

Archeology Vindicates the T'enach!

"Thy word is true from the beginning." Psalm 119:160

By Siegfried H. Horn

The northern Kingdom of Israel passed through a severe religious crisis under the reign of Ahab. Jezebel, his wife, a strongheaded Phoenician princess, tried with all the power at her disposal to introduce the worship of Baal and Asherah to Israel. The prophets of Jehovah were persecuted and killed to make room for hundreds of Baal and Asherah priests, who received official recognition in the state. Although a hundred prophets of Jehovah were saved by Obadiah (1 Kings 18:4) and seven thousand people did not accept the pagan Baal religion (1 Kings 19:18), the true religion of Jehovah was almost stamped out. God raised up one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament, Elijah, to meet this crisis. If it had not been for his work and that of his followers the kingdom of Israel might have perished a hundred years earlier than it actually did.

The archaeological discoveries have shed on Ahab's reign some light that supports the Biblical report. In the ruins of the palace storehouse of Samaria were found more than sixty notes that had accompanied tax deliveries of oil and wine, coming from a time shortly after Ahab's reign. They were written with ink on potsherds, and escaped in this way the fate of all other documents

written on perishable material, which were destroyed in the conflagration of the city when it was captured by the Assyrians. These notes mention the date of delivery, the place from where the products came, their quantity, and the names of the taxpayers as well as of the receiving officers. A typical note reads thus:

"In the tenth year. To Gaddiyau. From Azah.

	Jars of old wine
Abi-baal	2
Ahaz	2
Sheba	1
Meri-baal	1

These seemingly insignificant potsherds have great value. They allow us to get a glimpse of the administrative organization of the kingdom of Israel, and they show us what type of script, orthography, and vocabulary was in use during the time of Elijah. Their greatest importance, however, lies in the personal names, inasmuch as they reveal to us the religious trends prevailing. The Semites always bore meaningful names and liked to connect the names of their gods with the names they gave to their children. On the thirty personal names found on these tax notes from



Samaria, seven are compounds with Baal, as for instance the afore-mentioned Abi-baal, meaning “Baal is my father” and eight names are compound with Jehovah, as Gaddiyau, “My fortune is Jehovah.” This shows that the followers of Jehovah were not extinct, although Baal worship had made great inroads.

Names on Potsherds

One of the eight names connected with Jehovah found on the Samaria Potsherds warrants a special mention. This name, Egelyau, means “Jehovah is a calf,” and reminds us of the two calves that Jeroboam had set up as idols in the two national sanctuaries at Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12:28-33). Jehovah had been made into an idol and was understood to be one by every Israelite. One of them called his son “Jehovah is a calf.”

The Bible mentions as a special cultural achievement of Ahab’s reign an “ivory house” that he built at Samaria (1 Kings 22:39). For a long time it was not very clear what this meant. Did he build a house entirely of ivory, was it adorned or paneled with ivory, or was it painted in ivory color, which gave its name to the building? These were some of the questions asked by Bible commentators until a few years ago. The last excavations of Samaria carried out a few years ago before World War II finally solved the riddle.

The excavators found in the debris of the palace area numerous fragments of beautifully carved ivory plaques that must once have covered the walls and furniture of Ahab’s ivory house. This discovery reminded scholars of similar fragments found ninety years earlier by Layard at Nimrud (the ancient Kalah), one of the principal Assyrian cities.

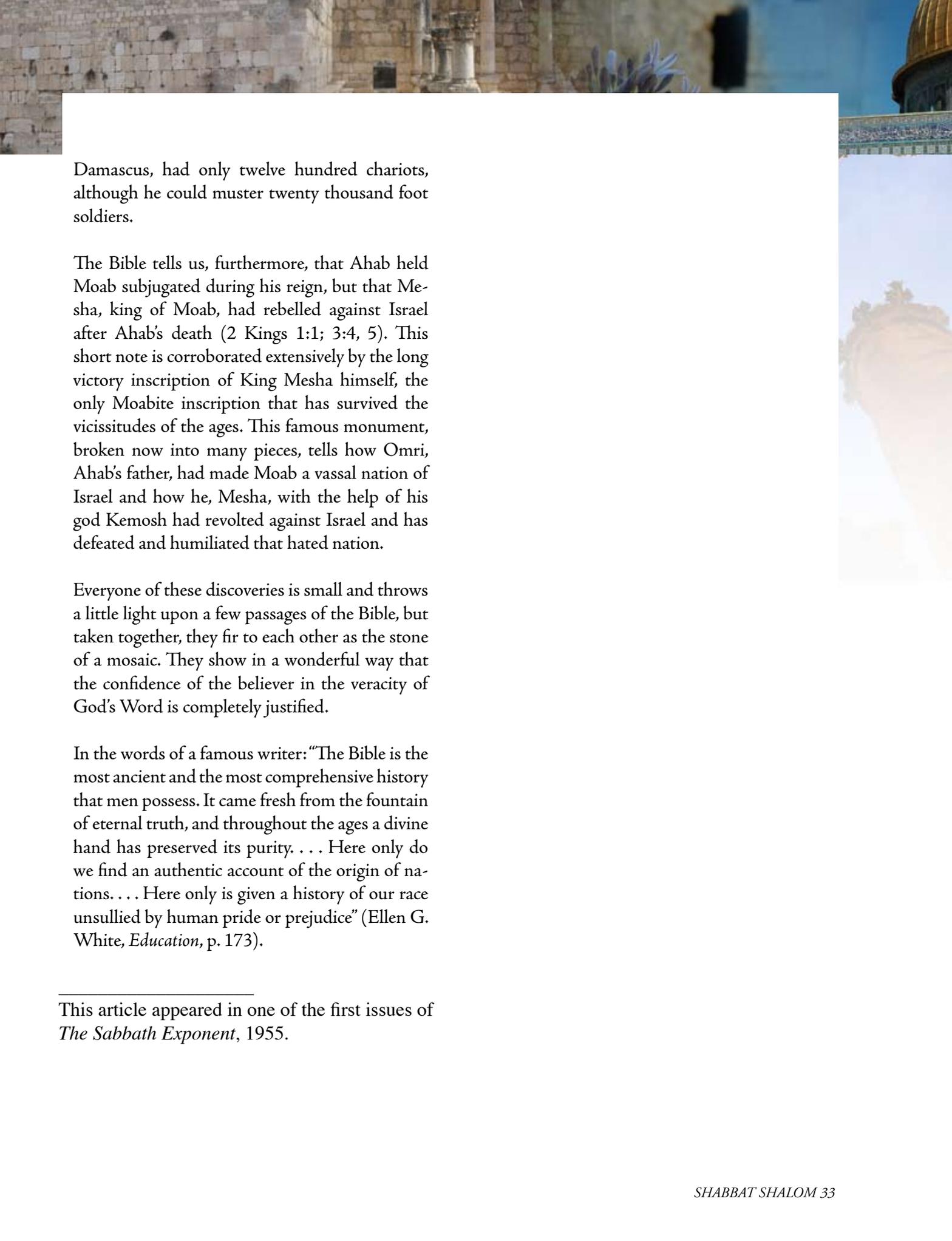
Ahab was the son of a warrior king, Omri, who had begun his career as an army commander of

the preceding ruler (1 Kings 16:16). The Bible is not very eloquent concerning the deeds of this singularly wicked king (1 Kings 16:25), but gives him credit for selecting the mount of Samaria for his kingdom’s new capital (1 Kings 16:24), a place that was of great strategic value to its inhabitants.

Samaria occupied one of the finest sites in Palestine, set on a low hill in the middle of a wide cup, bordered on all sides by mountains at a considerable distance, though with a distant view of the sea to the west. The wisdom of this choice was demonstrated in its subsequent history. The city was never taken by storm. Benhadad blockaded it and nearly took it by starvation (2 Kings 6:24 to 7:20), and in the final struggle of Israel with the Assyrians the city fell only after a long siege of three years.

That Omri had contacts with Assyria and appeared to them to be a strong ruler must be concluded from the fact that from his time forward the Assyrian records speak usually of the kings of Israel as “belonging to the house of Omri” and of their land as “Omriland.” Their designation was used up to the end of the kingdom, when Omri’s dynasty had given way to other dynasties.

Ahab, his son, followed in the footsteps of his famous wicked father. That he was a formidable warrior whose army was not to be despised we learn, not only from the Bible, but also from the Assyrian records. Shalmaneser III, a powerful Assyrian king, fought and won a battle at Karkar in Syria against a coalition of twelve Syrian, Phoenician, and Palestinian kings in 854 B.C. In the numerous records of this battle Shalmaneser tells us that “Ahab the Israelite,” one of the opponents, had the strongest army of the coalition with ten thousand foot soldiers and two thousand chariots. The next powerful king, Hadadzezer of



Damascus, had only twelve hundred chariots, although he could muster twenty thousand foot soldiers.

The Bible tells us, furthermore, that Ahab held Moab subjugated during his reign, but that Meshah, king of Moab, had rebelled against Israel after Ahab's death (2 Kings 1:1; 3:4, 5). This short note is corroborated extensively by the long victory inscription of King Meshah himself, the only Moabite inscription that has survived the vicissitudes of the ages. This famous monument, broken now into many pieces, tells how Omri, Ahab's father, had made Moab a vassal nation of Israel and how he, Meshah, with the help of his god Kemosh had revolted against Israel and has defeated and humiliated that hated nation.

Everyone of these discoveries is small and throws a little light upon a few passages of the Bible, but taken together, they fit to each other as the stone of a mosaic. They show in a wonderful way that the confidence of the believer in the veracity of God's Word is completely justified.

In the words of a famous writer: "The Bible is the most ancient and the most comprehensive history that men possess. It came fresh from the fountain of eternal truth, and throughout the ages a divine hand has preserved its purity. . . . Here only do we find an authentic account of the origin of nations. . . . Here only is given a history of our race unsullied by human pride or prejudice" (Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 173).

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