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The Lure of Biblical and Christian Archeology

A few years ago Prof. Ralph Van Deman Magoffin, then president of the Archeological Institute of America, wrote a fascinating little book, to which he gave the title *The Lure and Lore of Archeology*. About one third of his discussion in this book concerns itself with the first part of his subject, while the remaining two thirds of the book speak of the history and the science of archeology. The presentation is not technical, and therefore even the layman in the field will be able to follow the author without difficulty. Moreover, it is surprising to learn that the writer discusses so many subjects connected with archeology which are also of great interest to the theologian. And it is from the angle of the pastor and preacher that we wish to present the subject of Biblical and Christian archeology; for it is a field of investigation and information which will more than repay every student of the Bible if he will give it the attention which it deserves or if he will at least take note of some of the most important data in connection with his reading and indexing.

We here assume, chiefly on the basis of expressions from various sources, that the advantages of work in this department of study are generally known and acknowledged. For it is not merely the stimulation of information in itself that serves as a motive in the field of archeology but also that of practical application and use. One can hardly get an adequate picture of the daily life of people in Bible times and in particular of the social and economic conditions in the Orient two to four millenniums ago without the information supplied by archeology. It is true that this information is not required for the teaching of the doctrine pertaining to salvation as such, but it certainly enhances the presentation in a well-conducted Bible hour, and in many instances it supplies the background and the foil for the historical statements of the Bible.

Let us take an example from the book referred to in our introductory paragraph. Magoffin writes (p. 23): "In the thirteenth verse of the second chapter of Revelation, referring to Pergamum, it is written: I know thy works and where thou dwellest, even where *Satan's seat* is. That statement nonplused commentators until archeologists began to excavate at Pergamum. They laid bare the 'seat of Satan.' It was a temple of the ancient pagan gods, the altar of which had as its artistic adornment a sculptured battle between the gods and the giants. When the Germans excavated Pergamum from 1878 to 1886, they came upon this magnificent altar with its slabs of sculptured beauty. After getting out several of the slabs, the excitement became so intense that the

excavators sat down and simply wept for joy. Soon, to their mingled horror and amusement, they found they were sitting upon Zeus, the greatest of the Olympian deities. The 'seat of Satan,' the Pergamene altar, is now one of the most prized possessions of the Asia Minor museum in Berlin." And so other examples, thousands of them, could be adduced to show the value of archeological excavations for the Bible commentator and historian.

Let us look at a few of the fields which have been particularly fruitful in yielding valuable information to the student of the Bible, referring first of all to the Near East. Notable among the expeditions of the last decade are those of Woolley, who worked at Ur of the Chaldees, the original home of Abraham. Not only the various pieces of jewelry and other objects of craftsmanship and culture are of interest in connection with Woolley's reports, since they definitely point to the existence of an advanced civilization two thousand years before Christ, but in particular the fact that these excavators, at least to their own full satisfaction, have demonstrated that there was an antediluvian civilization and that the evidence of the pottery found would place the Deluge at the time given to it by the account of Moses. Readers of this article will recall that Breasted, the well-known authority on Egypt and other Oriental countries, a few years ago published an article, profusely illustrated, on Persepolis and the palaces of Xerxes and Darius, which fully corroborated the Biblical accounts of life at this Oriental court. And similar accounts have been brought to us from other areas in the former great empires of the East. We just mention, in passing, that constant progress has been made in our knowledge of the Hittites, so that this ancient people, whose very existence was discredited a few decades ago, is now known almost as well as the England of Henry VIII. In fact, Asia Minor presents a veritable mine of wealth of information connected with Bible accounts and the history of the Apostolic Church.

This is true in quite the same degree of Macedonia and Greece, as a reference to almost any number of the *American Journal of Archeology* will show. If, for example, the name of Erastus, the treasurer of the city of Corinth, is found in an ancient inscription connected with the gift of a mosaic floor to the city, we have every reason to believe that this was the same Erastus, "the chamberlain," of whom Paul speaks in his Letter to the Romans, chap. 16:23 b. Again, when the ancient floors and a part of the walls and of the chancel of an ancient Corinthian basilica are excavated, we can form a pretty good picture of the rise and the subsequent decline and fall of the congregation in Corinth from possibly the third or fourth to about the tenth century. Similar interesting

and valuable discoveries have been made in practically all the Christian centers of the early centuries.

Quite naturally the Holy Land demands a special measure of our attention, since it was the center of Biblical history. Expeditions from various museums and universities have worked with encouraging success during recent decades, especially since the World War. Large parts of the East Jordan country have been ransacked for architectural remains, and excavations are carried on more or less systematically in more than a dozen places between the ancient towns of Dan and Beersheba. The archeological work in Jerusalem was begun in an intensive fashion about a hundred years ago, although even at that Magoffin states that excavation "is just beginning in Jerusalem, and work there will be both slow and unsatisfactory due to the compactness of the modern city buildings." (Cp. Vol. V: 922-929, of this journal.) Practically every handbook and every monograph on archeological work in Palestine brings additional valuable information on some part of the city, as, for instance, on the *tsinnor*, or way of access, to the upper city which was utilized by Joab in conquering the Jebusite stronghold, or the finding of a hitherto unknown gate in the western wall of the ancient City of David. With the recording of such finds in even the semipopular and popular magazines, one is in a position to add to his index and to add to his appreciation of the several parts of the Holy City.

Near the fords of the Jordan which served the Galilean Jews on their regular journeys to Jerusalem the city of Beth-Shan is located. It was a stronghold even during the wars of the children of Israel with the Philistines, as we learn from the Book of the Judges and from First Samuel. The city was so strategic a point that it served as a fortress for successive inhabitants for over 3,000 years, as excavations during the last decade have demonstrated. From the description of the journeys of Jesus it is almost certain that He passed this town in the lower valley of Jezreel on more than one occasion.

While we are in the northern part of Palestine, we may just as well pay a visit to Tell el-Kedah, which has definitely been identified by Garstang as the ancient Hazor, the stronghold of some of the mightiest nations that fought against Joshua and Israel. The pottery fragments discovered on this hill have clearly established the conquest of the city at the time given in Holy Scripture; 1 Kings 9:15 states that Solomon repaired Hazor, so that it served as a link in his chain of fortresses. Cp. the conquest of the city, 2 Kings 15:29.

On the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee were the cities in which our Savior spent a good deal of His time and one of

which, Capernaum, He made His headquarters for approximately three years, or at least during the period of His main Galilean journeys. The location of this city has now definitely been established as that of the modern Tell-Hum. Stones from the ancient synagog, very likely that in which Jesus delivered His discourse mentioned in Luke 4, have been found, and they bear out the fact that the centurion who bore the cost of erecting this place of worship did not shrink back from expenses. Some of the ornaments of this synagog are a good deal like those of the synagog of Durah, which has recently been described in detail.

If we follow the ancient road from the Galilean highlands through the upper part of the Valley of Esdraelon and then ascend the divide toward the Valley of Sharon, we come to the location of the ancient stronghold of Megiddo, also one of the fortresses of Solomon. Cp. 1 Kings 9:15; 2 Chron. 8:6. Here a recent expedition excavated the level of Solomon's days and found one of the great stables of the king who first introduced horses in large numbers into Palestine. Each stable had twenty-four stalls, twelve on each side of the runway. Great pillars supported the roofs of each stable, and the horses were tied to the pillars. A stone manger stood between each two pillars. Space for 200 horses has been uncovered. One is filled with a feeling approximating elation when one sees pictures of these stables and notes even the hollows worn by the pawing of the horses' hoofs. The entire Biblical account of the reign of Solomon as given in Kings and Chronicles becomes more vivid as these discoveries are brought to our attention.

That one may almost speak of a romance of archeology is evident from a book like that by Kyle, *Excavating Kirjath-Sepher's Ten Cities*. It embodies the results of a joint expedition conducted by the Xenia Theological Seminary and the American School at Jerusalem and describes the work that was done at Tell Beit Mirsim, a mound thirteen miles southwest of Hebron. It speaks about the streets and houses of Kirjath-Sepher, of its water supply, of its furniture, implements, and weapons, of its cult objects and inscriptions, of its pottery, and of many other objects of interest. We get a glimpse of the city which Othniel destroyed and of that which he then built on the ruins of the old site; we are given intimate glances into the customs of the early inhabitants of the city, and the summary of results offers conclusions which bring the reader face to face with the truth of even the most incidental parts of the Scripture accounts. The author was able to estimate, with reasonable certainty, the time of Abram's call, the date of the Exodus, and the conquest of Palestine under

Joshua, the campaign of Shishak, and the destruction of the city by Nebuchadnezzar.

A similar story comes from a mound called Ain Shems, the Biblical Beth-shemesh. The excavations on this site have definitely shown that it was occupied from the seventeenth to the thirteenth century B. C. by Canaanites, that the Israelites destroyed it and built a new city on the ruins, occupying the hill till the tenth century, when it was taken by the Chaldean armies.

Another site which has received the attention of the archeologists is Tell en-Nasbeh, the ancient Mizpah. Concerning this city Magoffin writes: "During the World War a German aviator had chanced to take a photograph of the hill. Dean Badé, director of the Palestine Institute, saw the picture and was so struck by it that he secured the negative and had a clearer print made. Contours of walls and gates were then visible, contours which one does not see at all as he walks over the top of the tell. The area on top of the tell, which is enclosed by a sixteen-foot thick wall, is about eight acres. Almost at once the excavators came upon the platform of a tower citadel. Later, near the citadel, were found seven circular silos, or granaries. At the bottom of one was a stone which sealed an opening in the floor. The room below was a plastered cistern of the shape of a huge jug, and in it were found many pieces of Israelitish pottery of the Exilic period, but not a single sherd of an earlier period. The date at which this cistern was sealed was about 585 B. C. This at once made the excavators turn to the 40th and 41st chapters of Jeremiah, where is told the story of the treacherous murder of the governor of Judea, Gedaliah, whose administration under the Babylonians had been centered at Mizpah, by Ishmael and his friends, who had killed the governor and his friends and hidden their bodies in a near-by cistern. Nine cisterns were found by Badé, one of them large enough to have contained fifty or more men. . . . And so Tell en-Nasbeh has given up its secrets and revealed itself as the Mizpah of the Bible." (P. 52f.) When Badé, who has since, like Kyle, died, lectured in St. Louis, his vivid descriptions gave a real thrill to his listeners.

We cannot close this part of our discussion without referring to the work done on the site of the ancient city of Jericho, chiefly by Garstang and his assistants, who excavated here after he had completed his work at Hazor. When the scientists began to dig into the heap of ruins that had once been Jericho, they soon found ample evidence of destruction by fire, and that about 1400 B. C. Added to this came the discovery of fifteen hundred unbroken pottery vessels, of bronze weapons and trinkets, such as bead necklaces of carnelian, shell, and bone, and a number of bone

flutes, also scarabs inscribed with the royal *cartouche* of the reigning Pharaoh. But the most important discoveries were those connected with the walls of the ancient city, for the evidence definitely showed that the walls of Jericho had fallen outwards quite flat in various places, particularly on the west side of the city. In reporting on this discovery, Marston adds the explanation: "The unsatisfactory character of the foundations on which the walls stood and the defective nature of the brickwork as revealed in portions of the walls still standing no doubt contributed to the catastrophe, while the fact that the walls were tied together by the houses built astride them linked them in a simultaneous downfall." (*New Bible Evidence*, 142.) On the basis of archeological evidence therefore the Scriptural account of the fall of Jericho's walls has been shown to be true. At the same time the excavators produced evidence for the truth of the account of the marching around the city; for the entire area of Jericho was only seven acres, and the whole circumference of the city was about six hundred and fifty yards, or about the same size as the Jebusite Jerusalem which David captured.

Much more material could here be offered to stimulate the appetite of Bible students for the study of Biblical archeology, such as the evidence from Sinai, from Ras Shamra, from Tel el Amarna, and from Egypt, not to speak of a great deal of material from various parts of Europe; but we desire to refer briefly to some of the possibilities in the field of Christian archeology.

The extent of this field of knowledge can be estimated if one pages through the monumental work by the noted liturgist and archeologist Cabrol in his *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne*. But even smaller handbooks, such as those by Bennett, *Christian Archeology*, which is by no means obsolete, though now about forty years old, and Kaufmann, *Handbuch der christlichen Archäologie*, will serve to introduce the Bible student into this valuable field. For here we find information on the Christian art monuments, on the symbolism of Christian art, on early Christian paintings and mosaics, on sculpture and carvings in ivory, on early Christian church-buildings and epigraphy, on Christian poetry, hymnology, and music, on questions of the hierarchy and church discipline, on the worship and the Sacraments in the early Church, and on the archeology of Christian life (the Christian family, the Church and slavery, civil and military life, charities, general culture, and the care for the dead). Thousands of illustrations are available, and many of these present their own arguments, as, for example, the gilded glasses and bronze busts representing Peter and Paul, which, among other things, disprove the claim that Peter enjoyed the primacy or supremacy in the Apostolic Age.

Pictures of Peter go back so far at this time that several experts believe we have an authentic portrait of the apostle, just as we seem to possess a genuine portrait of Paul.

The possibilities of systematic study in this field are practically limitless, and they reach into every department of theological information, exegesis, doctrinal theology, liturgics, art, and scores of related fields. How interesting to find a Roman Catholic writer stating, for example, that the early Church knew no difference between the vestments of the laity and the clergy: "Liturgical garments were . . . originally nothing more than the good street clothes of the cultured gentleman but in the change of style gradually ceased to serve the ordinary way of living and were then, due to the conservative character of the Church, reserved for the liturgical use." (Kaufmann, *op. cit.*, 565.) One is fascinated also by the very interesting discussions of the sacred vessels as used in the early Church. The chalice of Antioch, for example, has been the topic, not only of articles in professional magazines, but even of entire books, and the experts have not yet fully agreed as to its date, some of them insisting on placing it at the end of the first century, whereas others, like Kaufmann, would not make the date earlier than the end of the second century.

But no matter which part of the field we investigate, we are bound to find information of particular importance, not only *per se* but with many possibilities for practical applications. In fact, history must be backed up by archeology and go hand in hand with it; otherwise its data will often prove inadequate and misleading. Biblical and Christian archeology should occupy a definite place in the study program of every pastor.

P. E. KRETZMANN

Sermon Study on Heb. 10:19—25

Eisenach Epistle Selection for New Year's Day

The lesson for New Year's Day consists of one long sentence made up of three exhortatory subjunctive clauses, introduced by a participle clause. In the introductory clause, vv. 19-21, the writer sums up in two statements the contents of the preceding chapters. We have the assurance of a trustworthy entrance to the sanctuary, and we have a great High Priest. On these two facts he bases a threefold admonition, to continue steadfast in faith (22) and in hope (23) and in love (24, 25). The pastor preaching on this text will do well to read the entire letter, for one cannot fully understand this passage without a knowledge of the preceding dissertation.