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Camels and the Bible

By Bryan Hodge

"Camel bones suggest error in Bible, archaeologists say" (Foxnews). "Will camel discovery break Bible's back?" (CNN). "Camel study throws the Bible's historical accuracy into question" (Global Post). These headlines appeared in February of 2014.

Lidar Sapir-Hen and Erez Ben-Yosef archaeologists from Tel Aviv University studies the bones of camels in the area of an ancient copper mine located in the Aravah Valley, south of the Dead Sea. These camels were used in the mining operation. The bones date to the 10th century B.C. using radiocarbon dating. This is the oldest find of domesticated camels in the area.

The issue raised by critics is that the Bible mentions camels being used by Abraham (Genesis 12:16; 24:10-ff; 24:61-ff) and Jacob (Genesis 30:43; 31:47) hundreds of years earlier than this oldest find of domesticated camel bones.

Let us respond: (1) The argument is based on a logical fallacy, *ad ignorantiam*. Jack Hebert wrote, "The critics assume that their supposed inability to find archaeological evidence of domesticated camels in the southern Levant at the time of Abraham somehow proves that none of these creatures existed in the region at that time. This is not the first instance where skeptics have made such a fallacious statement; they once declared that the Bible was in error when it mentioned the Hittite people because evidence for their existence had not been found. However, critics were eventually clearly shown to be wrong" (Genesis Camels: Bible Error? by Jake Hebert, www.icr.org). "The use of camels for copper mining is an important discovery. 'But to extrapolate from that and say they never had domesticated camels in Israel in the 1,000 years before that is an overreach' said Todd Bolen professor of Biblical Studies at Master's College in Santa Clara, California" (The Latest Challenge to the Bible's Accuracy: Abraham's Anachronistic Camels? by Gorden Govier, www.christianitytoday.com). (2) There is evidence that camels were domesticated in Egypt before Abraham's time. This evidence "come from a pottery camel's head and a terra-cotta tablet with men riding on and leading camels" dated at 3150 B.C. (Camels in the Bible by Shawn Nelson, www.geekychristian.com). "Egyptian artifacts depicting domesticated camels - which even secular archaeologists date before the time of Abraham - have been found" (Genesis Camels: Bible Error? by Jake Herbert). Remember that Abraham was gifted his camels from an Egyptian Pharaoh (Genesis 12:16). (3) Camels may not have been widely used in Israel in Patriarchal times. (a) Camels are associated with the rich, men like Abraham and Job. (b) Camels are associated with other places. Abraham received his camels from Egypt (Genesis 12:16). Jacob came out of Syria with camels (Genesis 30:43; 31:17). Joseph was sold to Midianite traders who were traveling with camels to Egypt (Genesis 37:25-28). "Even if camels were rare in the land of Israel during the time of the patriarchs, this does not mean that they were non-existent" (Genesis Camels: Bible Error? by Jake Herbert).

This story is greatly over-blown. Why? It seems that some are searching for a reason to reject the Bible. Is this the best objection with which they can come?