

Handout # 2. Biblical Creation and Archeology

a. Inscriptions and Writings: The Mesha Stele (Moabite Stone)

Popularized in the 19th century as the "Moabite Stone," the Mesha Stele is a black basalt stone, bearing an inscription by the 9th century BC Moabite King Mesha, discovered in 1868 at Dhiban (biblical "Dibon," capital of Moab). The inscription of 34 lines is written in the Moabite language. It is the most extensive inscription ever recovered that refers to ancient Israel. It was set up by Mesha, about 850 BC, as a record and memorial of his victories in his revolt against the Kingdom of Israel, undertaken after the death of his overlord, Ahab. The stele, which measures 44"x27", describes:

1. How Moab was conquered by Omri, King of Israel, as the result of the anger of the god Chemosh. Mesha's victories over Omri's son (not mentioned by name), over the men of Gad at Ataroth, and at Nebo and Jehaz;
2. His public buildings, restoring the fortifications of his strong places and building a palace and reservoirs for water;
- and 3. His wars against the Horonaim.

This inscription can be interpreted as supplementing and corroborating the history of King Mesha recorded in 2 Kings 3:4-27, thereby earning it a prominent place in the corpus of Biblical archaeology. However there are significant differences. In the Bible it is Ahab, Omri's son, who conquers Moab, and the rebellion is against Ahab's son Jehoram. Further, in the Bible, it is not Chemosh who gives victory to Mesha but Jahweh who gives victory to Jehoram. Israel withdraws, according to the Book of Kings, only because they are disconcerted when they see Mesha sacrifice his son.

The Stele is also significant in that it mentions the Hebrew name of God – YHWH. It is thought to be the earliest known reference to the sacred name in any artifact.

b. Scripture Reading: Genesis 1

c. Comparing Genesis 1 to other Mesopotamian Creation accounts: Enuma Elish and the creation account of Genesis

Similarities	Differences
(1) Both accounts speak of a time when the earth was without form and void.	(1) The Enuma Elish features several gods (polytheistic) while Genesis mentions only one God (though God refers to Godself in the plural in Gen 1:28 "let us make humans" which many Christians take as an OT proof text for the doctrine of the Trinity).
(2) Both accounts have a similar order of events in creation.	(2) While the Enuma Elish does not separate spirit and matter, the Genesis account carefully distinguishes between the two.
(3) Both accounts view humanity's purpose to be worshiping God/gods	(3) The Enuma Elish features conflict and violence among all characters, including the gods, while Genesis portrays violence as sinful and only occurring in the human community.
(4) Both creation accounts relate humans to God above animals.	
(5) The number seven seems significant in both accounts (seven tablets and seven days of creation).	

THE NATURE OF THE TWO CREATION ACCOUNTS

GENESIS 1	GENESIS 2
The heavens and the earth are created in six days.	Creation of the man and the woman (no time element mentioned).
Shows humanity in its cosmic setting.	Shows humanity as central to God's purpose.
A panoramic view of creation as a whole.	A detailed view of one particular aspect of creation.
Centers on God creating the heavens and the earth.	Centers on humanity as the crowning of God's creation.

THE SIX DAYS OF CREATION

DAY 1: Light.	DAY 4: Light-givers (Sun, moon & stars).
DAY 2: Water & sky divided.	DAY 5: Fish and birds.
DAY 3: Land & Vegetation	DAY 6: Land animals & man.

d. Archeological discovery from above: Pishon River?

The Garden of Eden was located between four rivers according to Genesis 2:10-14

In the 1990's, Boston University scientist Farouk El-Baz used photos from satellites orbiting the earth and space Shuttle Imaging Radar to locate an underground river which now runs under a portion of the desert of Saudi Arabia (James A. Sauer, "The River Runs Dry," Biblical Archaeology Review, Vol. 22, No. 4, July/August 1996, pp. 52-54, 57, 64 and Molly Dewsnap, "The Kuwait River," Biblical Archaeology Review, Vol. 22, No. 4, July/August 1996, p. 55.).

In Kuwait, a dry riverbed (Wadi Al-Batin) cuts through limestone and appears to disappear into the desert of Saudi Arabia. Actually, the river ran underground along a fault line under the sand. Some have theorized that this lost river corresponds to biblical descriptions of the Pishon River.

Discussion Questions:

How do you explain the similarities between the ancient Middle Eastern creation accounts? Do you believe that God's revealed truth to people other than our Jewish forebears? Are the differences in the accounts significant in your opinion? From the research presented here, you believe there is enough indication that that the garden of Eden was a real place in our geography and history? How important is it to your faith that the Garden of Eden story is history rather than sacred story?