

The Biblical World---A Review Article

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The Biblical World: A Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology. Edited by Charles F. Pfeiffer. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1966. 612 pp.

FOR OVER a year the students of Biblical studies have awaited the publication of this volume. The sub-title especially had given much promise of the purpose of the work, because there is a definite need for a dictionary of biblical archaeology to be published. This reviewer would be unfair, however, if he kept the reader in further state of anticipation that the book fulfills its purported *raison d'être*. Only the broadest stretch of the imagination can it be termed a dictionary of Biblical archaeology.

One of the purposes of a dictionary is to define; and a dictionary of Biblical archaeology should define terms that are used in connection with the science and methodology of Biblical archaeology. This book does not do so. For instance, the periods of Biblical archaeology have been designated by archaeologists as "Bronze Age," "Iron Age," etc. Yet none of these terms are found in the book. The student who would seek to know the characteristics of the Palestinian Iron Age will not find any answers in this volume. He will be forced to turn to other sources. This is unfortunate. Furthermore, such methodological and technical terms as stratigraphy, excavation, sounding, are not discussed (although there is a very brief-two-thirds of a column length presentation — explanation of Radio Carbon). The unsigned (all the articles, incidentally, are unsigned) entry on Pottery fails to present the value of pottery as a dating device. Pottery is treated as a product, as a utensil, and as an industrial commodity both from its own utilitarian use in industry as

well as the organization of industry around pottery making, but there is not one line to suggest the value of pottery as a means of dating — a contribution which Sir Flinders Petrie and William Foxwell Albright have seized upon and made good use of.

The definition given archaeology is quite acceptable, "Archaeology is the scientific study of the material remains which have been left behind by men during the ages." Biblical archaeology is further delineated as that branch of archaeology which is "concerned with the understanding of the history, life, customs, and literature of the Israelites and of those peoples in the neighborhood of ancient Israel who influenced them." The article on "Archaeology"—approximately 5½ pages of text—is a good introduction, but it does not begin to measure up to Gus W. Van Boek's article by the same title in **The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible**. As a matter of fact, the student who wishes to be brought up to date on most of the recent excavations and appraisals from archaeological data could very well turn to the respective article in the IDB and find much more detailed and informative material than in the work under review. And this in spite of the fact that the IDB does not claim to be a dictionary of Biblical archaeology, but only sees archaeology as one of several scientific disciplines whereby the knowledge of Biblical history, thought and literature might be better understood. But here is a work which is essentially based upon Biblical archaeology and yet is far from definitive in its nature or scope.

In the Introduction the editor has stated:

While it has been necessary to be selective in presenting the results of modern archaeological discovery, through the use of numerous cross references the editor has attempted

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to provide some material on the nature and significance of major discoveries. Biblical persons and places are mentioned only if archaeology has added to our knowledge of them. Major archaeological terms are defined to help the reader with no professional training in the subject to get the most out of the many valuable archaeological books that are now available.

Since, according to the editor, there is no archaeological materials that have been uncovered to substantiate their roles in history, the names of Samuel, David and Solomon are not discussed, although there is an article on Hiram (who is mentioned in the Biblical records as having international relations with both David and Solomon), on Gibeah (the fortress of Saul) and on Ezion-Geber (Solomon's industrial and commercial complex located at the head of the Gulf of Aqabah)—to name but a few. At the suggestion of Dr. Walter G. Williams, Chairman of the Department of Old Testament at the Iliff School of Theology, this reviewer wrote his doctoral dissertation on the subject, "The Reign of Solomon in the *Light of Archaeology*." His Bibliography was almost 35 pages in length, embodying books, articles in journals and dictionaries plus short archaeological reports from field expeditions, all of which touched on archaeological material treating Solomon's reign. Nor did the dissertation touch on literature that may have developed during the reign of Solomon, such as the J Document, the Court History of II Samuel 9-21 and I Kings 1-2, or the complex problem of the administration of Solomon's kingdom, discussed in part in I Kings 4:1-6, 7-19, 22-28. In both instances of literature and administration there is not sufficient archaeological data to substantiate a position. Yet here is a work which omits an article on Solomon because archaeology has not "added to our knowledge" of him! *Hinc illae lacrimae*.

The book is not without merit. The article on "Archaeologists and Their

Work" is quite valuable, but one wonders if such men as Albright, Garstang, Miss Kathleen Kenyon—her father, Sir Frederick Kenyon is not mentioned!—Melvin Grove Kyle and others can be dismissed with a dozen or so terse words that describe some of their contributions, and certainly not their major ones in every instance. Rather, in a dictionary of Biblical archaeology one would expect to find entries for each of these men. For instance, under Nelson Glueck's entry in the article embracing many archaeologists the reader will learn that Glueck excavated Ezion Geber, 1938-1940; Shiloh, 1932; Khirbet et Tannur, 1937, 1938; and Negeb, 1954 —. Under the column "Principal Activities and Discoveries" after Glueck's name there is not one word printed! The omission is incredible if not astounding. (Nor is Glueck among the 44 contributors to the volume!) Another value of the book is that so much information is contained in it, for a work of 612 double-columned pages is in itself a possible condition for acceptance.

But it is the approach of the book which is primarily disoriented that causes so much difficulty in accepting it. Let one concrete example be given: the Exodus. The article on "Exodus" is just a little over 13 lines in length, 89 words in *toto*. The great work of Glueck in the Transjordan has given a very broad and solid base to the proposition that the Exodus can not be dated before the Thirteenth Century. The further work of such men as Alt, Noth and Rowley gives further evidence that not all the Israelites were in Egypt at the same time, nor did they exit Egypt at the same time. Thus the covenant ceremony of Joshua 23-24 served to unite all the tribes into a unity based upon the experience of those who did come out of Egypt under Moses' leadership. These are two of the many problems which the Exodus presents to scholars today, and for which there is considerable archaeological evidence to support the positions. But not one word

about these new data is found in this very brief article.

In my own study of the reign of Solomon I was confronted with some problems: When did Gezer get into the hands of an Egyptian Pharaoh (I Kings 9:16)? Is the Tamar of I Kings 9:18 the same as the Tadmor of II Chron. 8:4? And can these two towns in any way be identified with Palmyra, or is there a problem of textual criticism involved? Did Solomon get his chariots from Egypt (Misraim) or from Misrim, which was located not far from Kue in Cilicia? Where was the location of Ophir? Was the Queen of Sheba an historical person? How reliable is the historicity of Chronicles when it differs from the historiography of Kings? How does one explain the sudden rise of the Davidic-Solomonic dynasty in the light of the political morass in which other nations were languishing? These are questions which, unfortunately, **The Biblical World** offers few, if any, solutions.

It is not the purpose of archaeology to "prove" the Bible; rather, archaeology presents data, and it is the task of the Biblical scholar to ascertain how these data help to understand what is written in the Bible on the one hand, and on the other hand to fill in the many blank spaces which we know the Bible does not discuss for the simple reason that the Bible is a book of faith, and not a book of geopolitics, science, linguistic analysis or history, nor is it a chronicle of events. Its material is often supplemented through archaeology, as well as other disciplines such as historiography, the history of the Ancient Near East, palaeography, comparative religion, psychology of religion, psychology of religion, sociology of religion, and linguistics.

If all that a dictionary of Biblical archaeology is going to do is to give a cursory review of passages in the Bible where a certain town is mentioned—as

in the case of Gezer, unfortunately—then what differentiates it from other more valuable works such as the revised one-volume Hasting's **Dictionary of the Bible**? Are critical issues simply to be deferred or by-passed? Are decisions regarding dates to be omitted because they do not fit into pre-conceived date charts? Or is archaeology simply to be used as another evidence that the Bible is "true"? As one peruses this work, he cannot but feel that the latter alternative undergirds the methodology of the book under discussion.

Where might one go at the present time to find a better work? There are several available. The cost of this particular one volume dictionary is almost enough to purchase one volume of the four-volume **Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible**, which, while it is not exhaustive, certainly offers far more than does this particular book. Dr. Walter G. Williams' work, **Archaeology in Biblical Research**, is a splendid introduction which deals with some of the terms, methodologies, personalities, literature and accomplishments of Biblical archaeology. The above-mentioned revision of the one-volume Hastings contains many splendid articles, many of which contain the very latest in archaeological discoveries. John Gray's **Archaeology and the Old Testament World** is now in paperback, and will give the eager reader many leads for further study. In addition, anyone can subscribe to the little but informative **Biblical Archaeologist**. By reading it consistently the average reader can be kept current in most areas of Biblical archaeology.

For the present, we must turn again to the task of a comprehensive and thorough dictionary of Biblical archaeology. The present volume will not suffice. Its goal was noble, but it fell quite short of the mark. There is still room for such a book to be written and to be in the library of every earnest Bible student.

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