

Archaeology and the Bible

Gordon Franz

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Earthquakes: On The Increase? Or Warning Of Judgment To Come?

Earthquakes are awesome natural phenomena that intrigue geologists who study them and terrorize victims who experience them. People caught in an earthquake often refer to it as one of the most terrifying experiences of their lifetimes. An earthquake, with its epicenter at Northridge in the San Fernando Valley, north of Los Angeles, California, jolted people awake in the early morning hours of January 17, 1994. The quake rumbled for 30 seconds.

This earthquake was the second-costliest natural disaster in America behind Hurricane Andrew. The quake measured 6.8 on the Richter scale, with 62 deaths and over 9,000 injuries. Twenty thousand people were left homeless, 10,000 homes were destroyed and another 46,000 were damaged. Experiencing this earthquake and the aftermath was traumatic. A friend of mine, Jessica, experienced the earthquake and relates this account.

“I’m a native of Los Angeles, which translates into one fact: I’ve been through many earthquakes. As a little girl, the 1971 Sylmar shaker, measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale, toppled a small statue in my parents’ house and knocked my doll collection to the floor. Several years ago the Whittier earthquake got my blood pumping enough to finally put together an earthquake survival kit: a can of tuna fish, a can of pineapple chunks, some Band-Aids and a sewing kit. Well, even if I remembered where my simple earthquake kit was hidden, it certainly would not have done me any good on

January 17, 1994. After the 6.8 shaker, which left me feeling dizzy for days as the ground continued to rock and sway like a drunken sailor, I was in no mood to eat or sew!

“The truth is, nothing prepared me for that morning. I was fast asleep. Suddenly, I felt the shaking and heard a loud noise and woke up. One would have thought I would have jumped out of bed immediately, but I was an old earthquake pro. Thoughts of riding out the quake under the warmth of my blankets crossed my mind. But the shaking got stronger and the noise more intense. My adrenaline kicked in. Leaping out of bed I discovered that the house was rocking so hard I could not move. The cacophony of sounds was frightening. Car alarms blasting, dishes crashing to the floor, buildings cracking, windows blowing out. Through it all, the sound of the earth, belching with a mighty jolt from its bowels, struck terror to my heart. It was a horrible sound. One which no one could ignore. A noise which woke up each and every one of us.

“There was no question in my mind that this was an earthquake. If, what I was feeling in Sherman Oaks was so strong that I could not even walk because the floor was moving so violently, I wondered what it must have been like at the epicenter. My fear was that hundreds of people must have died there. When the shaking finally stopped, I simply stood there, trapped by a mountain of books. Quietly I gave thanks to the Lord because I had survived. I would like to say that my faith prevented fear, but to be honest, I was petrified. My mouth was so dry I could barely speak. My limbs felt like rubber. My thoughts turned to my family, scattered in various parts

of L. A. Were they hurt? Or the unmentionable, were they dead?

“The earthquake of January 17th made every previous quake I had been through seem like a gentle tap. Minutes, hours and days passed. Neighbors screamed, cried and evacuated. Homes were condemned as unsafe and uninhabitable by the city. It turned out that my neighborhood, only a few miles from the epicenter, was one of the worst streets in the earthquake. It was later named one of the 14 ghost towns, an eerie souvenir of January 17th. Almost every building on my street was “red tagged”. This meant that people had to pack up and leave their homes behind. Yet there was one townhouse building, comprised of forty units, which had the overall structure and foundation left intact and deemed safe. That was my home. I knew that the Lord had not only saved my life, but also spared my home. I got on my knees and thanked Him with a grateful heart, “Thank you Lord, for Your hand of protection upon me.”

EARTHQUAKES AND BIBLE PROPHECY

Earthquakes play a role in Bible prophecy. They are mentioned in the Book of Revelation (6:12-17; 8:5; 11:13,19; 16:16-21) as well as the books of Isaiah (2:19,21; 5:25; 24:19), Ezekiel (38:19,20), Joel (2:10; 3:16) and Zechariah (14:4,5). A number of prophecy teachers point to what they assume to be an increase in the number of earthquakes and associate these quakes with the words of Jesus to show we are in, or near, the last days (cf. Matt. 24:7). As one writer puts it, “One of the major birthpangs Jesus predicted would increase in frequency and intensity shortly before His return is earthquakes” (Lindsey 1994: 83). Two questions should

be raised: First, has there actually been an increase in earthquake activities? And second, does Jesus really say there will be an increase in earthquakes before He returns?

In order to understand the purpose of earthquakes in the End-times, one must examine God's purpose for earthquakes in history. In the middle of the 8th century BC, the "Big One" hit the Middle East. Let us examine the Biblical record and the archaeological evidence for this earthquake.

THE EARTHQUAKE IN THE DAYS OF THE PROPHET AMOS AND KING UZZIAH

My study of this earthquake began during the summer of 1987 when I was working on the excavation at Tel Lachish in the Shephelah of Judah. One day I got "Sennacherib's revenge" (that is the Middle East version of "Montezuma's revenge") and was confined to bed, except for the occasional "turkey trot" to the outhouse in the eucalyptus grove some 50 meters from our camp. Trying to keep from getting bored, I began reading the excavation report from Tel Sheva and came across a reference to the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah.

There is considerable evidence to suggest that the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah dealt considerable damage to the Middle East. Dr. Yohanan Aharoni identifies Tel Sheva as Biblical Beer Sheva. Aharoni suggests that Stratum III (the third level of occupation) was partially destroyed by an earthquake during the days of King Uzziah, but quickly rebuilt by its inhabitants (1973: 107,108). The excavator at Tel Lachish concluded that the same earthquake destroyed Stratum IV. When I returned home at the end of the

summer, I compiled a list of sites which were effected by this earthquake. The list raised the questions, "What does this mean? Can we tell anything about this earthquake? Where was the epicenter? How strong was it?" For answers, I turned to my friend Dr. Steve Austin, a geologist at the Institute for Creation Research in San Diego. I gave him the list of sites with copies of the excavation reports and asked the question, "What does this all mean?" His reply was intriguing and exciting.

The Archaeological Evidence

The most vivid archaeological evidence for this earthquake was unearthed at Hazor, in the northern part of Israel, during the 1956 season. The area supervisor, the late Prof. Y. Aharoni, described the destruction to the walls of the houses. Some were cracked and others tilted or fell in a southerly or easterly direction (Yadin 1960: 24). One house had an ivory cosmetic spoon with a woman's head on the backside. Yigal Yadin, the excavator of the site suggested it depicted a fertility goddess (1975: 154,155), something that Isaiah condemned (Isa. 2:8, 18, 20).

This and other small finds gave indication of the material prosperity of the Northern Kingdom in the mid-8th century BC, something which the prophet Amos cried out against two years before this earthquake (Amos 1:1; 6:4). Renewed excavations by Hebrew University have uncovered further evidence of this earthquake (Dever 1992: 27*-35*).

Another city with archaeological evidence for this earthquake is the Jordanian site of Deir 'Alla. This site is situated about two-thirds of the way down the Jordan Rift Valley between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea.

This site also had walls tilting to the south and east as well as evidence for a rainstorm just prior to and during the earthquake (Franken and Ibrahim 1977-78: 68).

None of the excavations, which have been conducted in Jerusalem thus far, have unearthed clear-cut evidence for the earthquake in the mid-8th century BC. However, the literary evidence does suggest some destruction. Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, connected the earthquake with the time King Uzziah was struck with leprosy. He says at the time "... the Temple was raven, a brilliant shaft of sunlight gleaned through it and fell upon the kings face..." He goes on to say, "... while before [to the east of] the city at the place called Eroge [possibly Ein Rogel] half of the western hill [of the mount of Olives] was broken off and rolled four stades [730 meters] till it stopped at the eastern hill [the City of David] and obstructed the roads and royal gardens [in the Kidron Valley]" (Antiquities 9: 224,225; LCL 6: 119). The later reference probably refers to a landslide that resulted from this earthquake. The archaeological evidence from Deir 'Alla suggests that there was a rain storm prior to the earthquake. This would make the soil more susceptible to landslides. Recent studies by Israeli geologists show the western slopes of the Mount of Olives is landslide prone and there is strong evidence that three ancient landslides existed (Wachs and Levitte 1983; 1984: 118-121). Josephus probably referred to the one just above the southern end of the Silwan Village. This landslide would have filled in part of the Kidron Valley and probably covered Ein Rogel ("the springs of Rogel") with large amounts of dirt. It might have been Uzziah, or his son Jotham, who sank a deep well, known today by the Arabs as Bir 'Ayyub (the "well of Job") to

reach the waters of the spring. The prophet Zechariah (14:4,5) refers to this landslide as well (Wachs and Levitte 1984: 119,120, editor note). The noise generated by this landslide, especially as the sound echoed off the Kidron and Hinnom Valleys, must have been great. No wonder the people fled. The noise would have been enough to put the fear of the Lord into anybody!

Lachish, located about 28 miles southwest of Jerusalem in the Shephelah, has no visual evidence of this earthquake. However, certain considerations lead the excavator, David Ussishkin, to conclude that this earthquake destroyed Level IV (1977: 14-27).

Tel 'Erany, located a few miles to the west of Lachish, had uprooted walls and split paved floors in the Level VI city as evidence of this destruction as well (Yeivin 1979: 168).

During the 1990 season at Tel Gezer, evidence for this earthquake was unearthed in the area of the "Outer Wall". Here, large blocks were cracked from top to bottom. In another place, the upper two courses were displaced upwards and outwards, as though they had violently "jumped" off their foundation (Dever 1992: 30; Younker 1991: 28). Randy Younker, the associate director of the excavation, eventually convinced Dr. Dever, the director, that this was evidence for an earthquake based on his first hand experience with earthquakes in California (Dever 1992: 30).

A final site with archaeological evidence of this earthquake is 'En Hazeva, identified as Biblical Tamar, in the Aravah. In the gate area there are walls bowed outward with cracked stones on multiple courses. The excavators concluded, "based on the destruction debris

and its configuration, we believe that the quake mentioned in Amos and Zechariah was responsible for the destruction of the Stratum 5 fortress gate complex..." (Cohen and Yisrael 1995: 231).

These are some of the sites that have clear evidence of an earthquake in the mid-8th century BC. While we are dealing with a limited amount of evidence, a clear picture is emerging, i.e. a very violent earthquake in the middle of the 8th century BC with the tremor originating north of the land of Judah and Israel.

The Geological Evidence

Much research has been done on earthquakes in antiquities (Amiran 1951: 223-246; 1952:48-65; Amiran, Ariei and Turcotte 1994: 260-305; Amiran 1996: 120-130). Unfortunately there were no seismometers in the 8th century BC to measure earthquakes. If there were, we could determine where the epicenter was as well as the magnitude on the Richter scale. We do, however, have the observations of the destruction at archaeological sites that may help determine the intensity of the earthquake.

I gave this information to Dr. Steve Austin at the Institute for Creation Research. Using a modified Mercalli scale, he was able to suggest that the epicenter was probably located to the northeast of Hazor in Lebanon (Austin, Franz and Frost 2000:666,667). Austin based his suggestion on the direction of the collapsed and leaning walls and isoseismals. He also proposed that the magnitude of this earthquake was about 8.2 on the Richter scale! (Austin, Franz and Frost 2000: 667.669). This earthquake was the largest in the last 4,000 years on the Dead Sea-Jordan Rift.

The Biblical Evidence

Assigning a date would help to put this earthquake into perspective. Unfortunately the chronology of the 8th century is a thorny issue and scholars cannot agree on some dates. For the sake of convenience, this discussion assumes the standard chronology of Edwin Thiele who places it in the year 750 BC. Josephus and the Rabbinic sources state that the earthquake took place the same time King Uzziah was struck with leprosy. Josephus also seems to hint that the earthquake took place on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement (Antiquities 9: 222-227; LCL 6: 117-121). This would also fit the evidence for a rainstorm found at Dier 'Alla. Yom Kippur is at the beginning of the early rains.

The prophet Amos brings his message of impending judgment to the high place at Bethel “two years before the earthquake” (1:1). In this sermon he predicts there will be a strong earthquake (Amos 4:11; 6:11; 9:1) and other calamities in the near future if the people do not turn back to the Lord, His Word and His Temple in Jerusalem and away from oppressing the poor and needy. The ultimate judgment would be captivity by the Assyrians. Amos appears to use this earthquake as a “proof” that his words about the captivity would be fulfilled. If the epicenter were in the Mediterranean Sea, one would expect a tsunami phenomenon (tidal waves). Interestingly enough, some of the rabbinic sources seem to refer to such a phenomenon. Amos 5:8 and 9:6 state, “Who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the face of the earth” (Luria 1987: 259-262). Because Amos was able to predict this earthquake two years before it happened, something modern geologists cannot

do, Dr. Austin has begun to call this earthquake “Amos’ earthquake”!

The prophet Isaiah ministered in Jerusalem to the Kingdom of Judah and was a contemporary of Amos, also mentions this earthquake. Isaiah 2-6 gives a vivid picture of the moral conditions of the Kingdom of Judah during the reign of King Uzziah (II Chron. 26). The king began his reign following the Lord, but because of his strength, his heart was lifted up with pride (26:16, cf. Prov. 16:18). The people of Judah saw this arrogant attitude and followed the example of their leader. [Who said character does not matter?!] In the second chapter of his book, Isaiah addresses the deep seeded problem in Jerusalem and Judah, the sin of pride. He demonstrated the proper use of prophecy by describing the “latter days” (2:1) and encouraged the people to walk in light of what it shall be like some day in the future (2:2-5). There is a day coming when Jerusalem will be exalted (2:2), yet the people were exalting themselves (2:11, 17). There would be a day coming when the people would learn the Word of God (2:4), yet the people were neglecting to apply the word of God to their lives (2:6-9). There would be a day when there would be no more military activity because the people would beat their swords into plowshares (2:4), yet the expansionist policies of King Uzziah dictated he build up his military forces (II Chron. 26:6-15). In light of what it shall be like some day in the future, the proper response of the people should have been to live in light of the Word of God today. The Apostle John sets forth this same principle for the Church today (I John 3:1-3). Isaiah predicted that a strong earthquake would be used as an instrument of God’s judgment, if the people did not

humble themselves and turn back to the Lord (2:19,21, "...when He arises to shake the earth mightily").

When Dr. Austin sent me his conclusions on the geology of this earthquake, he included a map with a proposal that the epicenter was a point north of Hazor with the isoseismal lines emanating from it. My mind immediately went to Isaiah 2:13-16 and wondered if Isaiah knew of the direction of the shock waves. These verses reflect the north-south progression of the shock waves emanating from this earthquake. "Upon all the cedars of Lebanon that are high and lifted up [the territory of Lebanon], and upon all the oaks of Bashan [the Golan Heights], upon all the high mountains [Upper Galilee], and upon all the ships of Tarshish [those ships anchored at Ashdod, now controlled by Uzziah (II Chron. 26:6), and destroyed by the seismic sea-wave (tsunami)]. I cannot be dogmatic on this point, but it is a possibility.

Isaiah, the (Biblical) political activist, composed a song expressing God's displeasure with His people after all He had done for them. They had neglected the two pillars of social concern, justice and righteousness. Instead, there was oppression and weeping (5:7). In his explanation of the song he pronounced "woes" against the people of Judah (5:8-25). He singles out the pleasure seekers (party animals), among others, for their excessive drunkenness because "... they do not regard the work of the Lord, not consider the operation of His Hand" (5:12).

My only experience in an earthquake was on April 23, 1979 while studying at the Institute of Holy Land Studies in Jerusalem. It registered a 5.1 magnitude on the Richter scale (Amiran, Arie and Turcotte 1994:

284). As I recall, I was sitting in my room listening to the afternoon news broadcast. It was an eerie feeling as the quake hit and I watched the walls swayed as if elastic. When I realized what was going on, I got out of the building as quickly as possible. The “party animals” (5:11,12) probably saw the walls of their houses swaying the morning of Yom Kippur, after a night of feasting and drinking, instead of fasting, as they should, and thought nothing of the swaying. They reasoned, “The walls always appear to sway when I am drunk!” Not recognizing the hand of the Lord, they stayed in their houses as the roofs collapsed and killed them. Sheol, the place of the departed dead, is pictured as enlarging itself (5:14, 15), indicating that a considerable number of people were killed as a result of this earthquake. During the reign of Jotham and Jeroboam II, a census was taken (I Chron. 4:17), probably to determine how many people survived this devastating tragedy.

Some time after the earthquake, possibly around 735 BC, Isaiah reminded the people in the Northern Kingdom of their pride and arrogance by describing the aftermath of the earthquake. “The bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with hewn stones; the sycamores were cut down, but we will replace them with cedars” (9:8-11; Hayes and Irvine 1987: 184-186).

The Psalms of the sons of Korah, in my opinion, were composed in the 8th century BC, probably during the reign of King Hezekiah. The psalmist may be referring back to this earthquake in the beginning of Psalm 46. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the

midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with swelling. Selah.” This could be a description of the shock waves as well as landslides around the Sea of Galilee. There appears to be evidence for ancient landslides on the eastern and western shores of the Sea of Galilee.

The prophet Zechariah, more than 250 years after the earthquake states: “You shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah” (14:5). Recent studies of the Mount of Olives by Israeli geologists may be able to shed light on this passage (Wachs and Levitte 1984: 118-121). They think a landslide might be connected with the “splitting” of the Mount of Olives. In an extensive note by the editors, it was observed, “Regarding this passage there exists two conflicting interpretations. The more common reading of the text following the mention of splitting of the Mount of Olives is ‘And ye shall flee to the valley of my mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azel...’ as in the Masoretic text ... The Revised Standard Version (King James) Old Testament gives instead, ‘And the valley of my mountains shall be stopped up for the valley of the mountains shall touch the side of it...’ The source of this discrepancy lies in the confused reading of the Hebrew word for ‘shall be stopped up’..., and for ‘ye shall flee’... The vowels in both words are identical, but when the diacritical points were added to the Hebrew Bible at a later period to facilitate reading, the text was apparently misunderstood and the meaning changed in this case. ... The present authors, relying on their geological knowledge as elaborated in this article, have adopted the ‘shall be stopped up’ reading as more plausible in

relation to the natural phenomena described" (Wachs and Levitte 1984: 119,120 editor note). This is something to consider.

The earthquake in the mid-eighth century BC served as a warning of a greater judgment to come, captivity by the Assyrians. It confirmed the messages of the prophets Amos and Isaiah. Yet the people did not respond in a positive manner to the message of God.

EARTHQUAKES IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The Book of Revelation, written about A.D. 95, mentions at least five earthquakes (6:12-17; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:16-21). The final earthquake, mentioned in the seventh bowl of wrath, is described as "a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath" (Rev. 16: 18, 19).

The First century readers of the Book of Revelation would be "shaken" (no pun intended) by the statement "a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth." Some of the elderly people of the cities of Asia Minor would have remembered the earthquake of AD 17. Pliny described this earthquake in his Natural History. "The greatest earthquake in human memory occurred when Tiberius Caesar was emperor, twelve Asiatic cities being overthrown in one night" (2:86:200; LCL 1: 331). Tacitus, in his Annals, described this earthquake as well. "In the same year, twelve important cities of Asia collapsed in an earthquake, the time being night, so that

the havoc was the less foreseen and the more devastating. Even the usual resource in these catastrophes, a rush to open ground, was unavailing, as the fugitives were swallowed up in yawning chasms. Accounts are given of huge mountains sinking, of former plains seen heaved aloft, of fires flashing out amid the ruin. As the disaster fell heaviest on the Sardians, it brought them the largest measure of sympathy, the Caesar promising ten million sesterces, and remitting for five years their payments to the national and imperial exchequers" (2:47; LCL 3: 459). The elderly people of Asia Minor would have remembered the devastation of the AD 17 earthquake and thought to themselves, "If that was the worst recorded earthquake in human history and Revelation 16 predicts one even worse, I would not want to be around when that one hits!"

IS THERE AN INCREASE IN EARTHQUAKES?

After each major earthquake around the world, the pop-prophecy literature seems to contain articles regarding earthquakes and Bible prophecy. Invariably these articles point to the increase in earthquakes as proof that Jesus is coming soon. One writer states, "In the first century, Jesus Christ predicted an increase in earthquakes as a sign of His Second Coming" (Church 1994: 12). He then proof-text his point by quoting Matthew 24:7: "For nations will rise against nations, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places." Note the passage only says there will be "earthquakes in various places". It does not say there will be an increase. It is amazing how some prophecy teachers read into the passage something that is not there.

Two of the most popular prophecy teachers make similar statements. One says, "Earthquakes continue to increase in frequency and intensity, just as the Bible predicts for the last days before the return of Christ. History shows that the number of killer quakes remained fairly constant until the 1950s - averaging between two to four per decade. In the 1950s, there were nine. In the 1960s, there were 13. In the 1970s, there were 51. In the 1980s, there were 86. From 1990 through 1996, there have been more than 150" (Lindsey 1997: 296). His source is the United States Geological Survey (USGS), yet he gives no documentation for these statements. Another prophecy teacher, also citing the USGS says, "However, since A.D. 1900, the growth in major earthquakes has been relentless. From 1900 to 1949 it averaged three major quakes per decade. From 1949 the increase became awesome with 9 killer quakes in the 1950s; 13 in the 1960s; 56 in the 1970s and an amazing 74 major quakes in the 1980s. Finally, in the 1990s, at the present rate, we will experience 125 major killer quakes in this decade" (Jeffrey 1996: 194).

The geologist, who developed the Richter scale, apparently had some contact with prophecy teachers. In 1969 he wrote, "One notices with some amusement that certain religious groups have picked this rather unfortunate time to insist that the number of earthquakes is increasing. In part they are misled by the increasing number of small earthquakes that are being cataloged and listed by newer, more sensitive stations throughout the world. It is worth remarking that the number of great earthquakes from 1896 to 1906 (about twenty-five) was greater than in any ten-year interval since" (Richter 1969: 44).

Two prophecy researchers wrote to a number of reputable seismologists around the world and asked three questions of them. “(1) Do you feel that there has been a tremendous increase in major earthquakes during this century compared with earlier centuries? (2) Do you feel that the earthquake activity in this century is in any way unique? (3) Do you know of any other seismologist who holds that our time has seen an unusually large number of earthquakes?” In an appendix a selected number of letters were reprinted. All the responses were unanimous that there has NOT been a dramatic increase in earthquakes, as prophecy teachers would like to have us think (Jonsson and Herbst 1987: 46-87, 237-248).

More recently, a notice appeared on the US Geological Survey website entitled “Are Earthquakes Really on the Increase?” They state, “Although it may seem that we are having more earthquakes, earthquakes of magnitude 7.0 or greater have remained fairly constant throughout this century and, according to our records, have actually seemed to decrease in recent years.” They go on to explain why. “In the last twenty years, we have definitely had an increase in the number of earthquakes we have been able to locate each year. This is because of the tremendous increase in the number of seismograph stations in the world and the many improvements in global communications. In 1931, there were about 350 stations operating in the world; today, there are more than 4,000 stations and the data now comes in rapidly from these stations by telex, computer and satellite. This increase in the number of stations and the more timely receipt of data has allowed us and other seismological centers to locate many more small earthquakes which

were undetected in earlier years, and we are able to locate earthquakes more rapidly.” [http://wwwneic.cr.usgs.gov/neis/general/handouts/increase_in_earthquakes.html]

Dr. Steve Austin has demonstrated that the lists of the number of earthquakes given by the popular prophecy teachers are incomplete and poorly documented. If their analysis is correct, two assumptions should be true. “(1) a comparative infrequency of big earthquakes occurred in the first half of the century, and (2) an obvious increase in the frequency of big earthquakes occurred since 1950” (Austin and Strauss 1999: 34). Dr. Austin demonstrates in his article that both assumptions are false and concludes the exact opposite. “(1) a comparative excess of big earthquakes occurred in the first half of the century, and (2) an obvious decrease in the frequency of big earthquakes occurred since 1950” (Austin and Strauss 1999: 34). It behooves the prophecy teacher to be meticulous and complete in ones research and properly and completely document ones findings.

What do prophecy teachers do when confronted with the evidence that earthquakes are not on the increase? One prophecy teacher dismisses the evidence as unreliable because the geologists were “schooled with the uniformitarian secular viewpoint” (Church 1997:337)! This teacher is asking his readers to ignore the geological evidence and to blindly accept his interpretation of the text. It should be pointed out that Dr. Austin is a “young earth creationist”!

Are earthquakes on the increase? It might be hard to convince my friends in Southern California and some

prophecy teachers, but the answer is “No!” Yet the prophetic Scripture does not state there will be an increase, it just states there will be earthquakes in “different places”. Let us not read into the verse more than is there.

APPLICATION

It would have been interesting to take a survey of all the churches in Los Angeles on the Sunday after the earthquake (January 23, 1994) and see how many preachers spoke on the “increase in earthquakes” as a sign of Jesus’ soon return. One would hope that many preachers spoke in the vein of Isaiah and Amos, warning the people in the area to return to the Lord and His Word.

John Chrysostom, a priest in Antioch (in present day Turkey), took advantage of a similar situation after an earthquake devastated that city in AD 388 or 389. In his sixth sermon on Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16), given a few days after the earthquake, he warned the people of Antioch of a greater judgment to come (Roth 1984: 15, 16, 97-124).

My friend Jessica sent me an insightful handout prepared by her pastor, Jack Hayford of “The Church on the Way” in Van Nuys after the earthquake (Hayford 1994). He pointed out the every believer has three assignments in this life. They are: “(1) to show forth good works (Matt. 5:16); (2) to shine forth a clear witness (I Pet. 3:15); and (3) to sustain a life of effective, spiritually impacting prayer (Rom. 8:26-28)”. Churches acted as relief distribution centers for supplies that came into the area from various Christian organizations (Kellner 1994: 56, 57). What an opportunity for believers

in the Lord Jesus to show forth “good works” (Tit. 3:8; Gal. 6:10). This testimony afforded the opportunity to share the Scriptures to those who were asking “Where is God in the middle of all this?” The rest of Hayford’s handout provides the answer to this question from the Bible. All natural disasters are the result of the Fall (sin), but there is hope for those who would put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. The third issue he focused on was prayer. As Pastor Hayford commented, “We need to pray. We need to pray in confidence that it IS true – things would have been worse without what prayer there has been offered, AND, things will be worse if we don’t continue to intercede”. These comments on prayer are in the vein of Amos (7:1-6). He prayed, God heard, and judgment was stayed.

Are earthquakes on the increase? No. Are they a warning of greater judgment to come? Yes. Just as Amos and Isaiah warned the Northern and Southern Kingdoms respectively, of a violent earthquake to come and their words were confirmed by that earthquake a few years later. History has borne out the fact that the Northern Kingdom did not heed the words of Amos after the earthquake and they continued in their sinful ways. Since they did not take this warning to heart, Amos’ other prediction, captivity by the Assyrians, was fulfilled more than 25 years later. Today, earthquakes should be understood as signposts pointing to a greater judgment, separation from God for all eternity in Hell if an individual does not come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior.

The 1994 Northridge earthquake hit the pornography industry very hard. This industry, centered in and around Northridge, had every major studio and

distribution center hit during the quake. One pornography film director said, "Can you imagine how the fundamentalist are going to leap on this when the smoke clears? They will say it's God's retribution" (Ferraiulo 1994: 57). Retribution? Probably not. God still loves them, yet hates their sin. In love, He has given them a warning and longs for them to trust Him as their Savior so they will not be separated from Him for all eternity. Pastor Hayford observed, "It seems as though the earthquake forced these people to get honest. It has stirred many to the deepest points of introspection, and if just one of them is turned away from the filth they're involved in, it is a major victory" (Ferraiulo 1994: 57). More realistic is the comment by a Los Angeles Police Department detective, "I don't think there's anything that will drive these people out of the area, it's a billion dollar business" (Anonymous 1994: A11). The industry, and Los Angeles, will probably continue along their merry, sinful ways just like the Northern Kingdom did in the years after the earthquake, yet later suffered destruction and captivity. Will they, or anyone else, continue to turn their hearts from the warning God has given? Or will they examine their own lives, admit they are sinners and can not save themselves and put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as the One who paid the penalty for their sin?

The believer in the Lord Jesus should see earthquakes as the "whole creation groans and labor with birth pangs ... even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:22,23). The believer can look forward to a perfect creation wherein righteousness and the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ dwells.

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Is Mount Sinai in Saudi Arabia

Two treasure hunters stood on the top of Jebel al-Lawz thinking it was the real Mt. Sinai, the "Mountain of God". One was struck with fear because he thought he was trespassing on the "holiest place on earth". As he gulped down Gatorade and munched on M & M's, a sense of guilt overcame him because he had forged a letter from the king of Saudi Arabia in order to obtain a visa into the Kingdom (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: 10, 11, 74, 77, 79; Blum 1998: 206). Should he have felt guilty for this deceit? Yes, what he did was illegal, and offended the honor of the Saudi Arabian people. Should he have been afraid because he was on the holy mountain of God (Ex. 19:12)? No, because he was standing on the wrong mountain. MT. SINAI IS NOT IN SAUDI ARABIA!

This article will examine four aspects of the question regarding whether or not Mt. Sinai is located in Saudi Arabia. First, the credibility of the claims will be questioned. Second, the false assumptions by the proponents of Jebel al-Lawz will be disputed. Third, the Biblical evidence will be discussed. Fourth, the archaeological evidence will be examined.

Mount Sinai was the destination of Moses and the Children of Israel after the Lord miraculously delivered them from the bondage of Egypt (Ex. 18:5). It was from this mountain that the Lord also gave the Ten Commandments to Moses and the people of Israel (Ex. 19:1-3, 11,18; 20:1-17). Here, too, the prophet Elijah found himself after his escape from wicked Queen Jezebel (I Kings 19).

Pilgrims, scholars and tourists have visited the traditional site, Jebel Musa (Arabic for the Mountain of Moses) for more than 1,600 years. In the early 4th century AD Eusebius of Caesarea placed Mt. Sinai in the southern Sinai Peninsula. When Egeria made a pilgrimage to the East between AD 381 and 384, she visited Jebel Musa as Mt. Sinai (Wilkinson 1981: 1, 18, 91-100). This impressive mountain located in the southern Sinai Peninsula is situated behind the Byzantine monastery of St. Catherine's built by Emperor Justinian in the middle of the sixth century AD (Tsafrir 1978:219).

It may come as a surprise to most people, but scholars have identified 13 different sites as the "real" Mount Sinai (Har-el 1983:2). I would agree with the proponents of the Jebel al-Lawz hypothesis that Jebel Musa, the traditional Mt. Sinai, or any other site in the southern Sinai Peninsula, could not be the real Mt. Sinai. Professor Har-el in his book, *The Sinai Journeys*, has argued very convincingly, against the southern Sinai theory (1983: 175-233).

Recently, six American treasure hunters have added a 14th mountain to the already long list of candidates for the real Mt. Sinai: Jebel al-Lawz.

- Map of the route of the Exodus according to Har-El

Who's Who Among the Treasure Hunters

The idea of Mt. Sinai being in Midian (Saudi Arabia) is not new. Charles Beke suggested Mount Baggir, to the NE of the Gulf of Akaba, as the true location of Mt. Sinai in his book *Sinai in Arabia and of Midian* in 1878. Alois Musil (1926: 263,264, 269, 296-298) and H. Philby (1957: 222-224) identify Mt. Sinai / Horeb with Jebel al-

Manifa, near Wadi al-Hrob, 20 kilometers north of 'Ajnuna (1926: 269, 297). A French scholar, Jean Koenig (1971), has added the volcanic peak of Hala'l bedr to the list.

The late Ron Wyatt, a certified registered nurse anesthetist (CRNA) turned treasure hunter, added a fourth Midian site, Jebel al-Lawz, to the list. He also claimed to have discovered Noah's Ark, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Red Sea crossing and some of pharaoh's chariots, the Ark of the Covenant with the blood of Jesus on the mercy seat, and other spectacular archaeological discoveries. This list is enough to make any archaeologist green with envy! However, one of Wyatt's partners in his Saudi Arabian venture called it a "treasure hunt" (Fasold 1993b:4).

In 1978, Wyatt claimed to have discovered the Red Sea crossing at Newaba in the Gulf of Akaba (the eastern branch of the Red Sea) and some of "pharaoh's chariot wheels." This led Wyatt to conclude that Mt. Sinai must be in Saudi Arabia. His candidate for Mt. Sinai was Jebel al-Lawz because it was the highest peak in the entire NW Saudi Arabian region (Noorbergen 1982: 157-174). In 1984, Ron Wyatt and his two sons illegally crossed the border of Jordan into Saudi Arabia to visit the site. They explored and photographed the area around Jebel al-Lawz. As they tried to get back across the border they were captured, their film confiscated, and were jailed for 78 days as Israeli spies. They were eventually released.

In April 1985, Wyatt returned to Saudi Arabia legally under the patronage of a certain Mr. Samran al-Motairy. This time he had a contract with Samran to split the take on any "commercial minerals" found by them on

their treasure hunt (Fasold 1993b: 4-6; Blum 1998: 47). To help locate the gold, Wyatt convinced David Fasold, with his "molecular frequency generator" (MFG), into joining their expedition to search for the "gold of Exodus" (Blum 1998: 49-51). Fasold claims this device can detect various types of metal under the ground.

When one of Samran's workers discovered "a bracelet that glittered for all the world like the purest of gold" (Blum 1998: 58), they were arrested and charged with "robbing Saudi Arabia of its wealth from antiquity" which they claimed was a capital offense (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: 218). When they were finally released, all their film and notes were confiscated, and they were made to promise they would never return to Saudi Arabia and never publish or talk about their findings (Blum 1998: 59; Williams 1990: 25).

Upon his return, Fasold told Jim Irwin, the Apollo 15 astronaut who walked on the moon. Irwin in turn put Fasold in touch with two other potential treasure hunters - Larry Williams, a commodity trader and part time treasure hunter, and Robert Cornuke, a former police officer and SWAT team member (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: 218). Fasold told them about the location of Mt. Sinai and the gold from Egypt. Part of his material is reproduced in Williams' book (1990: 25, 209-211) as well as his own newsletters (1993a; 1993b). Before they began this venture, they consulted an unnamed university professor in California, who wishes his identity to remain a "deep dark secret" (Blum 1998: 108). He seemed to agree with this idea and encouraged them in their pursuit.

Williams and Cornuke journeyed to Saudi Arabia twice in the summer of 1988 as self-proclaimed "Adventurers of History" in search of Mt. Sinai and the "gold of Exodus." They returned to tell the tale (Williams 1990:10,23). Larry Williams wrote a book about their adventures entitled *The Mountain of Moses, The Discovery of Mount Sinai* (1990). It was later reprinted under the title *The Mount Sinai Myth* (1990).

Another author, Howard Blum also wrote a popular book entitled *The Gold of Exodus: The Discovery of the True Mount Sinai* (1998a) based on the adventures of these two treasure hunters. The book has some inconsistencies. For example, Ronald Hendel (1999: 54) points out that before Williams and Cornuke went to Saudi Arabia in the summer of 1988, they had a meeting with an unnamed Biblical scholar from southern California. During the course of the conversation the unnamed scholar mentioned an interview of Dr. Frank Moore Cross in the August 1992 edition of *Bible Review* (Blum 1998:120-122). Talk about getting an advance copy of a publication! How did this professor get a copy of a 1992 issue of *Bible Review* in 1988?! The book is excerpted in an article in the February 1998 issue of "Vanity Fair" (Bloom 1998b).

A video entitled; "The Search for the Real Mt. Sinai" (1998) is being distributed based on these books. According to the advertisement for the video, Hershel Shanks, the editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, endorsed this video by saying; "Jabal al Lawz is the most likely site for Mount Sinai."

A weak review of Blum's book and the video was given by Ronald Hendel in the July / August 1999 issue of

Biblical Archaeology Review (pages 54, 56) in which he never adequately deals with the arguments set forth by Williams and Blum. A spirited response appeared in the November / December 1999 issue of the same magazine by Tom Beard, the producer of the video (pages 66, 67). Hershel Shanks also added a clarification of his endorsement. He said, "The quote attributed to me is accurate but incomplete. I went on to say that all identifications of Mt. Sinai are highly speculative. A good case has been made that it is somewhere in northwest Saudi Arabia, and Jebel al-Lawz is the highest point in this area" (page 67).

In the spring of 2000, Bob Cornuke came out with his book that recounts their adventures in Saudi Arabia. The book is entitled *In Search of the Mountain of God* with the subtitle "The discovery of the real Mt. Sinai" (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000). It is basically a retelling of his and Williams' adventures found in the other books, but it also has a section at the end of the book about their search for pharaoh's chariots in the Gulf of Akaba. He has a tendency to embellish, just like Blum. For example, he claims the signs on the fence surrounding Jebel al-Lawz said, "No Trespassing Allowed. Violators Will Be Put to Death" (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: 1). Yet if one looks at the photograph in Blum's book, the sign actually says, "Archaeological area warning: It is unlawful to trespass. Violators are subject to penalties stipulated in the antiquities regulations passed by royal decree no. M 26, U 23.6.1392" (1998: plate 4, top). Williams (1990: 157) just mentions the fines, but not the death penalty.

The thesis of these books and video is that the real Mount Sinai is located at Jebel el-Lawz in Saudi Arabia,

and the gold that the Israelites took from the Egyptians is in "them thar hills!" Are their views correct? The simple answer is no. There are a number of significant problems with this view. Mount Sinai is in the Sinai Peninsula right where the Bible places it.

Problems With This View

The biggest problem with the identification of Mt. Sinai at Jebel el-Lawz is that it does not meet the Biblical criteria for the site. These claims are based on three false assumptions and a misunderstanding of the archaeological remains that they observed. It is beyond the scope of this article to deal with the Red Sea crossing and the chronology of the Exodus from Egypt to Mt. Sinai. I will tackle these issues in a future issue of "Bible and Spade."

False Assumption #1: The Sinai Peninsula was considered the Land of Egypt The first false assumption is that the Sinai Peninsula was within the territorial borders of the Land of Egypt. Over and over in his book, Williams (1990: 15-17, 22, 26) calls the Sinai Peninsula the "Egyptian Peninsula". If one looks at a modern Rand McNally Road map, the Sinai Peninsula is part of modern-day Egypt. However, 3,500 years ago, that was not the case.

The Bible says that once the Israelites left Succoth they were "out of Egypt" (Ex. 13: 18-20). The Land of Goshen was the eastern limits of the Land of Egypt. Apparently the fortresses on the Eastern Frontier Canal was the border between Egypt and the Sinai (Hoffmeier 1997: 164-175). Sir Flinders Petrie, the Father of Palestinian Archaeology, states that the copper and turquoise mines in Sinai were "in the desert outside the territorial border

of Egypt, which passed to the east of the delta" (emphasis mine, cited in Williams 1990: 56). Ironically Williams missed the implication of this statement.

One gets the impression reading Williams, Blum and Cornuke that the Egyptians had year-round mining activities and a standing army all over Sinai (Williams 1990: 58). It is true there were turquoise mines at Serabit el-Khadem in southern Sinai (Beit-Arieh 1993:4:1335-1338). However, as Petrie (1906: viii, 169) points out, mining was seasonal, from January to April, so the Israelites would have found Sinai "quite empty" when they left Egypt. He concluded, "The argument that the Israelites would not have traveled down to the region of the Egyptian mines has no force whatever. The Egyptians never occupied that mining district with a garrison, but only sent expeditions; at the most these were in alternate years, and in the time of Merenptah only once in many years" (Petrie 1906: 206).

It is also true that there were Egyptian soldiers garrisoned in fortresses in Sinai. However, those fortresses were limited to northern Sinai. Alan Gardiner, a leading Egyptologist, did an important study from the Egyptian sources of the "Ways of Horus" across the northern Sinai (1920: 99-116). An extensive survey and some excavations were conducted between 1972 and 1982 along this road in northern Sinai. The excavator concluded, "The survey results enable us for the first time to delineate the course of the 'Ways of Horus' in accurate detail, and to reconstruct the history of settlement and the degree of Egyptian activity on the land bridge between the Delta and southern Canaan" (Oren 1987: 76). One can understand why "God

did not lead them [the Children of Israel] by the way of the land of the Philistines [another name for the 'Ways of Horus'], although that was near; for God said, 'Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war [with the Egyptian garrisons], and return to Egypt'" (Ex. 13: 17; NKJV; the parenthetical statements are the author's). This verse also places the Sinai Peninsula outside the Land of Egypt. If the Children of Israel saw war with the Egyptian garrisons on the Ways of Horus in the Sinai Peninsula, they would return to Egypt. The Sinai was outside the Land of Egypt.

Another archaeologist who excavated extensively in Sinai, observed, "ancient Egyptian hegemony never extended into south central Sinai. The Egyptians did reach the western strip of southern Sinai, where they worked the turquoise mines of Serabit el-Khadem and similar mines at nearby Wadi Maghara. But despite the fact that south central Sinai contains copper deposits that were highly prized in ancient times, there is no evidence to indicate that the Egyptians were active in the exploitation of these copper deposits" (Beit-Arieh 1988: 36).

Williams (1990: 57,58) and others wonder how the Israelites could wander in the Sinai Peninsula for 40 years without running into the Egyptians. As noted above, there were some parts of Sinai that did not have any Egyptians. It should also be kept in mind what happened at the Red Sea. Pharaoh's elite force of 600 chariots and all his other chariots (Ex. 14:7, 9, 23-30; Josephus says that there was an additional 50,000 horsemen and 200,000 infantry, Antiquities 2:324, LCL 4: 307) were destroyed when the Red Sea collapsed on them (Ex. 14:23-30; 15:4,5).

As a result, Israel "feared and believed" the LORD (Ex. 14: 31). The Philistines, Edomites, Moabites, and Canaanites were afraid and trembled (Ex. 15:14-16; Josh. 2: 10). If there were any military units left in Sinai, either from an expedition to the turquoise mines in Southern Sinai or guarding the "Ways of Horus" in Northern Sinai, what Egyptian military commander in his right mind would want to confront Israel?! They understood Moses' statement that the LORD was a "Man of War" and He was an awesome and powerful God (Ex. 15: 3,6,7; if. 14:25 NKJV).

Cornuke raises the problem of the lack of archaeological evidence for Israel in Sinai. After citing Beit-Arieh's 1984 article in *Biblical Archaeology Review*, he says, "Fifteen years of exhaustive, painstaking investigation by veteran archaeologists found nothing to suggest as many as two-and-a-half million Jewish pilgrims once flooded the Egyptian landscape. No trace of a mighty host littering the wilderness with their smoking campfires, stores of food, cook pots, and acres of pottery, ceremonial implements and utensils, weapons, jewels, trinkets, and religious objects. No evidence of huge herds, flocks, or the daily waste and abandoned junk of a wandering multitude. Nothing" (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: 168).

In another article, Dr. Beit-Arieh (1988: 37) reiterates the problem: "Nowhere have we found any material remains of human occupation at the time (Late Bronze Age 1550 1200 BC) when the Exodus is supposed to have occurred". He continues with a plausible solution to the problem, although I do not think he believes it: "Perhaps it will be argued, by those who subscribe to the traditional account in the Bible, that the Israelite

material culture was only of the flimsiest kind and left no trace. Presumably the Israelite dwellings and artifacts consisted only of perishable materials" (Beit-Arieh 1988: 37).

The above results are understandable under "normal" conditions. Perhaps Cornuke did not consider that when the Israelites left Egypt, they had their kneading bowls (probably made of wood); the clothes on their back and any other clothes the Egyptians gave them. They also asked for, and received, gold and silver (Ex. 3: 21,22; 11: 2,3; 12: 34,35). Josephus adds that they received vessels of brass, which were used for their manna, metals, woven fabrics, decorations for armor, beasts of burden, and military implements (Antiquities of the Jews 3: 57; LCL 4: 347).

The armor they picked up after the Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea (Antiquities of the Jews 3: 59; LCL 4: 347). They dwelt in tents made from goat hair, not buildings. They also had the promise of God that their clothes and sandals would not wear out (Deut. 8: 4; 29: 5,6). Most of the articles were perishable and those metal objects were closely guarded because of their value. Most likely the Israelites left their pottery in Egypt because they knew it would break so they used the brass given to them by the Egyptians. They would have had no personal religious articles because that would be idolatry.

Due to the above factors, it is understandable that one would not expect to find archaeological remains.

In summary, Egypt exploited the natural resources of Sinai and controlled certain roads in the northern part

of the peninsula, but it was not within the borders of the Land of Egypt.

St. Catherine's Monastery at the base of Jebel Musa, the traditional location of Mt. Sinai. It was founded as both a monastic center and a pilgrimage site. The basilical Church of Justinian inside the compound was built between 548 and 565. In addition to the functional buildings, a "burning bush" and "well of Moses" are located within the walls of the monastery.

False Assumption #2: Mt. Sinai is in the Land of Midian
The second false assumption is that Mt. Sinai is located in the Land of Midian, which is identified as part of the Saudi Arabian peninsula (Williams 1990:68-74).

I would agree with the proponents of Jebel al-Lawz that Midian is in the area of northwestern Saudi Arabia today. I think most scholars would attest to that (Parr 1989: 39-66; 1996: 213-218). However, the Biblical text does not place Mt. Sinai in the Land of Midian.

- Map of Midian and Jebel-al-Lawz

In an interview with Hershel Shanks, Prof. Frank Moore Cross, retired professor of Hebrew at Harvard University opines that the mountain of God was located in the Land of Midian. When asked if he had a guess what mountain might be Mt. Sinai, he responded, "I really don't. There are several enormous mountains in what is now northwestern Saudi Arabia. Jebel el-Lawz is the highest of the mountain in Midian 8,465 feet higher than any mountain in the Sinai Peninsula; but biblical Mt. Sinai need not be the highest mountain. There is some reason to search for it in southern Edom, which was Midianite terrain before the expansion of the Edomites south" (Shanks 1992:32). He later put the

"Midian Hypothesis" in print, but did not endorse any mountains for the location of Mt. Sinai (Cross 1998: 60-68). Yet the question is still remains, Is Mt. Sinai in Midian?

The assumption that Mt. Sinai is in Midian is based on Ex. 3:1. As Cross (1998: 61) says, "This text presumes that the mountain is in Midian territory". It would be assumed that because Moses kept Jethro's flock of sheep and Jethro was a Midianite. When it says "he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God," the mountain of God must be in Midian. Williams (1990: 58) also states that Moses tended Jethro's flock at Mt. Sinai for 40 years. First of all, it should be pointed out that the Bible, in this verse, does not state that Moses tended the flock at Mt. Sinai for 40 years, nor does it explicitly state Mt. Horeb is in Midian. Second, I think a more plausible explanation of the geography can be given. (For a moment, permit me to assume that Mt. Sinai is outside the Land of Midian. Below I will demonstrate this from Scripture).

It is important to note the chronology and context of Ex. 3:1. In Ex. 2:23 the king of Egypt, who wanted to kill Moses 40 years earlier, died (Ex. 2:15; 4:19; cf. Acts 7:23, 30). Moses, while tending the flock in Midian for most of the 40 years, heard of his death. A plausible scenario of how he heard about the death was from some frankincense caravan that was returning from Egypt to "South Arabia" (MacDonald 1995: 1357). The Children of Israel were groaning because of their bondage in Egypt and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Ex. 2:23-25). Moses, who had a concern for his family (Ex. 4:18) and a heart for the children of Israel, wanted to learn more about

what was going on. He took Jethro's flock to Mt. Sinai (we will assume Mt. Sinai is located at Jebel Sin Bishar in western central Sinai. This region had good pastureland and was well-watered (Har-el 1983: 425)).

It is not unusual for Bedouin shepherds to go long distances to find pasture for their flocks. I have met Bedouin shepherds who come from the Beersheva region with their flocks north of Jerusalem, a distance of over 70 miles. What better cover could Moses want than being an old shepherd tending his sheep? Moses left Egypt as a 40-year-old Egyptian administrator, most likely clean-shaven and bald. Now he was returning as an 80-year-old man, probably with a beard and white hair! (At least that's what Charlton Heston looked like in "The Ten Commandments")! Nobody would recognize him after 40 years of being away (contra Williams 1990: 59). The Angel of the LORD, however, knew who he was and appeared to him in a burning bush (Ex. 3:2 4:17). Moses returned to Jethro (in Midian) and asked his permission to return to Egypt after being away for 40 years (Ex. 4:18). Jethro granted him permission and Moses set out toward Egypt. The Lord instructed Aaron to meet his brother at the mountain of God (Ex. 4:27). The impression from the text is that Moses was almost back to Egypt when he met Aaron and not Aaron traveling all the way to Midian to meet Moses.

If one looks at the Bible carefully, it will be observed that Mt. Sinai is outside the Land of Midian. Two verses demonstrate this placement. The first is found in Exodus 18. In the context, Moses and the Children of Israel are camped at "the Mountain of God" (Mt. Sinai). Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, brings his family to visit with Moses. During the course of their stay, Jethro gives

Moses some invaluable advice about governing the people. In verse 27, it states, "Then Moses let his father-in-law depart [from Mt. Sinai], and he went his way to his own land [Midian]" (NKJV, parenthetical statements added by the author). Jethro departs from Mt. Sinai to return to his own land of Midian.

The second verse that places Mt. Sinai outside the Land of Midian is found in Numbers 10. In the context, the Children of Israel are getting ready to depart from Mt. Sinai and Moses invites his brother-in-law, Hobab, to join them in going to the Promised Land (10:29). Hobab responds, "I will not go, but I will depart [from Mt. Sinai] to my own land [Midian] and to my kinsmen" (10:30). Williams (1990: 73) misses the point of this passage. He says Hobab is telling Moses "that he has no desire to leave his homeland of Midian". Williams is assuming that Mt. Sinai is in Midian. If that were the case, Hobab would have said, "I will not depart, but stay in my own land and with my kinsmen." However, the text is saying Hobab wants to return to his own land, the place of his birth (Midian), which can only be done by departing from Mt. Sinai, because it is outside his homeland. [My thanks to Prof. Faiman for pointing these two verses out to me. Har-el also makes this point (1983: 250)].

False Assumption #3: Galatians 4:25 says Mt. Sinai is in Saudi Arabia The third false assumption is that the Apostle Paul says in Gal. 4:25 that Mt. Sinai was in Saudi Arabia.

Cornuke plainly states this when he says, "The apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, informs us that Mount Sinai is in Saudi Arabia. Not

Egypt!" (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: 171). The Bible says nothing of the sort. Granted, the Holy Spirit could have predicted the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia long before it came on the world scene. After all, He predicted Cyrus by name 210 years before he became king of Persia (Isa. 44:28; 45:1; Antiquities of the Jews 11: 5; LCL 6: 315). Yet all the Bible says is that Mount Sinai is in Arabia.

Moses never uses the word "Arab" or "Arabia" at the time he wrote the Pentateuch. The words appear later in the Bible (I Kings 10:15; II Chron. 9:14; 17:11; 21:16; 22:1; 26:7; Neh. 2:19; 4:7; 6:1; Isa. 13:20; 21:13; Jer. 3:2; 25:24; Ezek. 27:21). So the Apostle Paul does not have a Mosaic use of the word "Arabia" in mind when he uses the word in Gal. 4:25 because "Arabia" did not exist in Moses' day.

The Galatians 4:25 reference might indeed support the view that Mount Sinai was in Saudi Arabia if the Apostle Paul was looking at a 1990 Rand McNally Atlas. However, it would not be true if he was looking at a First Century AD Roman road map. Although no actual maps of Roman Arabia exist from this period, we do possess the accounts of the contemporary travelers such as Strabo, a Greek from Pontus (64 BC to ca. AD 25). He describes the borders of Arabia as having its eastern border at the Persian Gulf and its western border at the East Side of the Nile River. This means that Strabo understood the entire Arabian Peninsula and the Sinai Peninsula to be included in First Century Arabia (Geography 16:4:2; 17:1:21,24-26,30,31; LCL VII: 309; VIII: 71-79, 85-87).

The word "Arab" first appears in an extra-Biblical inscription from a monolith found at Kurkh from the

time of Shalmaneser III (853 BC). Throughout the Assyrian period, various Assyrian kings describe the activities of the Arabs, or desert nomads.

The first time the word "Arabia" is used as a term for a designated geographical area is in the mid-fifth century BC by the famous Greek historian and traveler, Herodotus (born ca. 484 BC). He traveled to Egypt and wrote about his trip in his book, *The Persian Wars*. In his monumental work on ancient Arabs, Dr. Israel Eph'al of Tel Aviv University, points out that "Herodotus calls the entire region east of the Nile and the Pelusian Branch, from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, 'Arabia', and its population 'Arabs' (2: 8, 15, 19, 30, 75, 124, 158)". (Eph'al 1982: 193).

"Now in Arabia, not far from Egypt, there is a gulf of the sea entering in from the sea called Red [the Gulf of Suez], of which the length and narrowness is such as I shall show." Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* 2:11; LCL I: 285,287.

Moreover, in the mid-third century BC, 72 Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek (known as the Septuagint) and followed the contemporary use of the word "Arabia" when they referred to Goshen as "Goshen of Arabia" (Gen. 45:10; 46:34). While Goshen is clearly part of Egypt (Gen. 37:6, 27; Ex. 9:26), the translator imposed the third century BC geographical reality on their translation.

On Egeria's pilgrimage to the Holy Land, she visited Mt. Sinai (Jebel Musa) and also the Land of Goshen (Wilkinson 1981:91-103). In Goshen, she stayed at Clysma, a "city of Arabia" (Wilkinson 1981:100). She wrote, "It gets its name from the region, which is called

'the land of Arabia, the land of Goshen', a region which, while it is part of Egypt, is a great deal better than any of the rest" (1981:100,101). Egeria followed the Septuagint reading of Gen. 46:34 in her description of Goshen being in the Land of Arabia.

Therefore, when the Apostle Paul says that Mt. Sinai is in Arabia, he is using the First century AD understanding of the word. He would be perfectly correct in placing Mt. Sinai in the Sinai Peninsula because the Sinai Peninsula was part of Arabia in his day.

In conjunction with Galatians 4:25, three other verses have been used to demonstrate that Mt. Sinai was outside the Sinai Peninsula: Deuteronomy 33:2; Judges 5:4; and Habakkuk 3:3. It is stated that Seir, Mt. Paran and Teman are located in present day Jordan or even Saudi Arabia (Heiser 1998; Cross 1998).

Most scholars put the territory of Edom in the Transjordanian mountains to the east of the Aravah and northeast of the Gulf of Akaba. A careful examination of the Scriptures places it also on the west side of the Aravah (Num. 34: 3; Josh. 15:1). The area, called today the Central Negev Highlands, from the Wilderness of Zin and Kadesh Barnea, south to Eilat was also Edomite territory (Crew 1981: 121-151; Rasmussen 1989: 91; Meshel 2000: 104). If this were the case, the locations of Seir, Mt. Paran and Teman could be moved back into the Central Negev Highlands and northeast Sinai. A case can be made for Mt. Paran being in the area of Kadesh Barnea, known today as Ein Qudeirat (Num. 13: 26). Mt. Seir could be identified with the Jebel-es-Se'ira, 45 km to the west of Eilat and west of the Kadesh Barnea Eilat

road (Har-el 1983: 338). Teman would be located in the area of Kuntillet 'Ajrud where the inscriptions with the name "Yahweh of Teman" were found (Meshel 1993). If these identifications are accepted, then these passages (Deut. 33:2; Judges 5:4; Habakkuk 3:3) refer to the Lord leading the Children of Israel by the pillar of fire through the northeastern part of the Sinai Peninsula for 40 years.

Eleven Days to Kadesh Barnea

Another major problem for the Jebel el-Lawz site is the statement by Moses that Mt. Horeb (another name for Mt. Sinai) is "eleven days journey from Kadesh Barnea" (Deut. 1:2). It would be impossible to march more than 2 million Israelites through the difficult terrain from Jebel el-Lawz to Kadesh Barnea in the allotted time. However, Wyatt, Williams, Blum and Cornuke all ignore this problem.

Biblical Kadesh Barnea has been located at Ein Qedis (the spring of Qedis), where the Arabic name preserves the Biblical name Kadesh, in NE Sinai. Others have placed it 10 km. to the northwest at the tel near Ein Qudeirat that has an Iron Age fortress on it. Ein Qudeirat is the richest spring in all of Sinai producing a flow of water at about 40 cubic meters per hour! (Dothan 1965: 134). In a popular article on his excavations at Kadesh Barnea, Rudolph Cohen (1981: 21) asks, "Has the site been correctly identified? If so, why have we found no remains from the Exodus period?" I believe the area is correctly identified and as suggested before, would not expect to find remains of the Israelites.

Others that place Mt. Sinai in Midian recognize the "eleven days" problem and place Kadesh Barnea near Petra. The problem with this identification is that the southern border of Israel goes from the Salt Sea (Dead Sea) to the Sea (Mediterranean Sea) via the Wilderness of Zin and Kadesh Barnea (Num. 34: 1-5; Josh. 15: 1-4). If Kadesh Barnea were in the area of Petra, then most of ancient Edom's territory would be in Biblical Israel! Geographically that does not make any sense.

Misunderstanding the Archaeological Evidence

Those who hold to the Jebel al-Lawz site as Mt. Sinai are quick to point out the "archaeological evidence". Their reasoning is, "Look what was found, everything fits, it must be the site"! Let's look at the evidence and see if it really "fits".

Survey of the area

Our treasure hunters write as if they were the first westerners to explore Jebel al-Lawz and the surrounding area to do "research" (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: 2; Williams 1990: 101). Such is not the case.

In the early 1950's, Harry St. John Philby visited the region of Midian and surveyed sites in the area. His book, *The Land of Midian* was published in 1957, and "gives a detailed and reliable account of the topography of the country. Philby's descriptions of such ancient sites as he knew of and visited (such as Mughā'ir Shu'ayb, Rawwafah, and Qurayyah) are also, so far as they go, accurate and useful, but unfortunately his photographs are poor, and he did not publish any plans or any of the surface sherds and other antiquities which he diligently collected during his journeying" (Parr, et. al. 1968-1969: 194). Philby (1957: 209,215) viewed Jebel al-Lawz from

a distance and observed a "patch of snow" at the summit, but did not visit the mountain.

Parr continues: "Prior to Philby's explorations, the region had received a certain amount of attention from travelers and orientalists during the nineteenth and very early twentieth centuries. The early history of this activity has been recounted by Hogarth in *The Penetration of Arabia* (1904), and includes such names as Burckhart (1812), Ruppell (1826), Moresby and Wellsted (1831), Wallin (1848), Burton (1877), Doughty (1877/8), Huber (1878 and 1883) and Euting (1883). The construction of the Hejaz Railway between 1904 and 1908 made the area more accessible, and the opportunity to investigate was taken by such scholars as Jaussen and Savignac (1907-10), Moritz (1910), and Musil (1910)" (Parr et. al. 1968-1969: 196).

Williams laments that he tried to get information on Jebel al-Lawz and the caves at al-Bad' from people in Saudi Arabia. He claims that the government had not produced anything on these archaeological remains (1990: 183). As will be shown below, that is not the case either.

Mt. Sinai Covered with Smoke

Williams and Cornuke have pictures of the summit of Jebel al-Lawz "scorched black". Cornuke attributes this to the smoke that covered the mountain when the Lord came down on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19: 16-20). He claims that the "blackened rock had become a holy handprint for the ages. God placed his signature in heavenly flames in a fashion so electrifying, so stupefying, that man's proud logic and science would be hard-pressed to explain

it" (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: 77). Williams (1990: 78) is a bit more cautious concerning this evidence.

Science may provide the answer. Cornuke (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: 75) and Williams (1990: 167) brought back rocks for "future laboratory analysis". They arranged for geologists to look at their rock samples (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: 116). Researchers are interested in seeing the lab analyses, but they have been unavailable for the last 13 years. Judgment on this evidence should be withheld until the rocks have been scientifically analyzed and properly published.

The Altar of the Golden Calf

The golden calf incident is recorded in Exodus 32 (see also Deut. 9:21). When Moses did not return from his trip to Mt. Sinai, the people requested Aaron make gods for them. He obliged them by taking their earrings and fashioning them into a molded calf. When he presented the calf he said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt" (32:4). How soon he and the Children of Israel forgot the statement of the LORD that He brought them out of Egypt (Ex. 29:45,46)! The Bible says Aaron built an altar before the calf (Ex. 32:5).

Wyatt and Fasold found a huge pile of granite rocks in a plain about a quarter of a mile from the base of the mountain. On it, there were petroglyphs of bovine (bulls, cows and oxen) (Fasold 1993b: 8). Wyatt and Fasold claims that a Saudi archaeologist from Riyadh University said these were Egyptian-style cows and bulls, and that they had never been found anywhere else in Saudi Arabia (Williams 1990: 210, 211). However, in a later article, Fasold (1993b: 12) does not mention the archaeologist's claim, but attributes the identification of

the bovine as Hathor and Apis to Wyatt (Fasold 1993b: 8).

At Fasold's trial, the archaeologist that represented the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia allegedly said, "These drawings are the Hathor and Apis bull from Egypt. I have never seen them in this country before" (Williams 1990: 106). No Saudi archaeologist would say such nonsense. They would be well aware of the surveys that had been done in the area and the unpublished petroglyphs. They know that bovine petroglyphs were found in the Midian area as well as other parts of the country (Livingstone et. al. 1985: 132-134; Plates 126, 127, 133; Nayeem 1990: 91, 92, 95). In all the archaeological literature that I read on rock art in Saudi Arabia, not once have I ever seen the word "Egyptian" connected with the bovine petroglyphs.

Cornuke wondered why bovine petroglyphs were found in this area. He reasoned: "This isn't cattle country. It is sheep country and had been for as long as men had walked these plains. Saudi Arabia has never been known for cattle unless, of course, they were driven here by the fleeing Israelites" (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: 66). Williams makes similar statements as well (1990: 106).

What are we to make of this "evidence"? First, the Bible clearly states that Aaron, not the Children of Israel, made the altar before the golden calf (Ex. 32:5). I find it hard to believe that he could pick up these giant boulders and put them in place to make an altar! Cornuke believed that this "huge mound of stacked granite" (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: 64) was built by "workers skilled in the art of building cities and moving mountains" (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: 65). This view

is contrary to the Scriptures. Aaron built the altar, not the Israelites.

Second, one Saudi archaeologist who did his doctoral thesis on Saudi Arabian rock art dates the "patched bovine" to the Neolithic period (Khan 1991: 115; plate 1). The Neolithic period is considerably earlier than the Late Bronze Age and the date of the Exodus from Egypt. Thus, it has nothing to do with the livestock the Israelites brought out of Egypt (Ex. 12: 38; 17:3; Num. 20:19; 32:1; Deut. 3:19).

Third, during the Neolithic period there was much more rainfall in Saudi Arabia than at the present (Ingraham 1981: 62). Thus there would be ample grazing places for cattle then. One does not have to make the assumption the Israelites drove the livestock to Saudi Arabia.

Fourth, let's assume for a minute that this was the site of the golden calf (However, I do not believe it is). Moses destroyed the golden calf because it was an idol. He would also have erased the petroglyphs of the bovine because they were graven images. Petroglyphs would be totally contrary to the Law that Moses had just received from the Lord on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 20:4). To answer Cornuke's question, "Had we really stumbled upon the altar of the golden calf?" (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000:67). The simple answer is no.

Cave of Moses

Some two kilometers south of the town of al-Bad' are caves called by the local people the caves of Moses and Jethro. Philby (1957: 214) records the local tradition at Bir al Saidni "as the very (well) from which Moses rolled away the stone to draw water for the flocks of Jethro's daughters" (cf. Ex. 2:15-19). Cornuke (Cornuke and

Halbrook 2000: 89-104; plate 13) and Williams (1990: 177-183; pictures 17-19) tell of their adventures in the al-Bad' area.

It should surprise no one that there are traditions that Moses and Jethro lived in the area, after all, this is in the Land of Midian (Ex. 2:15; Acts 7:29). The traditions stem from the fact that there were early Jewish traditions of them in the area (Kerkeslager 1998: 156-158), a Jewish community at the town of Makna to the southwest of al-Bad' on the coast in the 9th century AD (if. Acts 2: 11; Musil 1926: 114, 115) and the Moslem tradition that Moses was one of their prophets (Bosworth 1984).

However, the interpretations that Williams and Cornuke put on these caves do not stand up to the facts. First, it is claimed that Moses and his family lived in these caves (Blum 1998a: plate 2; Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: 103). Second, Cornuke relates that the local tradition states that Jethro and Zipporah were buried in these caves based on some inscriptions found in them (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: 99). Williams (1990: 192) reluctantly came to the conclusion that these were burial caves. Unfortunately they give no serious consideration to the dating of these burial caves. The closest they come is to Williams' (1990: picture 19) claims that they have "Egyptian fronts". What are the facts?

The region around al-Bad' as well as these caves have been explored, surveyed, photographed and published long before Williams and Cornuke ever visited the area (Musil 1926: 108-116; Philby 1957: 233, 257-262; Parr et. al. 1971: 30-35; plate 12-17). The caves are called "Magha'ir Shu'ayb" (the Caves of Jethro) and are in reality, Nabatean tombs dating to the 1st century AD. They are not Midianite tombs dating to the Late Bronze

Age. The so-called "Egyptian front" is similar to what tourists see on the Nabatean tombs of Petra when they visit that site. As for the inscriptions, Musil (1926: 112) found five tombs with them but no mention of Moses, Jethro or Zipporah. Later, a British team of archaeologists resurveyed the tombs and found four inscriptions and published them, again saying nothing about Moses, Jethro or Zipporah (Parr, et. al. 1971: 32, 59). The caves are much later than the time of Moses and have nothing to do with the Exodus narratives.

The Altar of Moses and the 12 Pillars

The Bible says that Moses got up early one morning and built an altar at the base of the Mt. Sinai and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel (Ex. 24: 4).

At the base of Jebel al-Lawz is an enigmatic stone structure. It is comprised of three parallel V-shaped stone walls (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: plate 11 top, 12 top). The Vs are at a 45 degree angle and measures 120 feet in length (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: 86). This complex has been identified as an "angular stone altar" (ibid), trenches where they held the animals for sacrifice (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: plate 12 top), or a temple (Williams 1990: 208, 211; Fasold 1993a: 10).

Dr. Majeed Kahn, a Saudi archaeologist who worked on the survey of the area, has informed me that these are the remains of the living quarters for the miners of a marble quarry in the area. The pottery collected at the site dates to the Nabatean period second century BC-first century AD). "White crude marble" pillars were prepared there and exported to Petra for the buildings in that city. These pillars are not to be identified as the

12 pillars representing the 12 tribes of Israel as Williams (1990: 212) claims.

Williams (1990: 97) states that the "local Bedouins tell us the stones had been removed to Haql for a temple or monument erected by Solomon or Sulliman". Fasold reported that some of the stones were removed in the 1930's to build a mosque in Haql (1993a:10). Elsewhere he says, "There was mention that the temple was put there by Sulliman, I think the name could have been Solomon" (Williams 1990: 211). In a later publication, Fasold reported that their Bedouin guide, Ibrahim, claimed Suleyman erected the temple. He then goes on to say, "It wasn't long before Ron [Wyatt] had the story elaborated into the temple being built by Solomon and Suleyman tearing it down to build the mosque, without a shred of evidence" (Fasold 1993a: 10). The only way the dating of this structure will be resolved is by an archaeological excavation.

To add some confusion to the finds in the area, Wyatt and Fasold found large circular structures some 18 feet in diameter in the immediate area (Williams 1990: 208-210; picture 3; Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: 124). Williams (1990: picture 3) says they are the 12 pillars representing the tribes of Israel, but Cornuke discounts that and says they are either ceremonial platforms or large cisterns (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: 124). From the photographs and drawings, they look to me like the cairns, large stone circles probably connected with burials that are typical to the northwest Saudi Arabian area. The date and function of the cairns are unknown (Ingraham et. al. 1981: 69-71). Similar structures have been found elsewhere in the Levant. Mordechai Haiman, the excavator and surveyor of the cairn fields in the

western Negev Highland in Israel, states that those cairns generally dated to the Early Bronze age "were not burial sites, but were probably used in a death ritual" (1992: 25). I would also place the so-called "boundary stones" (Ex. 19:12) in the same category (Williams 1990: 63; Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: 85,86; plate 10 bottom; Blum 1998: plate 6 bottom).

Dr. Khan informs me that a book on the rock art and archaeology of the al-Bad' area is in preparation by the Saudi Department of Archaeology. It will have a chapter on the archaeology of the Jebel al-Lawz area. We eagerly await this publication for a more definitive explanation of the archaeological remains.

The Split Rock at Horeb

Deuteronomy 9:21 says there is a "brook that descended from the mountain" into which Moses threw the gold dust from the golden calf. Cornuke and Williams found a large ravine that snakes down the mountain. Cornuke observed, "The ancient watershed a chalky, blister-dry remnant of a bygone wellspring was filled with large, water-polished boulders, clear evidence of a fast-rushing torrent. In a land that receives half an inch of rain per decade, it was proof that a stream of some magnitude had once caressed these rocks" (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: 82). They also show a picture of a rock that is split 20 inches apart and suggest this is the rock the Moses struck (Ex. 17:2-6; Ps. 78: 15, 16, 20; 105:41; Cornuke 2000: plates 8 and 9).

Is this evidence of the split rock at Horeb? First, one should be cautious about making dogmatic statements based on photographs until a team of geologists is able to examine the rock closely. Second, Cornuke implies

that the smooth rock was a result of the "river" flowing from the split rock because the area only gets a half-inch of rain per decade. While the area is classified as an arid desert, it does get 100 mm (4 inches) or less rain per year that comes in the form of tropical monsoons (Ingraham et. al. 1981: 62). In Philby's (1957: 205-228) account of his travels to the Midian Valley, he mentioned heavy rains and floods. Those people familiar with desert geology know that flash floods can provide the mechanism to polish the rocks (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000: plate 8, bottom).

Fasold's gold

One of the reasons the treasure hunters went to the mountain was to look for the gold and silver that the Children of Israel took from the Egyptians as they departed Egypt (Ex. 3:22; 11:2; 12:35,36). Fasold claims that his "molecular frequency generator" (MFG) produced readings that indicated the whole area was "loaded with buried gold the gold of the Exodus" (Blum 1998: 59). He also claims that his MFG device picked up gold readings in the area of the "golden calf altar" (Williams 1990: 107,108; Fasold 1993b: 8). Is this possible? Gold in this area should not surprise any geologist or archaeologist. The Land of Midian was noted for its gold mines! In 1982 (before the treasure hunters showed up), a survey was done in the Jebel al-Lawz area and two gold deposits were discovered. One at J. Maqda Ar Rahyat (site 200-1004), northwest of Jebel el-Lawz and another in the Wadi Maswat (site 200-1003), on the southwest slopes of the mountain (Kisnawi, et al. 1983: 82, plate 79). The surveyors indicate that one of the places gold is found is in alluvial deposits found in pits in the wadi (dry river bed). The

miner just sifts the gravel or sand to find the gold (1983: 77). Fasold had set up his MFG device about 50 feet from the edge of the wadi (Blum 1998a: 53). Samran's workers were digging in the wadi when they allegedly discovered the "gold bracelet" (1998a: 58). One "bracelet" is insufficient evidence to claim that the gold of the Exodus is located at Jebel al-Lawz.

Why is the area fenced in?

The question has been raised, "If the area is not an important historical site, then why is it fenced in? What are they trying to prevent people from seeing?"

In most countries, it is standard practice to fence in archaeological sites. There are at least four reasons why archaeologists fence in any given site. (1) To protect the sites from animals. In the case of Jebel al-Lawz they might be concerned about sheep and goats knocking down the walls of the "v-shaped altar". (2) To prevent military maneuvers from running over an archaeological site. (3) To protect the archaeological site from trespassers and vandals. (4) To prevent illegal excavations by treasure hunters. It seems reasonable to assume that the Saudi Department of Antiquities fenced in the sites after the first set of treasure hunters visited it because they were concerned others might follow. As it turned out, they were right.

The Saudis are also members of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). This is an "international non-governmental organization of professionals, dedicated to the conservation of [the] world's historic monuments and sites."

To answer the questions raised above, the Saudis were protecting the sites and have nothing to hide. In fact,

they should be commended for fencing in the sites to protect the world's historic sites and cultural heritage.

The Conclusion of the Matter

Contrary to their claims and the dust jacket endorsements that calls their evidence "overwhelming" and "scholarly" the case for Mt. Sinai in Saudi Arabia has not been made. The identification of Mt. Sinai in Saudi Arabia is not new. Other scholars and explorers have identified different mountains in Midian as Mt. Sinai and such identifications have long ago received proper scholarly assessment. For example, Dr. Menashe Har-el, one of Israel's leading geographers and an expert on the Sinai Peninsula, and for many years professor of Historical and Biblical Geography at Tel Aviv University, researched these questions several decades ago in his doctoral dissertation at New York University. He reworked his dissertation and published it under the title *The Sinai Journeys, The Route of the Exodus*. In this book, Har-el (1983: 242-275) spends a whole chapter refuting the idea that Mt. Sinai is in Midian (Saudi Arabia).

Professor Har-el also sets forth a very plausible alternative for the identification of Mt. Sinai. He proposed Mt. Sinai should be located at Jebel Sin Bishar in western central Sinai. This proposal is followed in the Zondervan NIV Atlas of the Bible (Rasmussen 1989: 88-90). In the next article, Professor David Faiman (1986, 1989, 1994) of Ben Gurion University of the Negev will discuss Har-el's proposal.

Simply stated, Mt. Sinai should be located in the Sinai Peninsula right where the Bible places it, not in Saudi Arabia.

Footnotes:

1. The archaeologists in his own denomination, the Seventh Day Adventist, do not support his views. One can contact Dr. David Merling at the Institute of Archaeology, Horn Archaeological Museum, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49104-0990 for a prepared packet with articles refuting some of his ideas. Two other SDA researchers have evaluated Wyatt's ideas and found them wanting (Standish and Standish 1999). Another balanced review of Ron Wyatt's claims can be found on Bill Crouse's, "Christian Information Ministries" website. <http://www.fni.com/cim/reports/wyatt.txt>. See Also: "Archaeology with Ron Wyatt: A Personal Account, by Bernard Brandstater
2. Some have questioned the validity of this claim (Fasold 1993a:6,7; Anonymous 1999: 13).
3. Midian is left out of this list because Moses was related to Jethro by marriage.
4. Egyptian tomb paintings depict administrative officials with shaved heads.
5. This information was also found on Wyatt's web site.
6. My thanks to Jeffrey J. Harrison for pointing this out. See his web site: <http://www.totheends.com>.
7. Their web site is <http://www.icomos.org>.
8. For other arguments against the "Midian Hypothesis" see "Problems with Mt. Sinai in Saudi Arabia" by Brad Sparks at <http://ldolphin.org/sinai.html>.

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The Rediscovery of the So-Called Jesus Family Tomb in Jerusalem

On Monday morning, February 26, 2007, I heard the opening statement by Matt Lauer on the NBC Today's Show. It was: "Is this the tomb of Jesus? A shocking new claim that an ancient burial place may have housed the bones of Christ and a son. This morning a Today exclusive that could rock Christianity to its core." When I saw the interview with James Cameron and Simcha Jacobovici I said to myself, "This isn't new. It is a rehashing of the 1996 'Easter special' by the BBC!"

The segment on the Today's Show was an infomercial promoting the new book by Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino, entitled *The Jesus Family Tomb* (hereafter footnoted as J&P 2007), and the documentary that would be aired later on the Discovery Channel called "The Lost Tomb of Jesus." The book is well written, very dramatic and reads like a page turning detective novel.

I said in the title of this article, the "rediscovery" of the so-called tomb of Jesus' family because in 1996, the BBC ran an Easter special called "Heart of the Matter: The Body In Question" on the resurrection of Jesus. In this documentary they claimed that the ossuaries of Joseph, Mary and Jesus were found in 1980 and were sitting in the basement of the Department of Antiquities in Jerusalem. The London Sunday Times ran an article on March 31, 1996, entitled, "The Tomb that Dare Not Speak Its Name." Jacobovici acknowledges this BBC broadcast in their book (J&P 2007: 23, 24), and hints at his knowledge of the title of the newspaper article

(2007:194). Now he claims to have more information that was not available in 1996 to prove his case and has a different interpretation of some of the ossuaries.

In the Forward to the book, James Cameron describes the research as being done with “systematic rigor” (2007: viii), and called it “brilliant scholarly research” with conclusions that were “virtually irrefutable,” “compelling,” and “extremely convincing” (2007: xi, xii, xiv). Is this the case, or is Cameron overstating his case?

I had the distinct pleasure of meeting Simcha Jacobovici in Jerusalem during the summer of 2005 while he was filming a segment of “The Naked Archaeologist” at the Pool of Siloam. (He wasn’t naked, nor is he an archaeologist. By his own admission, he is an investigative journalist / filmmaker). One can not help but like the guy. He has a charming personality and is a very colorful character with plenty of chutzpah! J These comments are meant as a compliment.

The underlying premise of the book and documentary is that the family tomb of Jesus was discovered in Jerusalem and contained ten ossuaries (bone boxes) with bones of various member of Jesus’ family, including Jesus himself and his son Judah. The other members of the family were Jesus’ brother Jose, and mother Mary; Jesus’ wife Mariamene, who was actually Mary Magdalene; and another relative name Matthew. The book also claims that one ossuary went missing after the excavation and later surfaced on the antiquities market with the inscription “James the son of Joseph, the brother of Jesus,” so at least two of Jesus’ brothers would have been buried in this family tomb.

The implication of the book and documentary is that Jesus was not resurrected from the dead as predicted by Jesus, and proclaimed by His disciples and the early church. They also make very subtle statements that plant seeds of doubts in the minds of the readers about the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. The stakes are high in this discussion because the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus is a foundational truth to Biblical Christianity. If Jesus was not resurrected from the dead, this would rock Christianity to its very foundation. On the other hand, if the Lord Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead, then His claim to be God manifest in human flesh would be true. The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome and said that Jesus Christ was “declared to the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). If that is the case, and I believe it is, then people should trust the Lord Jesus as their Savior and then follow Him as they seek to live by the principles and teachings of the Lord Jesus.

The Discovery of the Ossuaries

In June of 1967, the city of Jerusalem was reunified after the Six Days War. Since then, there has been extensive building activity in the suburbs surrounding Jerusalem. On occasions, building contractors would come across ancient burials of the First and Second Temple periods and other archaeological remains. The contractor had a decision to make: Do the burials and other archaeological remains get reported to the Department of Antiquities or do they get blown up or plowed under? Unfortunately, many were not reported and were destroyed.

In March of 1980, a bulldozer exposed part of a Second Temple burial cave on Dov Gruner Street in the neighborhood of East Talpiyot, south of the Old City of Jerusalem. Fortunately, this one was reported to the Department of Antiquities and a salvage excavation took place. A double-chambered loculi and arcosolia tomb was excavated by Yosef Gath (permit number 938), with the help of Amos Kloner and Eliot Braun. Shimon Gibson drew the architectural plans of the burial cave. This excavation was conducted from March 28 to April 14, 1980. The reason for the lengthy excavation was that there was over a meter of terra rosa soil in the tomb. This burial cave contained ten ossuaries; six of which had inscriptions bearing the names of individuals on them, and pottery from the Herodian period.

An initial report of this important discovery was first published in Hebrew by Yosef Gath in the Israel Antiquities Authority's (IAA) periodical, *Hadashot Arkheologiyot* (1981: 24-25), so it was not readily available to the English speaking world. The ossuaries were not published in English until a catalogue of ossuaries in the collection of the State of Israel was released in 1994 (Rahmani 1994a: 222-224). In this catalogue, the nine ossuaries are numbered 701 to 709, the 10th ossuary, a plain broken one, was not published (1994a: 222b). The burial cave was finally published in English by Amos Kloner, one of the excavators of the cave, in the IAA publication *'Atiqot* 29 (1996) 15-22. Kloner also documented the tomb in his archaeological survey of the southern sector of Jerusalem (2000: 84*, 136; designated [106] 76.2-8/3). In a reworking and updating of his 1980 doctoral dissertation from Hebrew University, Kloner again published the Talpiyot tomb, in

a book entitled *The Necropolis of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period*, this time in Hebrew (Kloner and Boaz 2003: 207, 208).

Ossuaries and Secondary Burials

During the Second Temple period, Jewish burials included stone object called ossuaries. These limestone boxes contained the bones of a deceased person after the rite of secondary burials was complete about a year after the death of the individual (Rahmani 1994b: 191-205). In the newspaper articles and blogs concerning the Talpiyot tomb, sometimes the ossuaries are called coffins, chests, caskets, etc. This article will refer to them by their technical name, ossuaries.

It would be helpful if the Jewish burial practices were described in order to put this discussion into proper perspective. When a Jewish person died during the First Century AD, they were usually buried in a rock-hewn tomb or a trench in the ground before sundown, or at least within 24 hours of death. The only exception was the Sabbath: in this case, burial took place after sundown.

The dead body would be left to decompose. The family would have a seven day period of mourning called shiva. The initial mourning period was followed by a less intense period of mourning for thirty days called shloshim. However, the entire mourning period was not over until the body had decomposed, usually about a year later. The Jerusalem Talmud states: "When the flesh had wasted away, the bones were collected and placed in chests (ossuaries). On that day (the son) mourned, but the following day he was glad, because his forebears rested from judgment (Moed Qatan 1:5). In Tractate

Semahot ("Mourning") it states: "Rabbi Eleazer bar Zadok said: 'Thus spoke father at the time of his death: "My son, bury me at first in a fosse. In the course of time, collect my bones and put them in an ossuary; but do not gather them with your own hands"' (12:9; Zlotnick 1966:82). This practice of gathering the bones and placing them in ossuaries was called ossilegium (Rahmani 1994b: 53-55).

The Ossuaries of the East Talpiyot Tomb

Ten ossuaries were found in the Talpiyot tomb, six of them had inscriptions. Let us examine the six inscriptions. The first ossuary was given the registration number IAA 80-500 by the Department of Antiquities. Rahmani listed it as 701 in his catalogue of ossuaries in the State of Israel collection (1994a: 222b, 223a). This ossuary was decorated and had an inscription in Greek with the name "Mariamene, who is (also called) Mara" on it (Rahmani 1994a: 222b). Kloner points out: "The name Mariamene [is] a variant of the name ... (Miriam, Maryam) and ... (Marya)." [This name] "is inscribed on more than twenty ossuaries in the Israel State Collections (Rahmani 1994: 14, 115-116)." [These names} "are the most common feminine names of the Second Temple period (Hachlili 1984: 189). Ilan states that Mariam is used 80 times (2002: 242-248). Mara, a contraction of Martha, is used as a second name. This name too is common in the Jewish feminine onomasticon" (Kloner 1996: 17). Mara is record eight times in the onomasticon of names (Ilan 2002: 422, 423, 450).

The second ossuary, IAA 80.501, (Rahmani's 702; 1994a: 223a), was also decorated and had the name "Yehuda,

son of Yeshua" on it. In English, it would read "Judah the son of Jesus." Kloner again points out: "The name Yehuda (Judas) is the third most popular name in the Jewish onomasticon of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. In a study of 1,986 names of the Hellenistic and Roman period, conducted by T. Ilan, 128 persons were found to bear this name (Ilan 1987: 238)" (1996: 18a). She later enlarged her list to 180 names (Ilan 2002: 112-125, 449). Kloner goes on to discuss the name Yeshua, or Jesus. He states that this name is "a derivative of Yehoshua (Joshua). ... Yehoshua/Yeshua is the sixth most common name used during the Hellenistic and Roman periods in Eretz Israel, borne by 71 of the individuals studied by Ilan" (1996: 18a). Ilan later came up with a total of 104 names (2002: 126-133, 449).

The third ossuary, IAA 80.502, (Rahmani's 703; 1994a: 223a), was a plain ossuary with the name inscribed "Matya" on the outside of the ossuary. On the inside of the ossuary, the name "Mat(y)a" is scratched. Both names are shortened forms of the name Matityahu, or Matthew (Kloner 1996: 18). In Ilan's list of Jewish names, 46 males were identified with this name (1987: 238).

The next ossuary, IAA 80-504, (Rahmani's 704; 1994a: 223), a plain limestone box with an Aramaic inscription, was the one that caused a sensation. Dr. Rahmani described it in these terms: "The first name, preceded by a large cross-mark, is difficult to read, as the incisions are clumsily carved and badly scratched. There seems to be a vertical stroke representing a yod, followed by a shin; the vav merges with the right stroke of the 'ayin. The reading 'Yeshua' is corroborated by the inscription on No. 702 referring to Yeshua, the father of

Yehuda" (1994a: 223). Kloner comments: "The first name following the X mark is difficult to read. In contrast to other ossuaries in this tomb, the incisions are here superficial and cursorily carved. Each of the four letters suggesting "Yeshua" is unclear, but the reading is corroborated by the inscription on Ossuary 2, above (Rahmani 1994:223)" (1996: 18b). Both Rahmani and Kloner agree that the reading of this inscription is very difficult. In fact, both place a question mark after the translation of Yeshua. Others have suggested that the name be read Hanun. Interestingly, there was another ossuary in the State of Israel collection that has a clear inscription saying "Jesus the son of Joseph" (Rahmani 1994a: 77; no. 9). This ossuary, however, was unprovenanced (Suknik 1931: 19).

The fifth ossuary, IAA 80-504, (Rahmani's 705; 1994a: 223b) is another plain ossuary with the name "Yose" on it. Kloner observes: "Yose is a contraction of Yehosef (Joseph), the second most common name in the Second Temple period (Ilan 1987: 238; see Hachlili 1984: 188-190). Ilan has recorded 232 individuals with this name (2002: 150-168, 449). Some 35% of all known Jewish males of the Hellenistic and Roman periods in Eretz Israel bore "Hasmonean" names: Matthew (Ossuary 3, above), John, Simon, Judas (Ossuaries 2 and 4, above), Eleazar, and Jonathan. Joseph was the sixth brother in the family (2 Maccabees 8:22), and the similar popularity of this name may be explained by this fact (Ilan 1987: 240-241)" (1996:19). Simon / Simeon is the most popular name.

The last inscribed ossuary, IAA 80-505, (Rahmani's 706; 1994a: 223b, 224a), was a plain limestone one and bore the name "Marya".

The next three ossuaries that were published were uninscribed. Each had rosettes on them and one of them had masons marks (IAA 80-506, Rahamni's 707; 1994a: 224a, Plate 101; Kloner 1996: 20; IAA 80-507, Rahmani's 708; 1994a: 224a, Plate 101; Kloner 1996: 20; IAA 80-508, Rahmani's 709; 1994a: 224a, Plate 101; Kloner 1996: 21). The tenth ossuary, IAA 80-509 is just labeled "plain" (Kloner 1996: 21). Rahmani states that it was a "plain, broken specimen" but does not list it in his catalogue (1994a: 222b).

Dr. Rahmani cautiously draws the conclusion that the ossuary of Yose (No. 705) "with that of Marya on No. 706, both from the same tomb, may indicate that these are the ossuaries of the parents of Yeshua (No. 704) and the grandparents of Yehuda (No. 702)" (1994a: 223). Is Dr. Rahmani justified in trying to assume Marya (Mary) was the wife of Yose (Joseph)? Simcha follows Tabor's suggestion that the Yose ossuary held the bones of Jose, the brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3; 14:40, 47; J&P 2007: 65, 77, 204). On their website Cameron and Jacobovici initially claimed: "An incredible archaeological discovery in Israel changes history and shocks the world. Tombs with the names The Virgin Mary, Jesus of Nazareth, Mary Magdalene and Judah, their son, are found and an investigation begins." Are these claims justified?

Are These the Ossuaries of the Lord Jesus and His Family?

The simple answer to the question is NO! None of the ossuaries say "the Virgin Mary," "Jesus of Nazareth," "Mary Magdalene," or "Judah, their son." The filmmakers are reading more into the names than appear on the ossuaries. In all fairness to them, the

website was later modified. Jose is identified as the brother of Jesus, not Joseph, the father of Jesus, as the BBC claimed. Matya is identified as either the gospel writer (J&P 2007: 62), or a relative of Mary, the mother of Jesus (2007: 78). The fact that these names appear together is purely coincidental. The names of Joseph, Mary, Yeshua (Jesus), and Judah were common names of Jewish people living during the Second Temple Period.

I am always leery of people saying, “I am not biased in my thinking, I have an open mind and will follow the truth wherever it leads.” Everybody, without exception, has biases and presuppositions in their thinking. The perspective of the book and documentary is that Jesus bones were reburied in an ossuary in the Talpiyot tomb and he was not bodily resurrected from the dead. They do, however, allow for a “spiritual ascension” (whatever that means) (2007: 71, 137). My perspective (bias, if you will), on the other hand, is that the Lord Jesus Christ is God manifest in human flesh and that He died on Calvary’s cross to pay for sin and three days later His body was resurrected from the tomb just outside the city walls of Jerusalem. Now that all the cards are on the table, let’s begin the critique.

Charles Pellegrino suggests that the disciples stole the body of Jesus from the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. He quotes from the account in Matthews gospel (27:61-66) and says that the “writer of Matthew was not familiar with the mechanics of secondary burial” (J&P 2007: 72). Quite the contrary, as Byron McCane has pointed out, Jesus was very familiar with secondary burials when He rebuked His disciple with the statement, “Let the dead bury their own dead” (Matt. 8:21, 22; McCane 1990: 31-43).

Pellegrino also suggests a scenario whereby the disciples hid in the tomb during the Sabbath and then removed the body after sunset, but before the soldiers were posted at the tomb (J&P 2007: 73). This does not account for the fact that the disciples were scared for their lives. When the soldiers came at Gethsemane, they fled (Matt. 26:56 // Mark 14:50). After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples at evening. The Apostle John records that “the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews” (20:19). Yet the demeanor of the disciples changed dramatically after the giving of the Holy Spirit on Shavuot (the Day of Pentecost) in Acts 2. They boldly proclaimed the message of the bodily resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ. If they had stolen the body of Jesus, why would they preach a lie? And more than that, why would they die for a lie?

Pellegrino also wrote to Father Mervyn Fernando in Sri Lanka and asked him a hypothetical question. “What if archaeologists actually found, say bones and DNA of Jesus? Would a discovery such as this necessarily contradict what Christians believe about the Resurrection story?” (J&P 2007: 73). Father Fernando responded by calling Pellegrino’s attention to First Corinthians 15:35 and the verses that followed, and said, in part, “That is, the risen body of Christ (as understood by the apostle Paul) is a spiritual one, not the material / physical one he had in this life. That physical body would have perished, and if any part of it (bones) are recovered / identified, it would in no way affect the reality of His resurrection” (2007: 74). The reference to the spiritual body is found in verses 44 and 46. The verse say believers in the Lord Jesus will get a

spiritual body, one that will be raised in incorruption, glory and power (15:42-44). What does Jesus Himself say about that spiritual body? After His bodily resurrection, He appeared to His disciples out of thin air. This spooked them and they thought they had seen a spirit (Luke 24:36, 37). Jesus tries to reassure them by saying, "Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have" (24:38, 39). He then went on to eat fish and honeycomb! (24:41-43). Does a spirit do that? When Peter and John looked into the tomb, it was empty, except for the grave cloths and handkerchief that was neatly folded on the bench of the tomb (Luke 24:12; John 20:3-8). Note specifically Jesus said He had flesh and bones. There was no decaying of the flesh, nor would there be no bones left in the tomb to be collected a year later and placed in an ossuary.

According to early tradition, Joseph was buried in Nazareth (Bagatti 1969: 12; Kopp 1963: 64-66), possibly the "tomb of the saints" on the property of the Sisters of Nazareth (Livio 1990: 28). The fact that Jesus and his family were "poor" does not necessarily mean they could not have been buried in a rock hewn tomb. Joseph was a carpenter (Mark 6:3). Some have suggested that the word "carpenter" also included the craft of stone masonry. If that is the case, Joseph could have carved out the family tomb at no cost to himself. Early tradition also places Mary's burial in Nazareth (Kopp 1963: 65, 66). However, there is a 5th century AD tradition that places her tomb in the Kidron Valley near Gethsemane (Strome 1972: 86-90). There are some who doubt the historical accuracy of this tradition (Taylor 1993: 205,

206). A much later tradition places the burial of Mary in Ephesus in present day Turkey (Meinardus 1979: 113-117). The house where she allegedly resided was located on the mountain south of the city of Ephesus. The location of this house was revealed to Sister Catherine Emmerich in a vision (1774-1824). The name of this nun might ring a bell in some peoples mind because she was the source for some of the unbiblical scenes and events depicted in Mel Gibson's film, "The Passion of the Christ."

In Dr. Rahmani's catalogue of ossuaries, he observed that: "In Jerusalem's tombs, the deceased's place of origin was noted when someone from outside Jerusalem and its environs was interred in a local tomb. Thus, Bet She'an-Scythopolis is mentioned in a bilingual inscription (No. 139), Berenike (No. 404 and Ptolemais (No. 99), both probably cities in Cyrenaica, each occur once" (1994: 17). This last ossuary (No. 99) was originally published by Prof. Nahman Avigad which was in a collection of ossuaries that were discovered in a tomb in the Kidron Valley on November 10, 1941 and excavated by Prof. E. L. Sukenik. There were eleven plain ossuaries that did not have any decorations on them, but all had inscriptions with the names of the individuals that were reburied in the ossuary. Two of the ossuaries had place names of where the individual was from. Avigad concluded that the "family must have come from one of the large Jewish communities of the Diaspora - Egypt or Cyrenaica. ... Cyrenaica is more likely to have been the country of origin of this family. Its members belonged apparently to the community of Cyrenian Jews which is known to have existed in Jerusalem in the time of the Second Temple. In the New

Testament mention is made of their synagogue (Acts 6:9)" (1962: 12). In the Dominus Flavit necropolis another Cyrenian named Pilon was buried with a Greek inscription on his ossuary (Bagatti and Milik 1981: 81, 91; Fig. 23, no. 3).

Since Jesus and His family were from Nazareth in Lower Galilee and not Jerusalem in Judea, one would expect a place of origin after the name of the deceased. For example, Jesus of Nazareth, Jose of Nazareth, Matthew of Capernaum, Mary of Nazareth, Mariamene of Magdala, and Judah son of Yeshua from Nazareth. No place of origin is given on any of the ossuaries which indicate that were all Jerusalemites from Judea.

Is Dr. Rahmani justified in saying Mary and Joseph was husband and wife? Sometimes inscriptions on the ossuaries tell the relationship between people, i.e. son of, daughter of, husband of, or wife of, etc. In the case of Marya, there is no relationship indicator, so we do not know if she was the mother, wife, sister, aunt or daughter of Joseph, Yeshua, Yehuda, one of the three skulls on the floor, or someone in the uninscribed ossuaries.

The ossuary containing the bones of "Yeshua" (704) could not be that of Jesus of Nazareth for two reasons. First, the New Testament is very clear, Jesus bodily rose from the dead. Since His flesh did not see corruption (Ps. 16:8-11; Acts 2:25-32), there would be no need for an ossuary. Second, ossuary No. 702 contained the bones of "Yehuda, the son of Yeshua." Apparently the Yeshua of ossuary No. 704 had a son named Yehuda. Again the gospels are clear; Jesus never married and never had children (see J&P 2007: 105). Also, both

Rahmani and Kloner have questions marks after the reading of the name Yeshua on the “Yeshua, son of Joseph” ossuary. Others have suggested the name actually read Hanun.

In an interview with the Jerusalem Post, one of the excavators, Amos Kloner states: “It makes a great story for a TV film. But it's completely impossible. It's nonsense. There is no likelihood that Jesus and his relatives had a family tomb. They were a Galilee family with no ties in Jerusalem. The Talpiot tomb belonged to a middle class family from the 1st century CE. “

Did the Mariamene Ossuary Contain the Bones of Mary Magdalene?

Simcha tries to argue, based on a conversation with Dr. Bovon of Harvard Divinity School, that Mary Magdalene was the Mariamne, the sister of Philip, in the 4th century Apocryphal book, the Acts of Philip (J&P 2007: 95-103). This Mariamne was the one whose bones were buried in the Talpiot ossuary.

Dr. Richard Bauckham, a New Testament scholar, stated in a blog on the Internet: “There is no reason at all to connect the woman in this ossuary with Mary Magdalene, and in fact the name usage is decisively against such a connection.”

There is also a chronological problem concerning the “bones”. According to the scenario in the book, Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and they had a son Judah. That son was the “Beloved Disciple” at the Last Supper and the young boy who ran away naked from Gethsemane (Mark 14:51) who was about 10-13 years old (J&P 2007: 207-209). Assuming this is true for a

minute, and assuming Jesus was crucified in AD 30, let's crunch the numbers. Judah would have been born between AD 17 and AD 20. That would place the wedding of Jesus and Mary Magdalene between AD 16 and AD 19. Assuming Mary Magdalene was between 16 and 18 years of age when she got married, she would have been born between 1 BC and AD 4. Herein is the problem. According to the Acts of Philip (which the filmmakers believe is historically reliable), the event surrounding the martyrdom of Philip, the brother of Miriamne, takes place in the 8th year of Emperor Trajan (Roberts and Donaldson 1994: 8: 497). This would place the martyrdom about AD 104. Eusebius confirms the burial of Philip at Heirapolis and hints at a date around AD 100 (Ecclesiastical History 3. 31. 1-4; LCL 1: 269-271). If Mary Magdalene is the Miriamne in this account, she would be between 100 and 106 years of age when she proceeded to the Jordan [River] (Roberts and Donaldson 1994: 8: 503b).

Simcha assumes she died and was buried in Israel (J&P 2007: 102). If the Miriamene of the Acts of Philip is Mary Magdalene, more than likely she would have gone back to Galilee and her home town of Magdala, only a few miles from the Jordan River, not Jerusalem. There is also another chronological problem. Ossuaries ceased to be in use in Jerusalem after AD 70 (J&P 2007: 26; Rahmani 1994a: 21-25). How could Mary Magdalene be buried in an ossuary in Jerusalem after AD 105?

Simcha contends that the Romans would have executed all the heirs of anybody trying to establish a throne apart of the emperor in Rome (J&P 2007: 105, 106). In the case of Jesus, they would kill his wife and any children they might have. This scenario should raise

some serious questions for Simcha's contention. If Mary Magdalene was married to Jesus, why was she not executed on the spot? After all, she was at the cross when He died (Matt. 27:56 // Mark 15:40 // John 19:25). If one believes that Miriamne of the Acts of Philip is Mary Magdalene, she would have lived for at least 75 more years, through the reigns of a host of Roman emperors. Why did they not find her and have her executed? Simcha states that the Romans "were very good at hunting down sons, daughters and wives" (2007: 106).

The bones of Mary Magdalene are not in the ossuary of Mariamene who is also called Mara. They belong to someone else.

Is "Judah, the son of Jesus" the "Beloved Son", the "Beloved Disciple" and the young lad in Mark 14:51?

Simcha begins this chapter by correctly observing that: "In none of the Gospels, be they canonical or apocryphal, is Mary Magdalene – Miriamne – described as being married to Jesus. Nor is a child of Jesus ever mentioned" (J&P 2007: 105). He should have stopped at this point and gone on to the next chapter. Jesus was never married and never had a child with Mary Magdalene or any other woman. Yet Simcha insists, based on the ossuaries, that Jesus was married and had a child so any reference to these "facts" must be in "code."

According to Simcha, in order to hide the identity of "Judah, the son of Jesus" from the Romans, the disciples spoke in code. He speculates that Judah was really called the younger brother of Jesus named Judas (Mark

6:3). He goes on to speculate that this Judas was nicknamed “the twin” based on the Greek word “Didymos” and the Hebrew word “Te-om” (translated Thomas). This Judas was also the author of the Gospel of Thomas (J&P 2007: 106-108). In his “gospel” the Parable of the Vineyard Owner is given (Saying 65).

The parable of the vineyard owner (Mark 12:1-12) is misapplied in the book. They give a novel twist to this parable by saying it “could be referring to the fate that would have awaited any surviving son sent into the world by Jesus” (J&P 2007: 108). They acknowledge just before this statement, “Perhaps, as many have interpreted, the parable is describing his own death” (2007: 108).

Rather than “perhaps”, it would be better to say, this parable is talking about the death of the Lord Jesus. Mark records the reaction of those on the Temple Mount. “And they [the chief priests, the scribes and the elders (11:27)] sought to lay hands on Him, but feared the multitude, for they knew He had spoken the parable against them. So they left Him and went away” (12:12). Some of the religious leaders were trying to eliminate the Lord Jesus, and not some imagined son.

In the parable, Mark records a statement about the son of the vineyard owner. “Therefore still having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, ‘They will respect my son’” (12:6 NKJV). It is important to note that the son is called “his beloved.” [The Gospel of Thomas leaves out the word “beloved”]. The word “beloved” is used only three times in the Gospel of Mark. A careful reader of the Greek text of this gospel would remember the two previous occasions where the

word is used. The first time the word is used is at the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River. The voice from heaven [the Father] says, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (1:11 NKJV). The second time is at the Transfiguration of Jesus where the same voice from heaven says, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" (9:7 NKJV). The context of the first two usage is clear in Mark's gospel, so the beloved son in the parable is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, not Judah.

Simcha states that the Gospel of John "harbors a deep secret." He contends that the "beloved disciple" who leaned on Jesus' chest was His own son Judah. His proof is a statement: "Unless your eating habits are very different from mine, at my dinner table only my kids cuddle with me and lean against my chest" (J&P 2007: 207). A personal analogy is not proof that Judah was the beloved disciple. One should put the event in the Gospel of John in its proper context. It was at a Passover Seder when the "beloved disciple" leans back on Jesus chest while they are reclining during the meal. [Some translations use the word "sit", but the Greek word is "recline"]. The disciple whom Jesus loved is none other than the Apostle John, the youngest of the disciples. He does not mention his own name when he wrote the gospel because he finally learned the lesson of humility that Jesus was teaching.

The Apostle John does not draw attention to himself in the gospel he wrote, just like Dr. Luke does not mention his own name in the Book of Acts. That is the same reason John Mark does not mention his own name when he describes the "young man" who runs away naked from Gethsemane (Mark 14:51, 52; J&P 2007: 207, 208).

On the other hand, he might have been embarrassed to mention his name!

The speculation that “Judah, the son of Jesus” is the “Beloved Son”, the “beloved disciple”, or the young man in Mark 14 has no factual basis whatsoever.

Does the DNA Evidence Prove the Case?

The DNA evidence is presented as one of the smoking guns. The chapter on the DNA begins with the statement: “If these two ossuaries truly belong to Jesus of Nazareth and Mary Magdalene, DNA tests would reveal that the two people buried within were not related. All scriptural records – whether canonical or apocryphal – were clear on one genealogical point: Jesus of Nazareth and Mary Magdalene, if their DNA could be read, would be two individuals who had no family ties. But what are the alternatives? People in the same tomb were related by either blood or marriage” (J&P 2007: 167, 168, 207). I would agree with this statement, and as the mitochondrial DNA tests showed, the two were not related by blood (J&P 2007: 172, 207). But does that mean Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married to each other?

Mariamene in the ossuary could have been married to Yose, Matya, or Yehuda in the other ossuaries, one of the three skeletons that were discovered on the floor, if they were males, or someone in the uninscribed ossuaries. Or, for that matter, her husband might not have been buried in the tomb. Perhaps he died in a far off land while he was on a business trip. Since there was no ketubah (marriage contract) found in the ossuary of Mariamene, or the name of her husband on the ossuary (Rahmani 1994a: 15a), the DNA tests prove nothing.

In an interview, Simcha was asked why he did not have the remains in the other ossuaries tested. His response was “We’re not scientists. At the end of the day we can’t wait till every ossuary is tested for DNA. We took the story that far. At some point you have to say, ‘I’ve done my job as a journalist’” (Goodstein 2007: 10).

I think it is fair to say, they did not take the story far enough. They got the results they wanted so they could say Jesus and Mary were not related by blood, so this proved, in their minds at least, that they were married. For their scenario, no further testing was needed. Perhaps with further DNA testing it would have been shown that “Judah, the son of Jesus” was not related to “Mariamene”, or that “Jesus, son of Joseph” was not related to “Maria”. The “James the son of Joseph, brother of Jesus” was not related to “Jesus, son of Joseph” or “Jose”. These results would have been devastating for their scenario, so why test any further? Leave well enough alone. This “smoking gun” fired a blank.

The Statistical Analysis

The second “smoking gun” of the Jesus Family Tomb is the statistical analysis. As we have already seen, the DNA gun was a blank with smokeless powder. As we shall see, the Statistical Analysis will fire a blank as well.

One must ask: “What are the assumptions being made?” when doing statistical analysis. The results are only as good as the information that is put into the computation.

The Cameron / Jacobovici / Pellegrino / Tabor team started with the assumption that Jesus was not bodily resurrected from the dead. They also assume that a poor

Galilean family from Nazareth would buy a tomb in Jerusalem. One of the excavators described the burial cave this way: "It's a good-sized tomb, carved with great care under the direction of someone not lacking funds" (J&P 2007: 9). Jesus recounted His economic status by saying: "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Luke 9:58). They also assume, based on their DNA "analysis" that Jesus was married to Mariamene (a. k. Mary Magdalene). I do not believe they proved any of their assumptions so their statistics are meaningless.

James Tabor gave an interesting analogy on his website. He said: "Imagine a football stadium filled with 50,000 people—men, women, and children. This is an average estimate of the population of ancient Jerusalem in the time of Jesus. If we ask all the males named Jesus to stand, based on the frequency of that name, we would expect 2,796 to rise. If we then ask all those with a father named Joseph to remain standing there would only be 351 left. If we further reduce this group by asking only those with a mother named Mary to remain standing we would get down to only 173. If we then ask only those of this group with a brother named Joseph only 23 are left. And finally, only of these the ones with a brother named James, there's less than a 3/4 chance that even 1 person remains standing. Prof. Andre Feuerverger, of the University of Toronto, a highly regarded senior scholar in the field did the formal statistics for the Discovery project. His figure of probability came out to 1/600."

There is one major problem with this analogy. Jesus would not have even been in the stadium! This analogy denies the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Did the “James Ossuary” Come from the Talpiyot Tomb?

Simcha likes to add a bit of conspiracy theory to the plot of his book. He suggested that the so-called “James Ossuary” originally came from the Talpiyot Tomb (J&P 2007: 92, 184-188, 209, 210). At the conclusion of some fancy tests in a crime lab in New York, Pellegrino concluded that when the James ossuary was “compared to other patina samples from ossuaries found in the Jerusalem environment, the Talpiot tomb ossuaries exhibited a patina fingerprint or profile that matched the James ossuary and no other” (J&P 2007: 188). Simcha speculates that the 10th ossuary was misplaced or stolen after it left the site in Talpiyot and before it arrived at the Rockefeller Museum. If the 10th ossuary is in fact the “James ossuary” this would add immense credence to the idea that this is the Jesus family tomb.

Dr. Joe Zias, the chief anthropologist for the IAA in 1980, has stated in emails that he was the one who catalogued all ten of the ossuaries as they came to the Rockefeller Museum. Since it was a “plain” non-descript ossuary, it was placed in the courtyard of the museum.

Again, in the Jerusalem Post interview, Amos Kloner was asked about the alleged missing tenth ossuary. Kloner responded, “Nothing has disappeared. The 10th ossuary was on my list. The measurements were not the same (as the James ossuary). It was plain (without an inscription). We had no room under our roofs for all the ossuaries, so unmarked ones were sometimes kept in the courtyard (of the Rockefeller Museum).”

It can be easily demonstrated that the “James ossuary” and the tenth ossuary from Talpiyot are not one and the

same ossuary. Ossuary 10 (IAA 80.509) was published by Kloner as “plain” with the dimension of 60 cm long; 26 cm wide; and 30 cm high (1996: 21). When the “James Ossuary” was first published, the dimensions were given as 50.5 cm long at the base and 56 cm long at the top; 25 cm wide; and 30.5 cm high (Lemaire 2002: 27, 28). When Simcha published his book, he gave the dimensions of the “James Ossuary” as 56.5 cm long; 26 cm wide; and 30.2 cm high (S&P 2007: 210). Simcha notes the 3.5 cm discrepancy on the length and dismisses the idea that the length changed when the ossuary broke en route to Toronto in 2002. He suggested, however, that in the initial measurement at the Rockefeller the numbers were rounded off and concludes that “the missing ossuary and the James ossuary may be one and the same after all” (2007: 91, 210).

Note how Simcha changes the numbers. The discrepancy in length is not 3.5 cm as stated by Simcha, but 4 cm if we take the original measurements by Dr. Lemaire. There is a 1 cm discrepancy on the width if we take Lemaire’s numbers. Instead of 0.5 cm difference on the height, Simcha reduces it to 0.2 cm. Where Simcha got his numbers, we are not told, but it is obvious he is aware of the problem and is trying to marginalize the discrepancies.

It can be safely concluded, as Kloner has pointed out, that the 10th ossuary was never missing and is not the same as the so-called “James ossuary.”

This ossuary still presents a problem for Simcha. According to Oded Golan, the owner of the ossuary, he purchased the ossuary in the mid-1970’s, several years

before the Talpiyot tomb was excavated in 1980. These dates are important because in 1978 a law was passed that allowed the state of Israel to confiscate any antiquities that they deemed important. That would include the James ossuary.

Simcha can't have his cake and eat it too. Either the James ossuary was purchased in the mid-1970's as Golan claims and he should be exonerated at his trial (if he did not forge the inscription), or it's from the East Talpiyot tomb excavated in 1980 and Golan lied, thus giving him a one way ticket to jail.

Is There a Masonic Connection to this Tomb?

Jacobovici and Cameron try to add a Masonic Connection to this tomb, perhaps trying to cash in on the popularity of the Da Vinci Code (J&P 2007: 123-134). The chapter entitled "Whence Came the Nazarenes" is pure speculation and has no cited documentation so the reader can not judge the validity of the claims.

The Three Skulls

There were three skulls found on the floor of the burial cave and mentioned several times in the early part of the book as being important. A discerning reader would keep that in the back of his/her mind thinking that it would play an important role later in the book (J&P 2007: 10, 11, 14). Sure enough, Simcha speculates that some of the Crusaders, or Knights Templars around the 12th century, entered the tomb and place the three skulls in an "odd and clearly ceremonial configuration" (J&P 2007: 109, 123, 131). Gibson also had that impression, suggesting they formed a triangle pointing to the Temple Mount (2007: 15). Simcha asks if

it is possible that these are the skulls of Templar leaders that were honored by being buried in the tomb of Jesus (2007: 132).

The three skulls are clearly marked on Shimon's drawing (J&P 2007: Plate 1, facing page 110). However, only one skull appears in Kloner's publications (1996: 15; 2003: 208).

A much more plausible explanation is that these three skulls were on the shelf of the two arcosolias and rolled off during seismic activity in the area. Two of the skulls are just below the arcosolias and the other might have rolled across the floor.

There were more than three skulls associated with the tomb. Simcha tells the story of children in the neighborhood playing soccer with skulls (plural). How many there actually were, we are not told (2007: 4). There were from the antechamber of the tomb, outside the tomb proper. One of the neighbors collected two bags of bones from this area (2007: 11-13).

Simcha speculates that the Knights might have taken a skull and femur bones from one of the ossuaries and this became one of the Templar symbols, the skull and crossbones (2007: 133, 134).

A skull and crossbones are usually depicted underneath the cross where the Lord Jesus was crucified in Christian art. Some might suggest this is the meaning of the "place of a skull" (Matt. 27:33). The theological meaning that has been given for the skull and crossbones is that Adam was buried underneath the place of crucifixion. This was to illustrate the theological truth set forth in I Cor. 15:21 and 22. "For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the

dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.” Also the truth is Romans 5:12-21.

“Therefore, just as through one man [Adam] sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned ... For as by one man’s disobedience [Adam] many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous. ... even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (5:12, 19, 21 NKJV).

The Chevron and Circle Symbols

One of the striking features of the façade of the tomb is the chevron over the entrance and a circle underneath it (J&P 2007: 7, 8, 11, 12; for a good color picture, see the cover of Kloner and Zissu 2003). Simcha speculates that the “façade is related to the promise of Jesus – as a Jewish Messiah – to build a Third Temple at the ‘end of times,’ then even the ‘Templar’ name may be related to the Talpiot tomb” (J&P 2007: 134, see also 2007: 130).

This is pure speculation on Simcha’s part. The First and Second Temples had a flat roof and not a gabled one. The architectural description of the Temple described in the Temple Scroll is of a flat roof as well. The same is also true of the “Ezekiel Temple” (Ezek. 40-48). One would assume that the Third Temple would have a flat roof also.

At least one chevron appears on an Iron Age tomb that was exposed just south of Jaffa Gate. Shimon Gibson was one of the excavators and this author was on his team (Broshi and Gibson 1994: 147-150, picture on page 149. The tomb on the right has a chevron above the entrance).

James Tabor was examining an ossuary found in the Kidron Valley that had three inscriptions on it. One read “Alexander / (son of) Simon”, another read “Simon Ale / Alexander / (son) of Simon”, and also “of Alexander / Alexander QRNYT” ossuary (Avigad 1962: 9-11). Tabor claims that with the lighting just right, he saw “a chevron forming a circular gouge (modern or ancient?) to produce an inverted ‘V’ enclosing a dark circle” (J&P 2007: 129). In his report, Avigad says nothing about this. I would be surprised if something like this was missed by the keen observant eyes of Avigad.

I suspect that the chevron was an unfinished molding of a façade of a tomb that depicted a gabled roof with pediment and a circle, possibly a wreath, similar to the “Tomb of the Grapes” (Avigad 1950-51: 99, 100). Avigad also mentions that there are similar entrances in the southern necropolis of Jerusalem (1950-51: 100; footnote 7). The chevron could also represent a nefesh (Rahmani 1968: 220-225, Plate23; 1994a: 28, 29; 1994b: 198-203). Wreaths are also known on ossuaries (Rahmani 1972: 113-116).

The skulls on the floor of the tomb and the façade with an inverted chevron and circle underneath it are Second Temple phenomenon. The connection with the Knight Templars is pure speculation and not based in facts. Thus there are no Masonic connections with this tomb.

Other Factual Errors

There are factual mistakes that would have been caught if the book had been peer-reviewed and also fact checked by the publisher prior to publication. For example: Beth Shemesh was not the ancient home of Samson (J&P 2007: 31), it was Zorah (Judges 13:2;

16:31). It is not a legend that the Judeo-Christians fled to Pella (J&P 2007: 36), but an event based in historical reality (Pritz 1988: 122-127). Pritz's book is even quoted in the bibliography (J&P 2007: 214). John the Baptizer was not beheaded by Herod the Great (J&P 2007: 63), but rather, by his son Herod Antipas (Hoehner 1980: 110-171). The Aegean Islands do not spread "westward in long chains to the volcanic remnants of Thera" from Mt. Athos (J&P 2007: 95). Thera (Santorini) is to the south of Mt. Athos and the only chain of islands are the Sporades and beyond them is the island of Evia and then the mainland of Greece.

The Best Explanation

In the spring of 1979, while I was a graduate student at the Institute for Holy Land Studies studying archaeology and history of ancient Israel in Jerusalem, I attended a fascinating series of lectures at the Albright Institute in Jerusalem on ancient Jewish burial practices by Dr. Levi Rahmani. His last lecture was on ossuaries and the Jewish practice of secondary burials during the Second Temple Period. This lecture was later published in *Biblical Archaeologist* (Rahmani 1982). During the question and answer period, Father Pierre Benoit, the director of the Ecole Biblique, the French School of Archaeology in Jerusalem, asked Dr. Rahmani a loaded question. "Would Jesus' bones have been placed in an ossuary?" His response was a classic. "Yes, they would have been, but something unexplainable happened!"

The best explanation for the unexplainable was given by the angel who rolled away the stone from the entrance to the empty tomb. He said, "... He is not here, for He is risen as He said" (Matt. 28:6 NKJV)!

The events that transpired during the previous few days were all predicted by the Hebrew prophets hundreds of years before they happened. In fact, there were over thirty prophecies that were fulfilled during the last day of the earthly life of the Lord Jesus.

King David was also a prophet (Acts 2:30). Nearly a thousand years before the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, David gave a vivid prophetic description of the event (Psalm 22), beginning with the cry from the cross: "My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?" (22:1; cf. Matt. 27:46). David gave the reason God forsook His Son: because the Lord is holy (22:3). God could not look upon sin, even when all the sins of all humanity were being placed on His sinless Son. David also predicted the mockery and reproach by the crowd as Jesus was being crucified (22:6-8, 12-13; cf. Matt. 27:39-44). He foretold of the bones being out of joint and His hands and feet being pierced (22:14-17; cf. John 20:20), and even the casting of lots for his garments by the Roman soldiers (22:18; cf. Matt. 27:35 // John 19:24). David also predicted that not one bone in His body would be broken (Ps. 34:20, cf. Ex. 12:46; Num. 9:12; see also John 19:36). This fulfilled the picture of the Lord Jesus being the unblemished Passover Lamb that was slain for sinners (I Cor. 5:7). The prophet Zechariah foresaw that the people of Jerusalem would look upon the LORD Messiah whom they pierced (Zech. 12:10; cf. John 19:37; Rev. 1:7).

Isaiah predicted that the Messiah would be buried in a rich man's tomb (Isa. 53:9). Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus, a member of the Sanhedrin, and a wealthy man, approached Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus so he could bury it before sundown, according

to Jewish Law (Matt. 27:57 // Mark 15:43). Pilate granted this request, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah of being buried in a rich man's tomb.

David also predicted the resurrection of the Holy One, the Messiah (Ps. 16:8-11). The Apostle Peter gave a divine commentary on this passage, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:22-33). Peter had seen the Risen Lord Jesus on a number of occasions after He had been buried (Luke 24:34; Mark 16:14 // John 20:26-31; John 21:1-3; Mat. 28:16-20 // Mark 16:15-18; Mark 16:19 // Luke 24:44-49 // Acts 1:3-8; I Cor. 15:5). In his sermon, Peter quoted Psalm 16 and said it was the Messiah that David was predicting and not himself. The proof of that statement was that one could still go down to the City of David and see the tomb of David. If a person could get inside the tomb, they would still see the bones of David. He saw corruption, but the Lord Jesus did not, because He was bodily resurrected from the dead.

The prophet Isaiah foretold the reason the Messiah would die. He stated: "Surely He (the Messiah) has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, everyone, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (53:4-6 NKJV). On the cross of Calvary, the Lord Jesus, the Spotless Lamb of God, died as a perfect sacrifice, to pay for all our sins so that a holy God could be just and declared those who have put their trust in Him and Him alone, justified. When a person

trusts the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior, they are justified (declared righteous) by a Holy God (Rom. 3:21-5:2 NKJV).

The Importance of the Resurrection

The importance of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is clearly stated in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul writes that Jesus is “declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4 NKJV). He states elsewhere that the bodily resurrection is a crucial part of the gospel, the good news of salvation when one puts their trust in the Lord Jesus. “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preach to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you – unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve” (I Cor. 15:1-5 NKJV).

God loved sinful humankind so much, even though they were in rebellion to Him and his Word, that He sent His Son, the Lord Jesus, who voluntarily died on the Cross of Calvary, to pay for all the sins of all humanity (John 3:16; 10:7-18; Rom. 3:23; 5:8; I John 2:2). The death of the Lord Jesus satisfied the holiness and justice of God, so that salvation could be offered to sinners as a free gift, simply by putting ones faith (trust) in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior (John 6:47; Rom. 4:1-8). Salvation is by faith alone, in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, and no merits

or works of our own can gain us entry into Heaven and God's righteousness (Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8,9; Phil. 3:4-9).

Have you trusted the One who died for your sins and bodily rose from the dead, and offers you the free gift of eternal life, a home in heaven, the forgiveness of sins and the righteousness of God?

There were people in the church at Corinth in the First Century AD that questioned the bodily resurrection of the dead (I Cor. 15:12). The apostle Paul recounts the many eye-witnesses that had seen the Lord Jesus alive, after His crucifixion, including himself (I Cor. 15:5-8). Paul connects the importance of the bodily resurrection of the dead with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He states: "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up - if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable" (I Cor. 15:13-19 NKJV). Is the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus important? You bet it is!

The Conclusion of the Matter

I do not know who the Jerusalemite Jesus was that was buried in the Talpiyot tomb, but I do know where the Lord Jesus Christ is right now. After He was bodily resurrected from the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea on the third day, He physically ascended into heaven and He is

seated at the right hand of the Father waiting to return to earth to establish His Kingdom in Jerusalem.

Christianity has not been “rocked to the core” by the “shocking” claims in this book and documentary. There is no need to change history. The Lord Jesus Christ was bodily resurrected from the dead. No archaeologist will ever find an ossuary with the bones of the Lord Jesus from Nazareth because He never “saw corruption” (Ps. 16:10), thus never needing an ossuary.

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About the Author

Gordon Franz is a Bible teacher who has engaged in extensive archaeological and geographical research in

the Lands of the Bible. He has worked on a number of archaeological excavations in Israel, including: Ketef Hinnom in Jerusalem, Ramat Rachel, Kh. Nisya, Lachish, Jezreel and Hazor.

Nahum, Nineveh And Those Nasty Assyrians

[Disclaimer: If there are any similarities in this discussion between Ashurbanipal II and his Assyrian troops and Saddam Hussein and the Republican guards, it is purely coincidental. Having said that, it is my position Saddam Hussein is not discussed in the Book of Nahum, nor are automobiles on the LA Freeway (cf. Nahum 2:3)!]

If I mentioned the city Nineveh, what would come to your mind? Most likely you would say Jonah. We've all heard the story about Jonah being swallowed by the great fish and then going to Nineveh to preach against the city. His message was short and to the point, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." The city, from the king to the dogcatcher, repented. Have you ever wondered what happened to Nineveh after that? The short prophetic book of Nahum tells us "the rest of the story."

During the summer of 2002, I had the privilege of spending three days in the British Museum in London. Wow, what an experience! I have been studying and teaching archaeology for over twenty-five years and never had the opportunity to see the many objects on display in the museum that have Biblical connections. The main interest of my visit was the objects in the Assyrian Rooms, especially the rooms containing the bas-reliefs of Ashurbanipal II (ruled 668-631 BC), the last great king of Assyria. Several years ago I taught the book of Nahum at my home church. I endeavored to illustrate my messages with archaeological discoveries

relating to the text. In my studies, I was surprised at the number of references to objects in the British Museum. When I first visited the rooms with the reliefs, I was not disappointed. With the book of Nahum opened before me, most of the word pictures in the book could be illustrated, in one way or another, from the reliefs of Ashurbanipal II. In this article we will visit the galleries associated with the book of Nahum and visualize the “rest of the story.”

The Date of the Book of Nahum

Scholars have long debated the date of the book of Nahum. A wide range of dates has been suggested, from the 8th century BC (Feinberg 1951:126,148) to the Maccabean period, early 2nd century BC (Haupt). Yet the book gives us internal chronological parameters in order to date the book. Nahum describes the conquest of Thebes (No-Amon) by Ashurbanipal II in 663 BC as a past event, thus the book could not have been written before that date. The entire book is a prediction of the fall of the city of Nineveh in 612 BC. Thus, the book was written somewhere between 663 and 612 BC.

A case can be made for the proclamation of the message, and writing of the book, about 650 BC. If this is the correct date, the Spirit of God used this book to put King Manasseh into a position where he could come to faith and to bring Judah back to the LORD. Up until this point in the reign of King Manasseh, the kingdom, led by the king, was “more evil than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel” (2 Chron. 33:9). The LORD sent seers (prophets) to speak to the nation, but the nation would not listen to the Word of God (33:10, 18). While not named, one of the seers

was probably Nahum. His vision concerning the total destruction of Nineveh would be seen by the Assyrian overlords as fomenting rebellion and insurrection, and possibly seen as support for Shamash-shum-ukin, the king of Babylon, in his current civil war with his brother Ashurbanipal II. If a copy of the book of Nahum fell into the hands of the Assyrian intelligence community, King Manasseh would have had to give account for this book. The Biblical records state, “the LORD brought upon them [Judah] the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze fetters, and carried him off to Babylon” (2 Chron. 33:11). This event would have transpired in 648 BC, the year that Ashurbanipal II temporarily ruled Babylon after he eliminated his brother as a result of the four-year civil war (Rainey 1993: 160).

Dragging someone off with hooks in their nose would be in keeping with Ashurbanipal’s character. In the excavations of Sam’al (Zincirli) a stela was found with Esarhaddon holding two leashes attached to the nose-rings of Baal of Tyre and Usanahuru, a crown prince of Egypt. Flanking the stela, watching intently, is Esarhaddon’s son, Ashurbanipal on the left and his brother Samas-sumu-ukin on the right. Ashurbanipal observed his father’s brutality and followed his example (Parpola and Watanabe 1988:20, 21).

During Manasseh’s interrogation by Ashurbanipal II (and it must have been a brutal one, the text uses the word “afflicted”), he “implored the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed to Him; and He received His entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into

his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God" (2 Chron. 33:12,13).

Upon his return to Jerusalem, Manasseh began building projects in the city as well as elsewhere in Judah and removed the idols and altars he had placed in the Temple (2 Chron. 33:14-15). "He also repaired the altar of the LORD, sacrificed peace offerings and thanks offerings on it, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel" (33:16). This activity was in accord with what Nahum had challenged the people to do.

"Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace! O Judah, keep your appointed feast, perform your vows. For the wicked one shall no more pass through you; he is utterly cut off" (1:15). The challenge was for Judeans to renew their pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the thrice-yearly feasts of Pesach (Passover), Shav'uot (Pentecost) and Succoth (Tabernacles) (Ex. 23:14-17; 34:22-24; Deut. 16:16, 17). There was also a command for the remnant that faithfully prayed to the Lord desiring to bring the nation back to Biblical worship and to bring the king to the Lord. They were to perform the vow they had made to the Lord. The Bible records a half-hearted attempt to return to Biblical worship. "Nevertheless, the people still sacrificed on the high places, but only to the LORD their God" (2 Chron. 33:17). The only true place of worship was the Temple in Jerusalem, not the high places.

Nahum prophesied the destruction of Nineveh, the capital of the sole superpower, at the zenith of Assyria's power and glory. He boldly proclaimed a message that was not popular, nor "politically correct." In fact, most

Judeans would think his prediction of the downfall of Nineveh was impossible.

The Reliefs From Ashurbanipal's Palace in the British Museum

Ashurbanipal II reigned in Nineveh from 668-631 BC. At the beginning of his reign he lived in Sennacherib's "palace without rival." Ashurbanipal refurbished the palace about 650 BC. In Room XXXIII, he placed his own wall reliefs. Ashurbanipal's other major construction project was the North Palace for the crown prince (Russell 1999: 154).

Nahum was from Elkosh (Nah. 1:1). Some scholars have suggested Elkosk was located at the village of Al-Qush, 25 miles north of modern day Mosul, a city that is across the Tigris River from Nineveh. These scholars take this position because: (1) the names are similar, (2) the local Christian tradition holds that Nahum was from there and his tomb was there, and (3) Nahum's writings show his familiarity with the city of Nineveh. Some speculate that Nahum was an Israelite captive who lived in the area and was an eyewitness to the city.

There is, however, another possibility. Elkosh was in southern Judah and Nahum was part of the Judean emissary that brought the yearly tribute from King Manasseh to Nineveh. While in Nineveh, he would have observed the broad roads (Nah. 2:4), walls (Nah. 2:5), gates (Nah. 2:6), temples and idols (1:14), and its vast wealth (2:9). I'm sure the minister of propaganda would have shown him the wall reliefs in Ashurbanipal's residence. These reliefs were intended "as propaganda to impress, intimidate and instigate by representing the might of Assyrian power and the harsh punishment of

rebels” (Comelius 1989: 56). Or as Esarhaddon would say, “For the gaze of all my foes, to the end of days, I set it [stela] up” (Luckenbill 1989: II: 227).

Let us examine the reliefs found on the walls of Ashurbanipal’s palace and see how they illustrate the word-pictures used by Nahum in his book.

Blasphemy against Assur (Nahum 1:14)

In 650 BC, Nahum would have seen the newly opened Room XXXIII in the Southwest Palace of Nineveh (Sennacherib’s “palace without rival”) with the reliefs depicting the campaign against Teumman of Elam and Dunanu of Gambula in 653 BC. One particular relief would have caught his attention (WA 124802, Slab 4). On it, a pair of Elamite captives is being depicted as having their tongues pulled out and being flayed. The caption above stated, “Mr. (blank) and Mr. (blank) spoke great insults against Assur, the god, my creator. Their tongues I tore out, their skins I flayed” (Russell 1999: 180; Gerardi 1988: 31). These two individuals are identified in Ashurbanipal’s annals as Mannu-ki-ahhe and Nabu-usalli (Russell 1999: 163).

It was with great boldness that Nahum proclaimed, “The LORD has given a command concerning you [the king of Assyria]: ‘Your name shall be perpetuated no longer. Out of the house of your gods I will cut off the carved image and molded image. I will dig your grave, for you are vile’” (1:14). These words were a direct attack on Assur and the rest of the Assyrian deities, as well as the king. Yet Nahum boldly proclaimed the message God gave him, in spite of the potential threat to his life!

Chariots, Not Volkswagens! (Nahum 2:3,4)

The second chapter of Nahum describes the fall of the city of Nineveh to the Babylonians and Medes in 612 BC. He describes in detail the shields, chariots and spears of the Assyrian foes. While we do not have any contemporary Babylonian reliefs of their chariots, there are Assyrian reliefs of Assyrian chariots riding furiously. These chariots are depicted on the reliefs of the Assyrians attacking the Arabs.

Nahum mentions the broad roads of Nineveh. Ashurbanipal's grandfather, Sennacherib, was the one who improved the streets of Nineveh. In the "Bellino cylinder" he boasts, "I (Sennacherib) widened its (Nineveh's) squares, made bright the avenues and streets and caused them to shine like the day" (1:61).

In the context of the book, Nahum sees a vision of chariots in the streets of Nineveh, not Volkswagens, as some prophecy teachers have speculated!

Take the Booty and Run! (Nahum 2:9,10)

Nineveh was the Fort Knox of mid-7th century BC Mesopotamia. On every Assyrian campaign they always removed the silver, gold and precious stones and other items from the cities that they sacked. When they bragged about the booty that was taken, silver and gold always topped the list. As an example, after the fall of No-Amon (Thebes), Ashurbanipal bragged that he took: "Silver, gold, precious stones, the goods of his palace, all there was, brightly colored and linen garments, great horses, the people, male and female, two tall obelisks. ... I removed from their positions and carried them off to Assyria. Heavy plunder, and countless, I carried away

from Ni' (Thebes)" (ARAB II: 296, para. 778). There are also reliefs of Assyrian scribes writing down the booty that was taken from other cities.

In Nahum's vision he saw someone say, "Take spoil of silver! Take spoil of gold! There is no end of treasure, or wealth of every desirable prize. She is empty, desolate and waste!" (2:9,10a). The Babylonian Chronicles (BM 21.901) described the spoils taken from Nineveh by the Babylonians and the Medes in these terms: "Great quantities of spoil from the city, beyond counting, they carried off" (ARAB II: 420, para. 1178).

One of the excavators of Nineveh has commented, that there has been very little gold and silver found in the ruins of the city. The Medes and Babylonians "cleaned house" after they conquered the city, just like Nahum predicted.

Diodorus, a Greek historian from Sicily, writing in the 1st century BC, described the final hours of the king of Nineveh, Sardanapallus, in these words: "In order that he might not fall into the hands of the enemy, he built and enormous pyre in his palace, heaped upon it all his gold and silver as well as every article of the royal wardrobe, and then ... he consigned [his concubines and eunuchs] and himself and his palace to the flame" (Book 2. 27:2; LCL 1:441). Unfortunately the Babylonian account is broken at this point. It says, "On that day Sin-shar-ishkun, king of Assyria, fled from the city (?) ..." (ARAB II: 420; para. 1178).

If Diodorus is correct, the king of Assyria tried to take his wealth with him. At best, the gold and silver melted and were collected later. The Bible is clear that people cannot take their wealth with them to the afterlife, but it

can be sent on ahead. The Lord Jesus admonishes His disciples to “lay up for themselves treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:19-21).

The Lion Hunt (Nahum 2:11-13)

David Dorsey, in his outstanding book, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament* (1999:301-305), places the lion’s den verses (2:11-13) at the center of the book’s chiastic structure. In commenting on the pattern of the structure he says, “This progression underscores the certainty of Nineveh’s fall: Yahweh’s prophet not only believes that it will happen; he composes dirges as though it has already happened. The placement of the eulogy over the ‘lion’s den’ in the book’s highlighted central position reinforces this sense of certainty” (1999:304, *italics mine*).

Nahum used the lion and lion hunt motifs that both the Judeans and Assyrians would have been well familiar. The Assyrians had a long history of depicting their king and warriors as mighty lions or great lion hunters (Johnston 2001:296-301). The Bible also depicts the Assyrian warriors as roaring lions (Isa. 5:29) and Yahweh as a lion who will tear up His prey and carry it off to His lair (Hosea 5:14, 15; 13:7, 8; Johnston 2001:294, 295).

According to Ashurbanipal’s annals, at the beginning of his reign, two deities, Adad and Ea blessed the land of Assyria with plenty of rain. This rain caused the forests to thrive and the reeds in the marshes to flourish. This blessing resulted in a population explosion among the lions. They exerted their influence in the hills and on the plain by attacking herds of cattle, flocks of sheep and people. Many were killed (ARAB II: 363, para. 935).

Ashurbanipal II, following in the footsteps of his predecessors, took charge of the lion hunts in order to control the lion population (ARAB II: 392, para. 1025).

Ashurbanipal also engaged in lion hunting as a sport. Apparently lions were captured alive and put in cages in the king's garden in Nineveh and used for staged lion hunts (Weissert 1997:339-358). One relief that was found in the North Palace at Nineveh and had apparently fallen into Room S from a second floor had three panels depicting a lion hunt. On the top panel, a lion is released from a cage and Ashurbanipal is shooting him with arrows. The central panel is interesting because it shows the bravery of the king. On the right side of the panel, soldiers are distracting a lion. On the left side, Ashurbanipal sneaks up and grabs the lion by the tail as he rears to his hind legs. [I dare anybody to try this stunt at a zoo today!] The inscription above says, "I, Ashurbanipal, king of the universe, king of Assyria, in my lordly sport I seized a lion of the plain by his tail and at the command of Urta, Nergal, the gods, my allies, I smashed his skull with the club of my hand" (ARAB II: 391, para. 1023). The king attributes his bravery to the deities. Dr. J. E. Reade, one of the keepers of the Western Asiatic Antiquities at the British Museum has observed, "It is notable that much of the lion's tail has been chipped away, so that the lion has been, as it were, set loose; this defacement was probably the action, at once humorous and symbolic, of some enemy soldier busy ransacking the palace in 612 B.C." (Curtis and Reade 1995:87). On the lower panel, Ashurbanipal is pouring out a wine libation over the carcasses of four lions. In the inscription above, the king boasts of his power by saying, "I, Ashurbanipal, king of

the universe, king of Assyria, whom Assur and Ninlil have endowed with surpassing might. The lions which I slew, - the terrible bow of Ishtar, lady of battle, I aimed at them. I brought an offering, I poured out wine over them" (ARAB II: 392, para. 1021). The king attributes his mighty power to the gods, Assur and Ninlil.

In contrast, Ashurbanipal boasts that kings and lions are powerless before him. At the beginning of one of his annals (Cylinder F) he states, "Among men, kings, and among the beasts, lions (?) were powerless before my bow. I know (the art) of waging battle and combat. ... A valiant hero, beloved of Assur and Ishtar, of royal lineage, am I" (ARAB II: 347, para. 896). Ashurbanipal has tied his lion hunting and military conquests together in one statement.

In the vision of Nahum concerning Nineveh, Nahum asks a rhetorical question, "Where is the dwelling of the lions, and the feeding place of the young lions, where the lion walked, the lioness and lion's cub, and no one made them afraid?" (2:11). He sees Nineveh as a lions den that has been destroyed and the lions are gone. The "prey" in verse 12 is apparently the booty that the Assyrians have taken from all the cities they conquered in recent memory. In verse 13, the LORD states directly, "Behold, I am against you. I will burn your chariots in smoke, and the sword shall devour your young lions; I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your messenger shall be heard no more." The phrase "the sword shall devour your young lions" draws our attention to another relief showing Ashurbanipal thrusting a sword through a lion. The inscription associate with this relief says, "I, Ashurbanipal, king of the universe, king of Assyria, in my lordly sport, they let

a fierce lion of the plain out of the cage and on foot ... I stabbed him later with my iron girdle dagger and he died" (ARAB II: 392, para. 1024).

The book of Nahum sets forth an ironic reversal of the Assyrian usage of the lion motif. Dr. Gordon Johnston has observed, "The extended lion metaphor in Nahum 2:11-13 includes the two major varieties of the Neo-Assyrian lion motif: the depiction of the Assyrian king and his warriors as mighty lions, and the royal lion hunt theme. While the Assyrians kept these two motifs separate, Nahum dovetailed the two, but in doing so he also reversed their original significance. While the Assyrian warriors loved to depict themselves as mighty lions hunting their prey, Nahum pictured them as lions that would be hunted down. The Assyrian kings also boasted that they were mighty hunters in royal lion hunts; Nahum pictured them as the lion being hunted in the lion hunt. By these reversals Nahum created an unexpected twist on Assyrian usage. According to Nahum the Assyrians were like lions, to be sure; however, not in the way that they depicted themselves: rather than being like lions on the prowl for prey, the hunters would become the hunted!" (2001: 304).

Nahum was keenly aware of the culture that he was writing to and was able to effectively use it to convey a powerful message from the Lord.

Nineveh, a Bloody City (Nahum 3:1)

Nahum pronounced "woe to the bloody city (of Nineveh)" (3:1). The city and the Assyrian Empire had a well-earned reputation for being bloody. Just a casual glance at the reliefs in the British Museum from the palaces of Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal show the

“gory and bloodcurdling history as we know it” (Bleibtreu 1991:52). There are reliefs with people being impaled, decapitated, flayed, tongues pulled out, making people grind the bones of their dead ancestors, even vultures plucking out the eyes of the dead!

One panel graphically shows the disrespect for human life. On it, a commander is presenting a bracelet to an Assyrian soldier who had decapitated the five or six heads at his feet. There are two scribes behind him recording the event. This bracelet, perhaps a medal of valor, is worth five or six lives! In Assyrian thinking, life was cheap.

Countless Corpse (Nahum 3:3)

There is an old adage that says, “What goes around, comes around.” The Bible would use an agricultural metaphor, “You reap what you sow” (cf. Gal. 6:7). This is true in the geo-political realm as well as the personal realm. The Assyrians, over their long history, were brutal and barbaric people. Yet there came a point in history where God said, “Enough is enough,” and He removed the offending party (Nahum 2:13; 3:4).

Nineveh fell in 612 BC, yet it wasn't until the 1989 and 1990 seasons of the University of California, Berkeley excavations in the Halzi Gate that graphic evidence of the final battle of Nineveh was revealed. Upwards to 16 bodies were excavated in the gate, all slain (Stronach and Lumsden 1992: 227-233; Stronach 1997: 315-319). Archaeological excavations have vividly confirmed the words of the Biblical text. “Horsemen charge with bright sword and glittering spear. There is a multitude of slain, a great number of bodies, countless corpses – they stumble over the corpses” (Nahum 3:3).

The Fall of No-Amon (Thebes) (Nahum 3:8-11)

Nahum taunts the Assyrians for trusting in their fortifications for protection and security. Nineveh was a heavily fortified city, yet the Lord had decreed its demise.

He asked rhetorically, “Are you better than No-Amon (Thebes) that was situated by the (Nile) River, that had the waters around her, whose rampart was the sea, whose wall was the sea?” (3:8). No-Amon is the Egyptian word for “city of (the deity) Amon” commonly known today by its Greek name, Thebes.

Esarhaddon had taken Egypt on his second invasion in 671 BC. When he died, the Egyptians revolted and Ashurbanipal went to Egypt to put down this revolt. He cleared the Delta of the Cushites (Ethiopians) in 667/666 BC and the Cushite ruler, Taharqa fled to No-Amon. On Ashurbanipal’s first campaign against Egypt, he took 22 kings from the seacoast, with their armies, to help him fight the Egyptians. Ashurbanipal claims that he “made those kings with their forces (and) their ships accompany me by sea and by land” (Rainey 1993:157). One of those kings was Manasseh, king of Judah, with his army. On his second campaign, he went to No-Amon and defeated the city and razed it in 663 BC. There were Judeans in the Assyrian army that saw this event. When they heard or read the words of Nahum they would have been encouraged. The Assyrians were able to defeat a strong and impermeable No-Amon, and God would now fulfill His Word and Nineveh will fall.

Ashurbanipal had a relief of the fall of No-Amon. It is labeled “an Egyptian fortress” in the British Museum. Yadin cautiously states, “The crowning achievement of

Ashurbanipal's expeditionary force to Egypt was the capture and destruction of Thebes 'of the hundred gates' (the Egyptian capital during the XXVth Dynasty) in the year 663 BC. It is most probable that this is the event which the Assyrian artist depicted in such detail here in his portrayal of an attack on an Egyptian city" (1963:462). If this is the case, we have a very graphic illustration of the Biblical text. The top of the relief has the Assyrians besieging the city with ladders, soldiers undermining the walls and a soldier torching the gate. A close examination of the defenders reveals that there are two ethnic groups defending the city. One group with the Negroid features is the Ethiopians and the others are the Egyptians. Nahum said, "Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength. And it was boundless" (3:9a).

On the left of the relief, above the Nile River, are Ethiopian captives being taken out of No-Amon. A careful examination of these captives reveals chains on their ankles. Nahum prophesized, "Yet she was carried away, she went into captivity. ... They cast lots for her honorable men, and all her great men were bound in chains" (3:10).

Another remarkable illustration of the Biblical text is the group of twelve Egyptians to the right side of the relief awaiting their fate on the banks of the Nile River. As I stared at the group I noticed three children. Two were seated on the donkey and one was on the shoulder of his father. I could not help but wonder if these children knew the fate that awaited them. The words of the prophet were, "Her young children also were dashed to pieces at the head of every street" (3:10). Thankfully the Assyrian artist did not have the audacity to carve this scene on the relief!

An interesting side note should be mentioned. Manasseh was with Ashurbanipal II when he conquered No-Amon, the city of the deity Amon, in 663 BC. That was the year that a son was born to him, the future king of Judah, Ammon. Apparently Manasseh named his son after the Egyptian deity Amon. This is consistent with Manasseh's character of following after other gods. But why an Egyptian god and not an Assyrian one, I do not know.

The Fig Trees and the Forts (Nahum 3:12)

After asking Nineveh, "Are you better than No-Amon?" Nahum proceeds to describe the rapid fall of the cities and fortified surrounding Nineveh. He says, "All your strongholds are fig trees with ripened figs: if they are shaken, they will fall into the mouth of the eater" (3:13). When the figs are ripe, they drop easily from the tree when shaken. This is a word-picture that the Ninevites knew from personal experience. Figs were common in Nineveh, as attested to by their appearance on reliefs.

A Locust at the Banquet (Nahum 3:15b-17)

One of the most pathetic reliefs in Ashurbanipal's palace is one of a royal banquet that commemorated the defeat of the king's most hated foe, Teumman, the king of Elam. On this relief, Ashurbanipal is reclining on a couch under a grape vine in his garden sipping wine with his consort. There are servants around them with fans, while other servants are bringing food and playing musical instruments. From Ashurbanipal's vantage point on the couch he could gaze on the trophy head of the Elamite king hanging from a ring in the fir tree.

In a warped perversion of a Biblical description of peace, that of every man sitting under his vine and fig

tree (Micah 4:1-4), this relief commemorated the cessation of war with the Elamites after nine years. Ashurbanipal attributes his victory to “the Assyrian pantheon, and in particular, the deities Ashur and Ishtar of Arbela. Thus the human head may be viewed as more than a memorial to a successful battle; it is symbolic of a major threat to the Assyrian throne, a threat that was decisively eliminated through divine might” (Albenda 1977:35). Yet Micah says that real peace will come when the nations go to the LORD’s House in Jerusalem and worship Him. Then “they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nations shall not lift up sword against nations, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Micah 4:3).

There is one detail in this relief that should not be missed. In the upper left hand corner is one locust sitting on top of a palm tree. To its right is a bird swooping down as if to catch it. One art historian describes the scene this way: “Related to this is the image of a locust alight upon an upper branch of a tree, a short distance from the severed head of Teumman. A bird sweeps down toward the insect as if to devour it. This apparently minor detail may have special meaning, for in the annals Ashurbanipal describes the Elamites as a ‘dense swarm of grasshoppers’ [ARAB II: 329, para. 855]. Within this context, the locust may signify the last vestige of a once dreadful enemy, now virtually eliminated” (Albenda 1977:31,32).

At the end of the book of Nahum we have another reversal of fortune. Instead of the Elamites being the locusts, the Assyrians are, and they are about to be eliminated! But Nahum does not describe the destructive aspects of the locust plague, but rather, the

flight of the locusts after they have done their damage. In Nahum 3:17 he states, "Your commanders are like swarming locusts, and your generals like great grasshoppers, which camp in the hedges on a cold day; when the sun arises they flee away, and the place where they are is not known."

One of the pioneer Israeli biologists, Prof. F. S. Bodenheimer, puts this aspect of Nahum's mention of locusts in scientific terms. He describes his observations of the body temperature of the Desert Locusts (*Schistocerca gregaria*) in the fifth hopper stage thus, "Since dawn the locusts had been turning their bodies towards the rays of the sun to 'drink' the maximum of heat. Intensive migration set in only when the body temperature had reached about 40 degrees C. This utilization of sun radiation we called heliothermy" (1959:202). He attributes the first mention of heliothermy to Nahum (1959:201).

The Fall of Nineveh

Prior to the beginning of the 20th century, commentators discussed the date for the fall of Nineveh. The possibilities for this event ranged from 716 to 709 BC. In 1923, C. J. Gadd published a tablet from Babylon in the possession of the British Museum. The tablet was called the "Babylonian Chronicles" (BM 21.901) and it covered the years 616-609 BC, or the 10th to the 17th year of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon. The annals place the fall of Nineveh in the 14th year of his reign, the year 612 BC. This event provides the student of history with an absolute chronological peg for Biblical and Assyrian history.

Conclusions

We have journeyed through the halls of the British Museum in this article pointing out the reliefs and objects that help to illustrate the text of the small, yet important book, of Nahum. My hope is that this discussion has helped make the Biblical text “come alive” and has given the student of the Scriptures a more accurate visual aid to the Bible.

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Remember, Archaeology is NOT a Treasure Hunt!

Introduction

The headline of the Science Section of the New York Times for Tuesday, September 28, 2004 read, “Solving a Riddle Written in Silver.” I recognized the picture underneath the headline right away. It was a portion of a silver amulet that was discovered in Jerusalem in 1979. The article described the scholarly debate concerning the date assigned to the amulets by the excavator and his team in the latest issue of the Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research. They claim that these two objects contain the two oldest Biblical text ever discovered to date. Unfortunately the BASOR article is very technical. It discusses the style of the letters and how this is used to date the amulets. This, however, is important to answer the critics who have suggested the amulets were not as old as the excavator claims they were. This article will not deal with the technical aspects of the debate, as important as they are, but rather, I would like to take you behind the scenes and share some of the human interest stories relating to the discovery, unrolling, announcement and publication of these two amulets.

Monday morning, July 30, 1979 is as clear in my mind as if it were yesterday. It was about 6 AM when I arrived at the excavations below the St. Andrew’s Scottish Presbyterian Church, a site that would later be known as Ketef Hinnom, “the shoulder of Hinnom”.

The director of the excavation, Gabriel Barkay, known to his students and friends as Goby, asked me, "Gordon, how energetic are you?" I replied, smiling, "As energetic as a 25 year old person could be." "Good," he said, "I want you to clean out that cave over there with three junior high Israeli students." I was up to the challenge. As I headed for the cave, Goby confided, "By the way, the cave might be loaded. But remember, archaeology is NOT a treasure hunt." Thus began one of the most interesting weeks of my life.

This was one of the first archaeological excavations I ever worked on and now I was an area supervisor of three junior high Israeli students. I was about to receive a crash course with on the job training in Methodology of Archaeological Excavations 101, also known as, how to excavate a burial cave when you don't know what you are doing. Fortunately, I was a quick learner and Goby was a great teacher.

The Burial Cave

The repository, the place where the bones and any burial gifts for the dead were deposited after the flesh had decayed, measured 3.69 meters long, by 2 meters wide. The ceiling stood 2.23 meters from the floor. The ceiling had collapsed which suggested to Goby that there might be a sealed layer underneath with archaeological artifacts.

As we began to work, I realized three problems. First, there was a lack of light. We were dependent upon the sunlight or its reflection that came through the 51 cm by 61 cm door of the repository that stood about a meter and a half above us. Once our eyes adjusted to the darker cave we could see fairly well. Second, there was a

communication problem. I did not speak any Hebrew and the Israelis did not speak any English. Third, the three junior high students were just that, junior high students.

Goby gave them instructions in Hebrew to clean around any objects they found and leave them in situ so they could be measured, described, drawn and photographed in their original location. Do you think these junior highers listened to Goby or me? At first they would dig little pits until they found something and then hold it up and say, "Tireh ma matzati!" (Translation: "Look what I found!"). Frustration was setting in very quickly.

Goby instructed me to divide the cave into six quadrants and excavate one or two at a time. I put a string across the top of the ceiling of the repository and leveled it with a line level. This was our datum line. Using tape measures and a plumb line, I was able to draw an outline of the cave, then plot and draw many of the pieces that were uncovered. This was a learning experience for me. Goby stressed the importance of measuring all the objects from their lowest point. I am glad I listened to him because years later, it would prove very important in the dating of the amulets.

During one of our breaks the first morning, Goby said to me, "Gordon, I want you to find me an inscription. If you do, I'll give you a party." I laughed because I knew from his Archaeology of Jerusalem classes that inscriptions in Jerusalem are very rare. Nevertheless, I half jokingly said, "I'll find you an inscription on the last day and in the last square." Little did I know how prophetic that statement would be.

By Tuesday afternoon we had realized just how important this cave was, so we replaced the junior high students with adults from the Institute for Holy Land Studies across the valley on Mt. Zion. Late in the afternoon we had run out of boxes and bags to put our “special finds” in, so Goby and I went shopping for these items. We could not get these items from the Department of Antiquities because they were temporarily closed due to a police investigation.

We had already found bronze and silver objects that had corroded. I asked Goby if there was a chance of finding any gold objects. He answered in the affirmative and mentioned that a burial cave in the Silwan Necropolis across from the City of David had an inscription that mentioned there was no silver or gold buried in the cave and concluded with a curse on anyone who opened it (Avigad 1953: 143). I did not like that last line. Seeing the corroded objects that we had found, I asked Goby what gold would look like when it was uncovered. He said, “Don’t worry, you’ll recognize it when you see it.” How true that was, the next day I found a gold earring that looked like it was made the day before.

We were afraid that if certain elements in the population from the nearby neighborhoods found out about the jewelry objects they would visit the site at night and clean the place out. Since the site was out in the open and people were coming and going, we had to speak in code. Silver objects were called “gray matter,” gold was “lemon,” coins were “buttons,” and bones were called “Napoleons” (as in Bone-apart).

Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday were normal eight-hour days, but time was of the essence. Thursday we

worked from 5:30 in the morning until 5:30 at night, 12 hours. Friday we worked from 5:30 in the morning until 9:30 at night, 16 hours. While Goby and I were sifting in the late afternoon, two individuals with black hats and black coats were walking down the Hebron road on their way to the Western Wall for Shabbat prayers. They saw us and we saw them. Goby remarked to me with a serious tone in his voice, "We have to finish tomorrow because if we don't they will be back Sunday morning with their friends to protest our excavations." Thanks to Rev. Tom Houston, the pastor of St. Andrews, we were able to use an electrical outlet above the cave. Jim Monson, a professor at the Institute of Holy Land Studies, provided a light bulb and electrical cord so we were able to work into the night.

Saturday morning, August 4, we began work at 6 AM with the help of students and staff of the Institute. We divided into two groups with one excavating inside the cave, and the other outside sifting for the small finds that might have been missed by those in the cave. I was running between the two groups recording and drawing the objects. Earl Hagar was photographing the finds as they were uncovered.

About mid morning, Judy Hadley, an archaeology student at Wheaton College (now a professor at Villanova University) brushed aside some dirt to reveal a rolled up piece of silver. I described it in my journal as a "silver roll" and recorded it as object 31 from Area D, located at a level of 188 cm and then drew it on my plan. It was given basket number 481. Later, it would be called Ketef Hinnom amulet I. Goby suspected it might have an inscription on it, but it first had to be cleaned and unrolled and that would take time. We finished

cleaning out the dirt from the cave at 1 AM Sunday morning. It had been a 19-hour marathon day!

Sunday and Monday we continued sifting the material that was excavated after dark on Saturday. Sifting is best done in daylight so we took the dirt from each quadrant and placed them in labeled buckets, boxes, trays or whatever containers we could find so the dirt could be sifted in daylight. A second silver roll came up in the sifting during one of the afternoons. It would become known as Ketef Hinnom amulet II.

Monday, in one of the last buckets to be sifted, a seal was discovered. Using his son's Play-doh, Goby made an impression of the seal and it revealed the name "Paltah". Unbeknownst to us, this was only the first inscription.

A summary of the excavation has been published in preliminary form, but not a final excavation report (Franz 1986; Barkay 1994).

Opening the Scrolls

The two silver amulets were given an initial cleaning at the labs of Tel Aviv University. Museums in England and Germany were given the opportunity to unroll the objects, but declined because they were afraid of damaging the fragile objects. Three years after their discovery, the delicate job of opening them was finally entrusted to Joseph "Dodo" Shenhav of the Israel Museum. Under his able direction, the amulets were successfully unrolled during the fall of 1982 (Rasovsky, Bigelajzen and Shenhav 1992: 192-194).

On one Friday morning, Dr. Yaakov Meshorer, the curator of the numismatics section of the Israel Museum, looked at one of the amulets under a

microscope. He recognized the paleo-Hebrew writing. He tried to call Goby but because Goby had just moved he did not have a phone in his apartment. Yaakov left a message with Goby's wife saying "Urgent, call Yaakov." In Israel, when somebody gets a message like that it usually means that someone died and the funeral is that day. When Goby finally got the message he quickly called Dr. Meshorer who conveyed the good news about the writing on one of the amulets. Unfortunately for Goby, it was Friday afternoon and the museum labs would be closed until Sunday morning, so he had to wait until then to view the inscription.

That Friday night I took some students from the Institute to their homes after Shabbat dinner and vespers. Since I was in the neighborhood, I decided to stop by Goby's new apartment to see his succa (booth made of branches for the Jewish holiday Succoth) that his family had on their porch. He said with excitement in his voice, "Gordon, I have good news for you. One of the scrolls was opened and it has the word yod - hey - vav - hey on it." My Hebrew still wasn't that good, but I recognized the spelling right away. It was the name of the Lord, YHWH. This was the first time the Lord's name was found in an archaeological context in Jerusalem.

Goby entrusted the drawing of the two scrolls to one of his graduate students from the Institute, Bill J. Wilson. He would take the scrolls from my room, because I had them under lock and key, to the Israel Museum in order to draw each and every line he could see using an electronic microscope, the best in Israel at the time. It was a painstaking job, but Bill did an outstanding job of recovering and drawing 90% of the inscription but it still did not make sense.

The First Public Announcement

The first public announcement of this discovery was on Sunday afternoon, January 9, 1983, at a public lecture at the Rockefeller Museum sponsored by the Albright Institute and Hebrew Union College. These lectures usually last from three until four in the afternoon. As it turned out, this lecture was hosted and moderated by Professor Avraham Biran, the doyen of Israeli archaeology. There was a bit of irony in this setup. Avraham Biran is notorious for going over his allotted time when he presents a paper at professional meetings. Of course, no moderator would have the heart to stop an enthusiastic Dr. Biran in the middle of an exciting presentation, much to the consternation of the presenter that follows him! On the other hand, when he is moderating a session, he is famous for stopping a presenter in mid sentence if the person went over his or her allotted time.

Before the lecture to a packed auditorium, Goby told Dr. Biran about the two amulets and he would announce the discovery that afternoon. When he was introduced, Dr. Biran told the audience that Goby had an important discovery to announce.

The lecture started promptly on time (vintage Biran). Bill Wilson and I were sitting in the second row, right behind Dr. Biran. We were amused to see him sitting on the edge of his seat with excitement as each slide was put up on the screen showing a different discovery. Goby started his lecture with the topography of the site, then he talked about the Byzantine church and monastic complex. He moved on to the Roman burials and finally the Iron Age burial caves. I looked at my watch and it

was five minutes to four and Goby had not started to talk about Cave 25. I thought to myself, "Biran is going to yank Goby off the stage even before he has time to reveal the amulets." At 4 PM Goby finally got around to talking about Cave 25 and proceeded to talk about each discovery in the cave for another 15 minutes. Finally, the last five minutes he dropped the "bombshell" about the amulets and the Name of the Lord appearing in an archaeological excavation in Jerusalem for the first time. With that, Goby finished and the audience broke out in a thunderous applause. Avraham Biran was beside himself with excitement and publicly congratulated Goby on his "sensational" discovery.

After Goby talked with his colleagues and friends, I had a chance to speak with him. I said, "Goby, knowing Biran's habit of cutting people off in mid sentence, did you deliberately go overtime?" He gave me a devilish grin and said, "Yes." To this day, Goby is the only person known to have gone overtime during a session moderated by Professor Biran and gotten away with it.

The Oldest Biblical Texts

In 1986, the Israel Museum wanted to have a "display of the month" devoted to the excavations at Ketef Hinnom. In preparation for the exhibit, Adi Yardeni of the Israel Museum redrew the amulets. One morning she had a chance conversation with a religious colleague at the museum. She mentioned she was drawing a text with the name of the LORD written three times on it. He replied, "Three times? Maybe it's the priestly blessing." When Yardeni returned to her work, she tried to read the passage of Numbers 6:24-26 into the inscription. Much to her amazement, it worked. Thus, the first

Biblical inscription from the First Temple period was deciphered (Rabinovich 1986: 16, 17).

When the exhibition opened at the Israel Museum in June of 1986, the announcement of the two oldest Biblical texts was made. The next day it was in every newspaper in America.

On Saturday, June 21, 1986, I was attending a church picnic in New Jersey. One of the elderly gentleman from church asked if I had heard about an important Biblical discovery in Israel. I asked him questions about it, but he was vague on the details. He just remembered it was the oldest Biblical text ever discovered. He promised to bring the article from the paper to church the next day.

The next day he showed me the article. I got the shock of my life. As I was reading the article I began to realize, "This is the excavation I worked on. Those amulets were in my room. I've held them in my hand!" That afternoon I entertained the preacher for the day, Mr. T. Ernest Wilson, a retired missionary from Angola. In the course of our conversation he asked me if I knew anything about this discovery. I smiled and said, "Would you like to see a drawing of it?" At this point the drawings had not been published and Bill Wilson and I were the only ones in America that had a drawing of the amulets.

The Publication of the Texts

Archaeological protocol gives the right of publication in a timely fashion to the director of the excavation or to someone designated by the excavator. Goby has always been a thorough and meticulous scholar and will only publish something after he has completely studied the issue.

When I was in graduate school (1986-87) I was invited to give a paper on the amulets at the Southeast Regional Evangelical Theological Society meeting in Columbia, SC. I called Goby to ask his permission to give the paper. He hesitated at first, but then asked, "Will the people in the audience be theologians or archaeologists?" I replied, "Theologians." He said, "Fine, go ahead and give the paper." I appreciated Goby giving me permission because he still had not published the amulets in a technical fashion. The first article in Hebrew was in 1989 (Barkay 1989) and then translated and published in English in 1992 (Barkay 1992).

A Description of the Amulets

The larger amulet, Ketef Hinnom I, was 27.5 mm wide, with a diameter of 11 mm. In the center was a hole 2 mm in diameter, used to thread a string through in order to wear around the neck. When unrolled, the plaque measured 97 mm long and 27 mm wide. The weight of the object was 7.6 grams.

This amulet was almost pure silver. The metal analysis showed a 99% silver content and a 1% copper. These plaques might be the beaten (hammered) silver brought from Tarshish mentioned in Jeremiah 10:9.

The letters were incised on the plaques. Jeremiah, a contemporary of these amulets, describes how the writing was possibly done, "with a pen of iron, with a point of diamond" (17:1, NKJV).

At the top of the amulet is a group of letters that at first did not make sense. After re-photographing the amulets in 1994, the group of letters became readable (Barkay, Lundberg, Vaughn, Zuckerman, Zuckerman 2003). With

more letters, the text became more understandable. The first fourteen lines read, "...]YHW ... the grea[t ... who keeps] the covenant and [G}raciousness toward those who love [him] and those who keep [His commandments]. The Eternal? [...]. [the?] blessing more than any [sna]re and more than Evil. For redemption is in Him. For YHWH is our restorer [and] rock" (Barkay, Lundberg, Vaughn and Zuckerman 2004: 61). It was observed that the "substance of the reading for lines 2-7 is reasonably secure because these lines fit, at least loosely, a biblical parallel attested to in Dan. 9:4 and Neh. 1:5 (with a similar reading in Deut. 7:9)" (2004:55). The end of the amulet has part of the priestly blessing. The last portion of it, however, was lost when the scroll was unrolled.

The smaller amulet, Ketef Hinnom II, is 11.5 mm wide and 5.5 mm in diameter in a rolled up position. Unrolled, it is 39.2 mm long and 11 mm wide. Unfortunately, the bottom third was missing. The priestly blessing on it says, "The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face to shine upon you, and give you peace." The passage in Numbers 6:24-26 upon which it is based has fifteen words in it. The scribe of the amulet left out five words in order to create a shorter blessing. And we thought the Reader's Digest Bible was a modern invention!

The Dating of the Amulets

The burial cave in which the amulets were found was carved in the mid-seventh century BC. The pottery assemblage comes from three discernable periods. The first period is the end of the Iron Age. This pottery style parallels the pottery from Lachish, Level II, and the City

of David, Level X. These levels are dated to the end of the Judean Monarchy, or 587 BC. The second period is the Babylonian period when most of the Judeans were in captivity in Babylon. The prophet Jeremiah mentions people who remained behind after the Babylonians carried away, or killed, most of the Judeans (Jer. 41:5; 39:10). The third period represented was the Hellenistic period. The few finds from this period were confined to the area around the entrance of the repository of the burial cave.

Based on the style of the letters, or paleography, Goby dated the amulets to the late seventh century BC, or very early sixth century BC (Barkay 1992). Several scholars challenged this date and argued that it was much later, during the Hellenistic period. One of the reasons was the existence of the eight Hellenistic pottery pieces in the cave.

The importance of careful records cannot be overestimated. Goby had to go back and look at the journal that I kept and the plan of the burial cave with the objects plotted on them. It was observed that the average depth of the deposits in the repository was 65 cm deep. The Ketef Hinnom I amulet was found 7 cm above the floor. This demonstrated that the amulet was one of the earliest objects thrown into the repository. Ketef Hinnom II was found in Area A, the back quadrant. Goby observed that this was also one of the earliest deposits.

On paleographic grounds, these two inscriptions should be dated to the end of the seventh century BC. This fits well with the corresponding archaeological data as well as historical considerations. Clearly these are the two

oldest Biblical texts found to date. They predate the Dead Sea Scrolls by at least 400 years.

Implication for Biblical Studies

There is at least one important implication for Biblical studies. According to the critical scholars, Numbers 6:23-27 should be attributed to the so-called “P source” which is generally dated to the Post-Exilic, or Persian Period. It is obvious that we now have two examples of this text that were written prior to the Babylonian captivity. This makes it impossible to assume that the Priestly Benediction was crystallized during the Post-Exilic period.

A word of caution is in order. These amulets cannot be used to prove when the priestly blessing was originally composed, or even who wrote it. The only thing they can tell us is that at the end of the seventh century BC the priestly blessing existed. We have to turn to the Bible to find out that Aaron, the brother of Moses, first gave the blessing and Moses wrote it down sometime during the last half of the 15th century BC.

Conclusion

These amulets were worn around the neck to protect the wearer from evil or to surround themselves with the name of the Lord for protection. We observe the same phenomenon today when people wear religious objects, hoping that God would be gracious to them and protect them. It seems that the Biblical passages are added on at the end of a “prayer request” for protection from some evil person or calamity, or for blessing in the wearer’s life.

These two silver objects with Scripture verses on them could be the forerunner to the phylacteries of the later periods. It is interesting, Torah instructed the people to “wear the Word of God.” In Exodus 13:9,16 it says, “And it shall serve as a sign to you on your hand, and as a reminder on your forehead, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth” (NKJV, cf. also Deut. 6:8; 11:18; Prov. 6:21; 1:9: 3:3, 22; 7:3).

The people literally wore the Word of God. The LORD gave this injunction in order to keep the Word of God constantly before His people, that they might learn it and obey it.

Even today this is still a good practice. In memorizing the Word of God, a poster or picture with a Scripture verse on it is helpful. But more important than wearing the Word of God, or hanging it on our wall, is to have it abiding in our hearts. King David declared, “Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee” (Ps. 119:11 NKJV).

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Job in the Land of Uz

The Book of Job, the oldest book in the Bible, has its historical-geographical setting in the Land of Uz. The book begins, “There was a man in the Land of Uz, whose name was Job; and the man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1 NKJV).

THE LAND OF UZ

Scholars are divided on the location of the Land of Uz. Some have suggested it was near Damascus; others, based on Lamentations 4:21, have placed it in the Land of Edom. Jeremiah wrote, “Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, you who dwell in the Land of Uz!” The Edom location makes geographical sense in light of the Biblical statement of Jeremiah and the flora, fauna and material culture mentioned in the book.

The ancient territory of Edom is located to the east and west of the Aravah, the Jordan Rift Valley that goes from the Dead Sea to the Red Sea, also known as the Gulf of Akaba or Eilat. On the west side of the Aravah, in Israel today, it goes from the Wilderness of Zin in the north to Eilat in the south. On the east side of the Aravah, in Jordan today, it goes from the Wadi Hasa (Brook Zered) in the north to Eilat in the south (Crew 2002: 2-10).

THE OUTLINE OF JOB

The book of Job is divided into three sections. Chapters 1 and 2 describe Satan’s diabolical attack on Job. All through this section, Job does not have a clue where his suffering is coming from. He does not see the “big

picture” and understand that Satan is behind these attacks. Yet through it all, he could say, “The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD” (1:21). His dear wife, seeing the situation he was in says, “Do you hold to your integrity? Curse God and die!” (2:9). Bless her heart, she must have had the gift of encouragement!

The second section is Job’s debate with his friends. As the old saying goes, “With friends like these, who needs enemies!” This goes from chapter 3-37. Job begins the debate by cursing the day he was born, but he does not curse God. The final section is God’s one-sided dialogue with Job in chapters 38-42. In this section, God asks Job a series of questions out of the whirlwind. He begins by asking, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” (38:4). In other words, “Job, were you with me at the Creation?” The book ends with Job’s confessing his lack of knowledge, and he turns from his rebellious ways (42:1-6). The Lord restores double what Job has lost (42:7-17).

THE THEME OF JOB

Most commentators and preachers would say that suffering is the theme of the book. But a careful examination of the book seems to reveal a slightly different theme: that of lessons learned from suffering. The emphasis is on the lessons learned.

The two key verses in the book are Job 13:15 and 37:23, 24. Job expresses his faith by saying, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust Him.” “As for the Almighty, we cannot find Him; He is excellent in power, in judgment and abundant justice; He does not oppress. Therefore men

fear Him; He shows no partiality to any who are wise of heart.”

CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING

The Patriarch Job lived soon after the Noahic Flood. This fact is reflected in the book. Job recalls this event several times (Job 9:5-8; 12:14-16; 26:11-14; 28:9). Job also recalls the post-Flood period when the earth is dried up (Job 14:11, 12). His friend Eliphaz mentions it in his third discourse. He said, “Will you keep to the old way which wicked men have trod, who were cut down before their time, whose foundations were swept away by a flood? They said to God, ‘Depart from us! What can the Almighty do to them?’” (Job 22:15-17). The Lord reminds Job of the Flood as well. When the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, He asked Job if he was at the creation (Job 38:4-7). The interrogation began, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” (38:4). God then asked Job if he was at the Flood in verses 8-11 (Morris 1988: 23-33).

After Job’s encounter with Satan and the LORD he lived another 140 years (42:16). Job might have been close to 200 years old when he died. Job would have been a Neanderthal (Cuozzo ???). His age would put him in the period of the Patriarchs. Perhaps he was a contemporary of, or slightly before, Abraham who lived to be 175 years old (Gen. 25:7).

At this point, we should raise the issue of the place of Job in the archaeological chronology. If we assume a Biblical date for the universal, worldwide Flood in Noah’s Day, with no gaps in the chronology, than the date for the flood would be 2459 BC (Whitcomb and Morris 1973: 478). If there are gaps in Genesis 11, then

the Flood could be several hundred years before (Whitcomb and Morris 1973: 474-483). It is important to note, we are talking hundreds, not thousands or millions of years.

If you look at the standard archaeology chronological tables the so-called “Prehistoric” period for human history is as followed: The Paleolithic period – 1 million down to 18,000 BC. The Mesolithic period – 18,000 to 8,300 BC. The Neolithic period – 8,300 to 4,500 BC. The Chalcolithic period – 4,500 to 3,300 BC. This is in obvious conflict with the Biblical chronology. This is where evangelical archaeologists need to “rethink early earth’s history.”

Using round numbers for a moment, if the Flood is at approximately 2450 BC and Abraham is about 2000 BC, then one must take the archaeological chronology and compress 1 million years into 450 years! It will take an individual, or individuals, who will devote a lifetime (or at least a doctoral dissertation) to reading excavation reports, archaeological journals, paleontology journals and books on assorted subjects to rethink this chronology. One will have to define what the presuppositions of the evolutionary assumptions are in archaeology and remove the underpinning of those assumptions. Then, using a Biblical framework, harmonize the known archaeological and paleontological data with the Biblical record. Where exactly Job fits in the archaeological chronology, I do not know for sure.

THE FLORA, FAUNA AND MATERIAL CULTURE OF THE LAND OF UZ

The flora, fauna and material culture of the book of Job fits the Aravah / Wilderness. In his discourse on wisdom

(Job 28), Job describes the mining operations in the Aravah region. "Surely there is a mine for silver, and a place where gold is refined. Iron is taken from the earth, and copper is smelted from ore. Man puts an end to darkness, and searches every recess for ore in the darkness and the shadow of death. He breaks open a shaft away from people; in places forgotten by feet. They hang far away from men, they swing to and fro" (28:1-4). While scholars debate the precise archaeological period of Job, the Timnah Copper mines just north of Eilat, did have small-scale mining activities during the Chalcolithic period (Rothenberg 1972: 24-64). It is interesting that the rock engravings from Chalcolithic Site 191 have ostriches on them, an animal mentioned several times in the book of Job (1972: 55, Fig. 14; cf. Job 30:29; 39:13-18).

When I take the Tablot Seminary students to the Timnah Copper mines during their January "Biblelands" program, I always have the host of the program, Dr. Richard Rigsby, read Job 28 at the deepest mine. Dr. Rigsby was the one who translated Job in the New King James Bible.

The most intensive exploitation of the Timnah Copper mines was during the Ramesside period by the Egyptians with Midianite help. There was also mining activities during the Roman period and Medieval Arab period.

In his discourse on wisdom, Job also mentions coral. "No mention shall be made of coral or quartz, for the price of wisdom is above rubies (28:18)." Coral was found in the excavations at the Timnah Copper mines. They came from some of the most beautiful coral reefs in the world,

the eastern branch of the Red Sea. The port of Eilat is famous for its snorkeling in the coral reefs.

Unfortunately, the coral reefs in the Red Sea are dying off today because of pollution. It is obvious; man does not have wisdom!

Elsewhere in the book, the (Red) sea with its sea serpents, fish of the sea, and ships are mentioned (Job 6:3; 7:12; 9:8, 26; 12:8; 26:12).

A number of animals mentioned in Job are indigenous to this region, most of which can be seen in the Hai Bar (Yotvata) Biblical Wildlife Reserve (Clark 1981: 22-35). Avraham Yoffe founded this reserve in 1968 in order to preserve species that were indigenous to this region in antiquity. One of their goals is to breed species that are on the verge of extinction and then have a controlled release of various species back into their open, natural habitat (Clark 1981: 22-35).

At Hai Bar, one can see the wild donkey and onager (Job 6:5; 11:12; 24:3, 5; 39:5-8). Mountain goats, also known as ibex are in the reserve (Job 39:1-4; Ps. 104:18). The deer, or gazelle (Job 39:1); the cobra and viper (20:14-16); jackal (30:29); ostrich (30:29; 39:13-18); hawk (39:26); eagle (9:26; 24:3; 39:27); stork (39:13) and locust (39:20) are in the reserve as well.

In Job 38:39-39:30, God asks Job questions concerning the animal kingdom. Of the ibex He asks, "Do you know the time when the wild mountain goat bears young?" Interestingly, when Dr. Rigsby translated the book of Job for the NKJV, he had not had the privilege of visiting the Hai Bar Reserve. If he had the chance to retranslate Job, he would have changed "wild mountain goat" to "ibex".

One of my favorite animals in the Hai Bar is the oryx. This animal with its straight horns is classified in the antelope family. It is the Biblical re'em [Heb.] and has been identified by some scholars as the "unicorn" in the King James Bible (Clark 1984: 66-70). It has also been translated "wild ox" in some translations (Job 39:9-12; also mentioned in Num. 32:22; 24:8; Deut. 33:17; Ps. 22:21; 29:6; 92:10; Isa. 34:7). These animals also are depicted on the rock carvings of the Timnah Copper mines. There is also a relief found in Egypt with a side profile of this animal and it looks like it has only one horn! Interestingly, the Los Angeles Zoo presents this possibility on the plaque in front of the oryx pen.

The Cloisters in upper Manhattan has the famous "Unicorn Tapestry." Usually artists depict the unicorn as a horse with a single horn. Yet if one looks at the unicorn tapestry closely, the unicorn is depicted, not in the equine (horse) family, but rather the antelope family (Clark 1984: 68). Perhaps the oryx is the basis of the unicorn legends. People might have seen a side profile of the oryx from a distance and thought the animal only had one horn.

The Lord asks Job some questions about this creature. "Will the re'em be willing to serve you? Will he be led by your manger? Can you bind the re'em in the furrow with ropes? Or will he plow the valleys behind you? Will you trust him because his strength is great? Or will you leave your labor to him? Will you trust him to bring home your grain, and gather it to your threshing floor?" (39:9-12).

The oryx is a fascinating creature. It can live indefinitely without drinking water, but gets its water through the

vegetation that it eats and the dew it licks off stones in the early morning hours. It hardly perspires and has a high concentration of urine and dry feces. It's white hairs are hollow and create excellent insulation and acts like Styrofoam. Its only problem is man. When threatened, it will stand and fight. With the introduction of firearms, the oryx was hunted and is now on the verge of extinction. The Hai bar Reserve is breeding a herd for controlled release into the Maktesh Ramon.

Another animal that has personality at the Hai Bar is the ostrich. The Lord says of the ostrich, "The wings of the ostrich wave proudly, but are her wings and pinions like the kindly stork's? For she leaves her eggs on the ground, and warms them in the dust; she forgets that a foot may crush them, or that a wild beast may break them. She treats her young harshly, as though they were not hers; her labor is in vain, without concern, because God deprived her of wisdom, and did not endow her with understanding. When she lifts herself on high, she scorns the horse and its rider" (39:13-18).

The ostrich can weigh up to 150 kg and stand 2.5 meters high. They are birds, but flightless ones. Their wings are too small to allow the bird to fly. However, the wings are good for helping the bird make sudden stops and shape turns as they run at speeds up to 60 kph.

The Lord contrasts the ostrich with the stork. The ostrich lays her eggs in the sand and has other eggs lying around. Some think as decoys for predators or food to nourish the newly hatched chicks. While the ostrich seemingly abandons her eggs, the stork guards them carefully. The stork has its nest high up and watches over the eggs and cares for the young after they are

hatched. The Hebrews used the word *hesed*, usually translated “loving kindness”, as a characteristic of the Lord. He was lovingly loyal to His people, guarding them, watching over them, and nourishing them. The stork had been named *chasidah*. This afforded the Hebrew a vivid word picture of God’s character.

The Lord says that He deprived the ostrich of wisdom and did not endow it with understanding. Arabs in the Middle East will call someone “stupid as an ostrich” as a sign of reproach. We in the West have a similar concept. A billboard was put up on a road near my house that had an ostrich sticking his head in the ground. The caption said: “Only a bird brain crosses without looking.”

Two animals not in the Hai Bar are the Behemoth (Job 40:15-24) and the Leviathan (Job 41:1-34). Job describes the Behemoth, apparently a dinosaur of some sort, as moving his tail like a cedar. The indication is that he had a thick tail, something an elephant or hippopotamus does not have (40:17). He is found lying under lotus trees and willows, and in the reeds and marshes of the Jordan River (Job 40:21-23), probably just north of the Dead Sea near Jericho. Job knew the Leviathan, a marine dinosaur of some sort, from his travels to the Red Sea, known today as the Gulf of Eilat / Akaba (Job 41).

Footprints of land dinosaurs have been discovered in Israel. In 1962 an Israeli found some three-pronged prints in the bedrock of his garden at Beit Zayit, a suburb of western Jerusalem (Avnimelech 1966). The area was exposed and more tracks uncovered. Most likely the dinosaurs that made these prints were the

Struthiomimus and laid down toward the end of Noah's Flood.

A plant that is indigenous to the area is the broom tree (rotem Heb.). The white broom is not an edible plant, but can be sold to earn bread (Job 30:1-4). The young men who scorned Job made embers from the root of the white broom to sell in the marketplace. What lowlier livelihood could there be in the eyes of a once wealthy Job than one that involves sitting by a fire night and day, black with soot and reeking with smoke?

Yehuda Feliks (1981), a professor of Biblical and Talmudic Botany, gives a number of examples of plants mentioned in the book of Job and which are indigenous to the region of the Wilderness and Aravah.

JOB'S SPIRITUAL LIFE

What are we to learn from the life of Job? He was a blameless and upright man who feared the Lord (1:1). He would offer sacrifices for his children (1:5) and believed he needed a mediator between him and the Lord (9:33; 25:4; 33:23). Yet one of the most profound statements in the book of Job comes from his lips when he proclaims, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God. Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (19:25-27). Neanderthals had superior physical, cultural, technical and intellectual abilities (Cuozzo 1998). Because of evolutionary influences, I do not think we give the Patriarchs enough credit for knowing about the Lord Jesus Christ. Job knew about the Redeemer and the resurrection.

In reality, the Lord Jesus Christ is the answer to Job's problems. It was the death of the Lord Jesus on Calvary's cross that put an end to sin, defeated Satan and conquered the grave so there could be a resurrection. Just as Job trusted the Lord through his difficult situation, so each and every individual needs to trust the Lord Jesus for his or her salvation. A person's salvation is not dependant upon his or her good works, church membership or baptism. It is dependent solely upon faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone as the one who died and paid for all sins and rose again from the dead.

When it comes to trials and testings in our lives, Dr. Henry Morris summarizes the message of the book of Job in this way: "God's central message to Job, and to us, is not an explanation of why the righteous suffer, but rather a call to sound belief in creation and an emphasis on our stewardship over creation, under God. Afflictions that come our way can then be placed in proper context. We belong to Him, both by creation and by redemption, and He has the right to do with us whatever He will. We can trust Him, no matter what comes our way in this life, knowing that in the balances of eternity the Judge of all the earth will do right" (Morris 1988: 108, 109).

James, the son of Zebedee, sets forth Job as an example of patience. He writes, "Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. ... My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord - that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful" (5:7a, 10, 11). Might we learn the lessons of Job as well.

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The Synagogue on the Island of Delos and the Epistle of James

Introduction

Sefar Ya'akov, written by Ya'akov Ben-Zavdai, was addressed to Messianic Jews residing in the Diaspora, outside of Eretz Yis-rael. This small epistle, only five chapters long, has a distinct Jewish flavor based on the teachings of Yeshua ha-Mashiach.

I believe that James, the son of Zebedee, wrote this epistle soon after AD 30, as a follow-up letter, in order to encourage Jewish believers in the Lord Jesus who had come to faith during the annual pilgrimage of Shavuot (Pentecost) in Jerusalem (Acts 2).

In the First Century AD, there was a Jewish community living on the island of Delos. This island, situated at the center of the Cyclades Islands, was famous in Greek mythology as the birthplace of the god Apollo and his sister, the goddess Artemis.

This article will give a brief overview of the history of the island, and will discuss the Jewish and Samaritan communities that resided on the island, as well as the synagogue that was discovered during the archaeological excavations in 1912-13. The setting of the epistle of James is a synagogue in the Diaspora. I will use the Delos synagogue to illustrate several passages in the epistle. Using our "sanctified imagination," we will try to comprehend how a Jewish believer in the Lord Jesus on the island of Delos would understand the word-pictures in the epistle in light of the First Century AD history, geography, and material

culture. The archaeology of the islands of Delos and Rheneia, an island opposite Delos, will help to illustrate the word-pictures. To conclude this study, I will discuss the implications for the dating of the epistle of James.

A BRIEF GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY OF THE ISLAND OF DELOS

Delos is a small island in the center of the Cyclades. Pliny describes these islands as “lying round Delos in a circle which has given them their name”. He goes on to state, “By far the most famous of the Cyclades and lying in the middle of them, Delos, celebrated for its temple of Apollo and for its commerce” (Natural History 4.12:65; LCL 2: 165,167).

If one climbs to the top of Mt. Cynthus on a clear day, the islands of Siros can be viewed to the west, Tinos to the north, Mykonos to the northeast, Paros and Naxos to the south.

The island is 5 km long in a north-south direction. At its widest, it is 1.3 km in an east-west direction. The highest mountain is Mt. Cynthus which rises 112 meters above sea level. From a spring on the side of the mountain, flowing for 1.2 km, is the River Inopus, that flows into the Bay of Scardanas.

The first settlement on the island of Delos was discovered on Mt. Cynthus dating to the 3rd millennium BC. It did not seem to last long and the island was abandoned until the late Mycenaean period (1580-1200 BC) when the plain below the mountain was inhabited.

It was colonized by the Ionians about 750 BC. At this point in history, the island takes on its sacred status. Homer’s *Odyssey* (Book 6, line 162; LCL 1: 233) and the

Homeric Hymns, written about 700 BC, said that Delos was an important religious center. It becomes important because, according to Greek mythology, the island of Delos offered Leto a place to safely give birth to Apollo and Artemis from the fury of Hera, the wife of Zeus (To Delian Apollo LCL 325-337).

Athenian influence was exerted over the island in the 6th century BC. They “purified” the island by removing all the burials from the area around the Temple of Apollo in 540 BC.

The Persian Wars broke out about 490 BC. An alliance of Greek city-states was formed, called the Delian League, against the Persians in 478/7 BC. Delos became the center for this league and the treasury was kept on the island.

In the winter of 426/5 BC the second “purification” of the island occurred. This time all the burials from the island were removed and reburied in what the archaeologists call the “Purification Trench” on the island of Rheneia (Catling 1996:443).

From 314-166 BC, Delos enjoyed a period of independence and prosperity. The island began to develop as a commercial center with public and private banks. There was extensive building activity and foreigners began to populate the island.

In 166 BC the Romans gained control of the island. They put Athens in charge of the island and made it a free port. With economic prosperity came foreign influence. Foreigners from Italy, Egypt, Syria, Phoenicia, Israel brought their cults with them and built temples and shrines to their gods.

In 88 BC, Menophanes, an officer of Mithradates VI, “razed Delos itself to the ground”. If one can believe the reports of Appian and Pausanias (Description of Greece III:23.3-5; LCL 2:147), upwards to 20,000 people were killed on the island in this attack. In 69 BC, the pirates of Athenodorus, sacked the island, and it never regained its glory. It’s religious and commercial influenced waned. As Strabo put it, “When the Romans again got the island, after the king withdrew to his homeland, it was desolate; and it has remained in an impoverished condition until the present time” (Geography 10.5.4; LCL 5: 167).

However, in 58 BC, the Roman Senate confirmed privileges on the people of Delos. Throughout the First Century AD, there was a community on the island, and life went on under the control of the Athenians.

In the second century AD, during the reign of Hadrian, the Athenians put the island up for sale, but there were no takers! In fact, Pausanias states, “Delos, once the common market of Greece, has no Delian inhabitants, but only the men sent by the Athenians to guard the sanctuary” (Description of Greece 33:2; LCL 4: 69).

At the end of the 3rd century AD, there was a small Christian community on the island. Toward the end of the 7th century AD the island becomes abandoned.

For a detailed history of the island, see Laidlaw 1933.

THE JEWISH AND SAMARITAN COMMUNITIES ON THE ISLAND OF DELOS

Jewish and Samaritan communities on the island of Delos are well attested to in the contemporary literature

as well as inscriptions discovered in the excavations on Delos and Rheneia.

The first mention in the literature to a Jewish community on the island of Delos is in I Macc. 15:16-23. This passage contained a letter from the Roman proconsul, Lucius Calpurnius Piso (140-139 BC). It affirmed that the Jews were friends of Rome and the various kings should protect them.

During the reign of Julius Caesar, two edicts were given that protected the rights of the Jews on the island of Delos, both are recorded by Josephus (Antiq. 14: 213-216; LCL 8: 561-563 and 14: 231-232; LCL 8: 571-573).

Two funerary stela of Jewish women who were murdered on Delos were found on the island of Rheneia. Each stela contained a prayer for vengeance against the murderers (Deissmann 1995: 413-424). Interestingly, the Greek form of "El Elyon" ("God, Most High") is used on both inscriptions. This name also appears on one inscription found in the synagogue.

Recently, two Samaritan inscriptions were found 90 meters to the north of the synagogue building. One read, "The Israelites on Delos who make offerings to hallowed Argarizein crown with a gold crown Sarapion, son of Jason, of Knossos, for his benefactions toward them" (Kraabel 1984: 44). The second one said, "[the] Israelites [on Delos] who make offerings to hallowed, consecrated Argarizein ..." (Kraabel 1984: 45).

One can assume that both communities were engaged in the trade and commerce on the island.

THE SYNAGOGUE ON THE ISLAND OF DELOS

Excavations on the island of Delos began in 1873 and were conducted by the Greek Antiquities Service and the Ecole Francaise d'Archeologie at Athens. The most intensive excavations were carried out between 1902 and 1914. During the 1912-13 excavations, a synagogue building was discovered by the excavator, Andre Plassart. The site was later re-excavated by Philippe Bruneau in 1962 and published by him in 1970 and 1982.

The structure is located in a residential area in the northeast part of the island. It consists of several rooms. The main room, the hall of assembly, measures 16.9 meters north-south by 15.04 meters east-west, with a triportal entrance. The assembly hall was divided into two rooms, probably after the War of Mithridates in 88 BC. In the northern room, there are marble benches that line the wall. In the center of the west wall is a kathedra (throne) with a footstool. The entrance to a cistern is located In the southern room.

Four inscriptions were found in the excavations. Each contained the words, Theos Hypsistos ("God, the Most High") or Hypsistos ("the Most High"). The former is translated El Elyon in the LXX (cf. Gen. 14: 19,20,22; Goodenough 1957). This name of God also appears on the "Vengeance Inscription" from the island of Rheneia. One also contained the word proseuchai, sometimes translated "prayer halls" and could refer to a synagogue.

The excavator concluded that the synagogue was in use from the First Century BC into the Second Century AD. Recently, Monika Trumper published a comprehensive article advocating that this structure is the oldest original synagogue building in the Diaspora (2004). She contents that there were five phases of occupation from the 2nd century BC to the 2nd century AD. This, however, is not the final excavation report.

The identification of this structure has been hotly debated. The original excavator, Andre Passart, identified it as a Jewish house of worship (1913). E. L. Sukenik, in his *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece*, followed this identification (1934). In 1935, Belle D. Mazur came out with a study, *Studies of Jewry in Ancient Greece* disputing this identification. As a result of this study, Sukenik reversed his position on the structure (1949). Edwin R. Goodenough, in his monumental work, *Jewish Symbols of the Graeco-Roman Period* (1965:2: 71-75) analyzed Mazur's work and offered counter arguments. However, he concluded that the structure "might almost certainly ... be taken, without any protest, to be probably a synagogue" (2: 74). So much for archaeological dogmatism!

Hershel Shanks concluded that the structure was actually a temple to Zeus (1979: 43-45). There have been other studies by L. Michael White (1987) and A. T. Kraabel that reaffirm the synagogue interpretation. For the purpose of this paper, the synagogue interpretation will be accepted and followed.

THE SETTING OF THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

It is not the intent of this article to imply or suggest that the epistle of James reached the island of Delos, or that

James had this synagogue in mind. This synagogue is used only as an example of a First Century AD Diaspora synagogue to illustrate two passages in the epistle. Nothing more is implied. James was writing to Jewish believers in the Lord Jesus in the Diaspora (James 1:1).

The setting of the epistle of James is a synagogue in the Diaspora. The Diaspora is a technical Jewish term, in Greek, for the Jewish people living outside of the Land of Israel. James 2:2-4 says, "For if there should come into your synagogue a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing fine clothes and say to him, 'You sit here in a good place,' and say to the poor man, 'You stand there,' or, 'Sit here at my footstool,' have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?"

[2]

The early church met in synagogues before there was the split between the Church and the Synagogue (Acts 26:11). The Delos synagogue can illustrate James 2. On the west wall of the assembly hall was a kathedra (throne) of white marble that has been identified as a "seat of Moses." This was the most prominent seat in the synagogue where the rabbi would teach the congregation the Torah. Below his feet was a footstool. When the rich man came in, he was given a "good place", probably the seat next to the "seat of Moses" on the bench reserved for the elders. On the other hand, the poor man was relegated to stand in the corner or sit at the footstool of the rabbi.

The kathedra, or seat of Moses, illustrates the second passage. James 3:1 says, "My brethren, let not many of

you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment." The teacher of the Word of God, like the rabbis, scribes and Pharisees, would sit in the "seat of Moses" and expound the Scriptures. James warns the teacher about living a life that is contrary to what he is teaching. James still has the words of the Lord Jesus that he heard only a short while before ringing in his mind. "The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat, therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works, for they say, and do not do" (Matt. 23:2,3).

Most English Bibles translate the Greek word "synagogue" as either "assembly," "congregation," "meeting," "place of worship," or even "church"! If we see the epistle of James in its Jewish Diaspora context it should be translated, as the New Jerusalem Bible translates it, "synagogue." For a full discussion and debate of the word "synagogue," see Kee 1990; Oster 1993; Kee 1994.

THE WORD PICTURES FROM THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Permit me to use my "sanctified imagination" for a moment. Let's assume that the epistle of James did reach the island of Delos and believers in the Lord Jesus read it. How would they understand the word pictures used by James in the book? They, like us, read the Bible in the context of the world in which the reader lives. The believers on Delos would understand the epistle from the surroundings of their world.

Perhaps the believers were meeting on the Lord's Day in the synagogue of Delos when somebody came from the harbor carrying a copy of the epistle of James. With

great anticipation they began to read it. "James, a servant (*doulos*) of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1a). Delos had an earlier reputation as a great slave market. Strabo describes the slave market of Delos in these terms: "... Delos, which could both admit and send away ten thousand slaves on the same day; whence arose the proverb, 'Merchants, sail in, unload your ship, everything has been sold.' The cause of this was the fact that the Romans, having become rich after the destruction of Carthage and Corinth, used many slaves" (*Geography* 14.5.2; LCL 6:329).

James goes on to say, "To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (1:1b). The Jews who had come to faith were descendents of the tribe of Judah. Also living on the island of Delos were Samaritans, those of the northern tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh.

They continued to read, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials." James wrote this epistle to encourage the people as they go through trials and testings in their walk with the Lord. He recounts the words he heard the Lord Jesus say on the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:11,12). He then writes about testings from without (1:2-12) and temptation from within (1:12-18).

The believer who doubts the wisdom of God in testings is described as "a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind" (1:6). James had in mind the eastern windstorms that he had experienced while fishing on the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 8:23-27 // Mark 4:35-41 // Luke 8:22-25 and Matt. 14:22-33 // Mark 6:45-52 // John 6:15-21). The reader on Delos knew from experience the description of "holy Delos" given by Callimachus.

“Surely all the Cyclades, most holy of the isles that lie in the sea. ...Wind-swept and stern is she set in the sea, and, wave-beaten as she is, is fitter haunt for gulls than course for horses. The sea, rolling greatly round her, casts off on her much spindrift of the Icarian water” (Hymn to Delos 4; LCL 85). One can experience the winds and the waves today on the ferry from Mykonos to Delos.

When he describes temptation he uses a word from fishing terminology, “enticed” (1:14; Kent 1986:51). James the son of Zebedee used this word from his own fishing profession. The readers on Delos would understand this word picture from their personal experience as well. Callimachus continues in his Hymn to Delos, describing Delos as a place where “sea-roaming fishermen have made her their home” (To Delos 4; LCL 85). In the excavations of Delos, a number of fish hooks and implements used for mending nets (cf. Mark 1:19) were discovered. The term “entice” depicts a live bait, either a worm or fish on a hook to prompt the fish to bit it. The fish is deceived and caught. The temptation to sin is the same way. It looks alluring (Heb. 11:25), but when partaken of, it leads to death (James 1:15).

James gives an outline for the rest of the book in verse 19 (Hodges 1994: 15,16). “Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” James expands on the theme, “be swift to hear” in James 1:21-2:26. The believer is not just to hear the Word of God, but is also to do it (1:22). The second section, “be slow to speak” is expanded on in chapter 3. The third section, “be slow to wrath” is expanded on in James 4:1-5:6. The final section of the

book gives the key for going through trials and temptation. James says the believer is to have patience (waiting for the Lord's return) and pray (5:7-20).

The first section, "be swift to hear" is set in the synagogue, with its "seat of Moses" and footstool. James admonishes the believers to be swift to hear the Word of God and apply it to one's life. The setting of the synagogue has already been discussed. However, within the context of the synagogue in James 2, James quotes the Hebrew Scriptures in verse 8 (cf. Lev. 19:18) and verse 11 (Ex. 19:13,14). Passages that would be found in the Torah scrolls of the synagogue. In his discourse on "faith and works" he says, "You believe that there is one God, you do well" (2:19). The statement "one God" comes from the Shema (Deut. 6:4) that was recited in the synagogue as well as the Scriptures contained within the tefillin (Ex. 13:1-10; Deut. 6:4-9; Ex. 13:11-16). Tefillin were used in the First Century as attested to by the ones discovered at Qumran (Yadin 1969:13). James then gives two examples of people who expressed their faith before their fellow human beings by their works, Abraham and Rahab (2:21-25; cf. Matt. 5:16; Tit. 3:5,8). He concludes this section with verse 26, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." The Delians had an interesting custom concerning the dead. Strabo describes Rheneia, the island opposite Delos, in these terms. "Rheneia is a desert isle within four stadia from Delos, and there the Delians bury their dead; for it is unlawful to bury, or even burn, a corpse on Delos itself" (Geography 10.5.5; LCL 5: 167). Since Delos was a "holy" island, nobody could be born on the island for fear of infant mortality, nor die there.

The theme of “slow to speak” is addressed in James 3. James admonishes the teacher who would sit in the “seat of Moses” and expound the Scriptures. James uses seven illustrations from the Sea of Galilee to describe the effect the tongue has on other people. At least six of these would be clearly understood on Delos.

The first illustration is the bit in the horses’ mouth that turns his body (3:2b,3). On the walls of one of the houses was found a painting of a man riding a horse with the bit in the horses mouth. The Delians would understand this because of the hippodrome on the island. As previously mentioned, Callimachus mentions the course for horses. Few archaeological remains of a hippodrome were discovered to the east of the sacred lake.

The second illustration is that of a small rudder on a large ship (3:4). James the son of Zebedee, being a fisherman, knew the power of the rudder to turn a ship in the wind. The Delians understood the workings of the rudder from watching the ships maneuver as they came and went from this maritime trading center in the midst of the Aegean Sea.

The third illustration is that of a forest fire (3:5,6). James the son of Zebedee painted this word picture from the summer fires that were in the forests of Galilee and the Golan (cf. Amos 7:4; Joel 1:19,20; 2:3).

The fourth illustration is of the animals (3:7). The “creatures of the sea” would be understood by James as the fish in the Sea of Galilee. The Delians would understand it as the sea creatures in the Aegean Sea.

The fifth illustration is that of a spring (3:11,12). James would have understood the contrast between the fresh

water and bitter water from the time he spent at Tabgha, the fishing grounds for Capernaum. There were seven springs there; some were bitter and some very sweet. The island of Delos had only one source of fresh water, a spring on the side of Mt. Cynthos creating the Inopos River that flowed down to the salt water of the sea.

The sixth illustration James uses is of fruit trees, figs, olives and grapes. These trees were local to the Sea of Galilee as well as most of the Land of Israel. Today, if one visits Delos, it appears to be devoid of fertile land. The reason for that is twofold. First, during the nineteenth century, the island was used a pastureland for the sheep from Mykonos. Second, today it is an archaeological park under the auspices of the World Heritage Federation and farming is not permitted (Reger 1994:95). There are a few fig trees scattered here and there, but in antiquity there were farms that engaged in agricultural activity (1994:127-145). One can see vines on funerary monuments from Rhenea that would have reflected the earthly activities of the dead. Callimachus also mentions olive trees on the island (Hymn to Delos 4; LCL 105).

In the final word-picture, James describes the “wisdom that is from above” as being “without hypocrisy” (3:17). The word “hypocrisy” is a Greek theatric term for an actor that performs for the applause of the audience. James was well aware of at least three theaters in the area of the Sea of Galilee. From the northern shore of the Lake, one could see the Tiberias, Hippos and Gadara theaters. The recipients of the letter on Delos knew the theatric term “hypocrisy” because of the theater on the island. Also, a common motif of the period is painted

masks on the walls and mosaics on the floors. In a private house called the House of the Masks one can see such examples.

The third section, “be slow to wrath,” begins in chapter 4. James asks, “Where do wars and fights come from among you?” The implication of that verse is that the believers were fighting in the church meeting.

Whenever I speak on this passage in a church I ask, tongue in cheek, “Christians don’t fight, do we?” I usually hear snickering from the audience. Of course we always justify our fighting and bickering by saying, “We fight in Christian love!” James also states that some believers murder and covet (4:2). A sword found in the excavations reminds us of potential weapons that could be used to carry out this gross and sinful deed. A wall painting of two boxers fighting each other from one of the houses would illustrate the fighting.

In this context as well, James says that some believers are adulterers and adulteresses (4:4). Most commentaries say this is spiritual adultery, but in the context of the Greco-Roman world, it could be both physical as well as spiritual. On the island of Delos, there were temples to a host of deities that would try to lure the believer away from the Lord Jesus Christ. Some cults even used sexual immorality to attract people to it. The most notable one on Delos would be the cult of Dionysos, the god of wine and merrymaking. His shrine, called the Stoibadeion, was “a rectangular exedra which at both ends has a pillar which supported an oversize phallus, the symbol of Dionysos” (Zaphiropoulou 1993:32). Dionysos was also discovered on mosaics in private houses on the island (1993:34-37).

In the section on “slow to wrath”, James addresses the source of the problem, which is pride (4:6,10). James goes on to describe the arrogant merchants as saying, “Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”” (4:13). James reminds them that they don’t even know what tomorrow brings because life is like a vapor. Most of the Jewish community on the island of Delos probably engaged in trade and commerce. For the self-sufficient believer, this would strike home.

After the tragedy of September 11, 2001, I was watching an interview with several New York firefighters. One of them recalled the words of the chief chaplain of New York’s bravest, Mychal Judge, who died in the collapse of the World Trade Center. He said, “If you want to make God laugh, tell Him what you are going to do tomorrow!” This caught the essence of James 4:13-17. In this passage, James describes the arrogant merchants who plan their buying and selling activities and anticipate a profit, yet they do not realize that life is like a vapor. James admonishes them to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall do this or that” (4:15). It is a humbling thought to realize Someone else holds our future!

James goes on to address the rich in James 5:1-6. During the Hellenistic period, Delos was a very wealthy island. Several residential quarters of the city had very luxurious two and three story houses with beautiful mosaics and frescos on the walls. There were farms on Delos that grew wheat and barley (Reger 1994:95-101). James reflects the farmer / reaper who is being taken advantage of by the wealthy farm owner (5:4)

In the final section of the book, James returns to the opening theme, trials and suffering (5:7-20). He encourages the believers to have patience and look for the Lord's return (5:7-12) and to be persistent in prayer (5:13-20). In each of these sections, the believer on Delos has a decision to make, either to follow the Lord Jesus Christ or one of the deities on the island.

In the first section, James encourages them to look for the Lord's return and follow the example of the prophets. Delos was famous as the birthplace of Apollo, the god of prophecy, poetry and music. His temples stood in the center of the island. An individual could go to his oracles to consult the future, but the believe in the Lord Jesus has a "more sure word of prophecy," the Bible (II Pet. 1:19). The prophetic Scriptures were given to encourage the believers to godly living, comfort in times of sorrow, and patience as the believer preserves through trials (I John 3:2,3; I Thess. 4:13-18; Rom. 8:18-30; Blackstone 1989: 181-183).

James asks the question, "Is anyone among you sick?" (5:14). Most of the people on the island would go to the Asclepion at the headlands of the Fourni Bay for healing (Zaphiropoulou 1993: 52). James instructs the believers to "call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up" (5:14,15a). The response of the believer would be different than the society around.

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DATING OF THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

The epistle of James was written by James the son of Zebedee (Bassett 1876), and not the half-brother of the Lord as most commentators suggest (Davids 1982: 2-7; Hiebert 1992: 24-32). The view that James the son of Zebedee wrote the book is based on the internal content of the book and well as the word pictures. Many of the statements in the epistle are based on the teachings of the Lord Jesus, primarily the Sermon on the Mount and parables given in Galilee. James the son of Zebedee was an “ear witness” to these sayings. Many of the word pictures that are used in the epistle are from the Sea of Galilee. The authorship and date of the epistle will be discussed in greater length in another article.

It is also believed that the epistle was written soon (one or two years) after Pentecost (Shavuot) of AD 30 to encourage those believers in their new found faith in the Lord Jesus as they return to their family and friends in the Diaspora (Acts 2:8-11,41; James 1:1). These early Hebrew-Christians (or Messianic Jews) met in the synagogue buildings until the break with their Jewish brethren (Acts 26:11).

Archaeology and geography can add a third dimension to Biblical studies. The black and white (and sometimes red!) letters on the pages of Scripture can be placed in a historical and geographical context that can be visualized. The reader can say, “Now I see what the inspired writer is talking about.” Just as the readers on Delos could “see” the word pictures used by James when they read the epistle, so we can as well. Might we not just see the word pictures, but also apply them to our

lives. As James admonishes us, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only” (1:22).

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1 This article is dedicated to my fellow travelers: Richard, Donna, Zion and Judy (June 4, 2002), Alan, Heather, John, Karin and Stephen (Oct. 26, 2002) who tromped all over the island of Delos with me and listened to my "crazy idea" on the epistle of James.

[2]

All Scripture quotes are from the NKJV.

Asher Shall Dip His Foot In Oil

Petroleum Oil Or Something Else?

Everybody loves a treasure hunt! As a young boy, I liked adventures. On occasions, I would play “pirate” by taking a wooden cigar box and putting several rolls of pennies (a lot of money in those days for a boy my age) and other goodies and burying them in the backyard. Then I made a treasure map with various landmarks in the area and put an “X” on the spot where the treasure was buried. I would then proceed to rollup the map and put it in a bottle and seal it with a cork. The next morning I “found” the bottle “floating” in my backyard and set off to find the treasure. I will never forget the excitement of the discovery.

Years later, while a graduate student in Israel, I worked on an excavation of the edge of the Hinnom Valley in Jerusalem. We were excavating caves from the period of the Judean Monarchy (Iron Age). On the first day we found some bronze bracelets that had corroded and turned green and some silver earrings that had turned gray. I asked the excavator, Gabriel Barkay, if it was possible to find gold. He answered in the affirmative. Since the silver and bronze were corroded, I asked Goby what gold would look like if I found it. He said, “Don’t worry, you’ll recognize it when you see it!” The next day, I remember carefully brushing away the dirt with a paintbrush to reveal a beautiful gold earring that was 2,600 years old and looked just like new. I still remember finding my first gold object as if it was yesterday.

Today some Christian geologists and oilmen, encouraged by some prophecy teachers, are looking for greater treasures ... oil ... black gold, with the Bible as their “treasure map”! They are so convinced that Israel will soon be awash in fabulous oil wealth that they have invested millions of dollars of their own money as well as that of well-meaning Christians. Did the Creator leave a “treasure map” for modern geologists to find a huge deposit of oil under Israel? Would Israel then “bless” all nations by providing a steady flow of reliable oil to the world that is so dependent on OPEC? Or would the hungry bear, Russia, invade Israel to take the “spoil” (drop the “sp” and you have “oil”!, cf. Ezek. 38:13)? Does the Bible make such fantastic claims and should it be used as a magical divining rod for the discovery of black gold?

Israel, like the rest of the industrialized world, is dependent on a steady flow of oil from reliable sources. After capturing the Sinai Peninsula in the Six Days War in June of 1967, Israeli petroleum explorers discovered and developed the Alma Oil Fields on the western side of the Sinai Peninsula. These fields provided Israel with a reliable source of oil. However, Israel “lost” the oil fields in the negotiations for peace with Egypt. Part of the Camp David Peace Accord, signed in Washington, DC in 1979, included the return of these oil fields to Egypt in exchange for compensation and a promise of the sale of oil to Israel. Israel not only gave up land, but also a steady supply of oil with the agreement. Today, Israel does not have a steady, reliable supply of oil.

As of this writing (2004), there has been no major source of oil discovered in Israel. There are a few wells here and there that pump out small quantities of oil, but

nothing like the Persian Gulf area. Several Christian oilmen have tried to discover a marketable amount of oil, but to no avail. Some, using the Bible as their treasure map and guide, have tried to get the faithful to invest in their oil operations. A number of years ago an expose appeared in the Wall Street Journal with the headlines, "Prophets and Profits Motivate Evangelicals Hunting for Israeli Oil" (Getschow 1985:1). The article describes some of the personalities and operations, and then goes on to list several states that have prohibited the sale of "penny stock" because of the suspect nature of these groups and their operations. At one prophecy conference a book by Rev. Jim Spillman entitled *The Great Treasure Hunt* (1981) outsold the Bible (Getschow 1985: 16). This article will analyze the verses used by the prophecy teachers to find petroleum oil. Are they really referring to petroleum oil, or is it something else?

"... fruitful bough by a well" (Gen. 49:22)

As the patriarch Jacob laid on his deathbed in Egypt, he set out to bless his twelve sons. The account begins with Jacob calling them together to tell them what will befall them "in the last days" (Gen. 49:1). Most prophecy teachers automatically assume the phrase "the last days" are the days we are living in now. Is that the case? The phrase is used 14 times in the Old Testament. The context must determine if it is used of a day still in the future, or of subsequent years from the prediction. A clear example of a future day is Isaiah 2:2 which describes a future day when Jerusalem will be exalted (Varner 1987: 24). The "blessings of Jacob" were fulfilled in the subsequent years in the history of Israel after they entered the Land of Israel and settled it.

With regards to the blessing of Jacob, Spillman found several “cryptic” references in this passage. In verse 22, there is a “well” and in verse 25, “the Almighty ... will bless you (with) ... blessings of the deep that lies beneath.” He says the key to unlocking this cryptic message is an oilrig discovering oil deep in the ground (1981: 22-24). Is this speaking about an oil well in the Hill Country of Ephraim and Manasseh?

Unfortunately sometimes the prophecy teachers, on their trips to Israel, are so caught up in the contemporary society that they overlook some of the culture that has gone on for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. An appreciation of this “time capsule” is overlooked, and an understanding that would come to the true meaning of the text.

Would you join me for a short trip to a Palestinian home in the Hill Country of Samaria (West Bank)? In 1980, I worked in Jerusalem on the restoration of the pottery from a burial cave found by Joseph Free at ancient Dothan. It was like putting a jigsaw puzzle together without even seeing the picture! At the end of our time restoring pottery, the project supervisor, Dr. Robert Cooley, took his volunteers to visit Tel Dothan as well as have lunch at one of the ancient capital of Israel, Samaria. On the way home, we stopped at a village near Samaria to visit with relatives of the taxi driver. By western standards it was a “primitive” rural setting. The afternoon was hot and we appreciated the shade of the grape vine that spread out over the porch. I noticed the vine that was near a cistern so the family could water it on a regular basis. The blessing that Jacob bestowed upon Joseph was ... WATER! The grape vine (Ps. 80) that was planted by a well of water will shoot its branches

over the wall. The blessing from heaven is the rains that will come in their proper seasons when the people are obedient to the Word of God (Deut. 11:9-17). The waters will seep down into the rock and reach the water table and provide water from the deep, i.e. the well. Jacob's father Isaac had blessed him with "the dew from heaven" to provide the essentials for life, i.e. grain, oil and wine (Gen. 27:28).

The searcher has misinterpreted this so-called cryptic message.

"... to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock" (Deut. 32:13)

Spillman continues his search for petroleum oil with his "treasure map" in front of him when he turns to the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 32 and the last part of verse 13: "he made him draw honey from the rock, and oil from the flinty rock." He thinks it is absurd to understand the oil as olive oil because it came from crushed olives and honey could not be bee's honey because it comes from beehives. According to him, the honey is "earth" honey, symbolic of petroleum (1981: 36,37). It is true that the word translated "draw" does have the idea of "suck" or "eating to satiety" (Cassuto 1971: 108). But to read, "pump" and find an oilrig is a bit far fetched.

Prophecy teachers would do well to read the accounts of the 19th-century explorers to the Holy Land. The visit by these men opened up a whole new realm of Biblical study. They wrote about their experiences and the Palestinian folklore and how these illustrated the Biblical passages and ways. Rev. William Thomson, an American missionary in the region from 1833 to 1879,

traveled extensively and wrote a three-volume set, *The Land and the Book*, about his experiences.

On one of his trips he observed a phenomenon that illustrated Deuteronomy 32:13. “In the clefts of a precipice overhanging Wady el Kurn swarms of bees made their home. The people of M’alia, several years ago, let a man down the face of the rock by ropes. He was entirely protected from the assaults of the bees, and extracted a large amount of honey; but was so dismayed by their number that he could not be induced to repeat the exploit. One is reminded by this incident of the expression concerning Israel in the farewell ode of Moses, Deut. 32:13: ‘He made him to suck honey out of the rock.’ And Asaph. In the eighty-first Psalm, thus sings: ‘With honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee’” (Thomson 1882: 2: 259). Unfortunately Rev. Thomson does not describe the extraction process, but it is clearly referring to honey produced by wild bees.

When I was a freshman at Delaware Valley College of Science and Agriculture in Doylestown, PA, I had an interest in beekeeping so I joined the apiary society. At one time I asked the director of the society, a renowned beekeeper himself, if the beekeepers could “suck” honey out of the rock? His response was, “I strongly suspect that the term draw or suck simply means remove or extract. If the term ‘suck’ is accurate, there is no reason that the honey gatherers couldn’t have inserted hollow tubes into the honey combs and sucks honey into them” (Personal correspondence from Dr. Robert Berthold, August 31, 1994).

Prof. F. S. Bodenheimer, a noted Israeli biologist, has stated: “In Israel of Biblical times wild honey hunting

only was known, whereas at the same time real and extensive beekeeping was carried out in Egypt and Anatolia. In our country the first documents on beekeeping are found in the Mishnah tractate *Ohaloth*" (1959: 402). The writings of the Mishnah are much later than the Biblical period. The director of Neot Kedumim, the Biblical Gardens near Tel Aviv, Nogah Hareuveni, states: "Honey is mentioned several times in the Bible, but never is there an implication that it is a cultivated product. Apiculture developed many centuries later ..." (1980: 12). The honey was public property and had to be gathered (Prov. 25:16; Judges 14:8,9; I Sam. 25,26). Spillman is wrong to two counts. First, the honey referred to is wild bee's honey that does come from the rocks, and not petroleum. Second, the ancient Israelite farmer did not cultivate honey in beehives during the Biblical period.

In order to determine what the oil is in verse 13, one must take a careful look at the context in which it appears. Note all of verses 13 and 14. "... he might eat the produce of the field; ... honey ... oil ... curds ... milk ... lambs ... rams ... goats ... wheat ... wine." It is obvious from the context that the oil has to be olive oil because it is something that one eats. One does not eat, or drink, petroleum oil!

The flinty rock refers to the kind of soil that the olive trees grow in. Rev. Thomson again observed, "The substratum of this plain [near Beirut] is chalky marl, abounding in flint, and the sand is merely an intruder blown in from this desert on our left. The olive is found, also, in places where there is no rocky basis; but it is in soil such as this that the trees flourishes best, both in crevices of this flinty marl, and draws from thence its

stores of the rock beneath. I am told the tree languishes, and its berries are small and sapless" (1882: 3: 34). An alternative view set forth by Dr. David Eitam, an Israeli archaeologist whose expertise is olive presses, suggests this might allude to the rock-cut olive presses (1979: 154). The landmark on the "treasure map" has been misread. The oil is olive oil, not petroleum oil.

"Asher shall dip his foot in oil" (Deut. 33:24)

Before Moses died, he blessed the children of Israel. Of Asher he said, "Asher is most blessed of sons; let him be favored by his brothers, and let him dip his foot in oil. Your sandals shall be iron and bronze; as your days, so shall you strength be" (Deut. 33:24,25).

This was the verse that set Andy Sorelle, a Texas oilman and co-owner of Energy Exploration, Inc., on a new search for oil in Israel. In 1979 a college friend of Sorelle sent him a map of the territories of the twelve tribes of Israel. As he recounts the event, "There's a passage in Deuteronomy 33.24 where Moses, talking about the blessings of the twelve tribes, said Asher would dip his foot in oil. Well, on the map, the leg of Asher started in Lebanon; the heel of the foot was drawn at Haifa, and the toe at Caesarea. I suddenly realized that the only area we had not surveyed in Israel was that between Caesarea and Haifa" (Gafen 1981). On February 12, 1981, Sorelle began his first well in Israel on the Israeli naval base at Atlit. At 5,200 feet there was a small amount of oil evident but they continued to a deeper level. On December 1, 1981 they stopped their operation at 17,296 feet because the oilrig they were using could not go any deeper. It took almost a year to get a bigger rig in place; by the beginning of 1983 they

commenced operations again. Due to problems, they had to stop again at 21,428 feet (Gaverluk and Lindsted 1984: 11,24). I'm sure Mr. Sorelle is very sincere in his belief that there is a large amount of marketable oil in the area, but is there a Biblical basis for his belief? Should Christians be investing in this, or other oil operations based on this verse of the Bible? Two issues need to be addressed. First, what is the oil that is being referred to? Second, are the oilrigs in the tribal territory of Asher?

It is clear from the context that the oil in this passage is olive oil. The Hebrew word "shemen" is used 190 times in Scripture for "generally olive oil whether pure or prepared for various uses as perfume or ointment" (Austel 1980: 2: 937), and is never used for petroleum oil. Interestingly, the early rabbinic writings understand it to mean olive oil as well. In the tractate Menahoth on regulations concerning the meal offering in the Temple, the rabbis taught, "And let him dip his foot in oil: this refers to the territory of Asher which flowed with oil like a fountain" (Menahoth 85b). The context is talking about olive oil.

The second issue is the location of the oil wells. Sorelle placed his well near the ancient Crusader fortress of Atlit. Others placed them on Mount Carmel. Are these oil wells in Asher's territory? A careful study of the tribal-city list of Asher (Josh. 19:24-31) suggests otherwise. While it is true, a couple of Bible atlases place Asher's territory down in the Sharon Plain, south of the Carmel range, most place the tribal territory north of Mount Carmel (Carta Bible Atlas [2002] maps 71 and 72; Zondervan NIV Atlas of the Bible [1989] pages 99 and 102; The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands

[1985] map 49). A very careful analysis of the tribal list by Zvi Gal, the district archaeologist for Galilee, in whose jurisdiction "Asher" falls, has demonstrated that the southern border of Asher's territory was the Kishon River just north of Mount Carmel (1992: 101-104; 1985: 115-127). Another careful and detail study of the tribal territory of Asher was done by Dr. Zecharia Kallai, a professor of Historical Geography of Eretz-Israel at Hebrew University (1986: 204-224, 427-433). Where Sorelle and others have put their oil wells have been in Manasseh's tribal-territory, not in Asher's!

The context of Moses' blessing to Asher is that there will be an abundance of olive oil in his territory. Has that been the case? Another 19th-century explorer who visited the area of Asher, Canon Tristram, a missionary and a naturalist, recorded his impressions as he traveled over Rosh ha-Niqrah, or the "Ladder of Tyre" (on the northern border of Israel today), and viewed the Plain of Acco for the first time. He described it as "... a green cultivated plain many miles in extent, stubbed with olive groves, with their grey-blue hue spangling the carpet, and each grove half concealing a village" (Wilson 1980: 70).

Two Presbyterian ministers from Scotland took a journey to the Holy Land in 1839. On one trip they recorded their impressions of an area two hours from Tyre: "... the summits, were sprinkled over with groves of olives, showing how fertile and how suitable for the cultivation of the olive this range must have been in former days. This was more remarkable, because we were now in the tribe of Asher; and the prophetic blessing pronounced upon Asher, was, 'Let him dip his foot in oil'" (Bonar and

McCheyne 1973: 265). How discerning these two students of the Scripture were!

Only a few excavations have been conducted in the Israeli part of the tribal territory of Asher. The part in Southern Lebanon has not been touched at all, except the ancient city of Tyre. With a limited amount of excavations, archaeology could not shed light on the culture and agriculture of the day ... until recently.

Zvi Gal excavated a small fortress on a ridge on the slopes of Western Lower Galilee. This site, called Hurvat Rosh Zayit (Khirbet Ras el Zeitum in Arabic), is translated “the ruins of the head of the olives.” A discerning reader will notice that the name of the site has something to do with olives. It also lies less than a mile north of the Arab village of Kabul, which preserves the name for the site of Biblical Cabul (Josh. 19:27). When he excavated the site he discovered a small fortress, 80 feet by 80 feet with a wall preserved to the height of 10 feet, dating to the time of King Solomon. The mostly Phoenician pottery from the excavation dated from the late 10th to mid-9th century BC. This led the excavator to suggest that this was one of the twenty cities that Solomon gave to Hiram, king of Tyre. After examining the sites, Hiram did not like them and called the place “Cabul-land” (I Kings 9:10-14; Gal 1993a: 39). The most significant discovery for our study is three large olive presses. Gal states, “These settlers based their economy largely on the production of olive oil. A large complex of oil presses is now being excavated on the west side of the site. Within a well-built structure, we have found at least three presses, and another press outside the structure has been excavated and reconstructed. These presses, together with the many

rock cut installations found on the surface around the area, make this the largest known oil-press complex in Galilee" (1993a: 84; 1993b: 128-140). This complex dated to the 8th century BC and has Israelite features. It was destroyed by Tiglath-Pileser III in 733/32 BC (Gal 1990:91).

I believe with further excavations in the region, more olive oil installations will be uncovered, thus confirming the truth of Moses' blessing on Asher.

The last part of Moses' blessing says, "Your sandals shall be iron and bronze." Spillman suggests that this is referring to oil derricks that are made of iron and brass to prevent sparks from igniting a fire on the rigs as iron on iron would (1981: 49). Sorelle said this verse did not make sense until recent times because he believes that "this area will be such a developed oil field that from a helicopter it will look like he is wearing shoes of iron and brass" (Webber n.d.: 21). There is a better understanding for this passage.

To produce olive oil, there are three stages that must be gone through in order to get olive oil. First, the olives are crushed. Then, the olive pulp is pressed to express the liquid that is oil and watery lees, or impurities. Finally, the oil floats to the top and is separated from the impurities (Frankel 1994: 26). This process could, until recently, still be observed in some settings in one simple installation. The farmer would crush the olives with a stone, or treading them while wearing some kind of shoes (cf. Micah 6:15). The crushed olives were pressed with a stone and the liquids collected in a vat and the oil skimmed off after separating from the watery lees (Gal 1993b: 133). A better explanation for the "sandals of

iron and brass” would be that these are the shoes used by the farmer to crush the olives. This was the method used by the ancient Israelite farmer before the large stone olive crushers came into use during the Iron Age in Israel (Gal 1993b: 135).

It is interesting that Micah 6:15 mentions the “treading of olives.” One cannot tread, or crush, olives with bear feet. Quite possibly the shoes were of iron and/or brass. However, Oded Boronski says this phrase can “not be taken literally since this method is ineffective and the stones might cause harm to the feet of the treader.” The phrase should be “a poetic expression for oil pressing” (1987:119).

However, Rafael Frankel, an expert on the olive oil industry in antiquity, has observed, “Despite the fact that olives were usually crushed by rolling stones over them on flat surfaces, a special Greek word ... exists for the shoes which were worn while treading olives. It appears that olives were trodden in much the same way as grapes, except that the latter were trodden barefoot” (1994: 78).

The blessing of Moses to Asher should be understood in light of its ancient Near Eastern context. Asher was literally blessed with an abundance of olive oil and he would crush the olives with special shoes made of iron and/or brass in order to allow the oil to run out. To imagine an oilrig in this passage and to get Christians to invest in “penny stock” is not a good interpretation of this passage.

Jacob's Blessing of Asher (Gen. 49:20)

When Jacob blessed Asher he said, "Bread from Asher shall be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties" (Gen. 49:20). The Hebrew root for the word "rich" is "shemen" which is translated "oil or fatness". Again, the hint is of olive oil. But Jacob goes on to say this food shall be for the royal tables. Has this ever happened? Do people eat or drink petroleum oil at their tables?

Very little history was recorded in the Scriptures regarding the tribe of Asher. We do know that each tribe provided food for the royal court one month a year during the reign of King Solomon (I Kings 4:7, 16). I'm sure the people in the palace looked forward to the rich food from Asher. It must have been exquisite. Of course, olive oil is very healthy for a person as well.

Another case where food from Asher landed on the royal tables was Hiran, king of Tyre. In exchange for cedars and cypress wood from the Lebanon Mountains, Solomon promised him food for his household (I Kings 5:9). This food included 20,000 kors of wheat and 20 kors of pressed oil each year (I Kings 5:11; II Chron. 2:10, 15). The closest tribal to Tyre with this kind of food was Asher.

Just as Moses' blessing on Asher was literally fulfilled, so Jacob's blessing. The abundant food did end up on the table of royalty.

The Conclusion of the Matter

It has been demonstrated that the search for petroleum oil with the Bible as a treasure map or a magical divining rod is unwise and fruitless. The serious student of the Scriptures is to properly exegete the passage, i.e.

take out from the passage that which is in the text, rather than reading into the text that which is not there, which is what these oilmen and prophecy teachers are doing. The prophecy teachers should heed the words of James, "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing we shall receive a stricter judgment" (3:1). Bible teachers are responsible for properly interpreting the Scriptures and will be held accountable by the Lord for their teachings.

The Holy Spirit has several tools at His disposal to help the Bible student properly interpret the Biblical text. We have noted at least four in this paper. First, there are good linguistic tools available that will help the student understand the proper meaning of the words. Invest in a good lexicon or Bible dictionary. Second, there are the 19th century explorers who visited the Holy Land and wrote of their experiences. One should visit the local library and check out these books, they are fascinating reading. Third, one can glean insights into the Scriptures by visiting the contemporary Palestinian culture that still reflects the ancient ways of doing things. This gets harder and harder to find as the Palestinians improve their lot financially. And finally, there have been many archaeological discoveries that have added much light to the Biblical text and the material culture of the days of the Bible.

The blessings of Jacob and Moses to Asher are referring to olive oil, not petroleum oil. When I was a field trip instructor at the Institute of Holy Land Studies in Jerusalem, I always enjoyed the Sharon Plain field trip because we would end up at Mukrakah on Mount Carmel. This was the place where Elijah had the encounter with Ahab and the prophets of Baal (I Kings

18). As we journeyed the winding roads on Mount Carmel to Mukrakah we passed an abandoned oilrig. I would chuckle to myself because the rig was situated in a huge olive grove, probably owned by the local Druze. If only the oilmen had taken the time to look around them, they would have seen one of the essential blessings for daily life in ancient Israel, olive oil, not petroleum oil.

On one field trip I pointed to the oilrig and expounded the Scriptures of Asher's blessing and hammered the point that it was olive oil and the rig was in Manasseh's territory. Later, while having lunch at Mukrakah, a student sheepishly came up to me and confessed that he had lost a lot of money investing in those "penny stocks". He said, "I wish I knew then what you just related to us from the Scriptures. I would not have lost my money." I encouraged him to continue searching the Scriptures just like the Bereans (Acts 17:11).

Should Christians invest in oil exploration and operations in Israel? If the exploration is based on sound geological data, by all means. But if it were based on the imagination of some prophecy teacher who is not properly interpreting the Scriptures in their historical-grammatical, geographical and material context, it would be very unwise. The Christian should be discerning and invest his or her money elsewhere. After all, we are stewards of the money that the Lord has entrusted to us.

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David, Goliath And Tabloid Archaeology

One day a friend sent me an invitation to a church meeting and asked me if I knew anything about the subject. On the flyer was a picture of a human skeleton with crooked teeth and a rock embedded in his forehead. The title above the skull read: "They've Found Goliath's Skull!" Needless to say, that caught my attention.

I read with great interest what was written on the flyer. It reported: "Diggers in Israel believe they've made a giant discovery. For they're convinced they've come across Goliath's skull! And what's more, they say, the stone from David's slingshot is still embedded in the forehead. Archaeologist Dr. Richard Martin says: 'We found the skull in the Valley of Elah, in the foothills of the Judean Mountains, where David's battle with Goliath took place. The skull is huge and clearly belongs to a man of enormous statue.' Tests show that the skull is between 2,900 and 3,000 years old - about the right time for the biblical battle. Dr. Martin says: 'This is the archaeological find of the year.' Wrong, doc. If you're correct, the skull could be the archaeological find of the century! Make no bones about it!" [The identity of the church and its pastor will remain hidden to save them some major embarrassment]. What was the source for these claims? At the bottom of the flyer it cited the "Jewish Telegraph/UK/11 June 93". That sounded like a respectable publication from Great Britain.

I wrote to one of my students in the UK and asked him if he could chase down a copy of this edition of the "Jewish Telegraph" for me (this was before the age when you

could find anything and everything on the Internet). He was successful and it said basically the same thing that was on the church flyer. I did some more “digging around” and discovered the original source was an article by David Hudson in the May 25, 1993 edition of an American publication called “Weekly World News.” On one issue of the newspaper it boasted that they were “The World’s Only Reliable Newspaper.” In case you are unaware, the “Weekly World News” used to be a supermarket tabloid like the “The National Enquirer” and “The Sun” and was a very unreliable source of information (its last issue was August 2007). This is the publication that reported Elvis sightings and had articles such as “Hillary Clinton Adopts Alien Baby,” “Aliens Capture Top-Secret NASA Moon Base!” and “Garden of Eden Found.” (Folks, I’m not making this up ... they did!). The latter article claims the Garden of Eden was in Colorado and even the original apple that Eve ate was found!

The front page of the May 25th edition had the same picture of the skull with the rock in the forehead as the flyer. The headline said: “Goliath’s Skull Found in Holy Land! Dramatic discovery proves the Bible story true!” As I read through the article, red flags and warning bells began to go off. I knew of most of the leading Israeli and American archaeologists working in Israel, but I had never heard of this “Dr. Martin.” I was living in Jerusalem in the spring of 1993 when the alleged discovery was made on March 23, 1993 and never heard about the supposed “news conference” in Jerusalem given by “Dr. Martin” when he and his associates announced this “discovery.” I was perplexed by the fact that Goliath’s skull was found in the Elah Valley when

the Bible says David took his head up to Jerusalem, presumably as an act of intimidation against the Jebusites (I Sam. 17:54). I was suspicious about the “test” that showed the skull was 2,900 to 3,000 years old and wondered if it had been published, or would be published, in a scientific peer reviewed publication. It is safe to say, this whole story, both on the flyer and in the article, was fabricated. There is not a shred of evidence for any of these bogus claims.

The most important lesson we can learn from this story is that we should do a thorough search in order to find out what the original source of a story was. In this case, the bogus story came from an unreliable tabloid. One should look for, and seriously consider, material that has been published in scientific peer reviewed publications. This so-called “skull of Goliath” was never published in any archaeological journal by “Dr. Martin.” This fabrication came from the fertile imagination of David Hudson and should not be used as proof that the Biblical account of the battle between David and Goliath is true.