Royal Israelite stelae are largely missing (only one small fragment found; compare Moabite/Mesha stone)
- c. Synagogues: Hundreds existed in the NT era, but only one (Capernaum) from before 70 AD has been found
- d. Building material reuse and natural erosion/decay remove historical traces

### **2. Only a fraction of available sites are surveyed and identified**

- a. 1944: ~3,000 sites west of Jordan
- b. 1963: ~5,000 sites (Nelson Glueck surveys)
- c. Negev and Golan Heights surveys added several hundred new sites
- d. Kakabi estimates only a third of possible sites in Judea have been recorded

### **3. Only a fraction of surveyed sites have been excavated**

- a. Paul Lapp (1963): out of 5,000 sites, only 150 excavated (only 26 major excavations)
- b. Only 2% of potential, promising sites have had major excavations

### **4. Only a fraction of any excavated site is actually examined**

- a. Exceptions: small, short-lived sites like Qumran and Masada are completely excavated
- b. Megiddo: Chicago's Oriental Institute (1925-1934) abandoned complete excavation after top 4 strata due to scale
- c. Key finds are easily missed (e.g., Gilgamesh cuneiform fragment found in Megiddo's discarded debris)
- d. Hazor: John Garstang (1928) incorrectly concluded Hazor was minor in the 13th-14th centuries BC due to lack of Mycenaean pottery; Yadin later found abundant pottery
- e. Hazor's scale: Yadin cleared only 1/400th in 4 seasons; estimated 800 years of work to fully clear the 200-acre site
- f. Babylon (2,500 acres) and Nineveh (1,850 acres) would take thousands of years to clear

### **5. Only a fraction of materials and inscriptions have been published**

- a. Scarcity of trained experts and funding causes massive time lags
- b. Babylonian king list: acquired 1880s, published 1954 (75-year lag)
- c. Lipit-Ishtar law code: excavated late 1800s, published 1947 by Francis R. Steel
- d. Museum storerooms contain vast unpublished collections
- e. Kramer's estimate: only 10% of ~500,000 excavated cuneiform texts have been published
- f. Mari: 25,000 texts found, only 2,800 published; Eshnunna and Ur publications remain incomplete

## **IV. Principle 2: The Interpretation of Archaeological Evidence is Often Tentative**

#### **A. Subject to Revision and Reinterpretation with New Evidence**

1. Interpretations lie on a spectrum of certainty (doubtful, possible, probable, certain)
2. Written materials are clearer; material structures without writing require cautious interpretation

#### **B. Case Study 1: Solomon's Stables and Chariot Cities at Megiddo**

1. Biblical context: 1 Kings 9:15, 19 and 10:26-29 (Solomon's horse/chariot trade, building at Megiddo)
2. Initial discovery: Univ. of Chicago found rows of stone pillars with holes; interpreted as stables/hitching posts
3. Reassessment: James Pritchard (1970) and others dated the level to Ahab's time rather than Solomon's, reinterpreting the structures as storehouses or barracks
4. Methodological lesson: Historical judgments are deduced by archaeologists using opinion, common sense, and logic, not simply "popping out of the ground"

#### **C. Case Study 2: Solomon's Copper Mines and Smelting Furnaces**

1. Biblical context: Ezion-geber seaport (1 Kings 9:26)
2. Initial discovery: Nelson Glueck (late 1930s) found copper veins, slag, and what he believed was a refinery/smelting furnace
3. Reinterpretation: The "furnace" turned out to be something else upon further evaluation

### **V. Edwin Yamauchi's "Circles of Evidence" Model**

- A. Three overlapping circles: Biblical/Classical texts, Material Remains, Literary Remains
- B. Overlap of all three is relatively rare

#### **C. Historical Examples of Corroboration without Early Evidence**

1. Darius the Mede in Daniel: Lacks extra-biblical corroboration, but lack of evidence does not mean non-existence
2. Pontius Pilate: Historicity confirmed inscriptionally only in 1961 (Caesarea)
3. Herod the Great: First epigraphical attestation discovered in 1963-1965