

Is the Bible Historical?



Connecting the Sacred and the Secular

Is “the Bible” “Historical”?



- Hopelessly broad question
- The Bible consists of 72 books of widely different genre:
 - Biographical
 - Poetical
 - Fictional
 - Dramatic
 - Proverbial
 - Epistolary
 - Historical

Is the Bible Historical?



- Nonetheless, large sections of the Scripture claim to convey history, and do convey history.
- Our method: work from top down, like excavating a tell
- Beginning with NT, work backwards, revealing the historical connections of Scripture.

Our Method



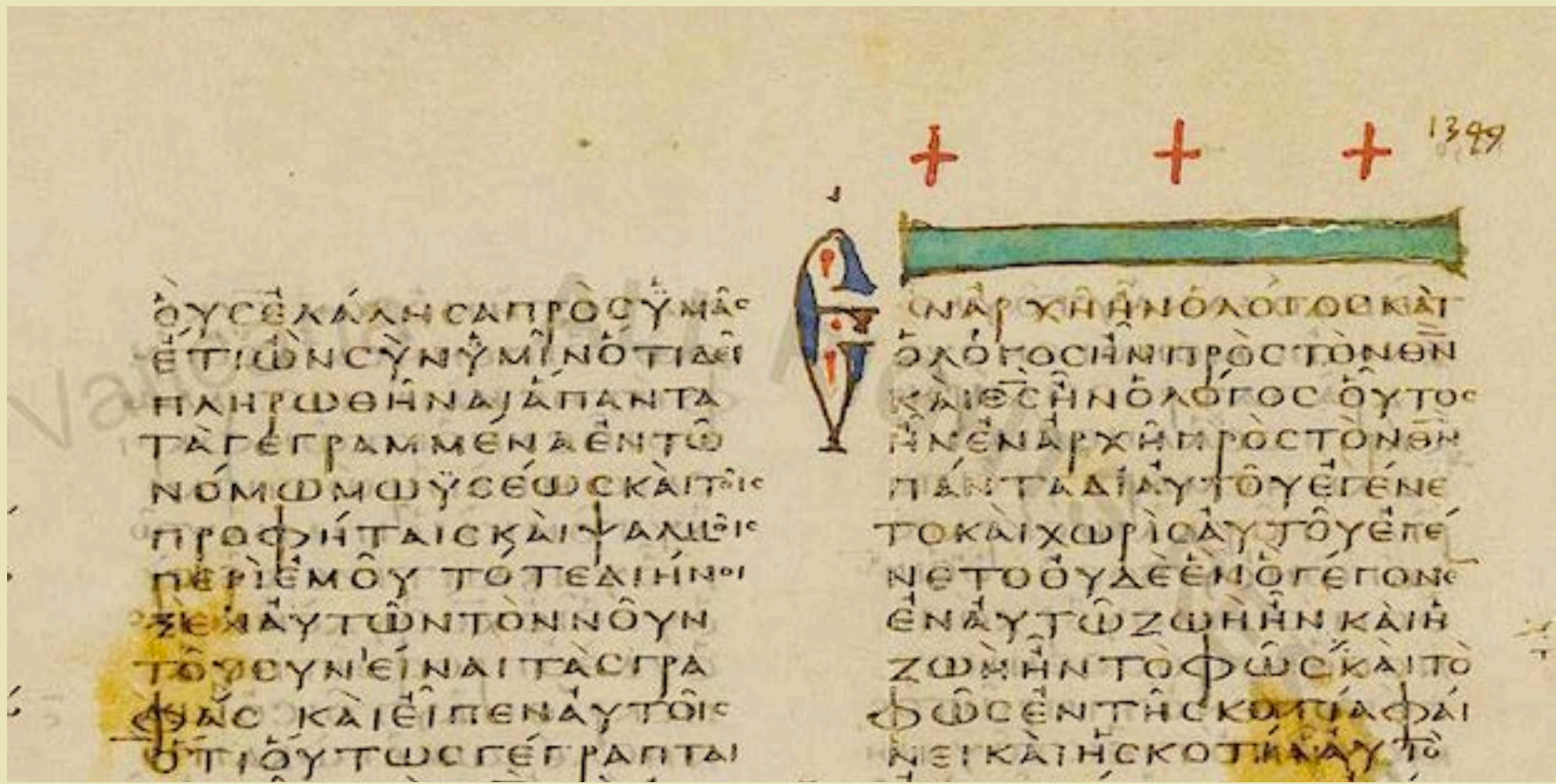
- The New Testament
- The Old Testament
 - Hellenistic Period (330-37 BC)
 - Persian Period (537-330 BC)
 - Babylonian Period (605-537 BC)
 - Monarchic Period (1000-605 BC)
 - Pre-Monarchic Period (1200-1000 BC)
 - Mosaic Period (1500-1200 BC)
 - Patriarchal Period (2000-1500 BC)

The New Testament



- The Reliability of the Text of the New Testament
- 5,800 manuscripts
- Complete manuscripts from mid-4th cent. on
- Partial manuscripts as early as 125 A.D.
- Compare with classical authors:
 - Julius Caesar (100-44BC): 10 mss., oldest c. AD 850
 - Thucydides (460-400BC): 8 mss., oldest AD 900
 - Herodotus (488-428BC): 9 mss., oldest AD 900s + frgs.

Vaticanus: Best Text



Papyrus 52: Oldest Text



NT Manuscripts



- Orders of magnitude more than other ancient docs
- Closer to time of writing than any other ancient docs
- Much, much greater confidence about the antiquity and authenticity of the text than classical works
- Moving on: historical testimony of
 - Paul
 - Luke
 - John
 - Josephus

St. Paul



- Well-educated, upper class Pharisaic Rabbi
- Roman citizen
- Trained as a religious lawyer
- Politically well-connected
- Provides some of the earliest and best testimony to the life of Jesus.

Paul on the Resurrection



- 1 Cor. 15:3 "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins ... 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me." (AD 55)

Earliest MS of Paul: P46



Testimony of Luke



- Well-educated, classically trained physician (Col 4:14)
- Only Gentile to write NT book(s)
- Wrote $\frac{1}{4}$ of NT
- Excellent historiographer, rarely (or never) slips up
- Wrote biography of Jesus and history of early Church

Famous Persons in Luke



- Emperors:
 - Augustus (63 BC–AD 14)
 - Tiberias (AD 14–37)
 - Claudius (AD 41–54)
 - [Nero] (54-68)



Famous Persons in Luke

- Roman Governors:
 - Sulpicius Quirinius (51 BC–AD 21) of Syria
 - Pontius Pilate (AD 26-36) of Judaea
 - Sergius Paulus (AD 41-44) of Cyprus
 - Junius Gallio (AD 51-52) of Achaea (Acts 18)
 - Son of Seneca the Elder, brother of Seneca the Younger
 - Antonius Felix (AD 52-58) of Judaea (coin behind)
 - Porcius Festus (AD 59–62) of Judaea

Pilate Stone



Famous Persons in Luke



- Judaeian Royalty:
 - King Herod the Great (reign 37–4 BC)
 - Tetrarch Herod Antipas (r. 4 BC–AD 39)->
 - King Herod Agrippa I (r. 41-44 AD, Ac 12:1)
 - King Herod Agrippa II (r. 48–66 AD, Ac 25-26)
 - Princess Drusilla, wife of Felix, sister of Agrippa II (life 38–79 AD, Ac 24)
 - Queen Berenice, Agrippa II's sister (life 28-81 AD, Ac 24-25)



Famous Persons in Luke



- Jewish High Priests
 - Annas (AD 6–15, Jn 18)
 - Caiaphas (AD 18-36, Jn 18))
 - Ananias (AD 47-52, Ac 23)
- Historically Renown Rabbi
 - Gamaliel I (d. AD 50, Ac 22:3)
 - Greatest first-century Rabbi



Accurate Titles in Luke



- Sergius Paulus, Cyprian *proconsul* (*anthúpatos*, 13:7)
- Felix, *governor* of Judaea (*hegemon*, Acts 23:24)
- Claudius Lysias the *colonel* (*chiliarchos*, Acts 24:22)
- Herod the *tetrarch* (*tetrarchos*, Acts 13:1)
- The *asiarchs* of Ephesus (*asiarches*, Acts 19:31)
- The *generals* of Philippi (*strategoi*, Acts 16:22)
- The *politarchs* of Thessalonica (*politarches*, 17:6,9)*
- The “First Man” of Malta (*protos*, Acts 28:7)

Summing Up on Luke



- Trained historian, accurate details
- Specifies the events of Jesus and the early Church by known, verifiable, datable public figures, many of whom were still alive at the time of his writing
- It's very hard to pull off a fiction or fraud when you are citing public officials and court actions

Testimony of John



- Unanimous early Christian witness to the fact that the Apostle John wrote the Gospel that bears his name.
- John used to be disregarded as historical witness, but it can't be any longer.
- The Gospel is clearly written by someone who spent extensive time in Judea during or at least near the time of Jesus (early 1st cent AD).
- Why? Similarity to Dead Sea Scrolls, knowledge of geography.

Testimony of John



- Language of John often parallels the Dead Sea Scrolls, all written before AD 70.
- John 12:36 While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become *sons of light*.”
- *The Community Rule*, 3:13 “A text belonging to the Instructor, who is to enlighten and teach all the *sons of light* about the character and fate of mankind ...

Testimony of John



- When the *Spirit of truth* comes, he will guide you into all the truth...
(John 16:13)
- Like purifying waters, He shall sprinkle each with a *spirit of truth* ...
(*Community Rule* 4:21)

Testimony of John

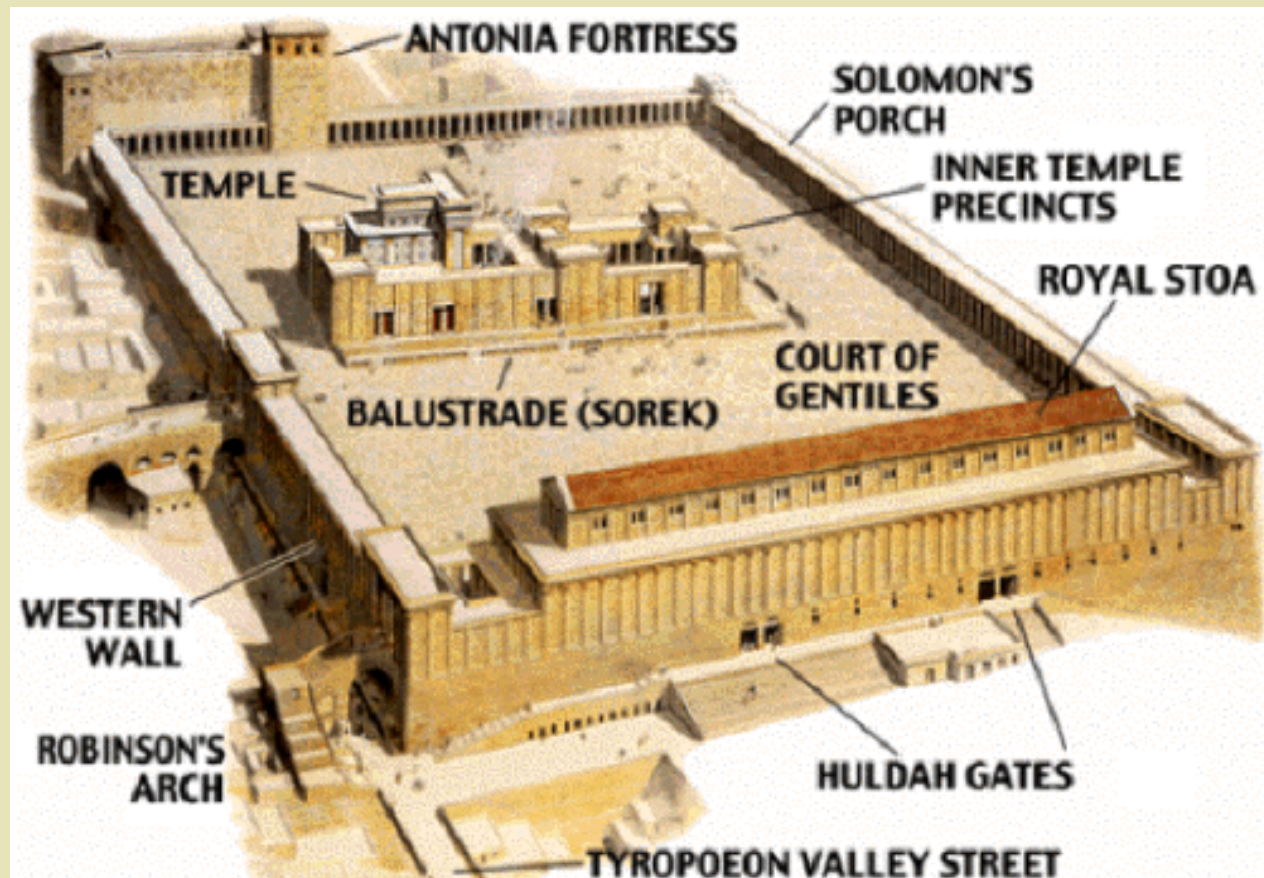


- John knows obscure details about Jerusalem before its destruction.

Portico of Solomon



“It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon.”
John 10:23



Pool of Bethesda



“Now there is in Jerusalem a pool, in Hebrew called Bethesda, which has five porticoes.”
John 5:2



Summing Up on John



- The Gospel of John clearly written by a first-century Jew with an accurate knowledge of Jerusalem before it was destroyed, and great sensitivity to religious disputes that were ongoing in the time of Jesus. In other words, this had to be a contemporary of Jesus of Nazareth.

Testimony of Josephus



- Titus Flavius Josephus, born Joseph ben Matisyahu (AD 37–100)
- Jewish general turned traitor
- Adopted by Emperor Titus
- Wrote two great works in retirement:
- *The Jewish War*
- *Jewish Antiquities*
- By far our best and most extensive historian of the first century AD.



Josephus on the Baptist



- “For Herod had put John, surnamed the Baptist, to death, though he was a good man and had exhorted the Jews to lead righteous lives, to practice justice towards their fellows and piety towards God, and so doing to join in baptism. In his view this was a necessary preliminary if baptism was to be acceptable to God.... Herod became alarmed ...for it looked as if the crowds would be guided by John in everything that they did ...” —*Antiquities*
18.116-119

Josephus on James



- “Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so Ananus (Ananias) assembled the Sanhedrin ... and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, and ... delivered them to be stoned. But ... the most fair-minded of the citizens ... disliked what was done; so they sent to the king [Agrippa], desiring him to send to Ananus that he should act so no more ...” *Antiquities* 20.9.1

Josephus on Jesus



- “About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who performed surprising deeds and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. And when, upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease.”

Josephus on Jesus



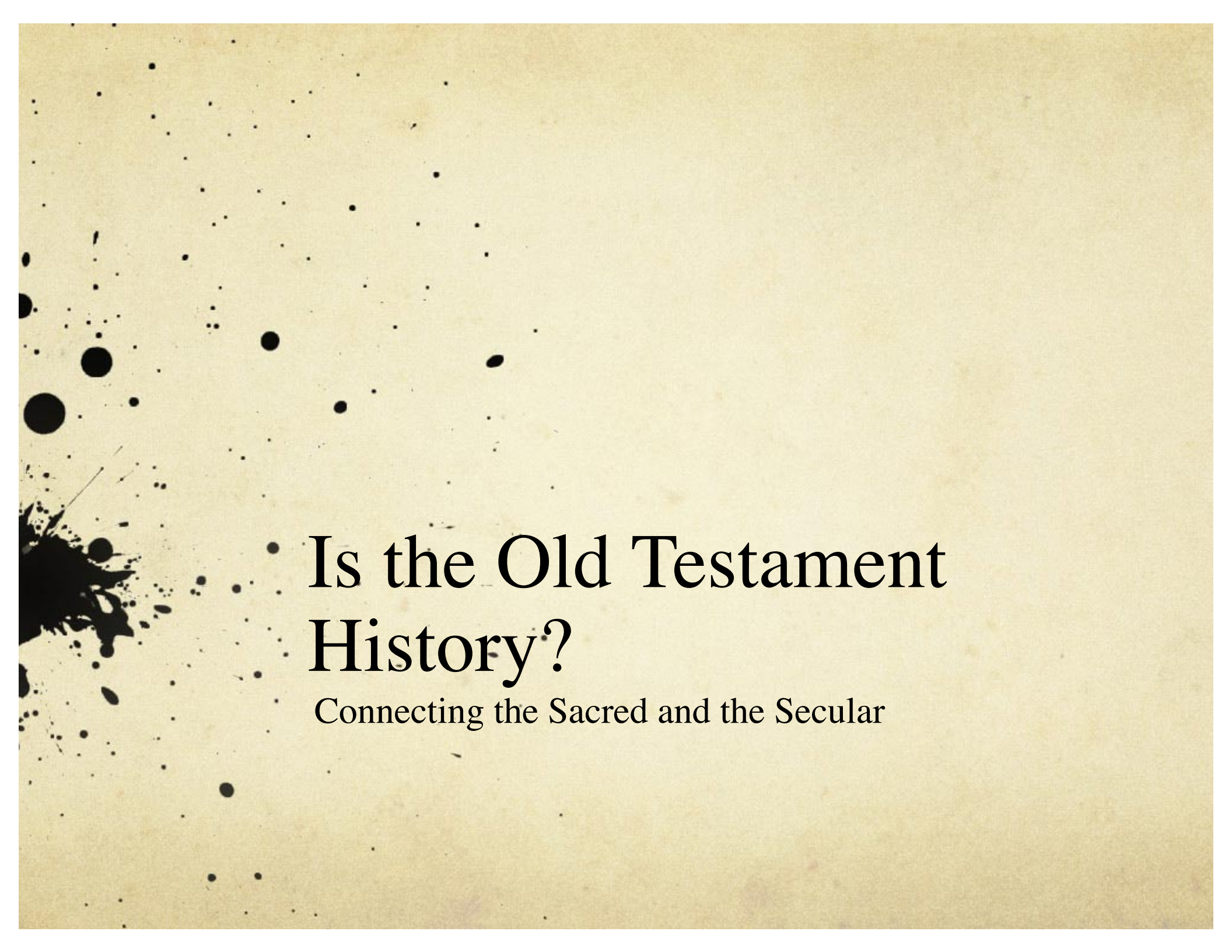
- “He appeared to them spending a third day restored to life, for the prophets of God had foretold these things and a thousand other marvels about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.”

—*Jewish Antiquities*, 18.3.3 §63

Summary of the NT



- Orders of magnitude more manuscripts, far earlier and more complete than anything else from antiquity.
- Paul gives early and indisputable testimony to all the essentials of the Gospel.
- Luke writes highly accurate history, recording the early Church in minute detail.
- John is clearly written by a 1st century Jerusalem Jew
- Josephus, a non-Christian Jew, gives important independent confirmation



Is the Old Testament History?

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Our Method

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The Hellenistic Period

- What was happening in the world:
 - 330–37 BC
 - Alexander conquers the world c. 330 BC
 - Dies, Empire split by four generals
 - Seleucus and Ptolemy set up empires in Syria & Egypt
 - Israel swings from one to the other for centuries
 - Whole world learns Greek and Greek culture
 - Rome is quietly growing in power
 - Jews fight off Seleucid emperor and gain freedom 166–66 BC

Hellenistic Biblical Books

- Sirach written in Alexandria Egypt
- Wisdom of Solomon written in Alexandria
- Books of Maccabees written in Israel
- 1-2 Maccabees our best source of history of Israel in this time.
- 1 Maccabees detailed and sober, 2 Maccabees a bit romanticized, dramatized, but still historical.

Mausoleum of Maccabees found in Israel



Persian Period: 537-330 BC

- What was happening in the world:
- Medo-Persian King Cyrus conquers Babylon, 537 BC
- Rules from Turkey to India
- Classical Period of Greece: Sophocles, Euripides, Socrates, Plato, Herodotus, Thucydides, Persian war, etc.
- Classical Period of Rome: traditional Roman Republic and culture (virtues), consolidation of Italy

Persian Period Bible Books

- 537 BC: Cyrus sends Jews back from Babylonian exile
- Daniel, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles, late Psalms, late minor prophets: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
- Jews return from Babylonian exile, rebuild Temple (516), live as Persian province of Yehud for 2 centuries
- Ezra-Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi describe this time period

Cyrus the Great (d. 530 BC)



Cyrus Cylinder

Records Cyrus' defeat of Babylon, rebuilding of Temples, repatriation of exiled peoples.
See 2 Chr 36:22, Ezra 1:1-8, Daniel 1:21



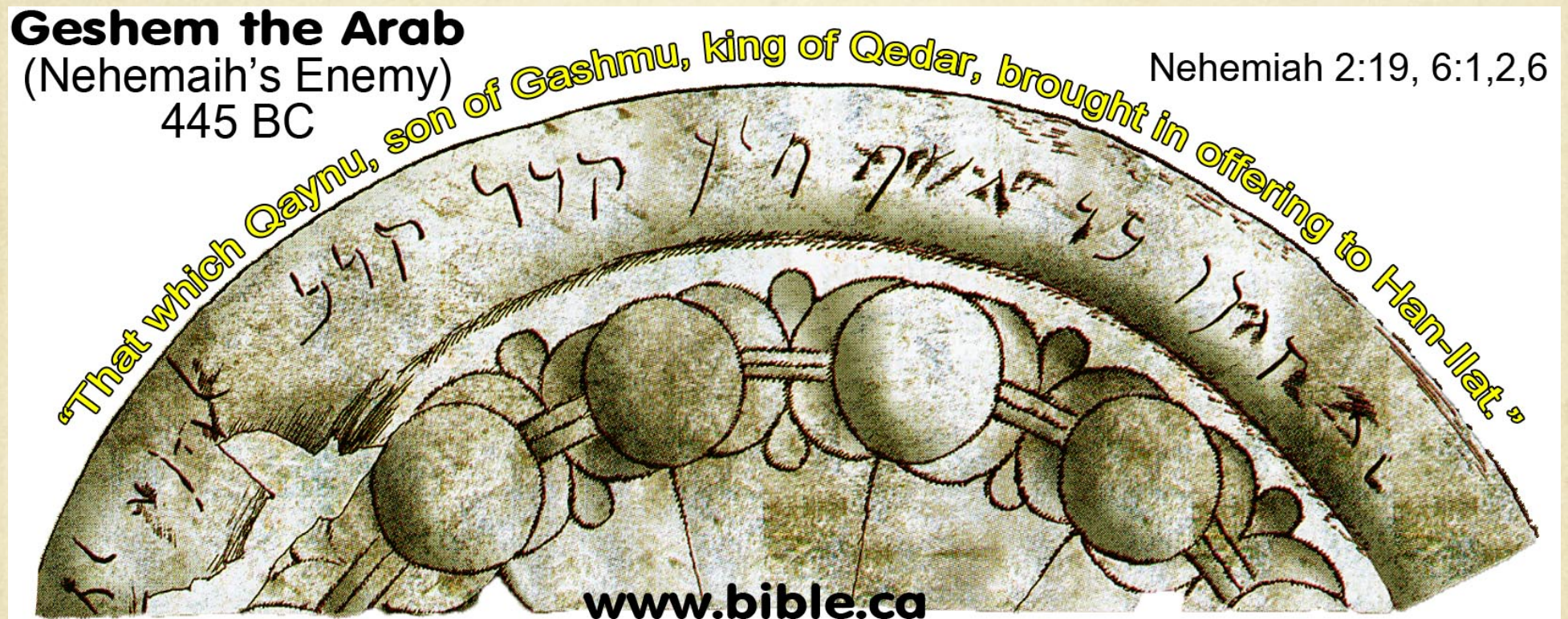
Nehemiah, Cupbearer of King



Nehemiah's Arab Enemy

Geshem the Arab
(Nehemiah's Enemy)
445 BC

Nehemiah 2:19, 6:1,2,6



www.bible.ca

Nehemiah's Samaritan Foe

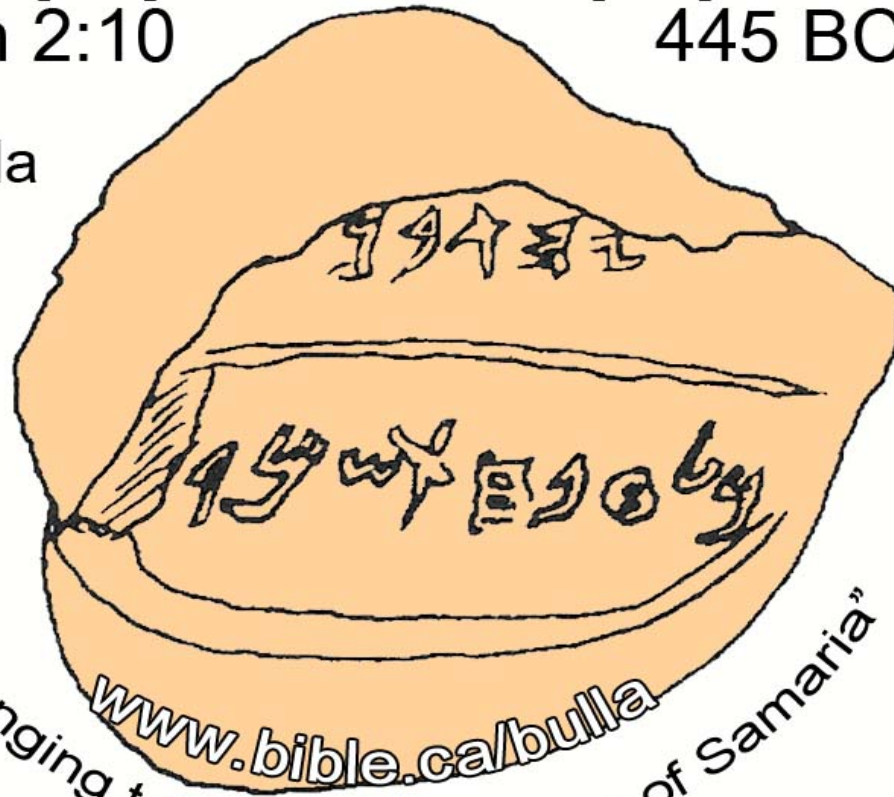
“Sanballat, Satrap of Samaria”

[SN]BLT PHT SMR[YN]

Neh 2:10

445 BC

Bulla



“Belonging to Sanballat, Satrap of Samaria”
www.bible.ca/bulla

Unknown
provenance

Unknown
current location

Babylonian Period 605-537 BC

- What's happening in the world:
 - Pre-classical Greece and Rome
 - Egypt waning in power
 - Buddha flourishes in India
- What's happening in Israel
 - Babylon defeats Assyria as world power
 - Jerusalem revolts 597, 587 BC
 - Destruction and Exile
 - Language changes

Babylonian Biblical Books

- Jeremiah
- Ezekiel
- 2 Kings
- Tobit
- Daniel
- some Psalms (Ps 89, 137)

King Jehoiachin, Exiled 597

Jehoiachin's Rations in Babylon
Jer 52:31-34 2 Kings 25:27-30

Olive Oil Rations:
"7.2 litres* for Jehoiachin,
king of the land of Judah"

"1/5 litre** for each of
the five sons of the king
of the land of Judah"

(Evil-merodach's daily ration)

Units of Pi and Sila:

1 Pi = 7.4 litres = 36 Sila

1 Sila = 0.4 litres

*Jehoiachin's ration: 1/2 Pi = 18 litres

**5 son's ration: 2.5 sila = 1 litre

one son got 1/5 litre each

561 BC

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Cuneiform tablet found at Ishtar gate in Babylon

Baruch's Personal Seal

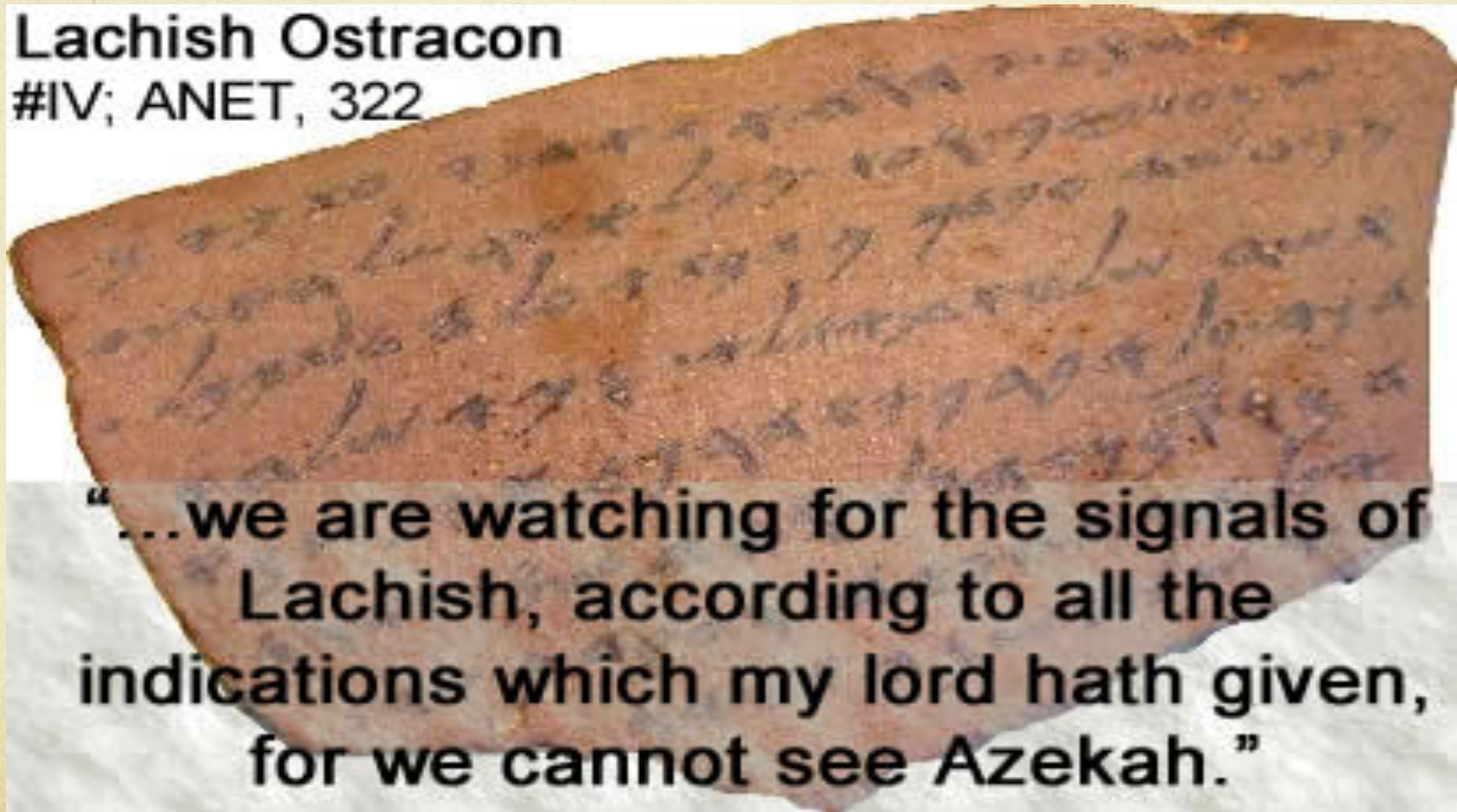


A bulla of Baruch ben Neriah.
The fingerprint (not noticeable in the photograph)
is located in the highlighted area.

Letters from the Final Siege

Jer. 34:7 The king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and ... Lachish and Azekah ... were the only fortified cities of Judah that remained.

Lachish Ostrakon
#IV; ANET, 322



Governor after the Destruction

Gedaliah, the Governor

Jer 40:8; 2 Ki 25:22 587 BC

Bulla

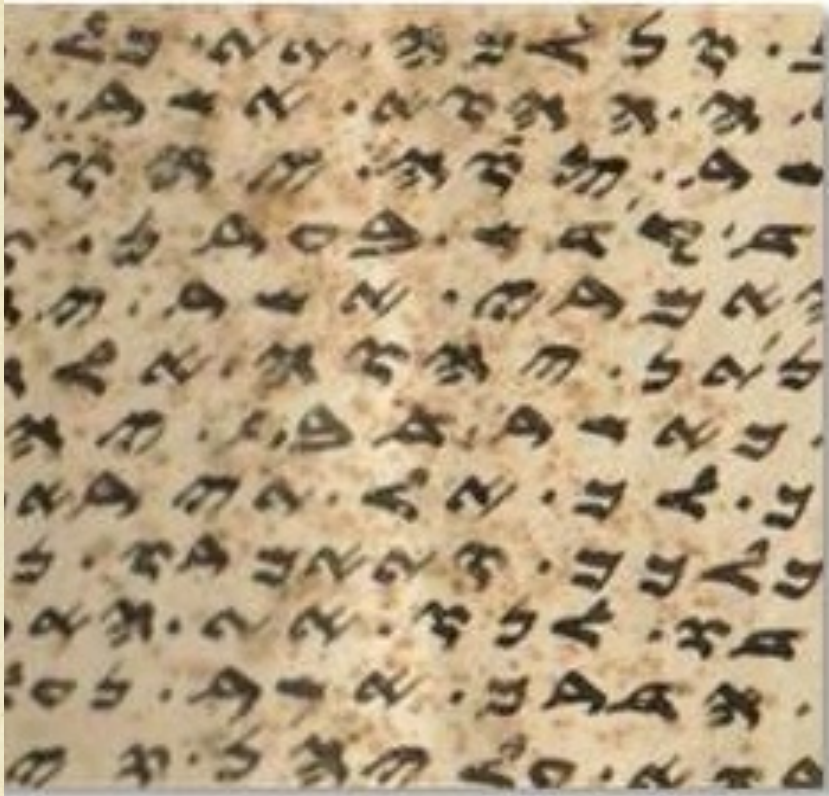


"property of Gedaliah who is over the house"
www.bible.ca/bulla

Lachish
1935 AD

Israel Museum

Change in Language/Script



Samaritan Torah Scroll



Jewish Torah Scroll

Monarchic Period 1000–605BC

- What was happening in the world:
 - Waning of empires in Egypt and Mesopotamia
 - Prehistoric period of Greece and Rome
 - Homer composes Iliad and Odyssey
 - Zoroaster teaches in Persia
- What was happening in Israel
 - Decline of ANE is opportunity
 - Rise of Davidic Empire, split into two kingdoms
 - Long decline of both kingdoms (1-2 Kings)

Biblical Books of the Monarchic Period

- 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings
- Most of Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes?
- Isaiah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Micah, others

David Founded Dynasty

Victory Stele of Hazael 841 BC

(King of Aram 841-800 BC)

8 kings

- ✓ Hazael
- ✓ Ben-Hadad II
- ✓ Ahab
- ✓ Joram
- ✓ Ahaziah
- ✓ Jehoram
- ✓ David
- ✓ Jehu

"I killed Joram son of Ahab
& Ahaziah, son of Jehoram,
of the house of David"

2 Ki 8:28

"House of David"

Hazael, king of Aram 841-800 BC

1. Hazael killed Ben-Hadad after he was anointed by Elisha. 2 Ki 8:7-15
2. The annals of Shalmaneser III say he usurped the throne and was "a son of nobody".
3. Elisha cried because he knew Hazael would kill Joram & Jahaziah. 2 Kings 8:28, Tel Dan inscription.

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David Founded Dynasty



Often called the “Moabite Stone,” the 9th century slab was found east of Dead Sea in 1868 at Dibon (Jordan) by F.A. Klein. It records:

- Conflict between **Moab's King Mesha and King Omri** of Israel, and Omri's son (Ahab; 2 Kings 3),
- Mesha's **successful liberation** and rule of the land
- Appears consistent with the **political and military climate** that existed in the 9th century BC according to 2 Kings 1-3

David Founded Dynasty



David's Administrative Center



Relief of Jehu (841-814 BC)

Shalmanesser III of Assyria:

The tribute of Jehu, son of Omri: I received from him silver, gold, a golden bowl ...



2 Kings 9-10

Hezekiah (715-686 BC)



“Belonging to Hezekiah, the Son of Ahaz”

Assyrian Siege of Lachish 700BC



Assyrian Chronicle of Hezekiah



Also known as the "Taylor Prism," this six-sided clay prism (701 BC) was unearthed by Geoffrey Taylor at Nineveh in 1830.

- Records the campaigns of King Sennacherib (705-681 BC) against Judah and King Hezekiah at Jerusalem (Isaiah 19; 36-37; 2 Kings 18; 19; 20)
- The annals tell, as does Isaiah 36-37, of how Sennacherib enclosed Hezekiah in Jerusalem 'like a caged bird.'

Hezekiah's Tunnel Inscription



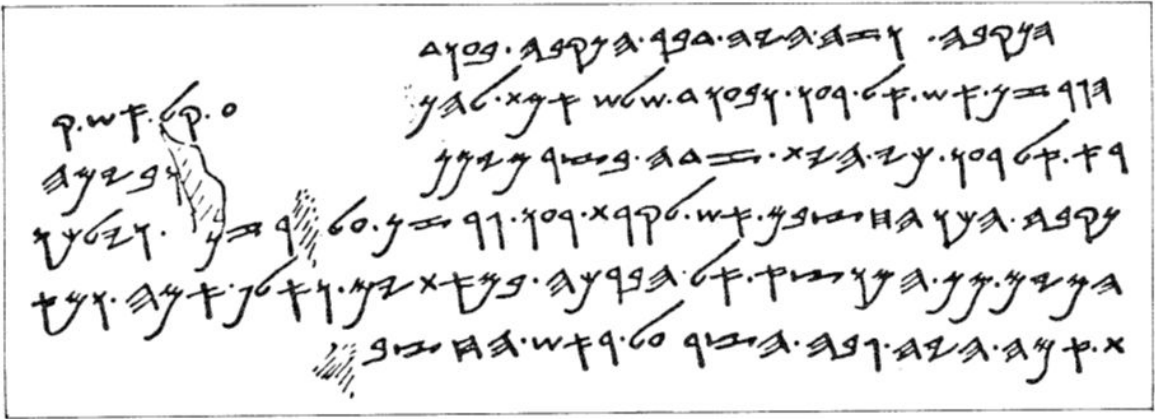
Hezekiah's Tunnel Inscription

The Siloam (Shiloah) Inscription

2Chron. 32: *King Hezekiah* building a tunnel at the *Gihon Spring*, before the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians in 701 BCE.



Happiness when those digging the tunnel from the two ends finally meet in the middle.



Monarchic Period Summary

- No doubt about the historicity of the monarchs
- Monumental remains from David/Solomon
- Most Judean/Israelite monarchs are attested in foreign annals, bulla, or inscriptions

Settlement Period (1250-1000)

- What was happening in the world:
 - Prehistoric Europe
 - Egypt's New Kingdom, then decline
 - Famous Pharaohs: Akhenaton, Tut, Ramses II, etc.
- What was happening in Israel:
 - Settlement of the Land under Joshua and the Judges
 - Biblical books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth

Amarna Letters



The Amarna Letters

Amarna Tablet EA144

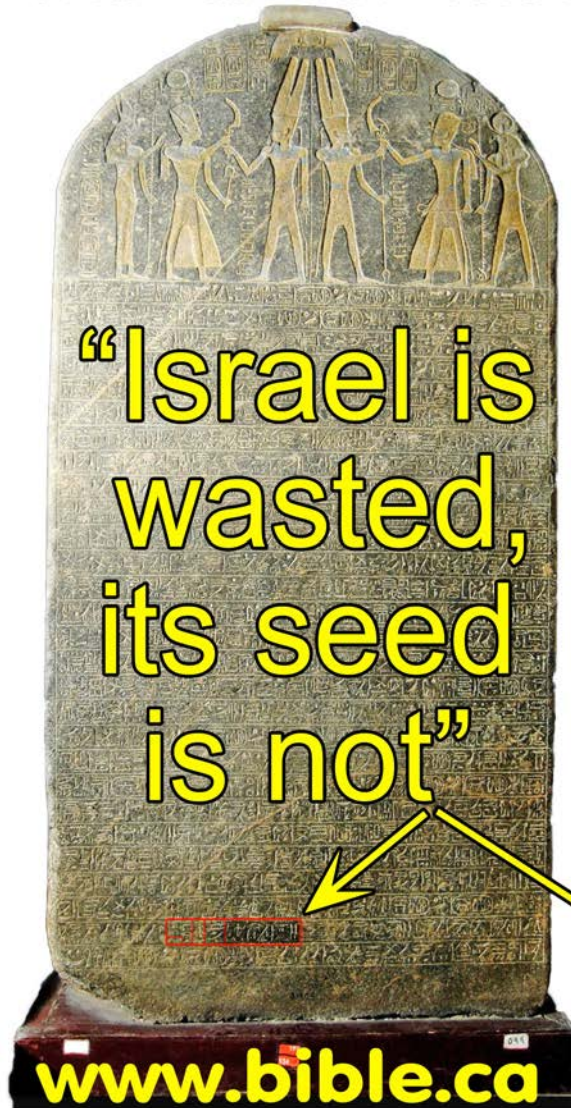
“From Zimreddi,
mayor of Sidon
to Pharaoh:
The war against me
is very severe.
All the cities that the king
put in my charge,
have been
joined to the Habiru.”

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Judg 1:31; 10:6; 1 Ki 11:5; Lk 10:13-14; Acts 12:20

Pharoah Merneptah Stele

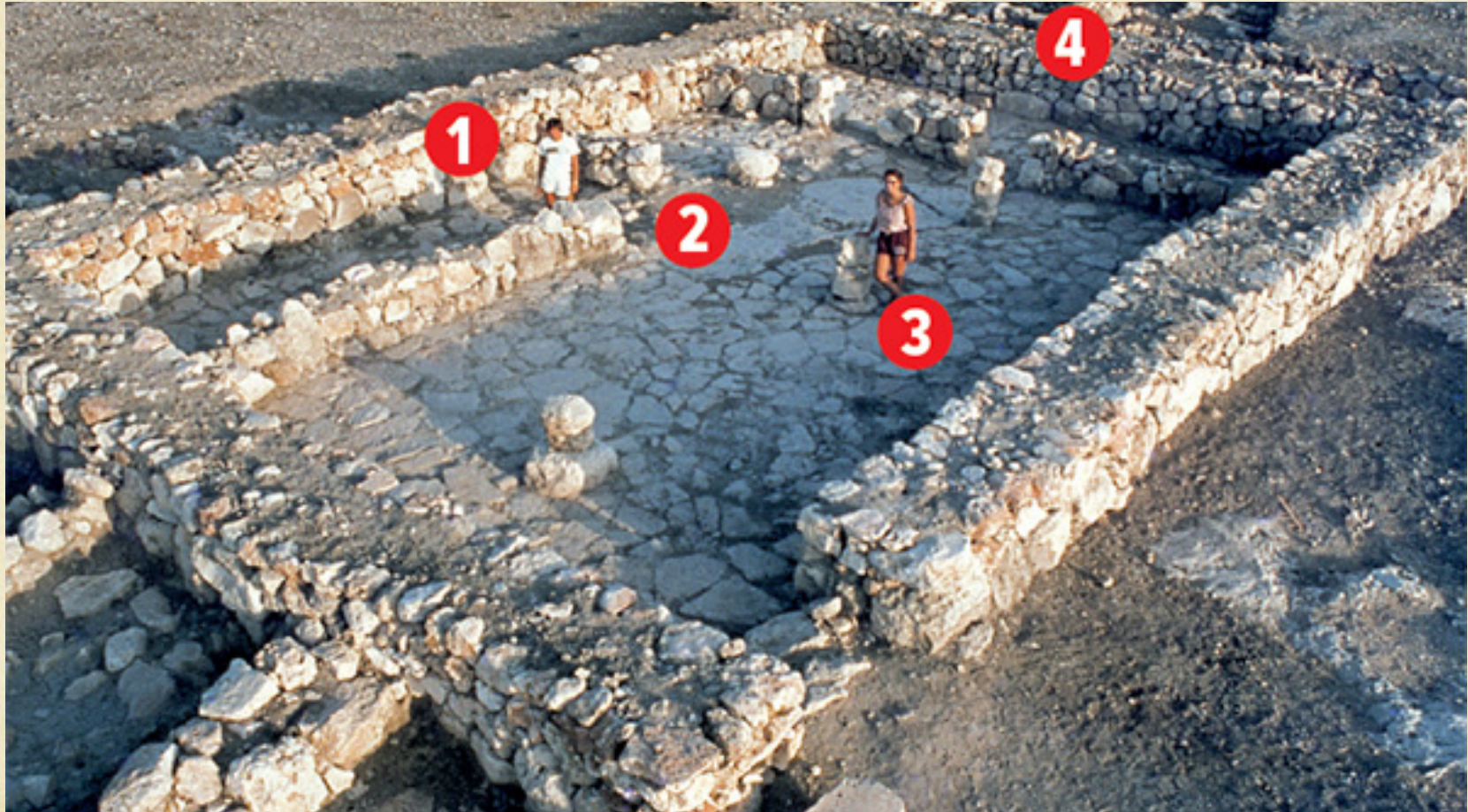
The "Israel" Merneptah Stele (1205 BC)



“Israel is
wasted,
its seed
is not”

5
10
15
20
25
26
27
28

Israelite Four-Room House



Mosaic Period (1400s?)

- What was happening in the world:
 - Most regions prehistoric
 - Egyptian New Kingdom flourishing
- What was happening in Israel:
 - Exodus (Exodus)
 - Sinai (Leviticus)
 - Wilderness Wanderings (Numbers, Deuteronomy)

Ark of the Covenant



Ark of the Covenant



Ark of the Covenant

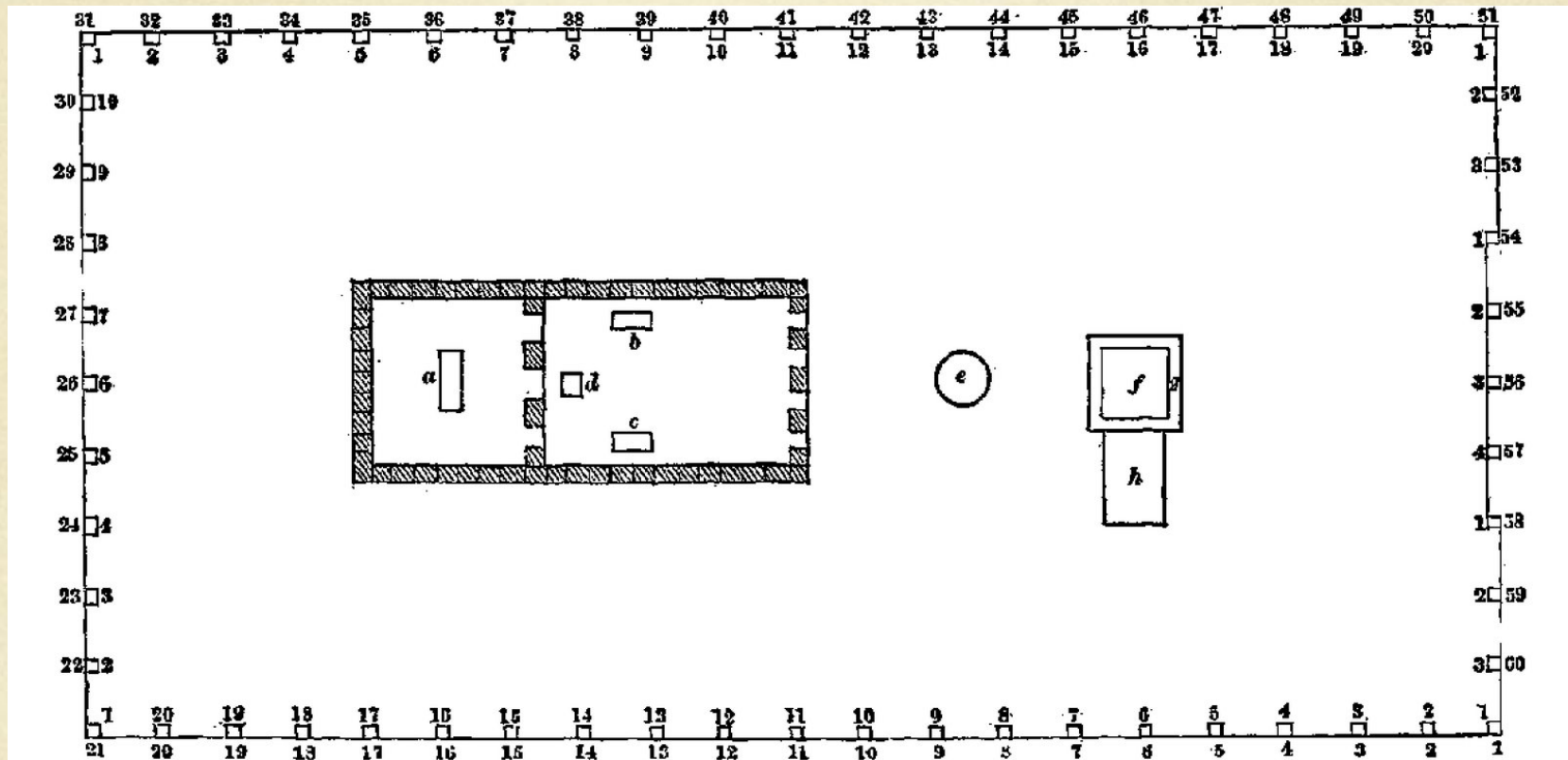
Ex. 25:10 “They shall make an ark of acacia wood; two cubits and a half shall be its length...”



Ramses War Camp



Tabernacle Lay Out



Plan of the Tabernacle and its Court. (From Riegenbach's *Mosaische Stiftshütte*.)

Large enclosure—Court (open overhead). Small enclosure—the Tabernacle (covered). *a*. Ark in the Holy of Holies. *b*. Table of show-bread. *c*. Golden candlestick. *d*. Altar of incense—*b*, *c*, *d* belong in the holy place. *e*. Laver, or basin for washing. *f*. Altar of burnt-offering. *g*. Gang or ledge

Mosaic Period

Num. 10:2 “Make two silver trumpets; of hammered work you shall make them...”



Hittite Treaties Parallel Deut.



studentreader.com

Hittite Treaties Parallel Deut.

Hittite Treaties	Deuteronomy	Exodus 20-24;
1. Title	1. Title (1:1-5)	1. Title (20:1)
2. Historical Prologue	2. Historical Prologue (1:6-4:43)	2. Historical Prologue (20:2)
3. Requirements A. Basic B. Detailed	3. Requirements A. Basic (4:44-11:32) B. Detailed (12-26)	3. Requirements A. Basic (20:3-26) B. Detailed (21-23)
4. Text A. Storage B. Reading	4. Text A. Storage (27:1-8) B. Reading (27:8-26)	4. Text A. Storage (24:4) B. Reading (24:7)
5. Witnesses	5. Witnesses (30:19)	5. Witnesses (24:9-11)
6. Consequences A. Curses B. Blessings	6. Consequences A. Blessings (28:1-14) B. Curses (28:15-68)	

Patriarchal Period

- Asiatic Chieftain “Absharru” Visiting the Pharaoh
Gen. 12:10: “Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.”



Sodom Found

Gen. 19:24 Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven...



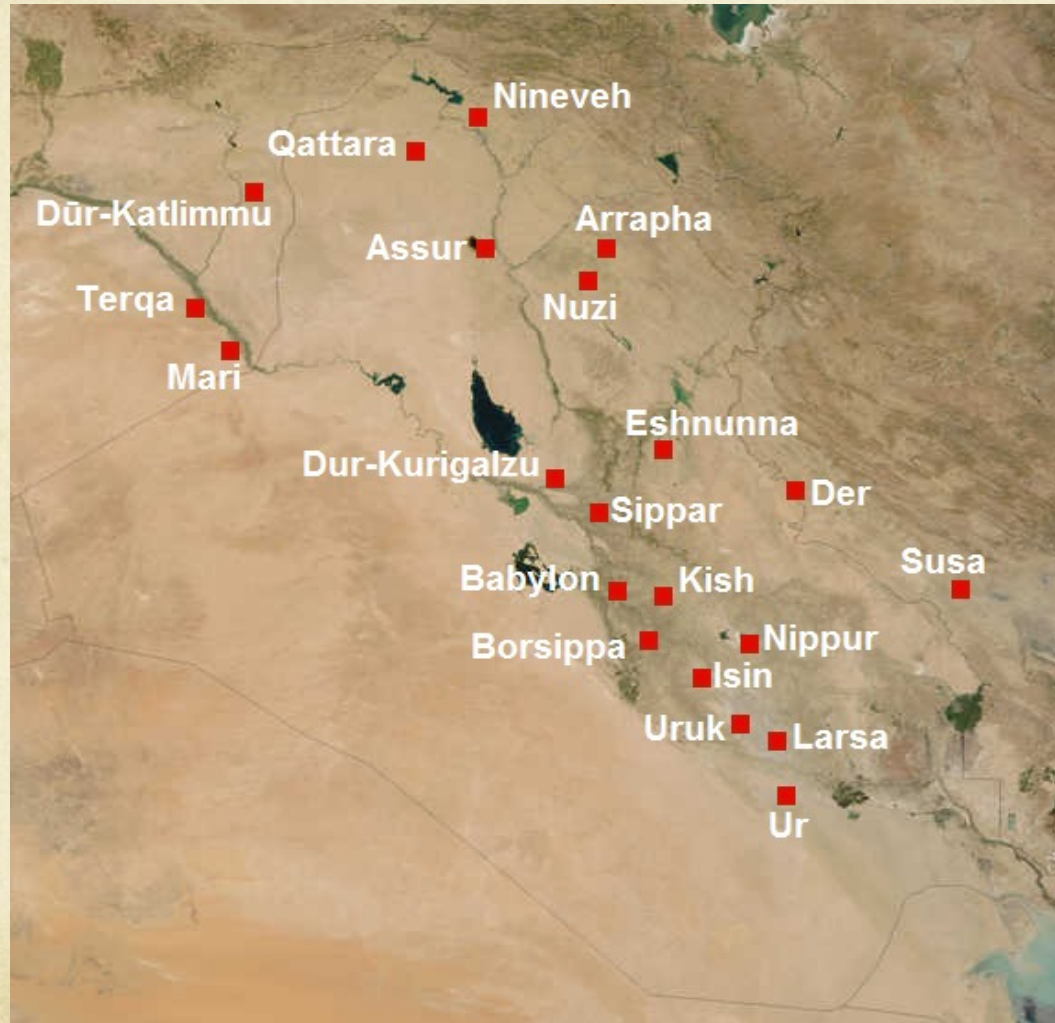
Sodom Found



Trinitite from Sodom



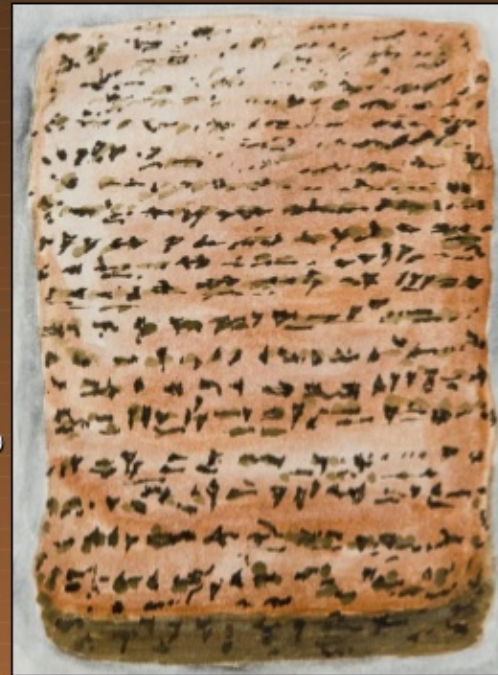
Legal Practice of Abram's Day



Legal Practice of Abram's Day

Nuzi Tablets 1500-1400 BC

Excavated in Nuzi (Iraq), these cuneiform tablets (drawing) describe society, laws and customs, that **parallel biblical patriarchs as late as 1st mill B.C.** It could explain why Abraham was reluctant to expel Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 21:10-11) and how a man may adopt a slave (Eliezer), relative or free-born, to care for an elderly man (Abraham) and carry on his family name (Genesis 15:2, 24; 24).



Nuzi Tablets

- Gen. 31:34 “Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them in the camel’s saddle, and sat upon them.”



Household Gods



Household god or Teraphim
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Nuzi Laws Clarify

- Jacob was adopted by Laban
- Adoption meant rights to grandchildren
- Household gods were evidence in court to the right of property ownership
- The teraphim gave ownership to in-laws and adopted children

Patriarchal Period Summary

- Some major incidents archeologically confirmed (Sodom and Gomorrah)
- Description of Abraham fits cultural data of the time period
- The culture and customs fit texts we have recovered from the time period.
- The accounts are at least properly situated in the early second millenium Near East.

Is the Old Testament History?

- Broadly speaking, Yes!
- The historical books are certainly situated in real history.
- Archeology and ancient texts confirm many specifics from the Hellenistic period to age of David.
- Before David, much circumstantial evidence for the Settlement, Exodus activities, and age of Patriarchs.