

Dever, William G. *Has Archaeology Buried the Bible?* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020. 168 pp. Hardcover. USD 25.99.

How historical are the Hebrew writings? In biblical scholarship, the answer to this question depends on one's ideological commitments. On one side, there are scholars of the so-called minimalistic school who see no historical or factual value in the biblical text (e.g., Thomas W. Davis, *Shifting Sands: The Rise and Fall of Biblical Archaeology* [Oxford University Press, 2004]). On the other hand, generally speaking, maximalists defend the historicity of the Hebrew text (e.g., Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* [Westminster John Knox Press, 2015]). These extreme positions have battled ideologically against each other. William G. Dever's new book proposes an alternative approach to doing archaeology and biblical studies, arguing mainly from what is found on/in the ground. According to him, a rereading of the biblical text through the lenses of archaeological data must guide this dialogue.

Dever suggests that interpreters of the Bible need to realize that there are two viewpoints of history, one from the texts that eventually became the HB, and one from archaeology. The first is a less literal and more idealistic version of the past presented by "the elites who wrote and edited the Hebrew Bible—right-wing, orthodox, nationalist parties and the literati in Jerusalem" (125). This version of history is not so much about how it was but how the prevalent orthodoxy of YAWHISM thought it should have been within ancient Israel. This history is viewed as mainly composed and edited during the seventh century BCE by religious reformers who realized after the exile Israel's painful mistakes. The second historiography, more realistic in Dever's view, comes from the data collected through various excavations from multiple sites dating to the same time period the authors of the HB attempted to describe given their agenda. This approach is more realistic because the evidence comes from the masses/people who inhabited the land and left evidence of their lives. Dever thinks that reconstructing the past in this way is less biased. In his words, "We can make the Bible more credible by seeing beyond its few elite authors to the lives of the masses of people who were also part of the Biblical world. These are those, to turn a phrase from the book of Daniel, 'who sleep in the dust'" (142). Using an allegorical method of interpretation, Dever suggests there is a possible way to discern between fiction, historical truth, and practical application. In my opinion, he challenges the minimalist's complete distrust of the biblical text and avoids the extreme literalism of the maximalists.

To accomplish this discriminatory task of distinguishing facts from embellishments in the biblical narrative, Dever first scrutinizes the text, then he presents the archaeology related to a given story, and finally, he tries to synthesize both. He follows a chronological sequence as presented in Scripture, starting from the patriarchs (Abraham, Moses, Joshua, etc.), and continuing

through the period of the monarchy (Books of Kings and Chronicles). In each section, he challenges both notions—the absolute historical and nonhistorical validity of the text—giving credence to both possibilities if informed by archaeological evidence. In the end, the litmus test is the interpretation of the once buried artifacts from the biblical lands. So for Dever, the book of Judges presents a more accurate portrayal of the actual situation within Israel during the Early Iron Age (from 1200 to 1000 BCE). However, the books of Exodus, Numbers, and Joshua are primarily composed of “stupendous [historically unreliable] miracles and...[equally fictitious stories] of genocide” (66). This is not to say that all the textual references are historically inaccurate. But instead, using archaeology, he thinks he can distinguish between what is factual and what is not in his understanding of the text.

One of Dever’s main arguments is the danger of absolute claims when dealing with ancient texts like the HB. This absolutism can come from either side of the argument. For example, minimalists have prematurely “killed” David and Solomon (e.g., Philip R. Davies, “‘House of David’ Built on Sand,” *BAR* 20.4 [1994]: 54–55) only to later encounter the problem generated by the appearance of the Tel Dan Stela. Similarly, some argued that the author of Daniel did not know who was governing Babylon during its fall in 539 BCE because he wrote *ex post facto* (since all records pointed to Nabonidus and not Belshazzar). Yet, thanks to further textual evidence, we know the author knew more than his later critics (see Clyde E. Fant and Mitchell G. Reddish, *Lost Treasures of the Bible: Understanding the Bible through Archaeological Artifacts in World Museums* [Eerdmans, 2008], 234). On the other side of the spectrum also, absolute claims are not scarce. Some have gone to great lengths to suggest that they can identify the Egyptian princess who took Moses under her care based upon their interpretation of archaeological and chronological data (e.g., James Feather, “The Princess Who Rescued Moses: Who Was She?” *ExpTim* 43.2 [1932]: 423–425). Dever correctly points in the direction of being careful about absolute claims without strong evidence. We would certainly do well to remember that the “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence” or that the way one interprets the evidence does not necessarily support the evidence verifying one’s interpretation. Caution and openness to criticism are a warranty in good scholarship.

Dever’s second strong argument is about the necessity of the interaction between the text and the artifact. Regarding the prophetic writings, Dever correctly asserts that “archaeology has supplied a real-life context for many prophetic utterances that were long thought to be vague and therefore lacking real thrust” (122). The amount of archaeological data collected in recent decades has much enhanced the understanding of the biblical text. However, and in partial contrast with Dever’s main argument of rereading the text solely through the lenses of archaeology, equally important is our use of the text to interpret archaeological data. A prime example is the conundrum of associat-

ing excavation sites with biblical places. There are many examples of how recent archaeological discoveries have illuminated the biblical text, like the mention of the Levites in the book of Judges alongside the current excavations at Shiloh and the recent discovery of the *Yeruba'al* (Gideon) inscription from Khirbet al-Ra'I, (e.g., Rollston, Christopher, Yosef Garfinkel, Kyle H. Keimer, Gillan Davis, and Saar Ganor, "The *Jerubba'al* Inscription from *Khirbet al-Ra'i*: A Proto-Canaanite (Early Alphabetic) Inscription," *Jerusalem Journal of Archaeology* 2 [2021]:1–15). Archaeology adds context to the text, and the text adds context to the archaeological finds. Thus, the reading and interpretation of texts and artifacts are not one-way. Archaeological finds should also be interpreted in light of the textual evidence in a legitimate dialogue.

Though I do not agree with all the synthesis Dever suggests in his book, I consider his proposal for an open dialogue between biblical archaeology and textual studies as a balanced way forward. Here I would just highlight the problematic method of reading the text allegorically to fit with one's interpretation of the current archaeological data. Of course, literalism and idealism are not the best method either. While one may disagree with Dever on his presuppositions on the text's authority, historical reliability, and origin of composition, a critical and open-minded reader will find this survey of archaeology valuable. He again succeeds in bringing together biblical text and its archaeological context. He also succeeds at highlighting the timeless and universal nature of the principles found in the text, indicating to the reader why the biblical message is still relevant. While neither the traditionalist nor the nihilist will be satisfied with his proposal, those willing to momentarily place their preconceptions aside will find Dever's attempt to understand the relationship between the artifact and the text beneficial. That does not mean they will agree with the specific applicability of his method, but it does provide a positive way to start or continue the conversation between these two disciplines.

Raymore, Missouri

ABELARDO RIVAS

Doak, Brian R. *Ancient Israel's Neighbors*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020. 211 pp. Paperback. USD 24.95.

Brian Doak, author of *Ancient Israel's Neighbors*, has been a pastor, holds a PhD from Harvard University in Near Eastern languages and civilizations, and has worked on an archaeological excavation in Israel. He is currently vice president of George Fox Digital and a professor of biblical studies at George Fox University, where he teaches courses on ancient language, the HB and literature, history of interpretation, comparative religion in the ancient world, iconography, archaeology, and history of the ancient Near East. This book is