

FACTS THAT SUPPORT FAITH

In the twenty-first century, the previous century's debate over the historical reliability of the Bible has taken on a new face and has gained fresh momentum in light of recent discoveries unearthed through archaeological excavation of the Holy Land. Many of these findings relate either directly or indirectly to the people, places, events, customs, and beliefs recorded in the Bible. As a result, the assertion by critical scholars that the Bible's historical descriptions are a product of human invention can no longer be maintained without facing strong counterarguments. Because of these finds, many modern scholars have revisited the archaeological and historical data with fresh insight into the reliability question. However, much of this valuable material often languishes in the halls of academia, leaving the layperson unaware of the immense body of archaeological information at their disposal.

Over the years, it has been our privilege to teach apologetics and theology courses at various undergraduate and graduate schools and conferences throughout the world. In addition, we have had the opportunity to travel extensively throughout the biblical lands, including Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, Greece, and Italy, as well as participating in archaeological excavation. In the process of communicating this material in the classroom, it is common to draw upon archaeological and historical data in order to demonstrate the reliability of the Bible. In doing this, we have seen the need to share with the body of Christ the accumulating data that reinforces our confidence in the historical narratives throughout the Scriptures. For as C.S. Lewis once wrote,

To be ignorant and simple now, not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground, would be to throw down our weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defense but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen.

As we have engaged many thousands of students and laypersons over the years in

defense of the faith once for all committed to the saints, we have become increasingly aware of the need for two important things: 1) to increase familiarity among the vast public of the basic archaeological evidence in support of the historical reliability of the Bible, and 2) to expand awareness that facts (that is, history) and values (that is, doctrine and morals) are inextricably connected. It is from recognizing these needs that this book was born.

This handbook offers a bridge that spans the gulf between higher academia and lay Christian readers. It provides a means of educating and equipping them for participation in the reliability debate, which has for too long been relegated primarily to journal articles and scholarly discussions. Moreover, this work is intended to fill the gap in knowledge that exists within the church between our readers and the historical events recorded in Scripture. This knowledge is crucial due to the role history plays—as the ground from which doctrine and spiritual significance grow. Jesus understood the relationship between history and doctrine when He asked Nicodemus a crucial question: “If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” (John 3:12).

The time for compartmentalized thinking that separates history from faith is past, since it would align the church with the assumptions of negative higher criticism, which sees no connection between the Jesus of history (whom they consider a nonsupernatural cynic sage who lived in the first-century) and the supernatural Christ of faith worshipped as God in churches around the world. The implications of unified thinking become clear when we understand that the *historical* death of Christ on the cross is inextricably connected to one’s *spiritual* forgiveness of sin (Romans 4:25); and the *historical* creation of “male and female” in the beginning, to one’s view of marriage as existing only between a man and a woman (Matthew 19:3-8). The crucial link between history and doctrine cannot be broken lest we damage the apologetic structure supporting why evangelical Christians cherish and rely on these very doctrines (Matthew 12:40).

In view of these things, this archaeological handbook is offered as an introductory beginning that confirms the “earthly things” contained in Scripture, in hope that the reader will become intimately acquainted with God’s redemptive history. After being acquainted with these discoveries, the skeptical mind can much more easily give the benefit of the doubt to the “heavenly things” offered in Scripture. Our threefold hope and prayer is that the reader would

1. recognize that the Christian worldview is holistic, viewing fact and value, faith and history, science and Christianity as complementary;
2. become familiar with the apologetic support offered by the field of archaeology as it relates to confirming the historical statements in the Bible; and

3. comprehend the height, depth, and extent of God's love for mankind as revealed through His redemptive plan—a love that can be verified in real time-space history.

The content of the book is not meant to be an exhaustive treatment of manuscripts or archaeological findings, nor a debate with the scholarly community. Rather, it is an introductory summary for the beginner who desires an understanding of the more significant artifacts and manuscripts relating to the historical and textual reliability of the Bible. Every attempt was made to offer commonly accepted facts concerning the data and its relation to the Bible, leaving the “technical” discussions for the professional archaeologist. It is our hope that our readers will grow in their interest, passion, and knowledge of the fascinating field of archaeology and the Bible. If this book piques the interest of our readers to further study, travel to Israel, or to get involved in archaeological excavation projects as a volunteer, it has been a success.

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