

EDITED BY
STEPHEN BAKER

LOOK AT A BOOK
Ecclesiastes
Page 1

BUILDING BLOCKS OF
THE CHRISTIAN FAITH
Atonement
Page 2

THE MORAL MAZE
**Can the Bible
be trusted?**
Page 5

Young PRECIOUS SEED

LOOK
AT A
BOOK

Ecclesiastes A Meaningful Existence

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY** Precious Seed Trustee

The Book of Ecclesiastes was included by Jews in the third section of the Old Testament known as Ketuvim (English = 'Writings'). The book is entitled 'The Preacher' in English, but in fact the Hebrew word 'Qoheleth' actually means a convener of, or a speaker at an assembly. The book is part of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament and reflects on the meaning of life and how it should be lived before God. The writer emphasizes throughout that the choices we as individuals make have a direct link with final outcomes. So the title 'Qoheleth' could merely be a nickname for a wise man who has assembled together sayings and reflections. The implication from the text, 1. 1, is that this wise man may have been King Solomon, cp. Proverbs chapter 30 verse 1, which is another wisdom text where the writer is also identified in a similar way.

The book is usually divided into three main parts – a beginning (chapter 1 verses 1-11), a middle (chapters 1. 12-12. 7), and an end (chapter 12. 8-14). Within this fairly flexible structure, the writer deals with a number of interesting topics, including the problems of accumulating wealth, growing old, and life's uncertainties. Believers tend to neglect this book, but most of us can probably quote a number of its most famous texts by heart, e.g. 1. 2, 9; 3. 1; 4. 9; 11. 1, 4; 12. 1, 6, 7.

So what is this book really about? Well, in simple terms, the writer looks at life in two different ways by taking one position and then another. Initially, he looks at life from a natural perspective, where God is left completely out of the picture. Everything is viewed from an earthly standpoint or, in the writer's words, 'under the sun'. His assessment of this way of life is that it is a sheer waste of time. It leads to scepticism and endless pessimism. His conclusion is deliberately brief - life without God is utterly futile, 12. 8. How very true that is!

But when God is at the centre of our life, then it has meaning and purpose. The first viewpoint is essentially like the modern concept of existentialism which regards human existence as unexplainable and that everything is meaningless. How up to date the Bible is!

So why is the second viewpoint so important? Well, if we have a living relationship with God then our lives become meaningful and worthwhile. Life is no longer mundane or humdrum.

The table below shows some of the key words/phrases in the book.

Key Words/Phrases

Words/Phrases	Number of Occurrences	Emphasis
Vanity	39 times	The futility (emptiness) of life without God
Under the sun	29 times	An earthly and short-lived viewpoint
God	4 times	The life of the believer
Heart	40 times	The heart is directly affected by different viewpoints
Wisdom	50 plus times	The connection between the two differing viewpoints

A good way of understanding the structure and overall message of the book is as follows:

- 1 Firstly, type out the whole book in Word format making sure that you check that your copy is accurate. Then, take a hard copy of the finished product. Use whatever translation you feel comfortable with for this personal exercise. If you are really keen to see different textual nuances, then you might think about setting several different translations side by side.
- 2 Next, prayerfully read through the whole book at one sitting, asking God to reveal to you the truth of His word and,
- 3 Then, read the text again highlighting the key words/phrases above using different highlighter colours.

This may seem to be a time consuming exercise, but it will give you a strategic grasp of the whole book. It will also lay the foundation for future study. The book will then really live for you!

YOUNG PRECIOUS SEED

is a supplement of *Precious Seed International* designed for those young in faith. Its purpose is to restate timeless truths from the word of God for a new generation of Christians and to kindle a biblical approach to current issues in the world in which we live. *YPS* is published by *Precious Seed International*, Pitcot Farm, Pitcot Lane, Stratton-on-the-Fosse, Radstock BA3 4SX, UK, and is also available separately from the magazine.



'Once . . . hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself', Heb. 9. 26.

He died an atoning death
for thee,
He died an atoning death;
O wondrous love!
It was for thee
He died an atoning death!

Thomas Dennis

The chorus from the old hymn shows the love of the Lord Jesus in His 'atoning death'. But what do these words mean? Doesn't atonement belong to the Old Testament? Does this subject have any direct relevance to the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? Before delving into this great topic, let's first consider some definitions.

Definition of Atonement

Two definitions

No 1 - Firstly, a work or satisfaction presented to God according to, and perfectly glorifying, His nature and character about sin by sacrifice; and secondly, the bearing our sins; glorifying God even where sin was and in respect of sin (and thus His love is free to go out to all sinners); and giving the believer, him that comes to God by that blood-

shedding, the certainty that his sins are all gone, and that God will remember them no more, *Concise Bible Dictionary*, Hammond, p. 90.

No 2 - First, as meeting all the claims of God – the claims of His nature – the claims of His character – the claims of His throne; and, secondly, as perfectly meeting all man's guilt and all his necessities C. H. Mackintosh, *Notes on the Book of Leviticus*, p. 226.

The concept of atonement is firmly rooted in the Old Testament. It is first mentioned in Genesis chapter 6 verse 14, where the word for atonement is translated as 'pitch'. This refers to the ark, which Noah was to 'pitch, or cover, within and without'. The covering on the ark brought about safety, salvation and protection to those inside, while the world outside was being judged for sin. The simple idea of a waterproof covering on the ark lays a nice basis for our consideration of the topic. It illustrates the preservation and salvation of man in the ark while outside the righteous demands of God are being satisfied.

Our brief walk through the

subject of atonement will largely centre on Leviticus chapter 16 which describes the Day of Atonement (DoA). Here we can see what this day meant for the nation of Israel and, more importantly, to God. We then will work out what can be learned now, in this present age, from what happened then. The word 'atonement' does not actually appear in the New Testament apart from Romans chapter 5 verse 11 in the KJV where all other translations use the word 'reconciliation'. The full meaning of this great Bible term is most fully seen in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. This is where we want to come to in our study with a consideration of Hebrews chapter 9.

Leviticus 16 - The Day of Atonement – what did it all mean?

This was an outstanding day in the Jewish calendar. No work was to be done as it was to be a Sabbath of rest. On this day, annually, a temporary covering of sin (atonement) was to be made in order that the people, the priesthood and the place of worship would be clean from all sin and defilement for another year.

Aaron was to take two goats, a ram and a bullock. The ram was for a burnt offering and the bullock for a sin offering. The interesting part was what he did with the goats. A careful look at this will teach us two aspects of atonement.

Aaron was to cast lots upon the two goats, Lev. 16. 8.

To 'cast lots' was a practice in



those days where two stones were written on with two options (i.e., Goat 1, Goat 2). The stones were then put in a container, shaken and then dropped out. Whichever one came out first or upright decided the choice. This method of making decisions seemed to be approved of by God and the use of it is recorded in Proverbs chapter 16 verse 33, and in other passages.

The first 'lot' was 'for the Lord' and the 'other lot for the scapegoat'.

The Lord's goat was then offered as a sin-offering sacrifice. The objective was to make 'an atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel', v. 17, and the other animals were also sacrificed as directed by God for the same purpose.

The scapegoat was to be dealt with very differently. Aaron was to lay both his hands on the head of the goat and confess all the iniquities of the children of Israel and all their transgressions and all their sins. This was a symbolic act where the guilt of the Jewish nation was transferred to the scapegoat (this is where we get our expression 'a scapegoat' i.e., one who takes the blame for another!) The scapegoat was then led into the wilderness, v. 21.

It is important to notice both similarities and differences between the two goats. Both were needed because of sin. The scope of the offering of the first goat was because of sin generally. The scapegoat was directly related to the actual sins of the people. The first goat was for the Lord, the

scapegoat was for the people.

God has been dishonoured because of sin. The picture in the sacrifice of the first goat was that the effect of sin in relation to God was being dealt with. His glory and honour were being maintained. In the offering of the scapegoat, the sins of the people were put away, they were dealt with. They, on the goat's head, were taken into 'a land not inhabited', v. 22, they could never be found. So, on the one part, God is satisfied and, on the second, the sins of the people are covered.

The Day of Atonement – what we can learn now

The 'DoA' pictures the work of the cross of the Lord Jesus in two ways. One is for God, that is, because the Lord Jesus died, sin in all its awfulness was dealt with, God was satisfied and glorified in maintaining His righteousness. There is also great blessing available to sinners as a result of the cross. A righteous basis for forgiveness has been established. The Lord Jesus gave Himself for me; He died in my place and took the punishment for my sins. All my specific offences against God were borne by the Lord Jesus.

These great truths can be seen in many New Testament verses, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world', John 1 29. These words are not teaching that everyone will be saved but that 'the sin' (definite article) of 'the world' is taken away by Him. As a result, people can be saved. Secondly, 'And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the ... whole world', 1 John 2. 2. Here

we see the specific provision of God in dealing with 'our sins', this is for the believer and the provision that is available for the whole world. How vast and far reaching is the effect of the cross of Christ!

Hebrews chapter 9 - Application to the believer in the Lord Jesus

Given that atonement is such an important doctrine for us to understand and we can see the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ pictured in the 'DoA', why isn't atonement expressly taught in the New Testament? A simple suggestion in answer to this question is that the work of the Lord Jesus is better! Atonement seems to foreshadow the great Bible doctrines of propitiation and substitution which form the basis for reconciliation.

Hebrews chapter 9 verses 23-28 contrasts the one offering of the Lord Jesus with the temporary and annual offerings of the 'DoA'. Notice the differences and consequences for believers in the Lord Jesus:

The sacrifice of the Lord Jesus is described as better than those on the 'DoA', v. 23.

The sacrifices of the 'DoA' provided access into an earthly holy place but the sacrifice of Christ provides access into heaven itself, v. 24, see also Heb. 10. 19, 20.

An absolute contrast is made between the annual repeated sacrifices over many millennia and the once for all sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, vv. 26, 28. Once was enough 'to put away sin'.

There is a completeness about this statement; 'He', the Lord Jesus, has completely, totally and finally 'put away sin'. Perhaps this is the 'Lord's lot' of Leviticus chapter 16, only better, as there is no need for any repetition; God is completely satisfied by the Lord Jesus offering Himself to put away sin. He has all the glory.

Verse 28 describes the specific benefit of the sacrifice to the believer. 'So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many'. Because He has put away sin and God is satisfied, each believer in the Lord Jesus can say, 'He bore my sins'. I suggest that here we see the scapegoat of Leviticus chapter 16 bearing the confessed

sins into the wilderness, only better! Better here, in that it is full, permanent and once for all. On the 'DoA' an Israelite could be satisfied that his sins for that year were covered, but a day, week, month later, he'd be in a different position, with new sins added to his account. How much better that the Lord Jesus Christ has completely dealt with my sin!

There is also mention in verse 28 of the coming of the Lord to the nation of Israel when 'shall he appear.' At this point, there will be a sense of completion to the picture that is painted in the 'DoA'. They will then live out the full effect of the 'DoA' as it is a day of mourning for the nation,

see Lev. 16. 31; 23. 27-29; Zech. 12. 10, which will result in a permanent covering for their national sins.

Our brief stroll though the subject of atonement began with the chorus from the old hymn and there we return as the writer sums up what the Lord Jesus has completed, yet challenges us about the response of our hearts to Him!

Have you read that He looked to heav'n and said:
 'Tis finished— 'twas for thee'?
 Have you ever said:
 'I thank Thee, Lord,
 For giving Thy life for me?'

ATONEMENT

OLD TESTAMENT			
Hebrew Word	<i>kaphar</i>	<i>kippur</i>	
English translations	Pitch Appease Atonement Reconcile Reconciliation Reconciling Merciful Purged	Pardon Purge them away Forgave Pacify Disannulled Put it off Forgive Pacified	Atonement
Meaning	To cover (specifically with bitumen); figuratively to expiate or condone, to placate or cancel: appease, make (an) atonement, cleanse, disannul, forgive, be merciful, pacify, pardon, to pitch, purge (away), put off, reconcile		From <i>kaphar</i> ; expiation (only in plural)
References	Over 100, mainly found in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers		Exodus 2. 36; Exodus 30. 10, 16; Leviticus 23. 27, 28; Leviticus 25. 9; Numbers 5. 8; Numbers 29. 11.

NEW TESTAMENT

The English word 'atonement' appears once in the Authorised Version of the New Testament, but this is a translation of the Greek word *katallage*. This word is used only four times in the New Testament and in all other uses, it is translated 'reconciliation'. Nearly all other translations translate the word as 'reconciliation'.

Meaning of *katallage* 'exchange' (figuratively adjustment), that is, restoration to (divine) favour: 'atonement', 'reconciliation'.

By SIMON SHERWIN Methihill, Leven, Scotland

Checking out the Old Testament – the textual evidence

In the May 2010 issue we looked at the 'bricks and mortar' evidence for the historical accuracy of the Old Testament and we saw that, where it was possible to check, what has been discovered through archaeological excavation reinforces what is found in the biblical text. However, it should be borne in mind that buildings and structures of themselves cannot prove anything, hence the controversies that often surround dating them. Pottery remains found at different sites have been used to great effect to build up sequences of different styles and techniques across a wide area to provide relative dates but this is as far as they can go. It may be argued that the fact that finds on the ground match up with what the Bible says is purely circumstantial. However, in response it may be said that the consistency with which such 'circumstantial' evidence supports the biblical text strongly suggests its accuracy. At the same time it is true that, for example, the fact that we have gate structures in different places from around the time of Solomon and that the Bible says that Solomon built the walls of these cities, is not conclusive proof that Solomon was responsible for their construction, although it is highly suggestive. Something else is needed, a further dimension that is, on the one hand, totally independent of the biblical text and on the other, has the capacity to place archaeological finds in

an absolute historical context. This dimension is provided by the discovery of textual evidence.

Over the years, tens of thousands of written documents have been discovered at various sites in the Near East. Even so, the picture that can be built up from them is sporadic and incomplete. To a large extent this is due to the differing materials upon which texts were written. Papyrus, for example, does not survive the passage of time except in exceptional circumstances. Other materials such as stone, potsherds or clay tablets, are much more durable. Another factor is what is known as 'accidents of discovery', that is, at some sites archaeologists have hit upon an archive or library whilst at others they have not (yet). The result is once again rather like a jigsaw with many pieces missing. However, we are able to get detailed snapshots of specific, often brief, periods in time and also to build up a more general picture of the history of the Near East during the period covered by the Old Testament, in particular that of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.



Taylor Prism

Before we look at specific examples it is worthwhile noting that wherever it is possible to check the text against external sources the detailed accuracy of the biblical text shines through. For example, in the books of Kings, Chronicles, Isaiah and Jeremiah eight different Assyrian and Babylonian kings are

mentioned.¹ Every single name appears in its right order, even when there are a number in quick succession. Where foreign officials are mentioned, these are given their correct titles and functions. The same is true the other way round. A number of kings of Israel and Judah are mentioned in Assyrian and Babylonian records, again in the historical order that they are found in the Bible. As believers we need not be surprised – it is only what we would expect from the word of God. It is interesting to note how many of the kings are attested outside the Bible.² The ways in which their names are found include seals or seal impressions, records of foreign kings and even a ration list. In 2 Kings chapters 24 and 25, we learn that when Jehoiachin was carried away to Babylon he was kept in prison until his (limited) release at the beginning of the reign of Evil-Merodach, Nebuchadnezzar's successor. At that time, 25. 27, he is still known as 'the king of Judah'. Although we have no records of his release, an otherwise fairly boring ration list from the time of Nebuchadnezzar records several allocations to 'Jehoiachin, king of Judah', his five young sons, and various other Judahites. Apart from the seals of Hebrew kings, there are various officials who are also attested, perhaps most notable amongst them 'Berechiah (Baruch) son of Neriah, the scribe', that is, Jeremiah's secretary, cf., e.g., Jer. 45.³ **The people of whom the Bible speaks were real people.**

The same is true of key events in Israel's history where they interacted with foreign countries and their kings. 2 Kings chapter 3, for example, records the rebellion of Mesha the king of Moab against Jehoram the son of Ahab, king of Israel. In 1868 a stone stele was discovered at Dhiban in Jordan which is now in the Louvre museum in Paris.⁴ This held an inscription by this same

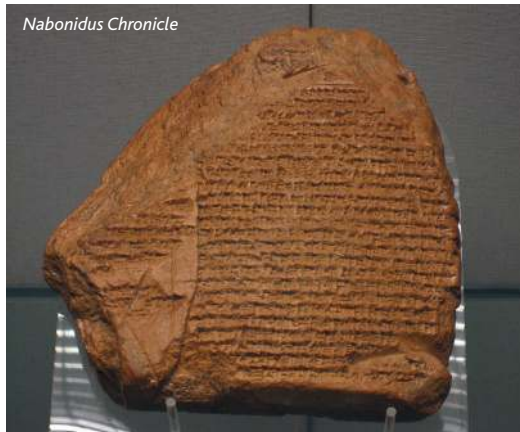
Mesha, king of Moab, relating how Omri king of Israel had oppressed Moab and how he had rebelled against one of Omri's successors. He records how Israelite dominion lasted for forty years – all the days of Omri, (no mention of Ahab) and 'half the days of his son'. In true Middle Eastern fashion it appears that he is trying to minimize Moab's humiliation by limiting the number of oppressors mentioned. However, if we add the years of Omri's reign (12) to the years of Ahab (22) and half the years of Jehoram (6), even if Mesha's number is an approximation we still arrive at forty. Thereafter, the two accounts diverge to provide a fuller picture of what took place. The account in Kings deals with Jehoram's reaction to Mesha's rebellion, initial successes and eventual forced withdrawal, 2 Kgs. 3. 27. Mesha, on the other hand, not surprisingly, makes no mention of Israelite successes but concentrates solely on his own gains, presumably after Israel and her allies had withdrawn. The two accounts, therefore, are beautifully consistent and complementary.



Mesha Stele

Moving on in time 2 Kings chapters 15 and 16 tell the story of the interactions of the kingdoms of Syria (Aram of Damascus), Israel and Judah with Tiglath-pileser III, king of Assyria. Six different kings are mentioned: Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah and Hoshea of Israel, Rezin of Damascus, and Ahaz of Judah. Of these five are mentioned in Tiglath-pileser's records. The fifth, Pekahiah, reigned for only two years and therefore presumably had no direct contact with the great Assyrian king. 2 Kings chapter 15 verse 19 states that Menahem gave tribute to Pul (another name for Tiglath-pileser). The Assyrian records confirm this. Kings gives the figure as one thousand talents of silver. Although there is no corresponding figure given by the Assyrians, the same figure was levied from another king whom

Tiglath-pileser installed as a puppet-king – Menahem requested the Assyrians’ help to establish his kingship and had to pay a heavy price for doing so. During Pekah’s reign a number of Israelite cities were annexed to Assyria. He himself was killed in a coup and replaced on the throne by Hoshea. All these details are confirmed by the Assyrian records, with the Assyrian king himself claiming the credit for installing Hoshea on the throne. At this time, Rezin was king of Damascus. Kings states that the king of Assyria attacked Damascus, captured it, carried its people captive and killed Rezin, 2 Kgs. 16. 9. The preserved part of the Assyrian records gives details of the siege of Damascus and the deportation of a number of captives. We do not have their account of its capture and Rezin’s execution but there is no reason to doubt this outcome, especially since Tiglath-pileser impaled Rezin’s chief ministers alive and put them on public view. 2 Kings also mentions the advances of Ahaz of Judah to the king of Assyria and payment of tribute, vv. 7-8. Tiglath-pileser confirms that he received tribute from ‘Jehoahaz (a longer form of the name) the Judahite’. **Once again, the Bible is correct in every detail.**



Nabonidus Chronicle

The fall of Samaria came under Hoshea. Against him came Shalmaneser V of Assyria who besieged Samaria for three years before the city was taken, 17. 3-5. This king reigned for only five years, yet the biblical account does not overlook him. He is credited with ravaging Samaria in a Babylonian chronicle.⁵ Israelites were deported to various places in Assyria and Media, from all of which people with Jewish names occur in documents dating to not long after the event.

Perhaps the most fascinating of the encounters between Israel and Assyria during this period is

the invasion of Judah by the Assyrian king Sennacherib during the reign of Hezekiah. This is not just because of the detail of the Assyrian and biblical accounts but also because they are augmented by a third, an account by the Greek historian Herodotus, which he attributes to Egyptian sources. The biblical account of the event may be summarized as follows: Sennacherib of Assyria invaded Judah during Hezekiah’s reign and took ‘all the fenced cities of Judah’, 18. 13. He laid siege to Lachish, v. 14. Hezekiah paid him tribute of three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold, v. 14. Sennacherib sent his officials and part of his army to besiege Jerusalem, v. 17. He left off the siege of Jerusalem to fight against the Ethiopians but

sent a letter to say that he would be back soon to finish the job off, 19. 9-13. His army was decimated and instead he returned home, 19. 35-36. He was later murdered in Nineveh by two of his sons and was succeeded by another son, Esarhaddon, 19. 37. Sennacherib, too, confirms that he conquered a number of cities of Judah and,

whilst he does not specify Lachish among them Jeremy Gibson (see *YPS Feb 2010 – Walk through the British Museum with me*) has drawn our attention in a previous article to the reliefs in the British Museum that depict the siege and conquest of this city. He also states that he laid siege to Jerusalem and confined Hezekiah ‘like a bird in a cage’. Thereafter the situation becomes interesting. In true Middle-Eastern fashion it would be unthinkable for Sennacherib to record the decimation of his army and it is therefore not surprising that he does not. However, it is noticeable that his account ends rather lamely in comparison with the rest of his campaign. In essence, when the spin is removed, he goes home without having captured Jerusalem! What, then, of the decimation of his army? The Bible says

that Isaiah predicted that he would 'hear a rumour', v. 7. This happens in verse 9 when 'he heard say' that the Ethiopians had come out against him. According to Sennacherib, when he first began his campaign the Egyptians and Ethiopians had come out to meet him and had been defeated in battle. The rumour that he heard, therefore, would be that they had regrouped and were ready for a second round. He therefore dropped everything and went out to meet them. According to the Greek historian Herodotus, the Egyptian warriors were not willing to fight (not surprisingly if they had already been defeated, though this is not the reason that he gives) and the 'army' that went out to meet Sennacherib as he came was a mixture of the general public. However, the night before battle was due to commence something miraculous happened that left the army defenceless and the Assyrian army was massacred.⁶ To really finish Sennacherib off, some Assyrian and Babylonian sources confirm that he was indeed murdered by his own son, the Assyrian



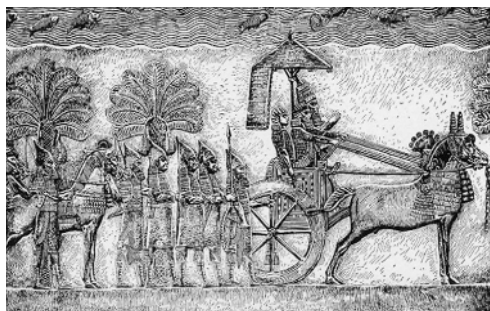
LMLK Seal Impression

form of the name 'Arda-mulissi' being the equivalent of the biblical 'Adrammelech', v. 37. **Once again, therefore, when compared with other texts the biblical account is consistent and complementary.**

Space constraints do not permit further examples but they could be multiplied were we to look at other events, such as the fall of Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar or the fall of Babylon under Cyrus the Persian, or the enemies of the Jews in the time of Nehemiah and so on.

In every case, where it is possible to ascertain the facts, the Bible displays its accuracy and reliability. Therefore, we might approach the scriptures with confidence without fear of the critics or the sceptics, with the knowledge that, though they are not written with the sole purpose of presenting history, the history they present is real and accurate.

was due to commence something miraculous happened that left the army defenceless and the Assyrian army was massacred.⁶ To really finish Sennacherib off, some Assyrian and Babylonian sources confirm that he was indeed murdered by his own son, the Assyrian



Sennacherib during his Babylonian war: relief from his palace in Nineveh

References

- 1 These are: Tiglath-pileser III, also known as Pul (the Bible knows both names!); Shalmaneser V; Sargon; Sennacherib; and Esarhaddon of Assyria; Merodach-Baladan II; Nebuchadnezzar II; and Evil-Merodach of Babylon.
- 2 These are, as is commonly accepted, Omri, Ahab, Joram, Jehu, Joash, Jeroboam II, Menahem, Pekah and Hoshea of Israel; David (as dynasty founder), Joram, Ahaziah, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Mannaseh, Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin of Judah.
- 3 For a picture of his seal impression see the article on Baruch on Wikipeda (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baruch_ben_Neria)
- 4 For further details and a picture search under 'Mesha' at www.louvre.fr.
- 5 His successor, Sargon II also claims the victory. This may be wishful thinking or it might really be the case that Shalmaneser died just after taking the city, leaving his successor to carry out the deportations. At this point the Bible simply states that 'the king of Assyria took Samaria', 2 Kgs. 17. 6.
- 6 Herodotus claims that mice came and nibbled through the bow strings and shield thongs so that they had no arms with which to defend themselves. To what extent this is true is open to question.