



Author of Unearthing the Bible

ARCHAEOLOGY and the PFOPT, F of the BIBLE

EXPLORING THE EVIDENCE FOR THE HISTORICAL EXISTENCE OF BIBLE CHARACTERS





"Titus Kennedy uses a rigorous methodology to demonstrate that the Bible is a book about real people. Far too often, Bible readers just skip over hard-to-pronounce names, assuming they must be uninteresting or unimportant. *Archaeology and the People of the Bible* builds a bridge from the present to the distant past and illuminates and contextualizes the inspired ancient narratives."

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John A. Bloom, PhD, PhD, MDiv, Founding Director, MA Science and Religion Program and Emeritus Professor of Physics, Biola University

ARCHAEOLOGY and the PEOPLE of the BIBLE

TITUS KENNEDY



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Oh that my words were written!

Oh that they were inscribed in a book!

That with an iron stylus and lead

they were engraved in the rock forever!

As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives,

and at the last He will take His stand on the earth.

Јов 19:23-25



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INTRODUCTION

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ver the last several decades, archaeological projects and research have uncovered new discoveries directly related to many of the people named on the pages of the Bible. While scholars generally acknowledge that the Bible may contain accurate geographical information, when it comes to the existence and lives of specific individuals named in the Bible, opinions about the historical nature of these figures and their positions have varied drastically due to presuppositions and limited archaeological data.

The idea that the Bible is primarily a mythological work composed as religious and political propaganda rather than an accurate retelling of the past continues to be widespread. This viewpoint implies that if mythology, the Bible may describe real locations but the events and even people are largely fictional rather than historical.

A comparison with the Bible has often been made with the *Iliad* of Homer, an epic poem with mythological elements composed in ancient times around the 8th century BC but probably set in the 12th century BC. Although the city of Troy is now known to have existed and was likely even destroyed as a result of a war similar to what Homer described, no evidence for any of the people named in the poem—such as Achilles, Hector, Agamemnon, Priam, Helen, or Paris—has ever been found in contemporary archaeological sources. Discussions of the gods and supernatural events connected to ancient Greek religion and mythology are prevalent throughout the text, and even though a few historical elements can be identified in the poem, the *Iliad* has been classified as a traditional work of historical fiction or myth.

This Bible as mythology and fiction position would therefore argue that simply because Jerusalem and the temple existed and were probably destroyed after being defeated by the Babylonians, this does not mean that David, Isaiah, Sargon, Hezekiah, Jehoiachin, Nebuchadnezzar, and Belshazzar were real people who held the titles and performed the deeds the Bible claims.

Indeed, the existence of a city and evidence for a battle in a similar chronological context does not mean that the events and people mentioned in the book are historical. And yet archaeological discoveries have now demonstrated the historical existence of these people and many others, indicating that the narratives accurately reflect and record historical reality with detailed precision.

Certainly many names that appear in the Bible have also been found in a variety of archaeological sources. Even more people might potentially be identified or proposed, but those who are only referred to in the Bible using a title or association are excluded. These speculative cases based only on information from their title and time period would include pharaohs or kings whose names are not specified and therefore can only be suggested identifications based on circumstantial evidence and parallels. Names appearing similar to the names of rulers from distinct cultural and chronological settings but lacking definitive links have also been excluded, including the intriguing examples of Chedorlaomer a possible Elamite king, Amraphel a possible Mesopotamian king, and Tidal a possible Hittite king.

Further, many others clearly named in records from antiquity dating to a later time period are also excluded. For example, although Lot is mentioned on a stone inscription from the Byzantine period at the Cave of Lot, and the cave had a long and ancient tradition along with archaeological materials dating to the Early and Middle Bronze Ages, the inscription does not come from the Bronze Age and therefore does not qualify as contemporary attestation of the person Lot.

The information must be thoughtfully evaluated and consistent criteria applied in each instance to avoid misidentifying the use of a name as unambiguous attestation for a biblical person. In antiquity as today, numerous people often shared the same name—especially those from similar cultural contexts and time periods. And even if there is an overlap of name, time, and place, the difference between possibility and certainty must be acknowledged. In order to associate an archaeological attestation of an individual with a person named in the Bible, multiple categories of information need to be present and match name, family, time period, location, title, or profession.

The first and most obvious is that the names must be the same and not a speculative nickname or unknown additional name. Second, if any family names are known, those must also match and be in the correct relationship, such as grandfather, father, son; grandmother, mother, daughter; brother, sister; husband, wife; or another relative. Third, the chronological setting for the archaeological person

and the biblical person must be within the same time frame and restricted to a reasonable lifespan, if that exact degree of timing is possible.

Fourth, the geographic setting or location must be consistent between the two sources, such as a particular city, region, or kingdom. Fifth, if there is any supplemental data such as title, occupation, place of origin, attribute, achievement, or association, then these must either match or be plausible. Finally, the archaeological source—a stele, statue, coin, tablet, manuscript, mosaic, ostracon, seal, bulla, ossuary, or any other artifact with writing containing a name and specific information about an individual—should be verified as authentic. Numerous scholars have objected to the study, publication, and use of unprovenanced artifacts—discoveries that cannot be traced to a controlled archaeological excavation, but instead are found in a collection, on the antiquities market, or on the surface of the ground by a pedestrian visiting an ancient site. While these unprovenanced artifacts lack archaeological context and should be scrutinized with a critical and skeptical posture, the current ability to analyze artifacts through rigorous scientific tests and evaluation by multiple experts has made forgeries almost impossible to escape detection. Therefore, many scholars consider unprovenanced artifacts that have been sufficiently examined to be worthy of discussion, publication, and inclusion in the archaeological record.

Ideally, all five of the aforementioned categories of information would be present and the artifact would have been discovered and clearly documented in a controlled archaeological excavation, making the association and identification certain. Lacking one or more of these conditions, identifying the person may still be possible, but a rating of probable, tentative, or speculative may be necessary. Circumstances are not always perfect in archaeology, and in many situations, the quantity and clarity of the information presently available is sufficient only to classify the identification as tentative or speculative. The objective in these cases is to provide information about identifications that are unclear or debated so that the reader is aware of both the possibility of attestation and the current problems or lack of data, understanding that the archaeological evidence exists, but might be inconclusive or disputed. The level of confidence or lack thereof can be noted for each potential person, but simply because an identification is speculative does not mean it should always be disregarded or excluded, for one new piece of data might solve the puzzle in the future.

By applying these five categories and examining every case of a named person in the Bible who appears to be attested by archaeological artifacts and ancient manuscripts, approximately 130 candidates emerge across both the Old and

New Testaments combined. The classification of each person as firm, probable, tentative, or speculative is based on evaluation with the five categories of information and the assessments of various scholars, whether or not the provenance of the discovery can be traced. Ultimately, however, there are identifications that will be disputed due to the weighing of evidence and different perspectives.

Readers will notice that the more recent time periods have a greater frequency of named people of the Bible attested in the archaeological record. This is due to the ravages of time and depth of excavation skewing results, along with variances in writing and recording practices between different cultures and time periods. Nevertheless, as new discoveries are made and past data is researched and assessed, the picture emerges that the Bible is not an ancient mythological book set in real places filled with fictional characters but a historically accurate source recording the lives and details of real people whose existence continues to be verified by archaeology.

PART 1

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OLD TESTAMENT PEOPLE

(CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER)

DANEL



Epic of Aqhat

Name: Danel

Time Period: 2nd Millennium BC (Bronze Age)

Geographical Area: Levant

Biblical Reference(s): Ezekiel 14:14-20; 28:3 Ancient Source(s): Epic of Aqhat; The Rephaim

Identification Rating: Probable (B)

The man named Danel, whose life is set in far-off ancient times during the Bronze Age in Ugaritic tablets and in the book of Ezekiel may be the same person. The Epic of Aghat was discovered on three tablets of the 14th centurv BC recovered in excavations at the ancient city of Ugarit, while a fourth tab-

let probably existed but has not yet been discovered (KTU 1.17-1.19). Although the text is incomplete due to damage and a missing tablet, the story focuses on a man named Danel ("God/El is judge") and his son Aqhat.

The protagonist, Danel, is described as pious and just, and his actions imply that he is wise. Danel is also called "man of the Rephaim" and "man of Haranam," and the text relates that he was a judge who advocated for widows and orphans, while also making it clear that he was a prominent hero and influential man.

The story reveals that Danel initially has no son and heir, so he makes a divine appeal through ritual and prayer and El blesses him with a son named Aqhat. Later, a special bow and arrows are delivered to Danel, and he instructs his wife to prepare a lamb to honor the guest who brought these weapons. Danel then gives the bow and arrows to Aghat. Unfortunately, due to the evil and covetousness of the goddess Anat, Aghat is murdered because he would not sell his special bow to her even though she offered silver, gold, and immortality.

According to the story, while out hunting, Aqhat is killed by Yatipan, the mercenary acting on the orders of Anat, and the bow is accidentally broken. At the instigation of his daughter Paghit, who sees a foreboding sign, Danel begins

searching for Aqhat, eventually learns of his son's death, and finds his remains. He then buries Aghat at the shores of Kinneret (Galilee), giving an important geographic marker as to the location of the events. Although the tablet dates to the 14th century BC, it is surely a copy of an earlier work. Clues in the text point to the time of Danel as the Middle Bronze Age, around the time of Abraham or possibly earlier, and according to the Book of Jubilees he was the uncle of Enoch. Danel also briefly appears in another Ugaritic tablet called the Rephaim.

This man from long ago named Danel is mentioned three times by Ezekiel alongside Noah and Job and in the context of Tyre (cf. Ezekiel 28:2-3). In the Ezekiel passages, Danel is grouped with two other men whose lives are set in the long-ago Bronze Age, described as righteous and wise, and at least in the case of Job and Danel, unable to save son or daughter. While the Epic of Aqhat reflects a polytheistic worldview rather than a monotheistic viewpoint, the original story may have been adapted and redacted by Ilimilku, the high priest of Ugarit, who also wrote versions of Keret and the Baal Cycle, in order to harmonize with the ideology and theology of Ugarit. The tablets from Ugarit that preserve information on and an ancient story about Danel appear to be discussing the same man noted in the book of Ezekiel.

"Even though these three men, Noah, Danel and Job were in its midst, by their own righteousness they could only deliver themselves," declares the Lord God. "If I were to cause wild beasts to pass through the land and they depopulated it, and it became desolate so that no one would pass through it because of the beasts, though these three men were in its midst, as I live," declares the Lord God, "they could not deliver either their sons or their daughters" (Ezekiel 14:14-16).

Barton, George. "Danel, a Pre-Israelite Hero of Galilee." Journal of Biblical Literature 60, No. 3 (1941): 213-25.

Parker, Simon. Ugaritic Narrative Poetry. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997.

BALAAM



Balaam text from Deir 'Alla

Name: Balaam (son of Beor)

Time Period: 15th century BC (Late Bronze Age)

and 9th century BC (Iron Age II)

Geographical Area: Mesopotamia and Moab Biblical Reference(s): Numbers 22:5-24:25;

Deuteronomy 23:3-4

Ancient Source(s): The Deir 'Alla Inscription

Identification Rating: Probable (B)

alaam, son of Beor, from Pethor, was hired by Balak the king of Moab to curse the Israelites during their wilderness wandering. The historical context of these events places Balaam in the Late Bronze Age, coming from Mesopotamia to Moab, while an ancient Aramaic document known as the Deir 'Alla Inscription or Balaam Inscription (KAI 312) dates to the 9th century BC in the Iron Age. Discovered during excavations at the site

of Deir 'Alla in Jordan (tentatively identified with ancient Succoth mentioned in Joshua 13:27), the Balaam Inscription is not strictly an inscription, but black and red ink written on plaster from an interior wall of a building. Although this poetic Aramaic text had been written on a wall around 800 BC, it appears to retell events and name an individual from centuries prior.

One of the oldest existing examples of Aramaic literature, reconstituted from 119 fragments, it relates events about Balaam. Beginning with "the book of Balaam, son of Beor, a seer of the gods," the text describes how Balaam received a divine message at night warning that darkness and chaos would be coming to the land. Balaam then attempted to appease the gods by going through various religious rituals. The people apparently rejected, condemned, and banned Balaam and his message, but specifics are difficult to understand because of missing pieces of text.



Undeciphered Late Bronze Age tablet from Deir 'Alla

Although fragmentary, this composition gives a matching name, family lineage, and profession for Balaam as a seer involved in divination, in addition to the person and events being geographically linked to the area of Moab. While the surviving text dates to the 9th century BC rather than the time of Balaam, it is possible that the information was passed down orally or adapted from an earlier written source. It is significant that a total of 15 tablets from the Late Bronze Age have been discovered at Deir 'Alla, and although difficult to decipher, the tablets demonstrate that written records existed at Deir 'Alla centuries earlier and close to the time of Balaam. Thus, Balaam, son of Beor, seems to be documented by an ancient Aramaic text from Moab, but the lapse of time means the attestation for Balaam as a historical person must be considered less than certain.

Balak the son of Zippor was king of Moab at that time. So he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor, at Pethor, which is near the River, in the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying, "Behold, a people came out of Egypt; behold, they cover the surface of the land, and they are living opposite me. Now, therefore, please come, curse this people for me since they are too mighty for me; perhaps I may be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed." So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the fees for divination in their hand; and they came to Balaam and repeated Balak's words to him (Numbers 22:4-7).

Hoftijzer, J. and G. van der Kooij. The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla Re-Evaluated. Leiden: Brill, 1991.