# Intro: Setting The Scene

## What is History?

A mix of Geography (things happen in places), Archeology (things can be dug up) and Texts (things can be carved or inked)

Historians, rightly, start from a position of skeptism – they tell us the minimum that facts point to. (ie Richard III has been found **‘beyond reasonable doubt’)**

Problem 1: Spin – facts are always interpreted

Just as in politics, everyone interprets the facts in line with their own ‘world view’. **No-one is neutral** – although many people try to be objective, we are all consciously and subconsciously biased.

Answer: own up – be honest with yourself and others.

**Your tour guide is biased** – He thinks the Old Testament and New Testament are historically reliable, though mainly told from a one ‘spin’ perspective.

*“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eye witnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.*”

Luke (chapter 1 verses:1-4) Owning Up to Spin - AD63

Problem 2: Facts – are cumulative rarely final

Facts are like data points on a graph. The more points you have the less curves you can fit through the data. Facts reduce the options they do not often ‘prove’ one version.

“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar – when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene – during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.”

Luke (chapter 3 verses 1-2) Telling the time using a calendar - AD63

Problem 3: Assumptions become your conclusions

Dogmatic naturalism starts by ruling out the miraculous and concludes God is not real.

Dogmatic belief starts by assuming God is real and concludes that he is.

Current Historical Camps

“Recently there has been a revival of interest in the history of ancient Israel, but it has divided scholars sharply into two camps.

In one camp are those who believe that a reasonably traditional but critical history of Israel can be reconstructed… they believe that archaeology does make a positive contribution to writing ancient Israel's history.

**The other group is sceptical about what can be known of Israel's history before the Babylonian Exile in 587 BC….** In this interpretation, the traditions in the Old Testament about the period of the Judges and the times of Saul, David and Solomon have to be treated with great caution”

(John Rogerson Prof Biblical Studies Sheffield: Chronicles of the OT Kings p8,13) The Tour - Dates

To try and make sense of the different exhibit we’ll split the history of the Old Testament into the following time periods:

Return from Exile 332 BC – 516 BC

Exile in Babylon 516 BC – 587 BC

Daniel

Kings of Israel and Judah 587 BC – 1050 BC

From King David, Solomon, Jehu son of Omri

**Judges Period 1050 BC – 1805 BC**

Including Moses, Joshua and the years Israel had no king

Patriarch’s Period 1805 BC – 2166 BC

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph

Arrive and Coffee!

Room 70 Roman Empire (return from exile)

Coins

Room 59 Ancient Levant (Patriarchs)

Bab Edh-Dhra

Room 57 Ancient Levant (Kings of Israel)

Lachish Letter, Shebna, Amarna Letters (Akhenaten?)

<http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=327261&partId=1&place=35484&object=20008&museumno=29832&page=1>

Clay tablet inscribed in Babylonian cuneiform; letter from the ruler Yapahu of Gezer to the Egyptian pharaoh Amenhotep III or Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten), including a request for help against marauders named as Hapiru (the Biblical Hebrews), a group known in the Near East since the early 2nd millennium BC as raiders, mercenaries and labourers, and later as simply dispossessed and homeless people; 4+4 columns?; 26 lines; complete.

<http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=364095&partId=1&place=35484&object=20008&museumno=125702&page=1>

Lachish Ostracon II (Lachish Letter II): pottery ostracon with Hebrew inscription

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\_online/collection\_object\_details/collection\_image\_gallery.aspx?partid=1&assetid=29403001&objectid=369626

Three line Hebrew funerary inscription from the entrance of a tomb which may have contained the remains of Shebna, the royal steward of King Hezekiah; much damaged.

Room 56 Mesopotamia (Patriarchs)

Culture – Hammurapi law, Atrahasis flood

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\_online/collection\_object\_details.aspx?objectId=8766&partId=1&place=35484&object=20008&museumno=104096&page=1

Clay tablet with four lines of inscription; school tablet with proverb; this is the teacher's version; the pupil's copy is on the other side.

Room 55 Mesopotamia (exile in Babylon, Kings and Judges)

Nabonidus, Taylor Prism

Nabonidus – 2nd in kingdom

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nabonidus\_Chronicle

The chronicle goes on to describe in several entries the self-imposed exile of Nabonidus in the Arabian oasis of Tema (mentioned as Teiman in Hebrew in the Dead Sea Scrolls fragment 4Q242 known as the Testimony of Nebonidus dated to 150 BC.[10][11] and the disruption that this caused to the Akitu (New Year) festival for a period of ten years. The king spent ten years in Arabia and left Babylonia administered by his son

Nabonidus – Sons name

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\_online/collection\_object\_details.aspx?objectId=327140&partId=1&place=35484&object=20008&museumno=91128&page=1

Complete clay cylinder, of Nabonidus, 2 columns of inscription, 26 lines, Late Babylonian; describes work on the temple of the moon god Sin at Ur by Nabonidus and includes a prayer for the king himself and Belshazzar, his son.

Nebo-Sarsekim (Nabu-sharussu-ukin) Jer 39:3

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\_online/collection\_object\_details.aspx?objectId=1571630&partId=1&place=35484&object=20008&museumno=114789&page=1

Clay tablet with six and one and four lines of inscription; Late Babylonian; administrative. The tablet gives the name and title of a high-ranking Babylonian officer who, according to Jeremiah, was present at the historic siege of Jerusalem in 587 BC with King Nebuchadnezzar II himself.

Room 52 Ancient Iran (return from Exile)

Cyrus Cylinder

Museum number90920

Title (object)The Cyrus Cylinder

Ezra 1:2-4; 2 Chron 36:23

Lunch and Coffee!

Room 4 Egypt (Kings of Israel)

Ramesses II statue - NB straw mud brick - can see straw - Large bust in centre of room

Tirhakah, Rosetta Stone

NB doubted as historic until Rosetta stone, NB also Ramases II statue

Museum number EA1779

Description Granite statue of Amun in the form of a ram protecting King Taharqa

Room 6 Assyria (Kings of Israel)

Stone Panel,

Museum number118908

Pul (Tiglath Pileser III) 745-727 Ashtaroth (Astartu) 2 Kings 15:29-30 p29

The town has just been captured and its inhabitants are being marched away. An Assyrian soldier waving a mace escorts four prisoners, who carry their possessions in sacks over their shoulders. Their clothes and their turbans, rising to a slight point which flops backwards, are typical of the area; people from the Biblical kingdom of Israel, shown on other sculptures, wear the same dress.

Kurkh Stela,

Museum number118884

Title (series)The Kurkh Stela

NB p28 Shalmaneser III - (NB not V) Writing describes military campaigns 853BC The reverse sside refers to Ahab the Israelite and claims Ahabs army had 2,000 chariots and 10,000 infantry

Black Obelisk

Museum number 118885

Description: Black limestone obelisk of Shalmaneser III; glorifies achievements of king and minister; inscription; illustrations show tribute from all directions; tribute bearers in five rows, identified by captions; each row has four panels, one on each side of the obelisk; 1. Gilzanu (North West Iran) tribute includes horses; 2. House of Omri (Ancient Israel- tribute from Biblical King Jehu 841BC); 3. Musri, or Egypt tribute or gift of elephant, ape and other exotic animals; 4. Suhi on the Euphrates, scene of animal hunting; 5. Patina in Southern Turkey.

Room 10 Assyria (Kings of Israel)

Lachish, Hezekiah

Chat and Coffee!

NB Page numbers in brackets refer to the book “Through the British Museum with the Bible” by Anderson and Edwards - available in the Museum bookshop.