

BOOK REVIEWS

The Case for Biblical Archaeology: Uncovering the Historical Record of God's Old Testament People, by John D. Currid. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2020. xviii + 263 pp. \$29.99.

John Currid is Chancellor's Professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary. His nearly five decades of experience in archaeology have prepared him aptly to write this introduction to the art and science of excavating the biblical lands. This primer provides an engaging and informative synopsis of the history and geography of ancient Israel as well as an instructive overview of the techniques used by archaeologists to uncover and interpret the material remains of the past.

Following an introduction, the book comprises nineteen chapters in three major parts covering the historical context of archaeology, the geography of the land, and the various categories of archaeological discovery that have proved useful to historians and biblical interpreters. Each chapter concludes with a list of key terms, discussion questions, and sources for further reading. Included also are forty color photographs of various sites and finds, three maps of ancient regions and current archaeological sites, and three appendices. The appendices include a timeline of the ancient Near East, a timeline of the kings of Israel and Judah, and a chronological outline of the extrabiblical references to these kings. The book concludes with a helpful glossary of nearly sixty archaeological terms, a bibliography, and two indices covering Scriptural references and subjects/names.

In the introduction Currid outlines the role of archaeology as shedding light on the historical and material contexts of the biblical narratives. Presuppositionalist readers will appreciate his caveat that "the purpose of archaeology (and related fields) is *not to prove the Bible*" (3, emphasis mine), a welcome distinction from a few other books on archaeology published last year (e.g., J. Daniel Hays, *A Christian's Guide to Evidence for the Bible: 101 Proofs from History and Archaeology* [Baker, 2020]; and to a lesser extent Titus Kennedy, *Unearthing the Bible: 101 Archaeological Discoveries that Bring the Bible to Life* [Harvest House, 2020]). Currid defines archaeology as the systematic study of material remains of the human past and explains its aim as the discovery, observation, preservation, and recording of the buried remains of the past in order to reconstruct ancient life (4–5). While the introduction provides a helpful overview, one deficiency is the lack of a clear purpose statement for the book itself. This lacuna points to one of the book's shortcomings as discussed below.

Part 1 ("Setting") surveys the geography of Palestine (chap. 2), the history of archaeology from the eighteenth century to the present (chap.

3), the process of tell excavation (chap. 4), and a brief history of biblical lands (chap. 5). Part 2 ("A Journey through the Land") zooms in on the major archaeological sites currently under excavation region-by-region: Galilee (chap. 6), the Jezreel Valley (chap. 7), the Negev (chap. 8), the Shephelah (chap. 9), Jordan River Valley (chap. 10), the southern coastal plain (chap. 11), and the central highlands (chap. 12). Part 3 ("Aspects of Society") offers the most insight into what archaeologists have been able to discover about ancient life. The chapters cover agriculture and herding (chap. 13), water management (chap. 14), architecture (chap. 15), ceramics (chap. 16), Hebrew language (chap. 17), burial practices (chap. 18), and small finds (chap. 19). This reviewer found the chapters on Hebrew language and burial practices to be most insightful, although readers will likely gain greater understanding of the Old Testament world from each of the foregoing sections. The book ends rather abruptly with the final chapter on small finds, offering no concluding chapter to tie together the study.

Currid has provided a helpful overview of archaeology and has furnished a window into the nature of archaeological work for those unfamiliar with the ins-and-outs of field excavation. The strengths of the book include its user-friendliness and insight for those interested in specific parts of archaeology, its quality photographs and maps, and its measured approach to the benefit archaeology offers (not to *prove* the Bible so much as to illumine it). The book itself is aesthetically pleasing, with its glossy pages and informative features (e.g., frequent breakout boxes with further resources or key terms). The only weakness of the book may well be its lack of a coherent purpose statement or aim. While the title indicates the author is making a case for biblical archaeology, the book does not really offer an argument for archaeology so much as provide a loosely organized overview of important parts of the archaeological task. Nor does the author specifically define what he means by "biblical archaeology" vis-à-vis archaeology in general. In spite of these omissions, I commend the book to readers interested in discovering more about the Old Testament world and the work of archaeology. I have added sections of the book as required reading in my Old Testament Historical Books course, and I would encourage readers of this journal to read this volume to gain greater insight into the Old Testament period.

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Bloody, Brutal, and Barbaric? Wrestling with Troubling War Texts, by William J. Webb and Gordon K. Oest. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019. 397 pp. \$45.00.

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