

Course syllabus: Berkeley, OLLI, Winter 2023
David Meir-Levi

Six Biblical Conundrums and their resolution with the aid of Archaeology and related science disciplines

Have you ever wondered about such Biblical conundrums as: ***Which is right, the Biblical Creation Story or Astrophysics; Did the Biblical Flood Story really happen; Were the Patriarchs paragons of virtue or were they really pimps and privateers; Did the Exodus really happen or is it the product of a later generation's overly vivid imagination; Did David and Solomon really exist; Were Jesus, and his older brother James, the messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Gabriel stone?***

Even if your answer is “no,” you are still very likely to enjoy “**Six Biblical Conundrums and their Resolution with the aid of Archaeology and other science disciplines**” because anyone possessed of critical acuity can benefit from the intellectual challenges posed by these conundrums and a reasoned and fact-based exploration of these issues.

With the assistance of Astrophysics, Cosmology and Meteorology, combined with Geology, Assyriology, Egyptology, Greek and Roman historical sources, Semitic epigraphy, and the Dead Sea Scrolls, we will examine the latest in Archaeological finds from Israel and surrounding areas in order to address these six conundrums.

A bibliography and assigned readings accompany the course. Students are expected to become familiar with the assigned readings. Both in the on-line and the classroom formats there will be ample time provided for Q&A and discussion. No prior knowledge or experience is required.

Combining the latest in Archaeological finds from Israel and surrounding areas with Biblical History and extra-Biblical texts, we will address the following six conundrums:

- a. *The Biblical Creation Story vs. Astrophysics: Which is right?*
- b. *The Flood Story: Geology says it happened! Really?*
- c. *The Patriarchs: Privateers or Princes; & did Abraham really pimp his wife?*

- d. *The Exodus Story: Did it Happen?*
- e. *King David and his dynasty: did they really rule?*
- f. *Jesus, James, Josephus, and the Dead Sea Scrolls.*

We will review relevant evidence from Archaeology, Geology, Assyriology, Egyptology, Greek and Roman historical sources, Semitic epigraphy, the Dead Sea Scrolls and Biblical narratives.

Week by Week Outline

Week 1:

- a. The Biblical creation story and similar stories from other cultures, ancient and modern
- b. The Astrophysics creation story and our expanding universe
- c. The six days of creation and how they correlate, or not, with Astrophysics
- d. Conclusion: which is supported by facts?

Week 2:

- a. The Biblical flood story and similar stories from other cultures, ancient and modern
- b. The geological evidence for ancient floods
- c. The correlation of the geological evidence with the Biblical and other flood stories
- d. Conclusion: did it really happen (spoiler alert: a definite maybe)

Week 3:

- a. The Patriarchs: their historical, political and cultural setting
- b. Hebrews, Hurrians, and Habiru
- c. Abraham the Hurrian vs. Abraham the Habiru
- d. Conclusion: Who were the Patriarchs, really?

Week 4:

- a. The Israelites in Egypt: the extra-Biblical evidence and correlation with Egyptian history
- b. Egyptian historical references to slave revolts and exoduses
- c. Archeological evidence of Israelites in Egypt
- d. Conclusion: Is there evidence of the Israelite exodus? (spoiler alert: a definite maybe)

Week 5:

- a. Saul, David, Solomon, and their historical, political and cultural setting
- b. Extra-Biblical evidence for the Davidic dynasty
- c. Extra-Biblical evidence for the Northern kingdom
- d. Extra-Biblical evidence for the kingdom of Judea
- e. Conclusion: the historicity and persistence of the Davidic dynasty

Week 6:

- a. Historical sources for the end of the Biblical period to the birth of Jesus
- b. The Roman occupation and millennial madness
- c. The Dead Sea Scrolls, Nag Hamadi Papyri, Ebionites and Gnostics
- d. Conclusion: The historical Jesus and the Pauline revolution

Objectives of the Course

Introduce to participants the complexity of the conundrums surrounding well known Biblical events and personages, and to the process whereby an in-depth survey of the extra-Biblical evidence related to these conundrums can cast much elucidating light upon the Biblical accounts.

Bibliography will be provided for each session.