

Finding Nebo-Sarsekim

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Critics of the Bible attack every facet of its credibility. These critics claim that the books were not written at the time they profess to have been written, that the men whose names the books bear are not the actual writers, and that the biblical characters are mental fabrications of the authors. Such criticism, however, is impossible to maintain rationally and honestly in the face of the vast amount of evidence that verifies the validity and authenticity of the 66 books of the Bible. Archaeological findings provide one line of evidence that continues to add credence to the biblical text. Tablets, seals, papyri, pottery, and a host of other ancient artifacts have surfaced that document the lives of characters mentioned in the Bible. These finds often show that the biblical texts under discussion were written at the time they claim to have been written, and that the biblical characters were historic and real.

One such archaeological find recently came to light. In 1920, the British Museum acquired a small stone tablet about two inches wide and one inch high. This stone tablet went into a large cache of tablets with ancient cuneiform writing on them. Since few people have the skill and knowledge to translate cuneiform, the tablet sat untranslated in the British Museum for about eight decades. Recently, however, Dr. Michael Jursa of the University of Vienna, one of the few people who can read cuneiform, translated the small stone tablet (Alberge, 2007).

The information on the tablet is nothing inherently spectacular. The tablet is dated to 595 B.C. and simply states that a Babylonian official named Nebo-Sarsekim dedicated a large gift of gold to the temple of Esangila in Babylon (Reynolds, 2007). While this inscription is unremarkable by itself, it provides an exciting link to the biblical text.

In Jeremiah 39, the prophet described Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar's successful attack on the city of Jerusalem. Jeremiah wrote that Nebuchadnezzar penetrated the walls of Jerusalem in the 11th year of King Zedekiah, which corresponds to 587 B.C. Upon infiltrating the walls, Nebuchadnezzar and several of his Babylonian princes sat at the Middle Gate. One of the princes listed as sitting with Nebuchadnezzar was Sarsechim (Jeremiah 39:3). The name "Sarsechim" is recognized as the same name as Nebo-Sarsekim. Thus, the small stone tablet mentions a Babylonian official alive in 595 B.C. and less than 10 years later Jeremiah mentioned an official by the same name. One member of the British Museum's staff, Dr. Irving Finkel, who works in the Department of the Middle East, said: "A mundane commer-

cial transaction takes its place as a primary witness to one of the turning points in Old Testament history. This is a tablet that deserves to be famous" (as quoted in Alberge, 2007).

Skeptics already have begun to attack the find. They suggest that the Nebo-Sarsekim on the tablet could be a different Sarsekim from the one mentioned by Jeremiah. While there is always the possibility that they are not the same person, the circumstantial evidence linking the two names establishes a strong case that the names refer to the same person. They both mention a Babylonian official, during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, in a time frame that would be expected if the same person is under discussion. In fact, besides a few "ultra-skeptics," the find seems to be accepted by the majority of scholars as extrabiblical evidence for the existence of the official mentioned in Jeremiah 39:3.

Concerning the significance of the find, Dr. Finkel stated: "If Nebo-Sarsekim existed, which other lesser figures in the Old Testament existed? A throwaway detail in the Old Testament turns out to be accurate and true. I think that it means that the whole of the narrative [of Jeremiah] takes on a new kind of power" (as quoted in Reynolds, 2007).

The biblical documents have more than archaeological evidence to commend them. Their internal consistency, unity, predictive prophecy, and scientific accuracy combine to produce an irrefutable case for the Bible's divine inspiration. Archaeological finds such as the tablet inscription, do, however, add cumulative weight to the overall case for the Bible's factual accuracy. As renowned archaeologist Nelson Glueck observed: "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which conform in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible" (1959, p. 31).

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Q What caused God?

A Everyone knows the Christian's response is to this question: God is eternal; He had no cause. Although atheists may think that this answer is a cop-out and unscientific, both observation and Revelation declare otherwise.

From what we observe **in nature**, matter and energy are neither created nor destroyed. Scientists refer to this fact as the First Law of Thermodynamics. Evolutionists allege that the Universe began with the explosion of a ball of matter 13.6 billion years ago, yet they never have provided a reasonable explanation for the cause of the "original" ball of matter. An attempt was made recently in the April 28, 2007 issue of *New Scientist* magazine titled "The Beginning: What Triggered the Big Bang." Notice, however, the last line of the article: "[T]he quest to understand the origin of the universe seems destined to continue until we can answer a deeper question: **why is there anything at all instead of nothing?**" (194[2601]:33, emp. added). The fact is, a logical, naturalistic explanation for the origin of the "original" ball of matter that supposedly led to the Universe does not exist. It cannot exist so long as the

First Law of Thermodynamics is true (i.e., matter and energy cannot create itself).

Since the physical Universe exists, and yet it could not have created itself, then the Universe is either eternal or something/someone outside of the Universe must have created it. Relatively few scientists propose that the Universe is eternal. In fact, there would be no point in attempting to explain the "beginning" of the Universe if they believed it always existed. What's more, the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which states that matter and energy become less usable over time, has led scientists to conclude that the Universe has not always existed.

If matter is not eternal, however, and it cannot create itself, then the only logical conclusion is that something/someone outside of nature (i.e., supernatural) caused the Universe and everything in it. Christians call this Someone, "the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 40:28).

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IN THE NEWS

In the July 16, 2007 issue of *Newsweek*, Lisa Miller informed readers about a new and different parenting book, titled *Parenting Beyond Belief*. Edited by Dale McGowan, this volume "aims to help folks who are raising their kids without religion deal with the sticky questions that come up about Santa Claus and heaven, and it raises more serious concerns about how to bring up ethical, confident, non-believing kids in a culture saturated with talk about God" (Miller, 2007, p. 10). According to McGowan's Web site, *Parenting Beyond Belief* "is the first comprehensive parenting book by a major publisher on raising children without religion" (2007). McGowan added: "We hope it isn't the last" (2007).

Included in *Parenting Beyond Belief* is discussion about a new summer camp for children of atheists. Camp Quest: The Secular Summer Camp, which operates in six different locations in North America, claims to be "the first residential summer camp in the history of the United States for the children of Atheists, Freethinkers, Humanists, Brights, or whatever other terms might be applied to those who hold to a naturalistic, **not** supernatural world view" (Camp Quest, n.d., emp. added).

It seems as if atheists are more determined than ever to indoctrinate children with godless materials and ideologies. In the end, Dale McGowan's hope of seeing more atheistic materials for families ultimately fails to provide reasonable, not to mention comforting, answers to life's biggest questions. Imagine the child who ponders his origin for the first time: "Mom, why are we

here?" "Ricky," mom replies, "we're here because, by chance, billions of years ago a tiny ball of matter exploded. Eventually Earth was formed, life emerged from lifeless matter, and millions of years later humans evolved from lower animals." "So we're here by accident?" Ricky asks. "That's one way of looking at it," says his mother. *Parenting Beyond Belief* and *Camp Quest* no doubt help atheistic parents explain origins and ultimate destinations to their children in a more creative way. However, the bottom line is, children will learn that life ultimately is meaningless because their existence is accidental and there is no life beyond death.

The key to an abundant life, both in the present and in the afterlife, is found only through Christ Jesus (John 10:10). May God help us to teach our children this truth, as well as reach out to those reared by atheists, who may never have heard the answers that Jesus and His Word can provide.

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