

Process of Using Archaeology for Biblical Studies: Incarnation, Revelation, and Event

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Abstract

The following paper is one of three lectures given at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in the fall of 2008 as part of the Sizemore Lectures. This paper focuses on theological underpinnings and biblical hermeneutics in the use of archaeology for biblical studies, and the underlying debate between a canonical approach and the historical-critical method. It will be proposed that theologians and biblical scholars who downplay the role of archaeology in biblical studies do not understand the nature of archaeological inquiry nor its benefits for biblical hermeneutics.

Introduction

In the previous article I discussed how archaeology is abused by the media. I discussed the problems of the simplistic methodological approaches conservatives and critical scholars use. I stated that biblical archaeology reconstructs historical and social processes of the past as it relates to biblical history. In this essay I want to focus on the process of using archaeology for biblical studies.

Archaeological data is different from textual data. Because of this fact, the purpose of biblical archaeology should be separate from biblical studies in terms of *methods* and *procedure*. This does not mean that they do not contribute to each other. You cannot be a biblical scholar without using the data that is being unearthed daily in Israel and its environs nor can you be an archaeologist that is uninformed about the biblical text or unaware of its rich literary composition.

Archaeology and biblical studies will always be intertwined. Conservative biblical scholars cannot downplay archaeological data nor can they be dismissive of its value. To illustrate this point, let me refer

you to the past issues of *The Evangelical Journal of Theology*.¹ There has been a dynamic ongoing debate on the date of the Israelite conquest. The editors apparently acknowledge the importance of the use of archaeology for biblical interpretation and have allowed for several evangelical scholars to debate these issues openly. Naturally the crux of the debate is centered on the biblical text and the archaeological data.

So, if the Bible does not equal archaeology, and biblical studies and archaeology are separate disciplines—how should they be used together? Or as my title states: What is the process of using archaeology for biblical studies? I will first discuss archaeology and faith, trends in the study of historical Israel, then theological views of the relationship between the events of Scripture and the canon of Scripture. I will make two propositions: the first is that archaeology is useful for apologetics. The second proposition is that archaeology is instrumental in hermeneutics. That is, archaeology is integral to the interpretation of Scripture and theology.

Archaeology and Faith

I have been critical of the way archaeology is used in apologetics and biblical studies. Naturally the question I should answer is, “Do I think archaeology is valuable for faith?” The answer is yes. Christians have always used archaeology for the defense of the faith. In the preceding article I briefly referenced the preaching of the disciples as recorded in the book of Acts. Any review of the content of these sermons will show that these men knew that the proclamation of the gospel is tied into the mighty acts of God!

The Christian faith, and the proclamation of the gospel have always been based on the revelation of God through the events and persons of the Old Testament—and the events and actions of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament. God acted in history through specific events, in a

¹ “The Rise and Fall of the 13th-Century Exodus-Conquest Theory,” B. Wood JETS 48 (2006); “What is the Biblical Date for the Exodus? A Response to Bryant Wood,” J. Hoffmeier JETS 50/2 (June 2007); “The Biblical Date for the Exodus is 1446 BC: A Response to James Hoffmeier,” B. Wood JETS 50/2 (June 2007); “Propositions for Evangelical Acceptance of a Late-Date Exodus-Conquest: Biblical Data and the Royal Scarabs from Mt. Ebal,” R. Hawkins JETS 50/1(2007); “A Critical Analysis of the Evidence from Ralph Hawkins for a Late-Date Exodus-Conquest,” R. Young and B. Wood 51/2 (2008); “The Date of the Exodus-Conquest Is Still an Open Question: A Response to Rodger Young and Bryant Wood,” 51/2 (June 2008).

specific time, among a specific people for the redemption of the world. Even our individual personal testimonies are based on an event—a space-time continuum in which we state that at such and such a time and place, Jesus knocked on the door and we answered. If you want to understand the Bible—you need to understand it within its revelation—in other words: its historical, geographical, and cultural context. Biblical archaeology is the one discipline that does this.

Biblical scholars have recognized this fact and a whole sub-discipline in biblical studies is devoted to the study of ancient Israel. All Old Testament and New Testament courses present the text within its ancient Near Eastern context. Exegetical courses have a unit on the historical and cultural context of the specific biblical book or books one is studying. You do not study the prophecies of Amos without placing Amos in the Iron Age hill-country context. Even in your preaching classes, a major component of sermon preparation is placing the chosen text not just in its literary context, but the historical and cultural backgrounds as well.

Today, critical scholars know that the key to undermining the proposal that God acted in history—is to question the historicity of the Bible. The past two decades have seen a growing trend of scholars who question the historicity of the biblical text. I would like to address these trends today.

Trends in the Study of the Bible as History

Both conservative scholars and critical scholars acknowledge the importance of studying the biblical text within its historical context. Part of this trend is due to the wealth of data coming from the spade of the archaeologist. Apologists have realized the value of archaeology data and have done an excellent job of illustrating the many historical hinge pins.²

It was a natural fit since it is plain from the biblical text that the pages of Salvation History are filled with historical, geographical, and cultural markers. Today, there is a raging debate over the nature of biblical history. I will briefly discuss the trends that led up to this point and how evangelical scholars are addressing the issues.

² For example, in Ralph O. Muncaster, *Can Archaeology Prove the Old Testament?* and *Can Archaeology Prove the New Testament* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2000) over 55 references to a correspondence to a biblical text and archaeology. In a fold out chart booklet Rose Publishing has 50 references of an archaeological find that corresponds with a biblical text (*Archaeology and the Bible: Old Testament*, Torrance: Rose Publishing, 2002; *Archaeology and the Bible: New Testament*, Torrance: Rose Publishing, 2003).

Trends in Biblical History

I have isolated five trends in the study of biblical history. These are:

1. Bible equals history
2. Interpret ancient Israel as an historian vs. a Bible scholar
3. Question if the Bible can be used to reconstruct the history of Israel
4. Determine that Israel's history is actually a fabrication
5. Crisis: the search for a paradigm

1. *Bible equals history*

This has been the basic approach of biblical scholars when writing a history of ancient Israel. It assumes that the biblical accounts provide an accurate account of history. While the Bible presents an account from creation to the cross: most evangelical scholars realize that the Bible does not record a direct time-line of historical events. Old Testament scholars realize that some events are contemporary, some are not necessarily in historical order, based on their position in the canon. The primary model, or paradigm, is that while the biblical text has a message (redemption, prophetic oracles, etc.), beneath the message are historical events. The authenticity of these historical events varies between conservative and moderate scholars. Most of the major textbooks hold to this paradigm.³ The main difference being that evangelical scholars believe that the history is integral to the message.

2. *Interpret ancient Israel as an historian vs. a Bible scholar*

The next group of scholars, or period of research, attempts to remove the integration of the message and history. Scholars state that we should write an history of ancient Israel without the overlay of theology—i.e. the message. One of the basic premises of this approach is the presupposition that the editing that was involved in the construction of the message of the Old Testament texts altered the authentic history. The main goal of reconstruction in Old Testament studies is to remove the 'bias' of the authors and then reconstruct the history. The view is that we

³ Alpert H. Baylis, *From Creation to the Cross* (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, 1996); John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Louisville:Westminster, 2000); Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), E. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids:Baker Books, 2008), Norman L. Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids:Baker Book House, 1977), Leon J. Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History* (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, 1970).

should be like any historian that uses texts as primary data (the artifacts)—and put together a viable reconstruction of the events and social processes. This is also where the artifacts uncovered by the archaeologist assist the historian..⁴

Many of these scholars have varying views of how much history is preserved in the biblical text. Most would agree that there is some authentic history but it must be analyzed within the larger historiography of the ancient Near East. Halpern⁵ has written an influential work where he postulates that the biblical writers were historians—but we need to judge their work within their cultural context.

Within this camp of historians—there is a trend to place the history of ancient Israel within the larger framework of the history of the Ancient Near East. Israel is only one tiny group of people among many (e.g. Philistines, Transjordan tribes) and it is only the fate of history that we have the survival of their sacred texts..⁶

3. *Question if the Bible can be used to reconstruct a history of Israel*

This trend, to separate history from the message, started a natural trajectory to question whether the biblical text had fabricated what actual happened, due to attempts to create a unifying story of origins for the Israelite nation. These scholars propose that the biblical text is so altered that there is very little historical validity in it..⁷ This view is exemplified in any conference with the intent to demonstrate that it is not possible to write a history.

While the biblical text is a sacred document and a theological work—beneath this level, historians believed they were able to reconstruct ancient history. The question is whether or not the Hebrew Bible is written with the *intent* of history? If the goal of the biblical

⁴Gösta W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), Michael Grant, *The History of Ancient Israel* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1984), J. M. Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2006). B.S.J. Isserlin, *The Israelites* (Minneapolis: The Fortress Press, 2001), Antony Kamm, *The Israelites: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), J. Alberto. Scoggin, *An Introduction to The History of Israel and Judah* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1993).

⁵Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

⁶Nadav na'aman, *Ancient Israel's History and Historiography: The First Temple Period* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006); K. L. Noll, *Canaan and Israel in Antiquity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

⁷Lester L. Grabbe, *Can a 'History of Israel' Be Written?* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

writers was to make theological statements—can we trust that it is authentic history?

4. *Israel's history is actually a fabrication*

Once Old Testament scholars started down this path of minimalist history, it was not long until the paradigm changed from the Old Testament text being a corruption of actual history—to the Old Testament being a complete fabrication of history. Instead of the biblical authors recording history, the biblical authors created history. Titles of recent books articulating this view are: “*The Invention of Ancient Israel*,” and the “*Creation of Ancient Israel*.”⁸ A book by Thomas Thompson, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel* proposes that not only did the biblical writers create this myth of history, but biblical archaeologists (and conservative scholars) continue this fraud.⁹

The current view among critical scholars is that the history recorded in the Bible is either a complete fabrication to support the Temple theology of the Babylonian returnees or, at best, it contains pieces of fragmented history pasted into a theological framework.

5. *Crisis: the search for a paradigm*

This is a natural result of the current biblical criticism. First the patriarchs were removed from history, then the Exodus was removed from history, next the Israelite settlement and conquest were removed, finally in the last decade, David and Solomon were removed from history. No wonder we are having a major crisis.

The history of the Bible is at a critical point. This is a major problem for critical scholars. If you, as a biblical scholar of ancient Israel, say there is no history in the Bible, then you have painted yourself into a corner and pulled the carpet out from under your job security. There is only one logical next step. Most scholars are not willing to go there. Therefore they need to find a paradigm that allows for the study of the history of the Bible stating that the Bible has value for defining what happened in the past—while also stating that these events did not happen.

There are three trends among critical scholars to deal with the reliability and historicity of the Bible. The first is to redate the history. Finkelstein has proposed that archaeologists have misdated our strata by nearly 100

⁸ For examples of these scholarly approaches see: Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (London Routledge, 1995) and Keith Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London:Routledge, 1996).

⁹ London:Random House, 1999.

years. What we have is the state starting in the ninth century instead of the tenth century. Thus the later kings of Israel fabricated the stories of David and Solomon. Many biblical scholars have jumped on this bandwagon—fortunately not many archaeologists have adopted this low chronology.

The second trend is to state that there are two histories: the actual history—that is revealed in the archaeological record; and the created history (theology) of the Bible. Davies has come out with a new book proposing that we need to study how ancient societies constructed their past with an emphasis on the theory of cultural memory.¹⁰ These first two approaches present a paradigm in which the Bible is real, it is just not *truth*. Even secular scholars of the Bible realize that there is a need for something substantive to study.

The third trend was proposed earlier this year: Get rid of biblical studies altogether. In a recent publication, Hector Avalos writes a treatise on biblical studies.¹¹ He provides a radical-critical view of the Bible, the enterprise to study the Bible (biblical studies), and the scholarly guild that conducts this enterprise. Avalos concludes with three proposals: 1) Eliminate biblical studies completely from the modern world; 2) retain biblical studies as is, but admit that it is a religionist enterprise; 3) retain biblical studies, but redefine its purpose so that it is tasked with eliminating completely the influence of the Bible in the modern world. He states,

I do not advocate the first option, at least for the moment, because I do not believe that the Bible should be studied, if only as a lesson in why human beings should not privilege such books again. My objection has been to the religionist and bibliolatrous purpose for which it is studied. The second option is actually what is found in most seminaries, but we must advertise that scholars in all of academia are doing the same thing, though they are not being very open and honest about it. *I prefer the third option. The sole purpose of biblical studies, under this option, would be to help people move toward a postscriptural society* (emphasis mine).¹²

Current approaches among Evangelicals

Evangelical scholars have not sat idle on the sidelines. They realize that these trends have undermined the Bible as an historical text. They also

¹⁰ Philip R. Davies: *Memories of Ancient Israel: An Introduction to Biblical history, Ancient and Modern* (Louisville:Westminster John Knox Press., 2008).

¹¹ *The End of Biblical Studies* (Amherst:Prometheus Books, 2007).

¹² *ibid.*, p. 341.

realize that they have taken a backseat in the use of social sciences in the interpretation of Scripture.

In the last few years, two major works of Old Testament history have been produced by conservative scholars. These two books both use archaeology to support the historicity of the biblical text. While they are not apologetic works in their genre, they do provide a defense for the faith, and more specifically, the historicity of the biblical text. Both books have the same goal of addressing the current minimalist paradigm; however, they are completely different in their approaches.¹³

Provan, Long, and Longman offer a theoretical discussion of historiography and the biblical text. This book is an excellent treatise on historiography and recent abuses in critical scholarship. The authors demonstrate that modern critiques of the history in the Bible are unfounded because they are basing their criticism on modern paradigms of history writing versus looking at how people in the 1st and 2nd millennia wrote history.

Kitchen is magisterial and comprehensive in his approach. He takes a classic historical-critical approach to the textual and archaeological data. Both books provide excellent treatments on the use of the social science of history and related fields; the archaeological and textual data, and their fidelity to the Word of God.

Event versus Canon

Fidelity to the Word of God: This takes me to my last topic in this essay—the Word of God. While the debate rages over the nature of history in the biblical record, believers are also debating the relationship of history to canon. Biblical archaeology has opened up a wider view of events in the past. Egyptian and Assyrian records provide events that happened in history, but are not recorded in the Bible. As a case in point, the Merneptah Stela is an account that mentions a major battle that occurred in the promise land that is not mentioned in the Bible. The irony is that this is the only text outside the Bible that mentions Israel. I come back to our simplistic equation: apologists use this artifact to demonstrate the historicity of ancient Israel—and rightfully so. The problem is that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between text and artifact. This can be duplicated for many other finds. Just over a week ago, a major

¹³ Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), Iain Provan, V. Phillips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

fortification was reported in a conference at Hebrew University that was most likely built by King David.¹⁴ It is natural to correlate this with David's protecting his new capital city, Jerusalem, against the Philistines down in the valley of Elah (which was a common staging ground between the Israelites and the Philistines).

Evangelical scholars realize that the historical events in the Bible are only a partial glimpse of what happened in history. Even the apostle John, in concluding his account of the life of Jesus, tells us that not all the miracles and sayings of our Lord could be recounted. Hence one of the issues is the nature of revelation, incarnation, and canon in reconstructing a history of ancient Israel, and specifically—the use of archaeology.

Current Methodology/Hermeneutics

To understand the theological truths found in the Old Testament one must understand the genre of historical narrative, therefore scholars addressing issues of biblical inerrancy and historicity have focused on historical criticism – particularly in Old Testament studies. At the heart of the issue is the nature of the interplay between history and revelation.

Debate between text and artifact

Ironically, as critical scholars started to abandon the whole enterprise of a history of Israel, evangelical scholars began to abandon the methodological debates between text and artifact and instead, focused on the literary aspects of the Bible. Conversely, evangelicals became marginalized in the archaeological enterprise. Thus archaeology programs began to diminish within seminaries and leading theologians preached the limited value of archaeology. Most evangelicals focused on the text to address the trends of critical scholars that were challenging the historicity of the Bible.

OT Narrative Criticism

A majority of evangelical Old Testament scholars believe that regardless of the difficulty of using archaeological data—the nature of the Old Testament text implies studying it within its historical context and the same is true for the New Testament. They also hold to the text as something above history—the incarnate Word. Hence, there have been major works to address these issues with a proper understanding of the

¹⁴ Yosef Garfinkel and Saar Ganor, "Khirbet Qeiyafa: Sha'arayim," *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* Volume 8, Article 22, pp. 2-10.

nature of the biblical text, and its uniqueness as historical writing. While the focus on the literary aspects of the biblical text have provided scholars with great insight into the depths of God's word, enough scholars realize that you cannot study theology or the biblical text without an understanding of the history in the Bible.

In a well-used and authoritative evangelical dictionary of theology, E.H. Merrill provides eight characteristics of OT history: 1) it is narrative, centering on people and events; 2) it is biographical, telling the story about God's work in this world through people; 3) it is tendentious, seen through the perspective and interpretation of the authors; 4) it is theocentric, presenting itself as the Word of God and not just a human record; 5) it is selective, as all details that do not relate to the central message are ignored; 6) it is historiographic, presenting itself as the writing of history; 7) it is consistently contextual, not just telling the past but relating to the needs of the present; and 8) it is interpretive, yielding the author's assessment of the events, often by way of editorial asides.¹⁵

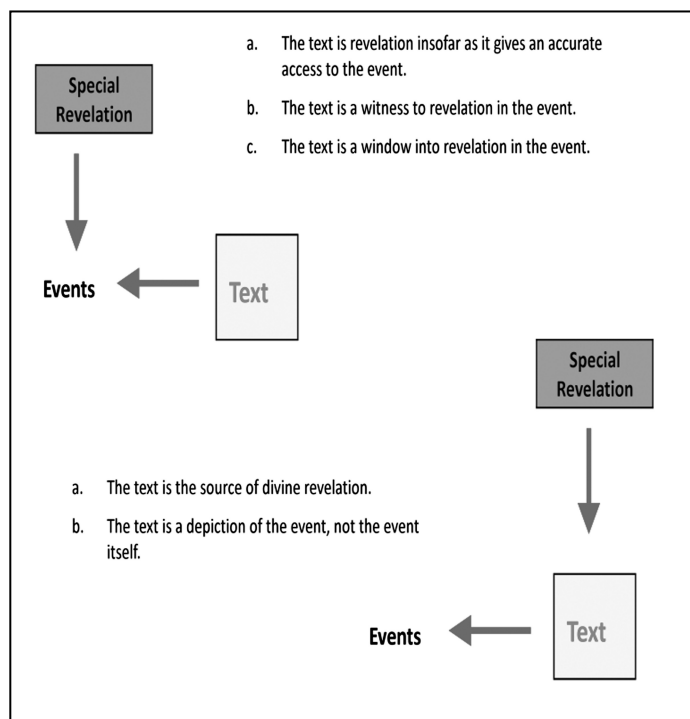
Canonical Approach: John Sailhamer

Theologians have struggled with the nature of God's revelation, especially as it is revealed in Old Testament texts. Not all theologians hold to the value of archaeology because the actual historical events are separate from the canon. Sailhamer's approach will serve as an example of the issues involved. In his major work on Old Testament Theology he discusses the relationship between text and event.¹⁶ He notes that a key to Old Testament theology is "the question of whether to find divine revelation in the text of Scripture or in the events to which the Scriptures refer."¹⁷ In the following illustration I have provided his two views of the relationship between text and event.

¹⁵ Eugen H. Merrill, "Old Testament History: A Theological Perspective," in the *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, edited by Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997).

¹⁶ John H. Sailhamer, *An Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 83.



He notes that there is a problem among evangelicals in their discussion of this issue. He states that,

Recognizing the importance of the inspired text of Scripture, evangelicals want to affirm that a theology of the Old Testament should look to the text itself as its source. However, wanting also to affirm the importance of history and God's actions in real events, they, for good reason, do not want to relinquish the importance of actual historical events. Consequently, the inclination of evangelical theologians has been to attempt to retain both options. They want a theology based both on revelation in the events themselves and revelation in Scripture.¹⁸

Sailhammer believes that the locus of revelation is the text (i.e. The Inspired written Word of God). This provides the foundation for Sailhammer's model of a canonical approach to Old Testament theology. Sailhammer points out some problems with historical reconstructions of the Old Testament. First is a critique of the historical-critical method.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 40.

This method elevates *something* outside of Scripture to judge Scripture (Neo-orthodoxy). Thus history becomes the arbitrator for the interpretation of Scripture. Another problem is that the attempt to study the world of the Bible is a modern endeavor and not a theological enterprise of the early church.

While Sailhammer emphasizes that the locus of revelation is the inspired text, he realizes that part of the revelation is placing the text in its historical-literary context.¹⁹ While this division between text and canon is useful—especially having a high view and keeping the authority on God’s Word (the canon), I prefer to struggle with the attempt to try and understand the relationship between the two because of the incarnation.

Historical narrative and Truth

In a recent issue of the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Grant Osborne discusses these issues in an essay entitled “Historical Narrative and Truth in the Bible.”²⁰ His essay is a statement that historical and theological truth are intertwined in historical narrative and cannot be separated into isolated compartments.” He notes that “both the raw facts and the assessment of those facts are essential in interpreting the stories in Scripture. He agrees with Sailhamer on the primacy of the canon, but he also acknowledges that the text uses historical events to present theological truths. Hence we need to have a hermeneutical approach that acknowledges that history is integral to the authority of the Bible.

Incarnational Analogy:

Peter Enns has written a popular book addressing issues of Old Testament historiography.²¹ He presents his model to deal with text and event as incarnational analogy. Just as our Lord came in a historical and cultural context—so too has Scripture. His point is that just as Jesus was both man and God, we need to view Scripture as both man-made and

¹⁹ Sailhammer uses the example of the first plague of the Exodus event where the Nile was turned to blood. Earlier commentators believed that the Nile actually became blood while conservative historical approaches interpret it as the water turning red in color due to a microorganism/sediment killing all living creatures in the river at once.

²⁰ Grant R. Osborne, “Historical Narrative and Truth in the Bible,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48/4:673-88 (December 2005).

²¹ Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2005).

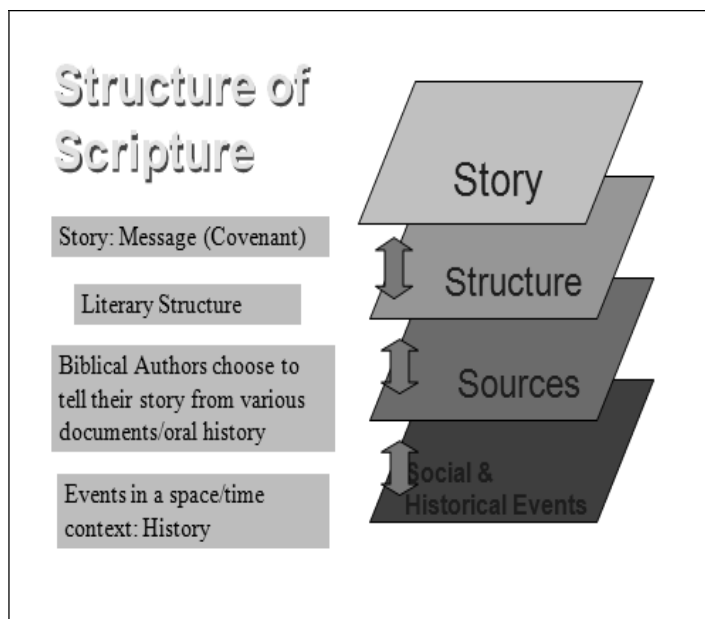
God-made. He would point out that just as Jesus was sinless yet fully a man, so too is Scripture without error yet written by humans. In contrast to Sailhamer, he attempts to provide a theological model that addresses the relationship between text and canon by focusing on Old Testament historiography within its context.

Paradigm Shift

Beneath the current attempts to address both revelation and events in the Old Testament, is the search for a model that keeps the historical nature of the Bible at the center. Critical scholars realize that at the heart of the authority of Scripture is the implicit claim throughout the Bible that the events of Scripture are historical acts of a mighty and sovereign God. They are not just Sunday School stories to teach morality such as Aesop's fables or the genre of the American fairy tale. They are not fictional accounts of great warriors and prophets to validate the ruling religious party in Jerusalem or the authority of a king. If they can remove the historicity of the events—they remove the Bible's authority. What is needed in the current archaeological debate of events in Scripture is a paradigm shift in our reconstructions using archaeological and textual data.

As I stated earlier, the problem is a simplistic equation that equates the biblical text in a direct one to one correspondence with the archeological/historical data. What is produced is a caricature of biblical history. In a paper I presented at the National ETS meetings four years ago,²² I proposed a paradigm shift for the use of archeology in apologetics. I introduced a model that takes a synchronic approach to revelation.

²² Steven M. Ortiz, *Retrospect and Prospect for Biblical Archaeology as Apologetics: Purpose, Process and Paradigm Development*, Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meetings, San Antonio, TX, November 17, 2004.



Conclusion

I return to my original questions: What is the process of biblical archaeology? Is archaeology valuable to biblical studies? I believe that the canon is set and we do not need any additional writings or archaeology to supplement scripture. On this point I agree with Al Mohler: “Authentic Christianity is based upon the inscripturated revelation of God—the Bible—as our authority.”²³ In the end, archaeology cannot prove or disprove the biblical text. Nothing can be found, or not found, that should shake our faith in the total truthfulness and trustworthiness of the Word of God.” Nevertheless, while stating the timeless truth of the authority of Scripture, we realize that the Bible did not fall out of the sky. The revelation occurred over a long space-time continuum.

Critical biblical scholars are proposing that we separate the Bible into two histories: the truth of the historical events and the theologizing of those events. This allows them to hold to the position that there was an ancient Israel in the Past—but the canon is a man-made object of created history. They know that if they are able to relegate the Bible to myth, it

²³ Al Mohler, *What Should We Think About Archaeology and the Bible?* www.AlbertMohler.com, posted: Tuesday, July 08, 2008 at 2:44 am ET

loses its authority. They realize that historical events are foundational to Scripture's authority—something that some theologians are comfortable abandoning. We hold to the same dichotomy, except we hold to the authority of the canon and do not propose a twenty-first century man-made dichotomy, but that the events that underlay the biblical text are intertwined with the revelation.

So, if the Bible does not equal archaeology, and biblical studies and archaeology are separate disciplines—how should they be used together? Or as my title states: What is the process of using archaeology for biblical studies? You cannot remove the Bible from history—and you cannot remove history (events) from the canon. This is part of God's revelation. The early disciples realized this when they encouraged the church that the Gospel is unique because we do not follow cleverly devised myths. How ironic that Peter was preaching against Gnostic teaching and today on the wave of the criticism of the historicity of the Bible is the renewed interest in Gnostic literature. *The DaVinci Code* was an old story, it just finally took off under Dan Brown due to his excellent writing but also it was following trends in the public arena. Archaeology is that one discipline that anchors the events in the Bible in a real time-space continuum.

Our sacred scriptures are unique. They are not just a collation of the sayings or the teachings of our founder. These are not a collection of wise sayings or mysteries of the universe as we find in eastern religions. They speak of a God who acted in history. They speak of a God who created the universe, a God who called Abraham, a God who heard the cries of Israel in Egypt, a God who sent a deliverer in Moses, a God who sustained the Israelites in the wilderness and led them into the Promise Land; a God who raised up a king and prophets; a God who sent his only begotten son to die on the cross; a God who knocked on the door of a young boy in East Los Angeles and that boy answered and accepted Christ and a God who perhaps knocked on your door.

We are called to preach this text. This text describes a living God who is sovereign in history. I believe that when we get back to this type of New Testament preaching—that God acted in the past, He is acting today, and He will act in the future—we will have the same transformational effect on society as it did in the first century AD.