

Excavating the Bible: New Archaeological Evidence for the Historical Reliability of Scripture by Yitzhak Meitlis Quotes

Before turning to archeology as a key to understanding the Bible (and the Bible as a key to archaeology), we must stress that the purpose of the Bible is spiritual, moral and ethical, and that it comprises various levels of comprehension accordingly. The Bible is definitely not a history book nor does it strive to be one. This fact was noted by Jewish sages many centuries ago when they formulated the rule that “chronology is of no significance in the Torah [Bible]” (Babylonian Talmud, Pesachim 6b). So it is not surprising to find that not all the travails of the Jewish nation are recorded in the Bible. The omission of various events does not testify in any manner to a lack of knowledge of the compilers of the Bible. To paraphrase the well-known adage of the sages regarding prophecy, “a prophecy needed for all time was recorded [in the Bible]; that which was not needed was omitted” (Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 14a), we may state that details of an event needed for the purposes of guiding future generations was recorded in the Bible, while one that was not needed was left out. To achieve its ethical ends, the Bible employed various scattered events taken from the historical past of the nation, yet the events and the reality they describe faithfully reflect historical truth.¹

Regarding the bargaining process during Patriarchal Period, it should be noted that there is an interesting Biblical detail which can be explained only in a Middle Bronze Age context or, more precisely, against the backdrop of the 18th-17th centuries BCE. In the narrative of the sale of Joseph, mention is made of Joseph being sold for twenty pieces of silver (Gen. 37:28). British scholar Kenneth A. Kitchen discovered (in documents from Mesopotamia) that in the third millennium BCE the price of a slave was ten shekels (silver); in the 18th and 17th centuries BCE, the price of a slave was twenty shekels; while in the 14th and 13th centuries it was thirty shekels. By the onset of the first millennium, the price of a slave had gone up to 50–60 shekels, while during the period of Persian rule the price was 90–120 shekels. The price paid for Joseph as described in the Bible fits perfectly with the economic reality of the Middle Bronze Age; he was sold for twenty shekels, the going price at the time. Surely, no one writing centuries later would have known the market value of slaves in that era!²

¹ 16 Kindle Ed.

² 47.

In scholarly circles, there is a well-known argument that the camel was not used as a beast of burden prior to the close of the second millennium BCE, i.e. not until long after the era of the Patriarchs. This argument, which was based at the time on the knowledge available in the 1960s, has not been mentioned for over thirty years! In his book, *The Camel and the Wheel* (published in 1975) Richard W. Bulliet refers to a fragment from a document from Alalakh in northern Syria (stratum VII, dated from the 17th century BCE) in which mention is made of “one portion of food for the camel.” We therefore know that by that time, the camel was domesticated, and it is possible that it began even earlier. Ofer Bar-Yosef writes that the use of the camel goes as far back as the fourth millennium BCE, well before the Biblical Era, and that evidence of this has been found in Iran.³

Buy the book: <https://www.amazon.com.au/Excavating-Bible-Archaeological-Historical-Reliability/dp/093543741X>

³ 52-53. – RU.org notes: While this quote from the book presents a perspective on the domestication and use of camels in ancient times, it's important to note that this topic is still the subject of ongoing scholarly debate.