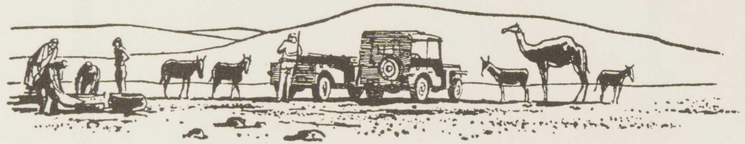
Dr. Nelson Glueck has unearthed stirring evidence of the Bible's accuracy

Biblical Explorer By Land and Air

by NORMAN CARLISLE



HOW AUTHENTIC are Old Testament descriptions of people and places that were not written down until hundreds or even thousands of years after the events occurred? Biblical statements convey religious meaning and more: actually, in background and detail, in their portrayal of a way of life, they often serve as a mine of invaluable information. For example, take *Genesis 13:10*, where an unknown chronicler describes the Jordan Valley in ancient times as follows:

"And Lot lifted up his eyes and he beheld the Valley of the Jordan. And lo, all of it was irrigated, and it was like the Garden of God."

For centuries, this was considered highly imaginative writing, since all available evidence had led to the conclusion that at the time of Lot—about 2,000 B.C.—the Valley of the Jordan was an uninhabited desert. No civilization, they said; no irrigation; no farms.

"The Valley," announced no less an authority than George Adam Smith in his famed *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, "has never been populous. It has deserved the name of wilderness."

Up to a few years ago, this conclusion remained unchallenged. Then, into that wilderness, armed with a conviction that Biblical descriptions would be found literally true, came Dr. Nelson Glueck, American archeologist.

A tall, lean, sunburned man, wearing Bedouin headdress, he looked like an Arab. Often he would squat for hours in the tents of desert wanderers, listening to their tales. Sometimes his Arab companions, desert-trained as they were, collapsed from the heat. Sometimes he himself had to lie exhausted before he was able to start again.

Curious Arabs watched as he strode across blank wastelands. They were more puzzled still when he would pick up a piece of baked earthenware that looked like a stone

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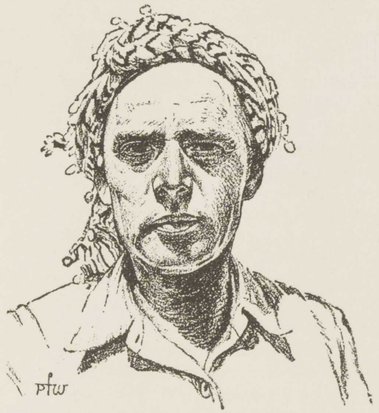

splinter and stand turning it over and over, a look of awe in his eyes. To the Bedouin, the shattered piece of pottery might seem a useless chunk of fired clay. To Dr. Glueck, it was a magic window permitting him to look into the Biblical world of the past.

What he saw through it, and others like it which he found, enabled him to make a startling announcement. Far from having been the wilderness the scholars supposed, "the Jordan Valley was not only one of the first settled sections of the country, but it was also one of the richest parts of all ancient Palestine and Transjordan . . . truly, a Garden of God."

Backed by the scientific evidence he produced, this statement was accepted as fact, and the maps of ancient Palestine were changed to show more than 70 cities that Dr. Glueck discovered.

Behind Dr. Glueck is more than a quarter-century of devotion to probing historical mysteries sometimes only hinted at in Biblical stories. Now a tall, spare man in his early fifties, he began his exploration of the Holy Land in his early twenties. As a young instructor at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, he paid his own way to spend summers working with the American School for Oriental Research in Jerusalem. Later, for many years, he served as director of this archeological center.

More recently, he became president of Hebrew Union College, where he imparts his love for the Bible and the Holy Land to the students training to be rabbis. But he still goes to Israel each summer, starting many of his searches from the vantage point of the plane. Strangely enough, ancient roads and city sites can often be *seen through the sand* by an aerial observer. Differences in the density of the sand above solid objects account for this curious effect. It is as if time, in its passing, had made an x-ray of civilizations long past.

Once, flying over a stretch of desert, Dr. Glueck looked down upon a remarkable road. Only after he had marvelled for a time about the fact that engineers had built the highway so rapidly since his last view of the territory, did it occur to him that this was no newly-built marvel. It was a portion of Trajan's Road, built by the Romans almost 2,000 years ago, and now revealed by shifting sands.

Though flying can help him to size up an area, the real searching is done on the ground. Dr. Glueck and his Israeli companions (and occasionally other archeologists) may reach a general area by jeep and then take to camels or donkeys. Eventually, when he actually reaches an area he wishes to explore thoroughly, he must dismount and traverse the ground on foot.

Often, only sheer willpower keeps him going, as it did on a venture into one desert area near the Red Sea. The heat was so searing that Dr. Glueck, Reginald Head, then of the Transjordan Department of Antiquities, and a companion, Ali Abu Ghosh, could walk only ten minutes at a time. Their lips were swollen and cracked, their water gone.

At last Ali fell to the ground, crying, "Water or I die!" Dr. Glueck pushed himself further. "Then suddenly it didn't matter any more," he recalls. "The earth seemed to rise to meet me, and I hugged it." Only the timely appearance of a band of Arabs saved them.

TO THE CAPABILITIES that have distinguished him as scientist, Biblical scholar and religious leader, Dr. Glueck adds the vision of a poet. To him the past is not gone, but vibrantly alive. Of the Holy Land he says:

"These are more than conglomerations of rock and soil. . . . These are the haunts of the Children of God, and His spirit is imprinted on the very atmosphere. I have stood on the shores of the Red Sea and heard the accents of Jehovah in Sinai. I have wandered in the wastes of the desert and heard the weeping of Hagar. I have sat in the tents of Ishmael and found myself peering into the faces of the Prophets. I have paced along the banks of the Jordan and watched the people of Israel crossing over to the Land of Promise."

This crossing of the Jordan is one of the disputed Bible stories explained by Dr. Glueck's explorations. He finds geological evidence pointing to the accuracy of the Biblical account, which says: ". . . the waters coming from the stream stood still, whereupon . . . all Israel passed over on dry land until the entire people had crossed over the Jordan."

Cross a river on dry land? Perfectly possible, says Dr. Glueck. Here, in this region of earthquakes, he has found evidences of rock slides that have repeatedly blocked the river and caused it to change course. If the Israelites arrived at the spot after such a slide, the river might well have been temporarily impounded behind slides of earth and rocks, while seeking a new course.

Many of Dr. Glueck's discoveries have been made with the aid of simple pieces of pottery, called "sherds" by archeologists. In ancient times, pottery was universal, used not only for cooking, eating, carrying water and as ornamental vessels, but for communications as well. On broken pieces of pottery, businessmen wrote bills, generals jotted military orders and ordinary citizens scribbled lists.

Dr. Glueck can pick up a sherd, study it for a moment, and announce: "This is from the time of Abraham." In such an instance, he can be positive, because pottery of Abraham's time had a particular type of handle and ornamentation, plus a greenish-gray appearance, unlike that of any other pottery.

One of the most fascinating mys-