

Marc Roby: Before we resume our study of theology, we have a question from a listener. This question refers to Session 16, where we discussed the need to make our calling and election sure. Our listener writes, “You talked a lot about questioning your own profession of faith to make sure it's true - questioning your motives, actions, habits, and heart-attitude. This is something that tends to get me stuck in introspection and self-focus. How can I gain strong assurance of salvation without getting stuck in an unproductive circle of introspection?”

Dr. Spencer: That is a very important question. One of the main points I was trying to make in that session is that my confidence and hope are *not* based on *anything* that I am or have done, they are based on the work Jesus Christ is doing in me and God's promise in Philippians 1:6 that he will complete the work he has started. So, in examining myself, I am *not* looking to see perfection, or to see that I am good enough for heaven. I can tell you for certain that none of us are perfect, and none of us are good enough for heaven. What we *are* looking for are signs that God is working in us to bring about serious change in our inner being. The real danger here is in mistaking some good change in habit – like stopping excessive drinking – for a deep-seated inner work of God.

Many people who are alcoholics, or addicted to cigarettes, or grossly obese are able to radically change their lives and stop these destructive behaviors on their own. You don't need to be born again to accomplish these things. What you should be looking for to have assurance of salvation is evidence that there is a deeper work going on within.

So, for example, if someone has been an alcoholic and is born again, he doesn't stop getting drunk just because it's better for his health and will make his life better here and now. Having been born again, he knows that getting drunk is a *sin* that dishonors God and is disobedient to his commands and deserves punishment, and he is being transformed to see this truth more clearly as time goes on. He is also being transformed to realize that life is a gift from God, his body and his life are not his own, and he needs to work hard to use his gifts and resources for the good of God's church. And he is being transformed to depend more and more on God's power working within him to do what is right, rather than trying to do it in his own strength. In other words, his motives and methods will not be selfish, powered by human will alone, and focused on this life.

Marc Roby: I think it is important to notice that you said one who has been born again “*is being transformed*”, meaning that it is a continual work in progress.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is a critically important point, none of these changes will be complete and perfect in this life. The former drunk may still find a seed within him that takes selfish pride in stopping his drinking and he may tend to focus on the benefits he gets in this life. And he may even fall down and drink at some time as well if he starts to depend entirely on himself. But, of course, if he is a true Christian he will repent and pray for God's help to live in obedience. Nevertheless, neither our motives nor our actions are ever perfect in this life.

Marc Roby: I certainly know that mine aren't, so it is comforting to know I'm not alone.

Dr. Spencer: Not only are you not alone, you are among the best possible company. Listen to what the apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 3. After saying in Verse 10 that he wanted “to know

Christ and the power of his resurrection” he wrote, in Verses 12-14, “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”<sup>1</sup>

The Christian life is one of constant warfare. We have enemies on the outside; the world, Satan and his demons, and we have a traitorous enemy within, our old sinful nature, which is being put to death, but will never be completely dead in this life. I said during that session that “If you have never had the experience of being deeply grieved by your own sin, of finding it loathsome and ugly and wanting to be rid of it, then you are not a Christian.” I think that is the key. A Christian has been humbled and sees himself as a sinner in need of a Savior and incapable of saving himself, and so he places his trust in Jesus Christ alone.

He doesn't think that his problems are caused by bad things that have happened to him or been done to him, nor does he think his problems are just bad habits. And he isn't primarily focused on this life. He realizes that he is a sinner. And that is a profound realization. A sinner is one who has offended Almighty God. He has violated God's law and deserves punishment.

**Marc Roby: That is a frightening realization.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes it is. But here is exactly where the power of the gospel comes into play. If you examine your life and find it wanting, and then Satan attacks and brings all of your sins to mind, accusing you of not being a Christian, your response should be “You're right Satan, I am a wretched sinner. But I'm saved by grace and Jesus Christ is my Lord, so go away!” We are promised in James 4:7 that if we submit ourselves to God and resist the devil, he will flee from us.

Paradoxically, one of the greatest pieces of evidence you can have that you are truly born again is to find yourself seriously questioning whether or not you are born again. So, take heart. If you see that you are sinner in need of a Savior, cry out for God to have mercy and forgive your sins on the basis of Christ's atoning work on the cross, and then trust that he is faithful and will do what he has promised. When a Christian does this, he can come away with great confidence and assurance. A confidence and assurance that are based on God – his faithfulness, his ability, and his promises. In his excellent commentary on the verses I read from Philippians 3, Matthew Henry wrote that “A holy fear of coming short is an excellent means of perseverance.”<sup>2</sup>

**Marc Roby: And we see again that fear can be a good thing!**

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew Henry's Commentary, Hendrickson Publishers, 1991, Vol. 6, pg. 596

Dr. Spencer: Yes we do. And we also see that fear of coming short is great evidence that you are born again and, therefore, you can be confident that God will preserve you; I noted Philippians 1:6 earlier, but you can also look at Jude 24, where we read that God “is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy”. But, two caveats are in order here. First, our present assurance can only be as strong as our present obedience. If you are not experiencing *any* victory over sin at all, you have no basis for assurance. You *should* be questioning your salvation. But the right response is to humble yourself, cry out for mercy and trust God and his promises. The second caveat is that the only place we learn about God’s plan of salvation and how to live a life pleasing to him is from the Bible. So, your faith and life *must* be based on the Bible. If you don’t have an interest in learning what the Bible teaches, you are not born again. If you do have that interest, then praise God, and keep listening to our podcasts!

**Marc Roby: Knowing that God has promised to complete his work is great assurance. Are we ready to move on with our study?**

Dr. Spencer: I think we are. But I really appreciate that question and want to encourage our listeners to email their questions to [info@whatdoesthewordsay.org](mailto:info@whatdoesthewordsay.org).

**Marc Roby: Alright. So, we are now ready to resume our study of biblical theology by continuing to examine extra-biblical evidence that corroborates the Bible. Last time we finished looking at evidence for the Israelites being enslaved in Egypt. And today we will examine evidence for the Israelites coming into Canaan sometime after 1400 BC.**

**Dr. Spencer, where would you like to begin?**

Dr. Spencer: I’d like to begin with solid, direct evidence that cannot reasonably be refuted. The Merneptah Stele was discovered by Flinders Petrie in 1896 in the ancient Egyptian city of Thebes. It is also sometimes called the Israel Stele, and it dates from about 1210 BC. The last three lines of this stele describe a military campaign in Canaan and almost all scholars agree that they contain the oldest extra-biblical reference to Israel yet found.<sup>3</sup> Israel is described as one of the enemies that the Egyptians had to deal with in the region of Canaan, so it’s clear they were well established, and the Egyptians considered them a formidable enemy by 1210 BC.

**Marc Roby: Alright. What else do we have?**

Dr. Spencer: The next evidence I would cite comes from the Amarna letters from the mid-14th century BC. These are clay tablets that contain diplomatic correspondence between Egypt and her representatives in Canaan. They discuss, among other things, dealing with a group of people called the Apiru, or Habiru. Some people think these are the Hebrews, although Kenneth Kitchen says that these terms cannot readily be linguistically related and he refers to them as “displaced people.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Wikipedia, also Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, pg. 159

<sup>4</sup> Kitchen, *op. cit.* pg. 165

Nevertheless, at the very least these letters provide us with a clear picture of the activity in this region at the time that is completely consistent with the biblical account in the book of Joshua. And, if the people who think that the Apiru are the Hebrews are correct, these letters provide amazing evidence for the activity described in the book of Joshua.

**Marc Roby: That would be truly incredible. Do we have anything more?**

Dr. Spencer: We have quite a bit of indirect evidence for the entry of the Israelites into Canaan as described in the book of Joshua. But, before we get to that, let me talk about the most controversial of the evidence, the evidence for the destruction of Jericho.

**Marc Roby: I'm sure most of our listeners have at least heard of Jericho, but perhaps I should quickly relate the biblical description of what happened there?**

Dr. Spencer: Please do.

**Marc Roby: Alright. According to the book of Joshua, the first city the Israelites captured after crossing the Jordan into Canaan was Jericho. God chose to make an example of Jericho to show the Israelites that he would give them victory in the conquest of the land, so we read in Joshua Chapter 6 that he had them march around Jericho once a day for six days and then, on the seventh day, they marched around the city seven times. When they finished the seventh circuit, the people shouted and the city walls collapsed so that the Israelites were able to go in and conquer the city.**

Dr. Spencer: I think we should add that we are told the Israelites then destroyed the city completely and burned it. But, they were commanded to not loot the city and they also spared the prostitute Rahab and her family because she had hidden and protected the spies that Joshua had previously sent into the city.

**Marc Roby: Very well. So, what evidence do we have for this?**

Dr. Spencer: Well, as I mentioned, the evidence is controversial. In the 1930's, Jericho was excavated by John Gastang, a British professor, and he concluded that the city was destroyed at the time of Joshua and corroborated the biblical account. But, Kathleen Kenyon, who excavated the site in the 1950's concluded that Jericho was destroyed around 1550 BC, almost 150 years before the Israelites arrived. Most archaeologists today agree with Kenyon. This conclusion is based on the fact that Kenyon did *not* find any Cypriot pottery, which was common from around the time of the conquest,<sup>5</sup> and also on Carbon-14 dating of some items from the site.

The evidence from both Gastang's and Kenyon's excavations was re-examined by Dr. Bryant Wood around 1990 and he found that some of the pottery found by Gastang was in fact Cypriot pottery, which would date the layer later than Kenyon did, and put it around the time the conquest starting in roughly 1406 BC.<sup>6</sup> Kenyon had excavated a different section of the city and

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<sup>5</sup> *Is the Bible Reliable? Building the historical case*, Dr. Stephen Meyer, The Truth Project, Focus on the Family, also the Carbon-14 dating of charcoal from Gastang was redone and gave an earlier date (see )

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

because Cypriot pottery was only used by the wealthy, it wasn't found in the section she examined. As for the Carbon-14 dates, there is a well-known discrepancy between Carbon-14 dates and dates determined from other historical factors in the second millennium BC, with the Carbon-14 dates being one or two hundred years earlier, and this isn't true just for biblical archaeology, so it isn't clear that the Carbon 14 dates are correct.<sup>7</sup>

If you accept Wood's conclusions, then there are a number of interesting features in the Jericho excavations that fit the biblical description. Meyer does a good job of presenting these in his video,<sup>8</sup> but let me give you a couple of examples. The walls appear to have fallen outward, which is not what you would expect if they were broken down by a conquering army from the outside. Also, there were jars with lots of grain still in them, which would be unusual since grain was valuable at the time and would typically have been plundered. But, remember that the Israelites had been specifically prohibited by God from taking any of the plunder.

**Marc Roby: That is very interesting. And, of course, the Bible indicates that the Israelites were very careful to keep this prohibition, since we are told about what we can reasonably assume was the only exception. Achan took some items and, when it was discovered, he and his family were put to death as punishment.**

Dr. Spencer: That's right. And, strangely enough, the items he took provide some indirect evidence for the account in Joshua. Kenneth Kitchen examines the list of items taken and notes that they fit very well in that period.<sup>9</sup>

**Marc Roby: Interesting. Is there anything else to say about Jericho?**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, there are two more things to note. First, a minor but interesting bit of indirect evidence concerns the prostitute Rahab. There is a debate about whether she was a prostitute or ran a tavern, although I suppose she certainly could have been both. In any event, the idea that she might have been a tavern-keeper fits the period well. Kitchen notes that the Code of Hammurabi mentions tavern keepers.<sup>10</sup> In Section 109 of the code we read, "If conspirators meet in the house of a tavern-keeper, and these conspirators are not captured and delivered to the court, the tavern-keeper shall be put to death."<sup>11</sup>

**Marc Roby: That is very interesting, and if anything could classify as a trivial detail, that would be it. You mentioned a second additional comment?**

Dr. Spencer: Yes. Kenyon concluded that Jericho was totally destroyed around 1550 BC and was then uninhabited for quite some time, including the time of the Israelite conquest. But Gastang's

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<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/08/Carbon-14-Dating-at-Jericho.aspx#Article>, and also note that Wikipedia makes a similar comment; "As in Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean, radiocarbon dates run one or two centuries earlier than the dates proposed by archaeologists." ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chronology\\_of\\_the\\_ancient\\_Near\\_East](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chronology_of_the_ancient_Near_East))

<sup>8</sup> Meyer, op. cit.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth A. Kitchen, op. cit., pg. 177

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pg. 167

<sup>11</sup> <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/ancient/hamframe.asp>

excavations at Jericho found some very interesting items in tombs. He found some scarabs, which are Egyptian amulets shaped like a beetle, that had inscriptions with the names of pharaohs who lived *after* 1500 BC. Obviously, that would not be possible if the city was destroyed completely prior to that time and was then uninhabited.<sup>12</sup>

**Marc Roby: Again, some very interesting pieces evidence. What other indirect evidence do we have for the conquest of Canaan?**

Dr. Spencer: Kitchen goes through the towns named in the Joshua accounts and shows that there is archaeological evidence for almost all of them.<sup>13</sup> In addition, he points out that the descriptions of the military campaigns fit the pattern in use at the time<sup>14</sup>, the names of people and of places are right for the period<sup>15</sup>, and the descriptions of the boundaries of territories fit the pattern in use at the time.<sup>16</sup> As we have noted before, it is really impossible to imagine that someone writing hundreds of years later could have gotten all of these details right, so all of this indirect evidence very strongly points to the account having been written at the time.

**Marc Roby: All fascinating. But, we are almost out of time, is there anything else you would like to add?**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, I'd like to point out that even though Kenneth Kitchen holds to a later date for the Exodus than I have been using, the things I have cited from his book today are still perfectly valid because we are just talking about the general time frame. Also, should it turn out that the date for the ruins excavated at Jericho is prior to the conquest, that doesn't mean the Bible is wrong. Kitchen himself assumes that the earlier date for the destruction is correct, but argues that the huge amount of erosion seen at that site during the long period of its being uninhabited would likely have wiped out the remains of a small city.<sup>17</sup> I don't think that is the most likely scenario, but it isn't impossible.

**Marc Roby: There is obviously some degree of doubt about some of the evidence that we've looked at, but other pieces of evidence, like the Merneptah Stele are hard to deny. Overall I think it is a very, very compelling case for the accuracy of the Bible. But, we are out of time for today.**

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<sup>12</sup> Meyer, op. cit., and <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/05/Did-the-Israelites-Conquer-Jericho-A-New-Look-at-the-Archaeological-Evidence.aspx#Article>

<sup>13</sup> Kitchen, op. cit., pg. 186

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pg. 173

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pg. 175

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, pg. 181

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, pg. 187