

## ~ACTS~

## Lesson 26- True and False Converts

As we began chapter 8 last week, we saw the persecution from Saul of Tarsus scatter the Church from Jerusalem, but what the enemy meant for evil, God turned it for good because these winds of persecution planted the Seed of the Word all over the world. And last week we saw the Gospel spread up to Samaria, and this week we will continue to see it spread all the way down to Ethiopia and in doing so, Luke makes a comparison between true and false converts.

Last week we ended when the power of the Holy Spirit was given to Samaria in verse 17, and standing by is a sorcerer named Simon Magus who is seeing the True power of God at work. Simon was a magician working in Samaria, and he had been deceiving the people with his sorcery and witchcraft until the Philip brings the Truth of the Gospel to the people of Samaria. And at that point, they stop following Simon and they turn to Jesus, Acts 8:9-12. As a result, Simon loses his business, and in desperation pretends to be converted to Christianity, but as we are going to quickly see, this was not a genuine conversion. It was only a ploy to gain the power of God for his own personal gain, **Acts 8:9-17**.

**18-19)** <sup>18</sup> And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, <sup>19</sup> saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

Here, Simon the sorcerer's heart is exposed. He has no interest in repentance and humbling himself to Jesus as Lord. He is just using this as another way to elevate himself. He had been deceiving people through magic. Performing signs and wonders through demonic influence, claiming that he is "the power of God." But now he is confronted with the True Power of God, and he wants to buy it for himself, Ezek 22:27. But Peter through the power of the Holy Spirit exposes his hypocrisy and he responds in verses 20-23...

**20-23)** <sup>20</sup> But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! <sup>21</sup> You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. <sup>22</sup> Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. <sup>23</sup> For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

Peter makes it very clear that Simon was not a true Christian. He only wanted the power of God for selfish gain. Peter makes four statements that reveal the true nature of his heart...

- 1) Your money perish with you... (perish- destruction, Matt 7:13, perdition, 2 Pet 3:7; Rev 17:8. Literally... Your money go to hell with you)
- 2) You have neither part nor portion in this matter (matter- Logos. You have no inheritance in the True Word of God)
- 3) Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you
- 4) You are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity

Clearly Simon Magus is not a Christian and notice his response to Peter. There is no repentance or ownership of his sin. In fact, it seems as though he may even be responding with a mocking sarcasm...

**24)** Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."

Peter just told him in verse 22 that he should repent and pray to God to be forgiven, but his response is that of mockery... "You pray to the Lord for me..." There is no humility, no contrite heart, there is no repentance, he is just mocking Peter and mocking God.

After this, there is no other mention of him in the book of Acts. But there are several records in church history about the life of Simon Magus. Sources such as Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* - Book 1 chapter 23; Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*- chapter 26; and Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 2.1.11-12; 2.13-15.

Irenaeus- *Against Heresies*- Book 1 chapter 23:1, 4

1. He, then, not putting faith in God a whit the more, set himself eagerly to contend against the apostles, in order that he himself might seem to be a wonderful being, and applied himself with still greater zeal to the study of the whole magic art, that he might the better bewilder and overpower multitudes of men. Such was his procedure in the reign of Claudius Cæsar, by whom also he is said to have been honoured with a statue, on account of his magical power. This man, then, was glorified by many as if he were a god; ... He represented himself, in a word, as being the loftiest of all powers, that is, the Being who is the Father over all, and he allowed himself to be called by whatsoever title men were pleased to address him.

4. They also have an image of Simon fashioned after the likeness of Jupiter, and another of Helena in the shape of Minerva; and these they worship. In fine, they have a name derived from Simon, the author of these most impious doctrines, being called Simonians; and from them "knowledge, falsely so called," received its beginning, as one may learn even from their own assertions.

Irenaeus describes Simon Magus and his followers as the founders of Gnosticism.

Peter, being filled with the Spirit and having a knowledge of the Truth of the God's Word is able to expose this evil and not allow him into the Fellowship. Just as 1 John 2:18–19 says, "<sup>8</sup> *Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.* <sup>9</sup> *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that not all of them were of us.*" Not all who say they are Christians are truly Christians... As Jesus says, "*You will know them by their fruit,*" Matt 7:16. Because the fruit comes from the heart not the mouth. That's why John warns us of the "if we sayers" in his first epistle, 1 John 1:8, 10; 2:3, 6, 9, 15-17- lovers of the world; 2:26; 3:10; 4:1-3. The NT is full of warnings against wolves in sheep's clothing and I would go so far as to say even wolves in shepherd's clothing. Therefore, guard your heart with the Truth.

After exposing Simon of his heresies, Peter and John return to Jerusalem, verse 25...

**25) So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.**

Nothing can stop the preaching of the Gospel; not persecution or false converts, or demon possessed heretics, because God is greater than all these and He is faithful to His Word, and He is faithful to those who proclaim His Word to the end, 1 John 4:4.

Therefore, with the Word of God being given to the Samaritans, God calls Philip to leave Samaria and go to the desert. Luke is now giving a contrast between true and false conversions. Obviously, Simon the sorcerer was a false convert, a wolf who only wanted the power of God for selfish gain. But now Luke makes the contrast, comparing the true conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch.

**26) Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert.**

From the human perspective, this probably didn't make any logical sense to Philip. There are hundreds, if not thousands of brand-new converts in Samaria, but God tells Philip to leave all of them and go to the desert. This just shows how important even one soul is to God and His purposes. And look at Philip's faithfulness and obedience. He doesn't argue, he just goes, verse 27...

**27) So he arose and went...**

Philip is completely trusting God, being led of the Spirit, and he leaves Samaria and heads south past Jerusalem to the road leading to Gaza. And God is providentially working this out for Philip to meet the Ethiopian eunuch on the way. The Bible doesn't tell us much about the origins of this Ethiopian eunuch, but verse 27 gives us a couple of clues...

**27) So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship,**

He was a eunuch which means he was castrated to be a servant in the king's household. He served the Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians. This name "Candace" is a title for a queen, like a Pharaoh or Czar. She was the queen mother of Ethiopia, and her son was the king. But the king was confined to the palace, while the queen mother ruled the kingdom. The Ethiopian eunuch was a servant with **great authority under the Candace queen and he was in charge of all her treasury**. So this is a high official of Ethiopia, the royal treasurer of the queen. This isn't some lonely nomad making a long trip by himself. He would have had a caravan of servants along with him. Ethiopia in the first century was a very large kingdom, it was ruled by the Aksum Dynasty which began in the first century and lasted for nearly 1,000 years. The area stretched from Egypt to the southern point of the Red Sea. To travel from Aksum to Jerusalem would be over 1,500 miles and take 2-3 months to travel.

Who was this Ethiopian? Some scholars say this Ethiopian eunuch was the first Gentile convert. But I disagree with this because Luke says the Ethiopian came to worship at Jerusalem. So this tells us a he wasn't a Gentile. Plus, Peter makes it very clear at the Jerusalem Council that the Gospel came to the Gentiles through his mouth with Cornelius, Acts 15:7.

Other scholars say this Ethiopian could have been a proselyte, a Gentile who became a Jew by following all the Jewish rites and laws, but I personally don't think he was a Gentile or even a proselyte who came to the Jewish faith because it is my conjecture, based on things we are going to learn today, that he was a full Jew from Jewish origin and a descendant of Abraham. So, the question is, how is this possible to have an Ethiopian Jew? And how did the Jews come to live in Ethiopia?

The Jews had a lot of dealings with the people of Ethiopia. Ethiopia is mentioned 39 times in the Bible and this country plays a prominent role in Jewish history. There were many opportunities for the Jews to have migrated into Ethiopia. Some Ethiopian Jews today claim descendancy from Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, although there is no Biblical proof to that story other than that *Solomon gave her all that her heart desired*, 1 Kings 10:13, but we're not sure what that all entailed. But we know for certain that Moses had an Ethiopian wife. That is clear from Numbers 12:1, and the Jews certainly could have migrated to Ethiopia on account of the Diaspora from the Babylonian invasion, Acts 2:8-11. And another conjecture to the Ethiopian-Jewish heritage is according to Ethiopian history and archaeological evidence, there may have been Jews who traveled from Jerusalem to Egypt and then eventually settled in Ethiopia in an effort to the guard the ark of the covenant from king Manasseh and later from the destruction of the Babylonian invasion. Because it is very clear from Scripture that during the reign of Manasseh, the ark was taken out of the temple and there is no record of it ever returning.

But however the Jews found their way down to Ethiopia, it is clear that there has been, and there is still today, Ethiopian Jews who are descendant from the lineage of Abraham. According to a recent news article from Manara Magazine, a magazine for Middle East and North Africa politics \*, they write, "*In 1977, the Israeli Parliament voted to grant the Beta Israel (Ethiopian Jews) the right to come to Israel under the 'Law of Return', which granted all Jews sanctuary in the country.* And today there are around 160,000 Ethiopian Jews living in the nation of Israel as Israeli citizens.

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\* [manaramagazine.org/2022/03/in-the-borderlines-the-status-of-ethiopian-jews-in-israel/](https://manaramagazine.org/2022/03/in-the-borderlines-the-status-of-ethiopian-jews-in-israel/)

So it's clear that there were Ethiopian Jews living in Ethiopia during the time of Jesus. I believe this Ethiopian eunuch is a God-fearing Jew coming to Jerusalem to worship. But I think he is coming to Jerusalem to do more than just worship in the temple. I believe he is coming to worship the Messiah and present a gift to Him. Because according to **Isaiah 18:7**, Ethiopia is prophesied to bring a gift to the Messiah when He comes. What is this gift? We don't know exactly what this gift could be. Some suggest it could be the ark of the covenant that Ethiopia has been guarding, but in any case, it is possible that this gift could be the reason for the Ethiopian's visit to Jerusalem, to find the Messiah and present this gift to Him. This would explain the reason why such an important man and his caravan of servants would go to such lengths to make the trip from Ethiopia to Jerusalem. I believe this man was making this trip to meet the Messiah.

So Ethiopia receives word that the Messiah has come, and the Candace Queen of Ethiopia sends the Ethiopian eunuch, her entrusted royal treasurer, and in my opinion, a God-fearing Jew, to check to see if it is time for the prophecy to be fulfilled. The eunuch travels with his caravan to Jerusalem as an Ethiopian Jew coming to worship the Messiah, Acts 8:27, and to see if the stories were true. Had the Messiah really come? Is it time for the prophecy of Isaiah to be fulfilled? The prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled, but just not the one he was expecting, Isaiah 53 not Isaiah 18. So, when he gets there, probably around the Day of Pentecost, things are not as he expects. He discovers the Messiah has been crucified and risen from the dead, but He is not on the earth anymore. This confuses the Ethiopian eunuch. He heard the Messiah has come, but it doesn't line up with his expectations. So he decides to head back to Ethiopia confused, but through God's providential Hand, He leads the eunuch to start reading Isaiah 53, which is the best place in the Old Testament to explain the fulfillment of the suffering Messiah. And in addition, God sends Philip to preach Jesus to him and guide him into the Truth of the Messiah.

So that brings us back to Acts 8:28-31...

**28-31)** <sup>28</sup> was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. <sup>29</sup> Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot." <sup>30</sup> So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" <sup>31</sup> And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.

Notice the eagerness of Philip. As soon as the Spirit told him to go to the chariot, Philip **ran to him**. Philip hears the man reading the Prophet Isaiah. Philip asks him if he understands what he is reading. The man asks for help and invites him into his chariot, and that's all the opening Philip needed. Isn't it amazing how God set this whole thing up?

**32-35)** <sup>32</sup> The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He opened not His mouth. <sup>33</sup> In His humiliation His justice was taken away, And who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth." <sup>34</sup> So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" <sup>35</sup> Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.

The eunuch was reading specifically from Isaiah 53:7-8LXX, and Philip preaches Jesus to him. Isaiah 53 is considered the gospel of the Old Testament. It so perfectly describes what Jesus did for us on the cross. That He was the vicarious substitutionary sacrifice who bore the Righteous wrath of God for our sins. And it even describes His resurrection from the dead and the inheritance we have as children of God. It's all in those twelve verses of **Isaiah 53**. This one text answers all his questions and speaks life to him.

**36)** Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?"



Philip preached Jesus to him, and he obviously told him about water baptism because this man is ready to be baptized at the first sign of water.

**37) Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”**

Notice that water baptism is NOT what saved him. It was his faith in Jesus Christ that saved him, and the water baptism was an outward confession of the faith in his heart. So, Philip tells him, **“If you believe with all your heart, you may.”** That is the answer to eternal life, to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God who came to this earth as propitiation for our sins, and He has risen from the dead for our Justification. This is saving faith. Placing your entire trust and reliance in Jesus Christ for eternal salvation. Now look at the man’s response to his faith in verse 38...

**38) So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.**

The eunuch is the one in charge of this caravan and he tells them to stop. Everybody is looking at him, but he doesn’t care who knows. He jumps into the water unashamedly because this is the most important decision of his life. Verse 39 confirms that Philip’s work is done with the eunuch...

**39) Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.**

This word “caught away” is the word *harpazo*. The same word we see in 1 Thess 4:17 referring to the “rapture.” God snatches Philip away and transports him up north about 25 miles to another city. Why did God do this? Why didn’t he just let him walk? Why did He snatch him away to another city? This is just my opinion, but I think this is God giving His confirmation of a job well done. This is like in the Old Testament when they would offer their sacrifices and then fire from heaven would come down and burn up the sacrifice, confirming that God was pleased with the sacrifice. That’s what comes to mind here with Philip. God is pleased with Philip’s LIVING sacrifice. He has been so obedient to the Lord and now as a result, the Spirit catches Philip away.

And notice the eunuch’s response... **he went on his way rejoicing.** This was the same reaction in Samaria, Acts 8:8, **“there was great joy in the city.”** There is always great joy in receiving the Gospel. This Ethiopian man went up to Jerusalem planning to give the Messiah a gift, but instead he discovered that the Messiah gave him the greatest gift of all, Eternal Life in His blood. And the eunuch **went on his way rejoicing**, taking this gift of grace, the Words of Eternal Life back to Ethiopia. And now today, 67% of the Ethiopian population is of the Christian faith, and it all started with this one Ethiopian man and his encounter with the Gospel.

**40) But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.**

Philip finds himself just north in Azotus (Ashdod). And he continues preaching the Gospel, εὐαγγελίζω, evangelizing in all the cities until he makes his way to Caesarea. The next time we see Philip in the book of Acts is about 26 years later in Acts 21:8. Luke calls him, Philip the Evangelist, and we find he is still living in Caesarea, and he has four daughters, but still being the faithful obedient evangelist working for Jesus Christ.

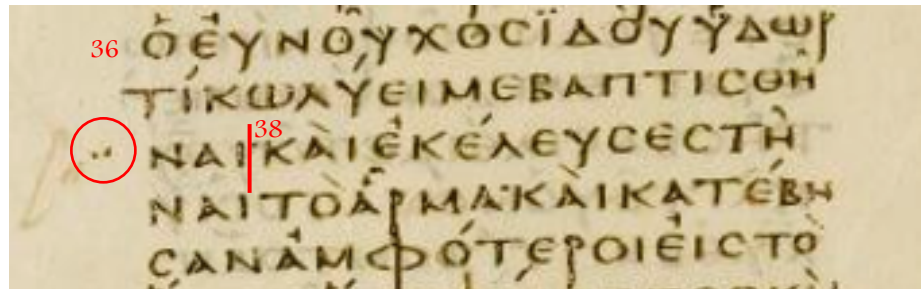
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I want to bring your attention back up to verse 37 because if you are reading any version of the Bible other than a KJV or a NKJV, verse 37 is not in your Bible or it has brackets around it saying that the oldest Greek manuscripts do not contain this verse. And the reason why these Alexandrian codices don’t have

this verse is because the Gnostics were trying to corrupt the Bible and take out key verses that speak primarily about the deity of Jesus as the Christ and our Savior.

Therefore, all modern translations that use the Alexandrian codices as their basis for translation rather than the Byzantine texts, namely the Textus Receptus, are missing these verses. These manuscripts have been dated as the earliest manuscripts closest to the originals, but that does not make them the best. But recently there has been a discovery by Philip Payne concerning the oldest Greek NT manuscript to date, namely the Codex Vaticanus. This manuscript dates back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, 325AD, and is considered to be the closest example of the Greek NT simply because it is the oldest, but that is far from the Truth.

In 1995 a scholar named Philip Payne happened to notice two little dots continually showing up in the margin of this Bible, and as he dug into this, he realized that these were scribal indicators notating a textual variant within the text. This is a picture of Acts 8:37 and if you



**Codex Vaticanus: Acts 8:37 omitted from text**

study the words, you will find that verse 37 has been omitted from this Bible, but notice these two little dots in the margin. These are scribal indicators that notate a textual variant in the manuscript. Meaning that everywhere this copy has differed from other copies of Greek manuscripts, the scribe indicated this variant by placing these two dots called “umlauts” in the margin. And there just so happens to be two little dots right next to where verse 37 is supposed to be, proving that in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, this scribe knew there were other earlier Greek manuscripts that did in fact contain these missing verses.

There happen to be about 750 places where these dots appear in this Codex, 750 places where the scribe notated a textual variant, and in most cases, these variants agree with the Textus Receptus. Proving that these missing verses were omitted in these Alexandrian texts. Up until this discovery, the earliest manuscripts of the Textus Receptus were from the 6<sup>th</sup> century. So the claim from pro-Alexandrian scholars is that the Byzantine texts added these verses in later, instead of them being omitted. But now these dots indicate that there were Greek manuscripts, contemporary with this Codex Vaticanus, and even older manuscripts at that time that agreed with the Textus Receptus. Proving that the Textus Receptus is in fact the pure words of the New Testament. And the KJV and NKJV are the only English translations that are translated from the Textus Receptus.

It is so ironic that the very manuscript that the pro-Alexandrian scholars hold in such high regard as better than any other example of the Greek NT is the very document that proves them wrong.

## The Journey of the Ark into Ethiopia

According to scholars and Ethiopian history, the ark of the covenant came to Elephantine Island in southern Egypt, and then later traveled south into Ethiopia. And there is archeological evidence and written documentation of a Jewish civilization and a Jewish temple that was located on Elephantine Island. And then when you compare these with the events in the Bible, specifically tracking the location of the ark, it starts to tell a story. The journey of the ark first begins with Moses when he received the design from God on Mount Sinai, Hebrews 8:5; Ex 25:9-22. The ark is easy to track from the point that Moses builds the ark until it is placed in Solomon's temple, and it is clear that the ark remains in the temple through king Hezekiah's reign, 2 Chron 32. But after Hezekiah it seems to have been moved out of the temple because in 2 Chronicles 35:3, Josiah requests to have the ark brought back to the temple. So what happened in between Hezekiah and Josiah that would make them remove the ark from the temple? Well, some pretty terrible things.

Manasseh was the king of Judah in between Hezekiah and Josiah, and it is recorded in 2 Kings 21 that during Manasseh's reign, he had no regard for the holy things of God in the temple. He built alters in the temple to worship other gods and did other abominable acts in the temple such as making his sons pass through the fire, demon worship, and witchcraft. He also destroyed many copies of the Scriptures, 2 Kings 22:3-13. Therefore, because of this destruction, sometime during the reign of Manasseh, 693 – 638BC, it seems that the God-fearing Jewish priests secretly moved the ark out of Jerusalem and migrated down to the southern part of Egypt, carrying the ark with them to protect it from Manasseh's destruction and abomination of the temple. And according to ancient history, it was transported to Elephantine Island to be kept safe. The Levitical priests who carried the ark then stayed in Elephantine Island to protect the ark and they built a Jewish community there.

Then after Josiah becomes king around 636BC, he begins cleansing the temple and restoring worship to God, 2 Chronicles 34-35, and he requests the priests and the ark to be brought back to the temple, 2 Chronicles 35:3. It is clear that the ark is being transported because Josiah says, "*it shall no longer be a burden on your shoulders.*" This was the way God instructed the ark to be transported, on the shoulders. This gives us a clue that the ark is on the move and not in the temple. But nowhere in the text does it say the Levites complied with the demand of Josiah to bring the ark back to Jerusalem. And it is my conjecture, just putting all the pieces together, that the Levites he is speaking to weren't living in Jerusalem either. They may have been on Elephantine Island guarding the ark.

Then, shortly after this account in 2 Chronicles 35, Pharaoh Necho wages war on Assyria to the north, but Josiah steps in and starts fighting King Necho. The king of Egypt is confused by this and tells Josiah, "I'm not fighting you, I'm fighting your enemy," 2 Chron 35:21. But Josiah pursues his attack against the king of Egypt. Why? It is my conjecture that Josiah knows that Necho has the ark in his possession in Egypt and Josiah is trying to take it back. However, Josiah gets shot with an arrow and dies. 2 Chron 35:20-24. Then that same year in 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar invades Judah, with his final siege being in 586BC, and he carries the Jews away to Babylon and destroys the temple, but the ark is not in the temple, it's still safe on Elephantine Island.

After the fall of Jerusalem in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, a Jewish temple was built on Elephantine Island to house the ark more permanently and to continue the Levitical practices, and there is archeological evidence of this from the German Institute of Archaeology. Then, according to Ethiopian history, sometime around 470BC, these Jewish Levitical priests transported the ark further south to Ethiopia to an island called Tana Kirkos Island in the middle of Lake Tana, and the ark stayed there for the next 800 years until 338AD†.

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† Elephantine, Official Guidebook, German Institute of Archaeology, Cairo, 1998; [www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.2307/4149987](http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.2307/4149987); [www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/who-are-the-ethiopian-jews](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/who-are-the-ethiopian-jews); Chuck Missler, Commentary on the Book of Acts p. 76-77; <https://baseinstitute.org/pages/ark-of-the-covenant>; <https://www.baslibrary.org/biblical-archaeology-review/21/3/4>