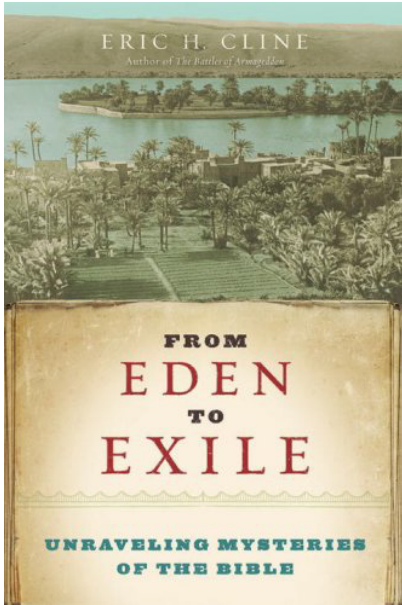


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Cline, Eric

From Eden to Exile: Unraveling Mysteries of the Bible

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In *From Eden to Exile: Unraveling Mysteries of the Bible*, Eric Cline addresses biblical mysteries that for centuries have fascinated the general public and have led amateur enthusiasts to write books, create Internet sites, and produce television documentaries. The issue for Cline is not necessarily that amateur enthusiasts, rather than professional scholars, are the ones publishing their historical theories about these biblical mysteries. Rather, for Cline the issue is that their versions of history too often advocate a cause, ignore contrary evidence, and advertise a moral purpose (x). In other words, they are bad history. With the popularity of biblical mysteries in mind, Cline suggests that his book serves two purposes. First, it is a word of warning to those who are easily persuaded by the very entertaining yet weakly argued historical theories of amateur enthusiasts (xi). Second, it is a call to arms to professional scholars: “deal with these mysteries in a serious way,” and publish your findings (xi).

The book is made up of an introduction that introduces the reader to Cline’s historical-critical methodology, seven chapters that address different mysteries of the Hebrew Bible, an epilogue, a suggested reading list, endnotes, a general index, and an index of biblical passages. Each of the main chapters is clearly organized with the following components: (1) a summary of the biblical story; (2) a discussion of additional textual and archaeological

evidence; (3) an evaluation of some of the explanations; (4) a discussion of the historical context; and (5) the identification of the most plausible answer to the mystery according to Cline, if there is one (xiii–xiv).

In chapter 1 Cline asks if it is possible to locate the garden of Eden. In this chapter the literary evidence dominates, and the archaeological evidence is very general and primarily geological (7–13). After assessing the available evidence, Cline concludes that the evidence does not allow him to come to a conclusion about where the garden was located or whether the purpose of the story was even to describe a physical place on earth (2).

Chapter 2 addresses the location Noah’s ark. Ultimately, Cline argues that most quests for Noah’s ark are misguided because of misunderstandings about the location of the mountains of Ararat (18, 36), a reliance on details from Genesis despite its contradictions (19–20), a focus on history rather than moral message of the story (25–26), and a lack of attention to the ancient parallels (36–37). Although Cline does not conclude that there was no historical flood that influenced the writers, he does write that there is no evidence for a *worldwide* flood and that a physical boat will probably never be found (36).

In chapter 3 Cline investigates the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. This chapter focuses on the archaeological evidence from Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira, which have been professionally excavated and may have been destroyed by fire at approximately the same time in the Early Bronze Age (45–49). Cline also explores less-convincing suggestions that the cities were near Masada, beneath the Dead Sea, or swallowed by the earth in an earthquake (50–54). Cline concludes that the story in Genesis probably served an etiological rather than historical purpose (59–60).

In chapter 4 Cline asks whether the exodus happened as described in the Bible and, if so, when. The discussion focuses on the issues of dating and the lack of archaeological evidence for any part of the story (84–85). This chapter also explores the popular suggestion—seen recently in the 2006 James Cameron production *The Exodus Decoded*—that the seventeenth–fifteenth-century B.C.E. eruption of the Santorini Volcano was the cause of the ten plagues and the scholarly suggestion that the exodus story was created in the seventh century B.C.E. at the time of King Josiah (85–87). The chapter ends neither confirming nor rejecting the possibility for some sort of exodus from Egypt, although Cline does emphasize the lack of archaeological evidence (89–90).

Chapter 5 asks whether Joshua actually captured Jericho and, if not, how the Israelites came to the land. Here Cline focuses on the archaeological evidence (99–102, 111–13) and the possibility that the hyperbolic biblical account should not be read as critical history (105–9). Based on the archaeology and the question of historical context, if the

exodus could not have happened until 1250 B.C.E. (90), how could Joshua have destroyed Jericho in either 1550 or 1450 B.C.E.? Cline concludes that Jericho was not destroyed by invading Israelites (116). Instead, he suggests that the Israelites “piggybacked” on the military successes of the Sea Peoples, who would have been the ones who destroyed the various Canaanite cities (118–19).

Chapter 6 asks about the location of the ark of the covenant. Cline discusses how all of the hypotheses are based on literary traditions and that there is no archaeological evidence to support any of them (150–52). Although Cline does not provide a definitive answer to the question, he does suggest that the ark was likely destroyed when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem (151–52).

Chapter 7 asks where the ten lost tribes went and where they are now (153). After discussing the various hypotheses, Cline breaks his trend and arrives at a definitive answer: “the Ten Lost Tribes were never lost; we know exactly where they went” (172). According to Cline, some were exiled, but most stayed in Israel or moved south to Judah.

The epilogue brings the book to a close with additional comments about historical methodology. Cline responsibly and humbly points out that, even where he comes to conclusions, they “may be overturned at any moment by future archaeological discoveries” (183). Cline also suggests that both scholars and nonscholars alike need to focus on a shared methodology rather than the need for historical consensus about the results (186–87).

I begin with a few minor critiques. First, although Cline chooses interesting mysteries, it is unclear why these and not others. For example, why did he not discuss the existence of the united monarchy (except a brief mention on 150), which is currently a hot topic in both scholarly and popular circles? Second, given the recent hubbub surrounding the James Ossuary and *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* (Discovery Channel, March 2007), it would have been both timely and interesting to include some mysteries of the New Testament as well. Third, at times Cline does not emphasize enough that historical questions are not appropriate for some of these mysteries. This is most obvious in the chapter on the garden of Eden, which gives the false impression that the various hypotheses have the possibility of locating the *biblical* garden: “if it existed, is most likely to have been located in the region of Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent” (13). Historically speaking, even if a location can be identified as the model for the description of the garden in the story, it does not prove the historicity of the biblical stories that took place in the garden. For the general public, this distinction may not be so obvious.

These minor critiques notwithstanding, there is much to commend in this book. For the general public, the book provides detailed investigations of biblical mysteries that are too often treated simplistically on the Internet, in television documentaries, and in popular books. Cline effectively guides the reader through the maze of ancient texts and archaeological evidence, all of which must be considered when making historical claims, and he does so in easy-to-read language. In this regard, Cline successfully introduces the general public to the critical tools used by biblical scholars, archaeologists, and ancient historians. Perhaps most important, Cline informs the reader that ancient history writing is not an exact science: “We need to keep in mind there is a wide range of reactions and responses to these mysteries, even among archaeologists, ancient historians and biblical scholars themselves” (xiv). Furthermore, Cline helps the reader identify the weaknesses with many of the historical conclusions made by amateur-enthusiasts who claim to have solved these mysteries. To leave these claims unchallenged would have been a disservice to both ancient history writing and the interested public.

Cline acknowledges that this book neither adds anything new to scholarly debates nor covers the entirety of the debates (xiv–xv). “What I have tried to do in this book is introduce an ancient historian’s and archaeologist’s point of view, along with genuine archaeological and historical data and considerations—information that is all too frequently lacking in the publications and television specials written and produced by nonspecialists” (188). This book’s contribution to academia is precisely that he succeeds in his quest to present complex scholarly research *and* methodologies in accessible language, something most scholars cannot do or have not done. Not only does this book disprove bad history; it teaches what constitutes good history, and it does so in an entertaining fashion. At a time when mysteries of the Bible are extremely popular, this book provides a service to biblical scholars, archaeologists, and ancient historians by providing the general public with the necessary tools to critically assess historical claims about mysteries of the Bible.