

Examining the Evidence for the Destruction of Jericho | with Dr. Titus Kennedy – Part 2

(July 18, 2023)

Frank:

Archaeologist Nelson Glueck, a number of years ago said, there has been no archaeological discovery that's ever controverted a biblical reference. Is that still true? We're talking about Jericho today. And in the last program, which aired last week, about Jericho with my friend, Dr. Titus Kennedy, we covered a lot of ground. So, we're going to kind of pick up our conversation where we left off. You're going to have to listen to that previous podcast. And you're going to want to, because we talked about who excavated Jericho, and we talked about what has been found there physically.

And we were right in the conversation when we had to end because we ran out of time, as to how do we really know the date of the destruction of Jericho, approximately 1400 BC? The specific biblical date would be 1406. We talked about that in the last podcast as well. But let's just round it off to about 1400. We talked a little bit about pottery. And we were right in the middle of a discussion, Titus, when we had to leave, on the scarabs. First of all, what is a scarab? Some of our listeners might not even know what we're talking about. What's a scarab?

Titus:

So, this artifact comes from the scarab beetle that's found in Egypt, the dung beetle, which represented life and rebirth. And they're these big, huge beetles that the Egyptians decided to make into symbolic artifacts. So, on the one side of it, it looks like a beetle. But then if you flip it over to the underside, you have an inscription there, sometimes not always, but a lot of them do. And in cases of what we might call a royal scarab, you have the name of one of the kings, one of the pharaohs there. And so, these were made during the time, during the reign of that particular pharaoh.

And that allows us to then say, okay, this scarab was made during these years. And the scarab was made during these years. So, they can be helpful chronological indicators, kind of like a coin that has the head of a ruler, and his name, and perhaps even the year. For example, a coin of Nero, when Nero was emperor from 54 to 68 AD. And those were minted during his reign. But they weren't minted before or after. Yeah, they remained in use sometimes longer. But that's when they were made. If we find those in an archaeological layer, we can say this is from mid to late first century AD. So, scarabs are a similar thing. They're just not as common.

Frank:

And in the previous program, you mentioned that they found scarabs at Jericho (John Garstang did in the 1930s) for the pharaohs of Egypt, in almost a successive line for about 200 years from



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about 1600 BC to 1400 BC. The last one they find is Amenhotep III, whose reign ends around 1400 BC. Is he the son of Amenhotep II, or the grandson?

Titus:

He's the grandson.

Frank:

He's the grandson of Amenhotep II, and Amenhotep II is probably the pharaoh of the exodus. So, he's the grandson. And then they don't find any other scarabs after that. Which Titus, you're saying, would seem to make sense that okay, the city was destroyed and not really inhabited after that, except for hundreds of years later. Am I getting that right?

Titus:

Right. Yeah, we have a convergence of data essentially. So, we talked about the pottery. The pottery indicates that people were still living in the city of Jericho in the 15th century BC, from 1500 to 1400 BC. Well, that's also what the scarabs show us, and then they're not there after that. The city's destroyed; it's abandoned. It seems like when it was destroyed and abandoned is right at the end of the period we see from the pottery in the scarabs, about 1400 BC. And that's, again, also the date that we would get from biblical data if we're looking at those years that are specified.

Frank:

Another way to date the destruction at Jericho is through a cuneiform tablet that was found there. Explain that. What is that?

Titus:

There's just been one tablet found at Jericho so far. And it's not in great shape. But from an analysis of the epigraphy, the writing style, and the fact that it is this specific type of tablet, it seems to date to about the 15th century BC. Now, the Amarna letters are very well known. And this might be about the same time as the Amarna letters.

Whether or not it was connected to that correspondence, we don't know. But tablets have been found at several other sites in Canaan from the same period. So, it does fit with this kind of, a little bit before, a little bit after 1400 BC period. I wouldn't use that as your main line of evidence, but it does fit with what we've seen with the pottery and then also with the scarabs.

Frank:

Didn't the Amarna letters have something to do with the fact that the area now known as Shechem, was pretty much... They didn't resist Joshua. They just allowed him to come in and take the area without any resistance. Is that what the Amarna letters were about?

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Titus:

Yeah, there's some of them. So, the Amarna letters tell us that the land of Shechem was given by its local Canaanite king to the Hapiru. So, that could correlate with what we read in Joshua, how there's no battle at Shechem. There's no conquest of Shechem. There's no destruction of Shechem. The king of Shechem is not killed. And yet, the Israelites, and the old Israelites, the young Israelites, the men, women, children, and even the natives of the land (local Canaanites), are all there together and there's this assembly. Well, that's a peaceful gathering. There's no battle. And Joshua doesn't say how that happened, how they acquired Shechem. But the Amarna letters may give us a clue into that, that it was given to the Israelites by the local king.

Frank:

And friends, just so you know, a lot happened at Shechem. That's where God first spoke to Abraham. That's where Joshua had the tribes of Israel on two different mountains, one is Mount Ebal, and one is Mount Gerizim. And when you go there, when we go to Israel, you can stand right there and see how they could have shouted blessings and cursings at one another.

Because that's what they were told to do by Moses when they got into the land. That's also where Jacob's well is, where Jesus met the woman at the well, all this area right there. There's so much history right there in Shechem. And so, the cuneiform tablet found at Jericho was the same kind of communication that the Amarna letters would have been in about that same century. That's essentially what you're saying. Correct?

Titus:

Yep.

Frank:

All right. Now, how about the sequence of layers? That's another way to date Jericho. How do we know from that it was about 1400 BC?

Titus:

The stratigraphy at Jericho. That is, we're looking at the different strata, or the different layers. That also correlates with the biblical narrative about Jericho. Not just from the book of Joshua. We've got to go later on too, to Judges and Kings. So, first you have the city, this walled city. Archaeology, check. That's there. Then you have the collapsed walls and the fire destroying that city. Right? Okay, check on the archeology. Then in Jericho, we have an abandonment according to the biblical text. Yes, that also is shown by the archaeology.

Frank:

And no looting.

Titus:

No looting, yeah. But the next layer that has any kind of occupation at Jericho, that comes in what's called Late Bronze Age II. It's about the 14th century BC or so. And we just have this

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house, this mansion, we might call it, that's there for a short period of time. The city is not rebuilt. People are not living in the city of Jericho. There's somebody or a small group of people living at a residence at Jericho.

Well, this can correlate to Judges 3, with Eglon of Moab, living there in his villa or palace for a short period of time before he's assassinated. Then the whole city's abandoned, or continues to be, until finally we have the city rebuilt in what's called the Iron Age II. So, during the divided kingdom around the 9th century BC. And that is reflected both in the biblical narrative, in Kings and also in the archaeological record there at Jericho. That's when we get the next city that's actually built.

Frank:

So, you're saying for like 400 - 500 years, there's nothing there.

Titus:

Right? Yeah. Basically, almost 500 years. Yeah, over 400 years.

Frank:

Wow. Now, how about radiocarbon dating? Can that help you date the destruction date for Jericho or date the destruction period?

Titus:

It can, I think. But it also is not quite as precise as people might wish for or think that it is. And maybe we can get some better samples and dates. But essentially, what we have right now, there are a lot of samples taken from the Kenyon excavation. But they didn't even run many of those samples until decades later. Initially, some of those dates came out in the 80's. And it looked like they actually fit a 1400 BC destruction. But then, the British Museum said there's a problem with their equipment calibration, and they redid them. And they landed closer to the 1500 1550 date.

A lot of them were done later on. And they in their uncalibrated dates, they were much closer to 1400 BC. But in their calibrated dates, they were more like what Kenyon proposed, date 1550ish. The Italian Palestinians joint expedition did a couple of samples too. And one of theirs did get very close to the 1400 BC date as well.

So, you really have evidence that could go either way. Or I should say, you have radiocarbon dates that could go either way, as far as about a 1550 or 1400 BC date at Jericho. It's really not deciding or resolving the dispute between those dates. But I think what the radiocarbon dates do tell us is that there's no case, just like with the rest of the archaeology, there's no case for a late 13th century BC destruction.

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Frank:

So, the 1200's exodus and conquest doesn't fit the archaeology at all. But the 1400's could fit. Particularly with regard to radiocarbon dating. It does seem to fit it more precisely with pottery, scarabs, the cuneiform tablet, the sequence of layers. What about other historical sources, Titus? Do we have any other way of dating the destruction of Jericho?

Titus:

Well, we have no Egyptian account of a conquest of Jericho, either during this expulsion of the Hyksos around 1550, or later on during the 18th dynasty. So, in one case, we have a lack of sources on this Egyptian side, which was Kenyon's basic theory. But then on the 1400 BC side, we have the historical source in the book of Joshua. That's our only ancient historical document, or source that's talking about the destruction of Jericho at this time. And what are we going to do with that, you know?

Are we going to say, that's a valid historical source? Or are we going to say it's an invalid historical source? Or are we going to say, let's see how it matches up with archaeology. If we can at least say, let's look at how it correlates, or doesn't correlate with the archaeology, but we can see from what we've talked about, pottery scarabs, perhaps this cuneiform tablet, the stratigraphy, all those things match the biblical narrative regarding Jericho, and its destruction, and subsequent abandonment and rebuilding. Radiocarbon is not really solving the dispute for us so much. Maybe in the future we'll know more. But I think we have a very compelling case from both the manner in which Jericho was destroyed and then also the timing, the chronology of it.

Frank:

So, we've got the manner down in the sense that the walls fell flat. The material was not looted. The fire took place, just like the account from Joshua says. And when the walls came down, they allowed the people to walk right into the city because of the way it oddly fell. It fell flat and then created a ramp right up the side of the retaining wall, and they could walk right into the city.

And then you're saying most of these ways that we date the destruction appear to give us a 1400 date. As you said radiocarbon dating could give us a 1500 or so date. But what it can't give us is a 1200 or so date. So, everything seems to be pointing in the direction of the fact that Joshua's account appears to be confirmed by the archaeology. It's certainly not disconfirmed. We can see that now. Titus, if you were ever given the opportunity to excavate there in Jericho yourself, what would you go looking for? What would be your intent? What would you try and excavate?

Titus:

I'd focus on the walls to clarify some of those issues in terms of, do we continue to have this collapse everywhere, even other spots we haven't excavated? Is it also showing that it fell down on itself and formed this ramp? And then investigating the building of the wall. That is, when it was first rebuilt in this Middle Bronze III period we talked about earlier, just confirming some of

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that. But also doing a stratigraphic profile, the side of the trench, so that we can see the different layers of occupation, the fire destruction, the abandonment, and what's the material that's found in there. Especially with the destruction layer. What kind of pottery and other artifacts are we finding in there?

Is it more of the same that Garstang found and also Kenyon found as well? Are there specific pottery forms and types that we can say, yeah, these definitely date to Late Bronze I, or is it something else? So, I would seek further clarification, really. I would probably take several new radiocarbon samples too and see what those turned out in different labs. And hopefully just get a more robust data set. I wouldn't expect results would be very different from what's already been found there.

Frank:

Right. Now friends, if you want to go further, the article that Titus just wrote is called "The Bronze Age Destruction of Jericho: Archaeology in the Book of Joshua." It's in the journal "Religions." We'll put the link in the show notes. And then, make sure you pick up his great archaeology books. One is called "Unearthing the Bible: 101 Archaeological Discoveries That Bring the Bible to Life", by Titus Kennedy. And the newer one is called "Excavating the Evidence for Jesus: The Archaeology and History of Christ and the Gospels."

And as I mentioned in last week's podcast, Titus, and I have done a few different podcasts that you want to listen to. One is March 7, 2020. You've got to get the Cross Examined app to listen to this. Get the Cross Examined app, two words in the App Store. Look for March 7, 2020. Go back in the archives, "8 Findings from Egypt for the Exodus." Also, we did one on May 20, 2022, called the top 20 evidences for Jesus outside the Bible. So, you'll want to avail yourself of those. And Titus, where can people find you online? If they want to go further, where do they go?

Titus:

I would suggest looking at some of the books and articles that I've written. And I'm on some various YouTube channels and other interviews like I've done with you, where we talk about various archaeological discoveries and discuss those.

Frank:

Yeah, in fact, Sean McDowell did an interview with you not long ago. So, go over to Sean's YouTube channel. You can see another interview with Titus on some of these issues. So, it's always great having you on Titus. You're doing great work. Keep it going.

Titus:

Thank you, Frank.

Frank:

All right. That's the great Titus Kennedy, ladies and gentlemen. Check out his books again, and we will see you here, Lord willing, next week. God bless.

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