

BOOK REVIEW

Title: *The Stones Cry Out*

Author: Randall Price

Publisher: Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1997

Reviewer: Father Mark B. Beesley, St. Louis, MO

God tends toward the simple things of the world—the common things. Think about how He uses water. So abundant, it blankets two-thirds of the planet and yet with it God can wash away our sins and deliver new birth. Or how about the oil of Christ? This simple substance is so commonplace—it fills our lamps and cooking and yet, with the presence of the Holy Spirit it becomes the oil of gladness sealing our Baptism. And what of bread and wine? Are they not so routine that we hardly give them notice? And yet, through these modest things, our loving Savior communicates to us His redeeming Body and Blood. Because God uses the humble and lowly things of the world for His holy purpose, it should be no surprise that salvation history is given witness by means of old rocks and potsherds.

In his book, *The Stones Cry Out*, Randall Price lures us into the world of Biblical archaeology with the suggestion that “tangible things can assist faith in its growth towards God” (Price 1997, 28)—and, indeed, they do. While the verity of our most holy Orthodox faith stands on its own, the material remains of ages past offer an intriguing glimpse into the foreign world of the patriarchs, prophets and apostles. By taking something of a chronological walk through the evidence, Price offers up a smorgasbord of facts and insights into the Biblical record including the lives of the Patriarchs, the Exodus, the conquest of Canaan, St. David, the Ark of the Covenant and more.

The Stones Cry Out begins with the author’s own estimation of Biblical archaeology and its value for contemporary Biblical studies. “The proper use of archaeology in relation to the Bible,” notes Price, “is to confirm, correct, clarify, and compliment the Bible’s theological message” (Price 1997, 35). It is an uncommon view during a time when many claiming to teach theology believe the Scriptures to be little more than the remnant of an ancient myth. Price is forthright about the limitations of archaeology and the considerable dearth of archaeological evidence, but he is confident that future excavations will continue to fill-in the historical voids.

One example from the book involves the famously iniquitous cities, Sodom and Gomorrah. Several references to the ancient cities appear in Scripture, but to modern Biblical scholars their existence was nothing more than an ancient canard, a fabrication of Israelite storytellers. But beginning in 1924, the renowned archaeologist, W.F. Albright, began a search for the cities at the southern end of the Dead Sea, believing that they might be buried underwater south of the Lisan peninsula. During his search, Albright discovered evidence of a heavily fortified community on the eastern shore of Transjordan at a site known in Arabic as Beb edh-Dhra. The remains included houses, walled buildings, numerous cemeteries and artifacts indicating a large population had once lived there. But failing to find a layer of debris suggesting destruction, Albright considered the site only a place of sacred pilgrimage.

Later excavations in 1965, 1967 and 1973, revealed a fortification wall 23 foot thick around the city along with towers and a Canaanite temple. Outside of the city, they found evidence of a large cemetery with thousands of human remains—one tomb held about 250 individuals along with a wealth of burial artifacts. Archaeologists also found evidence of a vast destruction by fire—the site was covered by a layer of ash many feet thick. There are many reasons why an ancient city might be destroyed by fire, not the least of which is an enemy attack. But why attack a cemetery far outside the city? Curiously, they discovered that the buildings burned from the *inside-out*. Further study revealed that the fire did not begin on the inside, but began on the roof. When the fire had burned through the roof, it entered and spread through the rest of the structure.

Archaeologist Bryant Wood concluded that the evidence is hard to explain naturally. Possibilities might include an accident or an earthquake causing a fire to spread or even a conqueror setting the city on fire. But the compelling evidence, according to Wood and other archaeologists, is best explained by the epic fire and brimstone destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. So, it would seem, the cities existed after all!

The Stones Cry Out is filled with fascinating evidence in support of the Biblical record. Writing from an Evangelical perspective, however, the author is very eager to confirm Biblical revelation with archaeological “proofs.” The Protestant “Scripture alone” bias is also hard to miss. So for Price, archaeology is an essential science for establishing the Bible’s believability. To his credit, however, he is quick to say, “If you wait for archaeological proof of the Bible before you’re willing to begin considering the Bible as trustworthy, you will wait beyond your lifetime” (Price 1997, 344).

The book is engaging and delightful to read and, best of all, it allows the reader to wade into the pool of Biblical Archaeology at the shallow end. Because we are not overwhelmed by archaeological minutiae, the author lets us rejoice in the tangible evidences, which support our Orthodox faith and lets us give thanks to God for such earthy things as old rocks and potsherds.