

ARCHAEOLOGY AND OT THEOLOGY: THEIR INTERFACE AND RECIPROCAL USEFULNESS

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I. INTRODUCTION

This essay originated as a lecture delivered at Southern Adventist University in 2014 for the annual Gerhard F. Hasel Lectureship. This was to me an unusual honor and privilege since I have long known and admired the respected scholar and churchman for whom the series is named. I began teaching OT theology at Dallas Theological Seminary in 1977 and recognized very early on that if I were to have any grounding at all in the discipline as it evolved and found expression at that time there was a *sine qua non* without which I could not dispense. That, of course, was Gerhard Hasel's *OT Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, at that time in its second edition. From 1977 until my retirement from the Seminary in the spring of 2013 I leaned so heavily on that edition and the two that followed that I nearly wore them out. When I received the sad news of his untimely decease over ten years ago, one of my first thoughts was: Who will pick up the mantle of the great prophet and keep us informed concerning the field of study we both loved so much?

Professor Hasel had a great interest in both biblical archaeology and biblical theology, especially the latter, and thus it was not difficult for me to pick a topic by which the two disciplines could be reexamined, particularly in their relationship the one to the other. A further impetus to my choice of topic was my awareness that his gifted son Michael is on the faculty of this fine institution and in his own right is gaining wide recognition for excellence as a scholar in the area of archaeology, recently at Khirbet Qeiyafa and now at Tell es-Safi (Gath?). Between them they bridge the disciplines about which I am writing here, namely archaeology and biblical theology. The following offering pays tribute to Hasel the elder, a man beloved, admired, and sorely missed by his colleagues near and far for the example he set in life and ministry.

II. FOUNDATIONAL METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

I wish first to deal with biblical theology, which is made distinctive by the adjective “biblical.” Hasel astutely observed with regard to biblical theology’s relationship to systematic theology, in particular, that “the Biblical theologian draws his categories, themes, motifs, and concepts from the Biblical text itself,” as compared

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to the systematic theologian who “endeavors to use current philosophies as the basis for his primary categories or themes.”¹ This definition was not intended as a trivializing subordination of systematic theology; for Hasel goes on to say in the same context, “the Biblical and systematic theologians do not compete with each other. Their function is complementary. Both need to work side by side, profiting from each other.”²

A possibly useful metaphorical analogy from the mining of precious metals or stones is that biblical theology provides the raw materials from the mine of biblical truth with which systematic theologians can create beautiful and perfectly shaped theological presuppositions. However, they must never exceed the limits to which the materials can be exploited nor, on the other hand, they must never fail to make fullest use of their potentials. Or again to speak analogically, biblical theology is the seedbed from which grows the full fruition of biblical revelation organized in a systematic, non-contradictory, and understandable manner. For the conservative theologian of either kind, the Scriptures of the Hebrew and Greek Bibles are the inerrant Word of God, a revelation to be trusted in whatever it intends to say, whether about history, science, philosophy, sociology, or any other discipline. This includes biblical archaeology, which, after all, is an attempt to discover all the evidences possible of the fields of study just suggested and to discern how these evidences comport with the testimony of the OT and NT

Archaeology of the Levant was first undertaken by persons closely connected to the church and the Scriptures who in some instances had the clear agenda of “proving” the Bible by their discoveries.³ By the early twentieth century the field was taken over largely by scholars who, under the guise of objectivity and the scientific method, undertook their work with no concern for proving anything (or so they averred) but pursued their labor only for its own sake as a scientific enterprise. From that time until now these two pursuits, with the same objectives respectively, have been engaged in unearthing the “Holy Land” and neighboring areas. A magnificent endeavor close to the heart of both Hasels has been the Madaba Plains project in central Jordan led by scholars such as Siegfried Horn, Douglas R. Clark, Lawrence T. Geraty, Oystein S. La Bianca, and Randall W. Younker.⁴ Their major

¹ Gerhard Hasel, *OT Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (4th ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 195.

² *Ibid.*

³ The great cuneiformist and Assyriologist A. H. Sayce, though not himself on a mission of “proving” anything, made the comment 120 years ago that “we cannot fail to be struck by the fact that the evidence of oriental archaeology is on the whole distinctly unfavourable to the pretensions of the ‘higher criticism.’ The ‘apologist’ may lose something but the ‘higher critic’ loses much more.” A. H. Sayce, *The “Higher Criticism” and the Verdict of the Monuments* (London: SPCK, 1894) 561. See also Ziony Zevit, “The Biblical Archaeology versus Syro-Palestinian Archaeology Debate in Its American Institutional and Intellectual Contexts,” in *The Future of Biblical Archaeology: Reassessing Methodologies and Assumptions* (ed. James K. Hoffmeier and Alan Millard; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 3–19, especially pp. 8–12.

⁴ See, *inter alia*, *Madaba Plains Project II, III, IV, V* and *Hesban 1, 6, 7, 12, 13* (ed. D. R. Clark, L. T. Geraty, L. G. Herr, O. S. LaBianca, Larry A. Mitchel, Paul J. Ray Jr., Sandra Arnold Scham, Angela von den Driesch, S. Douglas Waterhouse, R. W. Younker, et al., 1990–2010).

work is centered at Tall Hisban, Tall Jalul, and Tall Umayri, the latter with its wonderful four-room house. All of these have revealed important historical information such as the fact that the Transjordan was occupied and with major settlements in the Late Bronze era (c. 1500–1200 BC), contrary to previous surveys and the claims of critical scholarship.

Fundamentally at stake in the archaeology/Bible engagement is the matter of authority. Conservatives generally ascribe authority to the Bible as God's Word and therefore hold the sacred text to be without historical, scientific, or theological error when correctly understood. Scholars who claim that the Bible at best is only the witness of an ancient people to these perceived realities are quite ready to claim objectivity for themselves and to label those who differ as "obscurantists," "pre-suppositionists," and, worse still, "fundamentalists"⁵ In any event, authority from this point of view is to be located in archaeological and other scientific research whereby ancient times can be closely examined by themselves and for themselves without the tendentious intrusion of dogma.

Most ideally, I suppose, archaeology ought indeed to be pursued without the objective of proving anything, finding satisfaction in whatever the spade turns up. If it should substantiate claims made by the Bible, all well and good; if it does not, and, in fact, shows the Bible to be in error, so much for that. But life is not that way. All conscientious, scientific researchers look for some thing or some way to validate hypotheses or to reinforce provisional or even hoped-for results. A case in point is the disappointment experienced by NASA scientists that signs of life cannot thus far be detected on Mars.⁶ Should not the scientist simply go about his work dispassionately with no emotional attachment to what he is doing? Why does he really care whether life exists on that planet or not? The answer, of course, is that in any field of research, including archaeology, the personal preferences and unavoidable emotional investment of the researcher in each case will cloud or inform or even distort the methods the individual employs and the conclusions he or she eventually reaches.

The bottom line is that both texts and tells must be informed by exegesis, that is, subjected to the most rigorous and objective investigation possible so as to arrive at a proper understanding of what each is "saying."⁷ Obviously, the materials thus examined are vastly different: texts work with words, clauses, sentences, and larger literary contexts whereas archaeology works with architecture, artifacts

⁵ Thus even William Dever, a respected and relatively moderate scholar, peppers his work with direct or "side blows" attacks against conservatives who emit the slightest hint of theological presupposition. See his *What Did the Biblical Writers Know & When Did They Know It?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) 27, 46, 58, 61, 107, and 263.

⁶ [http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2426424/NASA: "Disappointment: The Curiosity rover has scanned Mars for methane every day but has not found any, which probably means it does not support life."](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2426424/NASA:)

⁷ The term "exegesis" derives from the Greek *exegesis* ("explanation, interpretation"). William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the NT* (2d ed.; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979) 277–78. The noun occurs only once in LXX (Jud 7:15) where it renders the Hebrew *sabar*, "cracking open" (*HALOT*, 1405).

(chiefly pottery), and, in rare cases, with inscriptions. In the latter case, these, like biblical texts, must also be “read” through a process of decipherment, transcription, and interpretation in terms of genre, dating, and comparison to similar texts in the same or different languages. It is fair to say with regard to archaeology that mute as well as inscripational remains can be as mishandled, misinterpreted, and bent to ideological presuppositions as readily as can biblical writings and with the same disastrous results.

A contemporary example involves an evangelical archaeologist (hereafter Mr. X) who claims to have found the site of ancient Sodom, destroyed, according to the OT, in the time of Abraham (Gen 18:20–33; 19:29). Most conservative scholars date Abraham to the end of the third millennium before Christ and the beginning of the second, that is, c. 2000 BC. Mr. X, however, has dated the destruction of his site, which he adamantly holds to be Sodom, at c. 1600 BC, 400 years later. Rather than conjecture that his dating of the destruction layer may be incorrect or that the site is not Sodom after all, he has argued that the biblical chronology is at fault or, at least, has been misinterpreted by those who place Abraham at an earlier period.

In making his case, he construes the 480 years of 1 Kgs 6:1, which mark the period between the exodus and the laying of the foundations of Solomon’s temple in 950 BC, to be a multiple of 40 and 12, a position that is almost *de rigueur* to those committed to a late exodus date. To him, 40 is an artificial number used to indicate the length of an ideal generation; however, a normal, literal generation is more likely 25 years or so. Thus, the text, in his view, is really saying that there were actually 300 years between the exodus and the temple, the former, on alleged archaeological grounds, now being 1250 BC.⁸ Even with this adjustment, Abraham, who died 450 years before the exodus (by this scheme at 1785 BC), would have been off the scene as late as 1600 BC.⁹ Clearly Abraham by this reckoning could not be contemporary to the destruction of Sodom in 1600 BC, so Mr. X proposes that the entire patriarchal period must be moved forward to the Middle Bronze Age (2000–1550 BC) and beyond, into the Late Bronze Age (c. 1550–1200 BC). This necessitates an entirely new set of dates for the great patriarchs with Abraham in old age at least as late as 1600 BC, Isaac much less than the attributed age of 180 at his death, and Jacob likewise much younger than 147 at his decease. The reason is that Moses and the exodus, the conquest of Canaan under Joshua, and the period of the judges

⁸ This is arrived at by the general consensus that a radical socio-political adjustment occurred in Iron Age I (1200–900 BC), a development brought about by an inner revolt of Canaanites who threw off their old oligarchies, moved to new sites characterized by the so-called “four-room house” and other features reflecting socio-economic change, and who in time became identified with the Israelites under Joshua. See notably Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979) 556–63. More recently, see Niels Peter Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988) 88–117; and Robert B. Coote, *Early Israel: A New Horizon* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 71–72, 83–93, 170–73.

⁹ The 450 years consists of the date of Abraham’s death (c. 2000 BC) minus the 115 years that elapsed before Jacob migrated to Egypt and the 430 years of Israel’s Egyptian sojourn (545 years in all) or 1446 BC. Mr. X allows only 215 years for the sojourn thus bringing the date of Abraham’s death down by that amount to 1785 BC, still too early to harmonize with 1600 BC.

must all be compressed between the date of the death of Jacob and the commencement of David's kingship at 1006 BC. At the very least, this necessitates an exodus date no later than 1250 BC, a date acceptable to Mr. X.

Table 1: Alternative Patriarchal Chronologies

Names of Patriarchs and Events	Text References	M	LX	S
Foundation of Solomon's Temple	1 Kings 6:1	967/66	967/6	967/6
Reign of Solomon	40 years (1 Kgs 11:42)	971–31	40 years	40 years
Reign of David	40 years (1 Kgs 2:11)	1011–971	40 years	40 years
Deposit of the Ark at Kiriath-jearim and its stay there	100 years (1 Sam 7:2; cf. 1 Sam 4:11; 2 Sam 6:1)	c. 1104–1004	100 years	100 years
Jephthah's judgeship	6 years (Jdg 10:8; 12:7) + oppression of 18 years	c. 1124–1106	6 years	6 years
Ammon's years since the Conquest	300 years (Jdg 11:26)	1406–1106	300 years	300 years
Beginning of the Conquest		1106	1106	1106

To compound the complexity (a necessity if Mr. X's postulation is correct), he reduces the ages of the patriarchs, regarding the figures as artificial, again a change mandated by his 1600 BC destruction of Sodom. Though he does not provide even hypothetical figures, a proposal such as halving the numbers to more reasonable life spans would yield something like the following: If Abraham died at half the age attributed to him (87 rather than 175), perhaps 20 years after 1600 BC, he would have been born in 1667 BC or so. Isaac, at the same truncated age of one-half the biblical figure of 180 years (i.e. 90), might have been born perhaps when Abraham was 90, or in 1577 BC, and Jacob saw the light of day when his father was 30 years old, in 1547 BC. But Mr. X had already proposed that Jacob entered Egypt with the Hyksos, usually dated around 1730 BC, thus eradicating either that suggestion or a birthdate that late.

A second scenario, with 1730 BC as a point of departure and working backward, and again arbitrarily halving the years attributed to the patriarchs, would find Jacob to be 68 in 1730 BC (b. 1798 BC); Isaac 30 years old when Jacob was born, living 50 more years after that, and dying at 90 in 1648 BC (b. 1738 BC); and Abraham, 50 years old when Isaac was born, himself born in 1788 BC and dying 38 years later, in 1750 BC, far short of 1600 BC and the destruction of Sodom.

This tedious recitation of chronology demonstrates the resorts to which an archaeological benchmark, when taken as absolute, forces radical transformations of biblical data in the interest of preserving the authority of the benchmark as opposed to the authority of the biblical text read at face value. Surely it is more pru-

dent—at least for the evangelical—to reassess the archaeological data in light of Scripture rather than vice versa.

III. THE RELEVANCE OF BIBLIOLOGY TO BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

I began my classes on biblical theology for many years with the quip, “A defective bibliology will inevitably result in a defective theology,” a principle I still maintain.¹⁰ The reasons are many: (1) theology, especially biblical theology, is inextricably tied to the Bible; (2) how one views the nature of the Bible will determine to what extent it has theological authority; (3) the seriousness with which one takes the data of the Bible in every way it speaks has a direct relationship to the role those data will take in shaping a proper biblical theology; and (4) a legitimate biblical theology must be subordinated to the Bible itself *when and if the Bible is properly interpreted and properly applied*. It is incumbent upon the theologian to have a mastery of as many of the sub-disciplines of biblical scholarship as possible. These include (1) a knowledge of the languages of the Bible (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek); (2) familiarity with the historical and cultural world in which the OT texts were composed; (3) a comprehensive overview of the contents of the Bible and a grasp of how its integral parts intersect to create a single grand narrative of salvation history; (4) a knowledge of the historical-critical approaches that profoundly affect popular conceptions of the nature and authority of the Bible; and (5) a sense of how the methods employed fundamentally shape biblical-theological outcomes.¹¹

This is particularly the case with the diachronic method of doing theology, that is, the method that traces the theme or themes of the Bible throughout their historical, linear development. The principle involved is sometimes referred to as “progressive revelation” since it operates with the assumption that God revealed himself and his purposes gradually through the course of biblical history as the recipients of that revelation became increasingly able to understand its truths and to live by them.¹² The aforementioned prerequisites to undertaking the challenge of creating a diachronic theological system become more understandably critical when its linear dimension comes into play.

However, the weakness of the diachronic method when applied to the OT lies precisely in the fact that the flow of the biblical narrative cannot always be discerned in the non-historical literature of the material. This is notably the case in the poetic and wisdom literature and even in the prophets. In the former collection, many of the psalms give no clues as to their authorship and/or setting and much of the wisdom material likewise lacks such helpfulness, especially Job and Proverbs. Some of the prophets are difficult to date (e.g. Obadiah and Joel) and others seem not to follow chronological sequence, Jeremiah being a good case in point. There-

¹⁰ See my *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the OT* (Nashville: B&H, 2006) 18–33.

¹¹ A thorough and practical overview of biblical theology’s relevance to preaching and the church may be found in T. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of OT Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958) 97–115.

¹² Gustave Oehler provides an early and excellent definition of this concept. Gustave F. Oehler, *Theology of the OT* (trans. George E. Day; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1950; repr. of 1873 English edition and trans. of original German, 1873–74).

fore, these sections at least are difficult to square with a consistently diachronic approach.

In some models of biblical theology, a more systematic path is followed, one hardly different from systematic theology in that it, like systematic theology, is built along synchronic lines. It prefers to disregard rigid historical and chronological strictures and to isolate themes or categories around and within which theological interpretation can be organized. The perceived deficiencies in this model are what led to the diachronic method in the first place, since it seemed that to flatten out theology without respect to the times and circumstances of the people who first produced and heard the sacred scriptures was to disregard ordinary pedagogical principles of learning that included the notion that truth or facts can only gradually be assimilated as learners become more and more mature and capable of absorbing accumulating revelatory information.¹³

A rather recent *media res* approach, “canonical theology,” is so called in that it undertakes the task of deriving OT biblical theology from the canonical order of the ancient Jewish tradition of the tri-partite sequence of Pentateuch, Prophets, and Writings.¹⁴ A theology based strictly on this principle has the advantage of eliminating consideration of the details of progressive revelation, on the one hand, and a forced, presupposed, and perhaps alien system onto the Procrustean bed of the text. However, this method also presupposes that the canonical shape reflects not only hoary Jewish tradition but also that the tradition was essentially divinely inspired. This is an assumption about canon formation never even hinted at in Jewish literature. Thus, although canonical theology bridges the yawning canyon between diachronic and synchronic methods, it has its own dogma that disallows complete objectivity. In sum, the approach that views the OT as a gradually unfolding record of God’s self-disclosure seems best and least likely to cater to any given theologian’s own predilections or preferences. Hasel, who opted for what he called a “multiplex approach,” and argued that it, for the Christian, must also embrace the NT, put the matter as follows:

A multiplex approach leaves room for indicating the variety of connections between the Testaments and avoids an explication of the manifold testimonies through a single structure or unilinear point of view. The multiplex approach has the advantage of remaining faithful to both similarity and dissimilarity as well as old and new without in the least distorting the original historical witness of the text in its literal sense and its larger kerygmatic intention

¹³ The most influential early voice in appealing to an alternative to the systematic (or dogmatic) approach was that of Johann Gabler in his famous inaugural address to the faculty of the University of Altdorf in 1753. It was titled “About the Correct Distinction of Biblical and Dogmatic Theology and the Right Definition of Their Goals.” For convenient access to an English translation, see *The Flowering of OT Theology* (ed. Ben C. Ollenburger, Elmer A. Martens, and Gerhard Hasel; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992) 492–502.

¹⁴ Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970); Childs, *OT Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

nor falling short in the recognition of the larger context to which the OT belongs.¹⁵

With this brief consideration of bibliology and biblical theology and their interdependence as a foundation to our larger topic, it is appropriate now to step back and give thought to the interface between archaeology and OT biblical theology.

1. *Archaeology and OT theology.* Three considerations must come to the fore in the attempt to bridge these two separate and distinct disciplines, namely, (1) an absolutely unbiased and objective archaeological methodology; (2) a view of the OT that its texts themselves take, and that is their claim to be the Word of God; but also that, as documents, its texts must be subjected to the most rigorous and objective exegetical and interpretive approaches possible; and (3) the obvious fact that the nature and character of the Bible itself determines both the content and shape of biblical theology (a matter dealt with above). Only then can the interface between the 'soft' science of theology and the 'hard' science of archaeology be credible and mutually beneficial. The following steps are proposed if such results are to be achieved:

(a) So-called "biblical archaeology" cannot make the case that because it is archaeology done for the church or for the glory of God, it can bypass the normal standards of objectivity and personal disengagement. Whatever has proved to be acceptable in the pursuit of archaeological method in general should be applied also to biblical archaeology no matter the outcome. If the result appears to weaken or even totally undermine the case for a biblically-based interpretation of a text, then both the interpretation and the archaeological conclusions should be held in abeyance until a definitive harmonization or compelling reinterpretation of the data on either or both sides of the case can be achieved.

(b) The Bible should not be considered *a priori* an illegitimate step-child unworthy of consideration as a trustworthy historical document despite its primary purpose and function as a religious composition and even its self-claim to be divine revelation. The reasons for this trust (among others) are its generally agreed-upon historiographical literary genre and its remarkable record of conformity to known historical persons, places, and events obtained through centuries of painstaking efforts by secular archaeologists, epigraphers, philologists, editors, and historians.¹⁶

¹⁵ Hasel, *OT Theology* 207.

¹⁶ On this point, see the classic work of the moderate scholar W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957): "So many corroborations of details have been discovered in recent years that most competent scholars have given up the old critical theory according to which the stories of the Patriarchs are mostly retrojections from the time of the Dual Monarchy" (p. 241). Good scholar and all, Albright was far from being a reliable prophet, for the critics have hardly surrendered the ground. Even so, as late as 1996 the minimally minimalist scholar Volkmar Fritz conceded with some small caveat that "biblical tradition has presented Solomon as a great builder; this he certainly was, according to evidence based on archaeological research, even though he may not have been the splendid ruler who appears in biblical tradition." "Monarchy and Re-Urbanization," *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States* (ed. Volkmar Fritz and Philip R. Davies; JSOTSup 228; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) 195. Even the minimalist critic Niels

The persistence of cynics and skeptics in their denial of these established facts and the logical corollary that the Bible almost uniquely falls short of the standards expected of an historical artifact remains puzzling to scholars, like our honoree, who gave and give the Scriptures pride of place.

IV. THREE RECENT INTERFACES OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE

Space constraints demand brevity and specificity in demonstrating the mutual interconnectedness and interdependence of archaeology and the Bible that is the major thrust of this article. Hence, the three examples presented here are limited to the historicity of Israel's United Monarchy period and especially of David and his reign. As to David, he is the principal figure in the books of 1 Samuel 16 through 1 Kings 2 and 1 Chr 3:1–9; 11:1–29:30, an astounding 59 chapters or 7.7% of the entire OT; or, from another perspective, 87 pages of BHS out of 396 for the entire corpus of history books or 22% (5.5% of the entire OT)! This is by far the most devoted to any biblical character. Yet, the majority of modern critics either question or flatly deny David's very existence. A logical adjunct to this is the same skepticism about the reality of a royal palace in Jerusalem of the scope and scale befitting a king of the Bible's description of David and his realm. Therefore, the following rather recent discoveries are adduced in support of the biblical narrative: (1) the Tell Dan inscription (c. 850 BC); (2) the City of David project in Jerusalem (early 10th century); and (3) the fortress at Qeiyafa (OT Shaaraim?) (early 10th century).

1. *The Tel Dan Inscription.* Wrapping up a day's work at Tel Dan in the dig season of 1993–94, an associate of Avraham Biran, the lead archaeologist, noted in the slanting rays of the late afternoon sun an irregularity in one of the stones that lined the gateway of the ancient site. Closer inspection revealed a worn inscription which, upon close study soon after, proved to be an Aramaic royal inscription from the reign of Hazael (841–801 BC) who at the time was at war with Israel to the south (2 Kgs 8:12–13; 10:32–33; 12:17–18). Of special interest is the fact that the Aramean referred to his southern enemy not as Israel but as “the house [i.e. dynasty] of David” (*bt dwd*).¹⁷ Though by that time the nation was known more commonly abroad as Israel, it was also designated as the “house of so and so,” an example from the same period being the nomenclature “House of Omri” after the powerful father of Ahab, King Omri. For it also to bear the name “House of David” would therefore not at all be irregular. Against the arguments by some that the existence of a “House of David” need not be proof that such an individual actually lived is

Peter Lemche reluctantly concedes, “If archaeology is correctly used, it is an inexhaustible source of information for understanding the history of Israel.” He then appears to contradict his own assertion by claiming that “What it is not able to do is to inform us about individual historical events,” forgetting, it seems, the hundreds of secular texts that do this very thing. Niels Peter Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (JSOT BibSem 2; Sheffield: JSOT, 1988) 73.

¹⁷ With vocalization the name is to be read as *bēt dāwīd*. In light of this reading, Andre Lemaire subsequently revisited the famous Mesha Inscription from about the same period (also known as the Moabite Stone) and read the *dwd* of line 9 of that text “David” as well (cf. 2 Kgs 3:4–27).

undercut by the analogous fact that the Omri of “House of Omri” can hardly be denied historicity.¹⁸

2. *The Khirbet Qeiyafa Inscription.* For many years a prominent site that lay near the proposed boundary between Israel and Philistia gave promise of yielding important information of some period or other of Israelite history. Many scholars identified it as ancient Shaaraim, “the place of two gates.” Recent excavation has not only confirmed this identification because of the double structure of the formation of the gates but also as an important outpost from the United Monarchy, probably the first half of the 10th century. Most remarkable is the discovery of an inscription in archaic Hebrew, now considered the oldest of its kind ever found in that language.¹⁹ Though no well-known persons are mentioned in the inscription, it does refer to Philistine cities and suggests the kind of uneasiness along the border reflected also in biblical texts of the United Monarchy period (cf. 1 Sam 13:1–7; 14:1–48; 17:1–54; 31:1–10; 2 Sam 5:17–25; 21:15–22). In fact, Shaaraim itself is mentioned in 1 Sam 17:52, though only as being on the route to Gath from the Valley of Elah following David’s dispatch of Goliath.²⁰ The significance otherwise is that the site’s massive fortifications and public buildings bespeaks the kind of project only a powerful and wealthy nation could install. That could be only in the period of David and Solomon.

3. *The City of David Project.* Since 2005 Eilat Mazar has conducted a comprehensive, large-scale excavation of the spur of land between the Kidron and Central (or) Tyropoean valleys just south of the Old City of Jerusalem, the so-called “city of David.”²¹ She has begun her work where Kathleen Kenyon, Yigal Shiloh, Ronny Reich, and Eli Shukron left off their excavation, which was primarily in areas adjacent to the where she has focused her work.²² On the basis of the monumental architecture, pottery, and other cultural indicators, Mazar has concluded that “the Large Stone Structure [of Iron IIA of the early 10th century] should be identified with King David’s Palace, built by the Phoenicians” and “it is a testament [*šit*] to

¹⁸ The common Neo-Assyrian name of Israel is *Bît Humria*; cf. James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the OT 2* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955) 280, 281, 284, 285. The latter two references come from the reign of Sargon (721–705 BC). Omri died in 885 BC, so for 160 years or more Israel retained his name, at least in some circles. Therefore, it is not impossible that it should be called “House of David” in other contexts in the days of King Hazael of Damascus (841–801), 130 or more years after David’s death (p. 971).

¹⁹ Christopher Rollston, “What’s the Oldest Hebrew Inscription?” *BAR* 38/3 (2012) 32–40, 66–68. Rollston is not certain that Qeiyafa is older than the Gezer, Tel Zayit, and Izbeth Sartah texts and, in any case, thinks it is Phoenician, not Hebrew. This is contrary to the view of Emile Puech, who considers it to be the oldest Hebrew exemplar. See Puech in “L’Ostracon de Khirbet Qeyafa et les debuts de la royauté en Israël,” *RB* 17/2 (2010) 162–84. More work needs to be done on this technical philological matter before consensus can be achieved, but in any case it does not affect the question of the content of the inscription.

²⁰ For its border location in the Shephelah only some 15 miles SW of Jerusalem, see William Schlegel, *Satellite Bible Atlas: Historical Geography of the Bible* (Jerusalem: William Schlegel, 2011) maps 1–2.

²¹ Eilat Mazar, *The Palace of King David* (Jerusalem: Shoham Academic Research and Publication, 2009).

²² *Ibid.* 11.

the power of the ruling authority behind the endeavor.”²³ Her opinion has only been reinforced in reports subsequent to 2009.²⁴

V. CONCLUSION

The interface of archaeology and biblical theology provides an excellent example of mutual interaction and the possibility, at least, of mutual enlightenment in the study of either or both these fields of inquiry. They are but two disciplines among many that could and perhaps should be addressed in tandem. The logical and epistemological issues at hand are not primarily ones of method—though obviously digging and reading are two different kinds of exercise—but of authority, priority, and commitment.

If there is a cardinal sin in the adversarial comparative method it is that of presupposing the outcome before one begins and doing whatever is necessary to predetermine the outcome by whatever means possible. In the case of the Bible and archaeology, so-called “biblicists” are frequently accused of trying to “prove” the Bible by finding artifacts and formations that can be bent in the direction of providing that very proof; whereas, on the other hand, biblical scholars or historians of a more iconoclastic tradition can be said to be looking for evidence that undermines the “superstitious” or “fundamentalist” ignorance of those who regard the Bible as absolute truth, no matter the subject on which it speaks. While these may be caricatures in some sense, an element of ideological reality undergirds each.

A second concluding point is that neither archaeology nor biblical scholarship should be undertaken by amateurs, that is, dilettantes who may be eager to do the hard work of each discipline but who are inadequately trained by learning and experience to do so. It is commonplace on a dig for a square supervisor to yell “stay off the balks” or “don’t trip over the strings” or “use a pastiche and not a spade.” Likewise, students of the Bible who know little or nothing of the languages, literatures, and theology of the Bible ought to avoid the pontification common to young scholars in particular, but completely out of bounds for the ingenuous who may have grand motives but who can do great exegetical and theological harm. Of them one could also warn about the balks, the strings, and the inappropriate use of the wrong tools.

However, solid training and impeccable method are not enough and here is where the two undertakings may have to part company. I speak of what is at stake the very most, namely, truth and the kind of truth to be found in an ultimate sense only in God and in his revelatory word. Truth, of course, must be distinguished from mere fact, no matter how compelling, because facts are not self-interpreting any more than the Bible is. Pottery, tombs, and implements also

²³ Ibid. 64, 65.

²⁴ See for a report on a large hoard of gold coins from the site <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article:2416658/Dr-Eil> (accessed October 24, 2013). Also found was a 3,000 year-old jug, clearly from the Davidic/Solomonic period.

must, like Scripture, be subject to exegesis, as we stated early on, for they lie before us mute and meaningless unless they can be put into some kind of context that itself is not constructed in a *petitio principii* manner. Moreover, there is no life in pottery and other artifacts, no redemptive quality, no access to God, and here is where the novice can outstrip the scholar whether of the academy or the tell. Did not Paul ask of us, “Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” (1 Cor 1:20 NIV).

Archaeology and biblical theology may, and indeed, should interface, but where doubt lies as to truth and authority we do well to hearken to a man who lived in the archaeological period, as it were, and I refer to Joshua. Permit me on a closing note to take paraphrastic liberties as follows: “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the archaeological conclusions reached on the other side of the River, or the gods of secular scholarship in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord of the Word of our God” (Josh 24:15 NIV with some redaction).