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**FAITH *IN SITU*:
DIGGING GOD OUT FROM THE *TELL***

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1. Introduction

The early archaeological discoveries in the Near East during the 19th century coincided with the challenge of evolutionism and biblical criticism. Scholars had started to study the Bible in the light of the literature, culture, and religion of the region. They began to question the historical veracity of the biblical events. The Bible was studied as any other ancient piece of literature. It was no longer regarded as the inspired Word of God, as Holy Writing. One big question evolved: “Did it really happen as the Bible states it?” In the light of emerging evidence coming from archaeological excavations both sides—those who questioned the authority of Scripture, and those who upheld it—looked to the new discoveries for support of their respective position. As one scholar noted (cited in Dever 2003: 4):

Not a ruined city has been opened up that has given any comfort to unbelieving critics or evolutionists. Every find of archaeologists in Bible lands has gone to confirm Scripture and confound its enemies. . . . Not since Christ ascended back to heaven have there been so many scientific proofs that God’s word is truth.

One of the major questions in the ongoing debate is concerned with the early history of ancient Israel (see e.g., Davies 1992, Whitelam 1996, Grabbe 1997, Thompson 1999). “... what if ancient Israel was ‘invented’ by Jews living much later, and the biblical literature is therefore nothing but pious propaganda?” (Dever 2003: ix). The discussion does not only take place among specialists; on July 29, 2000, the *New York Times – Leisure Section* ran the headline “The Bible, as History, Flunks New Archaeological Test”. Books by Israel Finkelstein and Neil A. Silberman (2001, 2006) have climbed on top of the bestseller lists.

The historical question is not a mere philosophical one; it is essential to the Christian faith. Since God has revealed himself within history, this history has to be able to be experienced. Thus, historical events become meaningful in regard to faith, and therefore it makes a difference whether events reported in Scriptures took place or not, whether they happened the way God revealed them or not (for further discussion on the relationship between Near Eastern Archaeology and the Bible, on what Archaeology can not and can do, see Younker 2000). This paper will not further elaborate on the

general nature of the relationship of Near Eastern Archaeology to the Bible. Rather, it will focus on the people that do archaeology and what it can do to them.

Over the past five years I have developed an archaeological project in Jordan. My research focuses on the area of the ancient Moabites east of the Dead Sea. Whenever I have a season in the field, I take a group of students with me. I limit the group to a maximum of five students. The teaching of archaeology is much more effective in a small-group setting. It allows us also to interact with the local population much better and travel more effectively than with a large group. Through group worship, lectures, discussions and first-hand experience of the Bible Lands, the students develop a new personal platform to encounter the Bible. They begin to read the Bible with different eyes and to develop a sense for the cultural, socio-economic, and intellectual history of the Bible as well as a sense for the reality of daily life during biblical times. The paper will explore the unique opportunities of small-group archaeological projects to gain knowledge and experience in the area of archaeology, Biblical history, the material culture of the Bible Lands, etc., and to develop faith and trust in the eternal word of God.

2. The Project

Research in Near Eastern Archaeology within the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been initiated by the German Siegfried Horn who started excavations at Tell Hesban in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The Institute of Archaeology was founded at Andrews University in 1980 by Lawrence T. Geraty. Siegfried Horn's students continued to develop and expand an archaeological and anthropological research program in Jordan, called the Madaba Plains Project. This project has gained international praise and recognition. William Dever (1993: 127) underlines that "this combined project has long since become one of the most sophisticated and truly interdisciplinary of all American archaeological excavations in the Middle East."

One of Siegfried Horn's students, Udo Worschech, Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Archaeology at Friedensau Adventist University in Germany, began archaeological surface surveys and excavations in Jordan in 1983. As one of his students I joined him in fieldwork in 1987. In 2001 I decided to start my own research project. I began the Wadi ash-Shkafiya Survey near Wadi al-Mujeb (biblical River

Arnon) east of the Dead Sea, the settlement area of the ancient Moabites. This project was established to collect archaeological data from one of the main tributary wadis of Wadi al-Mujeb. Wadi ash-Shkafiya branches off the main wadi and cuts into the central Moabite Plateau (Ard al-Kerak). This survey showed that the various wadis that lead into Wadi al-Mujeb were widely frequented during ancient times. Especially Wadi ash-Shkafiya shows a number of strong fortifications indicating that this wadi served as one of the major routes leading up to the Central Moabite plateau. A number of important sites (more than 50 altogether) could be identified and studied during this survey. They could be dated to a range of periods beginning with the Early Bronze period up to the Islamic age (see e.g., Ninow 2002a).

One of the most important sites that were discovered during the initial survey is Khirbat al-Mamariyah. This site is situated on a hillside that rises from the wide bed of Wadi al-Mujeb near the point of the confluence of Wadi ash-Shkafiya and Wadi al-Mujeb. Three small seasons of excavation so far have established the basic outline of the site. The results so far show that the site was essentially a one-period site and dates to the Iron I Age (ca. 1200-1000 BCE), the period of the Judges in the Old Testament. Khirbat al-Mamariyah formed part of a chain of fortified sites along the northern and eastern border of the Central Moabite plateau. Whereas all the other Iron I sites are found in rather remote areas on top of the plateau, Khirbat al-Mamariyah is situated on the crossways of important routes that connected the northern Dhiban plateau with the southern Moabite plateau. Most of the traffic that crosses Wadi al-Mujeb had to pass by this site (see e.g., Ninow 2002b, 2004, 2005). The research of these sites is providing important insights into the early history of the Moabites in this region.

Besides hiring local workers archaeological projects depend on voluntary workers. Volunteers are highly motivated. Usually, no previous experience is necessary. Often, students from various educational institutions and backgrounds join the dig. Some expeditions offer credit courses from sponsoring institutions. Large projects have a core staff of 25-30 professionals joined by 50 and more students plus local workers. They are accommodated in hotels or a Kibbutz nearby.

Although Friedensau Adventist University is a relatively small school compared to other Adventist educational institutions around the world and does not offer a Biblical Archaeology program, it has recognized the importance of Near Eastern Archaeology in regard to Biblical studies (this is contrary to the trend at secular universities in Germany) and has continually supported research projects. During the

past five years I have been able to carry out archaeological expeditions in Jordan for several weeks each year. I have taken students not only from Friedensau, but also from other universities with different majors (Theology, Archaeology, Social Work, etc.). The group included Adventists as well as non-Adventists.

Limiting the group to a small number allows a much more intensive experience than with a large group. We don't live in a hotel; we rent an apartment in a small village that is near our site. There is no tourist infra-structure; just a simple place to stay and the local population: we live *with* the people; we eat their food; we endure the smell of the animals (mostly sheep and goat); we are disturbed by the crying of donkeys and the barking of wild dogs during the night; sometimes no water for three days.

Coming back to the area, to the same village year after year allows us to get acquainted with many of the villagers; we share their joys and sorrows, their daily labours; we become friends. Travelling during the weekends to the many places of archaeological and biblical interest is much easier with a small group.

3. The Student

Most of the students coming to Jordan to join our project experience their first encounter with the Lands of the Bible. For some it is a real culture shock. Everything is different to their previous experience: the weather is different, the food, the people, the speed of life, the language, money, traffic, going to the lavatory, etc. In our preliminary meeting I request that the students hand in a written report of their experience after they have returned from Jordan. I am particularly interested in the things that impressed them. What was their experience like? What did they learn? What has changed? What have they gained from their experience? What did it do to their faith? Some write a diary to deal with their impressions and emotions during the expedition. When I meet these former students after they have graduated I follow up on their experience and how they were influenced by it.

The following is based on personal interviews with the students, their written statements, and my own personal experience:

3.1 Development of Intercultural Sensitivity

An appreciation of cultural factors is not only important from the point of view of 'tact' and 'good manners' but also in appreciating how people from a different culture conceptualize values and norm, behaviour and manner. You may experience the discovery that the same ordinary behaviour—maybe just a small gesture—can have different meanings in different cultures. The immersion into another culture requires at least to some willingness to let go of one's own culture. It is an exciting development to observe how one—if open to the new culture—begins to function in that new culture. The locals appreciate your effort to talk—if only in bits and pieces with many gestures—in their language. Each trip to the bakery brings you one step closer to perfection in the Arabic language. In this context, the concept of time has taken on a completely different focus. Whereas we westerners are concerned with punctuality and knowing the exact time, the people there value the time we spend together no matter when or how long.

Coming in contact with the Bedouin makes you aware of the fact it does not need many possessions to be satisfied. It makes you also aware that you are indeed a rich person. It does not take much to make them happy. In the western world we are always complaining on a high level. Watching these Bedouin families cope with every day life situations conveys a different speed of life. Our life is determined by our organizers and mobiles that mercilessly jerk us out of our reveries; theirs is determined by nature, by the rising of the sun, the need for pasture for the animals, the seasons. Their life breathes calmness—something that has no place and no time in our hectic western world. One year a Bedouin had camped with his family and relatives right beside the track that led to our site. Each morning we would pass his tent on our way to work. Finally, one morning he stopped our car and invited us for a cup of tea. From then on, each morning we would drop by, sit at the entrance of the tent, watching the sun rise and having nips of sweet tea. One discovers that slowness could be a valuable ingredient to our living (cp. Ecc 3:1 “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven”).

3.2 Development of Religious Sensitivity

Western perception of Islam and Muslims has long been dominated by negativity and confrontation (Europe's history has a long standing tradition of direct military threats through Islamic forces; the US has a bias in favor of the State of Israel, thus opposing the Palestinians and their Islamic allies). The 9/11 attacks in the US and subsequent assaults on Madrid and London, or suicide attacks of Hamas or the Al-Aqsa-Brigades on Israel have had a crucial influence on the perception of Muslims and the Islam in general.

Instrumental in shaping public opinion were predominantly the media. By communicating and viewing graphic and extreme events, Islam never had the chance of a fair presentation to a broader public. Islam has been equated with suicide bombing, subsequent entry into paradise accompanied by many virgins for the martyrs, fundamentalism, discrimination against women, etc. Arabs are suspects on principle. Imagine, someone boards a plane in London bound for New York and finds out that an Arabic looking person is his/her seat neighbor; for fear of an attack he/she will be an unhappy camper for the entire duration of the flight (What about me? When I board a plane flying from Frankfurt to Amman the whole plane is full of Arabic looking men!).

Coming to Jordan allows us to observe how Islam shapes an entire society and is being practiced in a Muslim country. Living in one of the most secular countries in the world, I am impressed with people that take their faith seriously whether in public or privately in their homes. We count many Muslims among our closest friends in Jordan. While visiting with them we often discuss questions of religion and share prayer.

Their seriousness, their love for Allah, their striving for an ethical life before God impresses me. Often I am challenged to evaluate my personal life before God. In as much our Christian faith should or does generate a Christian world view, Islam also is a worldview that permeates the entire life and culture. Understanding this world view helps to relate much better to the ongoing debate on the "The Clash of Civilizations" (Samuel P. Huntington) and the conflict between the Western world and the Muslim countries. It also makes me more sensitive towards people within the Christian debate that do not share the same faith and positions that I do.

3.3 Development of Political Sensitivity

Visiting Israel, talking to Jews and Palestinians alike produces an awareness of the issues involved. One recognizes that there is more to a coin than one side.

The philosophy of dispensationalism and the political development in regard to the State of Israel during the past 50 years has produced close ties between evangelicals and Israel: It has shaped popular opinion first and foremost in America and, to some extent, U.S. foreign policy. Evangelical circles in other countries like Germany begin to stress the focus on Israel. Yet—I repeat myself—if you concern yourself with the problem on the spot you realize that there is more to a coin than one side. Political sensitivity helps to critically evaluate current events (and biblical prophecy).

3.4 Experiencing Limitations

Living and working for several weeks together in contexts that do not correspond to what the student is usually exposed to, requires social competence. The climatic conditions, limited living space, coping with different characters within the group, suffering from the “curse of the Pharaoh”, lack of water to wash or use the lavatory let the student experience personal limitations. They recognize that everyone has to play a vital part within the group, and if one does not give the mission his/her support everybody else suffers. Participating in a small-group project like this involves a great deal of self-responsibility and social awareness, thus contributing to character building, the development of social skills, and enhancing self awareness.

3.5 Recognizing That the Biblical World Is a Real World

Coming to the Bible Lands, living there for quite some time, mingling with the local people (especially with the Bedouin) takes you literally back into the World of the Bible. You observe and experience things that have not changed since the time of Moses or Jesus. It is as if the biblical stories come into play before your eyes. You recognize: the biblical world is a *real* world.

As we grew up with the stories of Abraham, David, Elijah, Jesus, and the Apostles, we created pictures in our mind that were influenced by the world around us. Abraham looked like the grey-haired conference president that preached so powerfully every other year. David's pasture was situated in the beautiful meadows of the Tennessee valley (or respective areas of beauty in your neck of the woods). Paul preached in a room that resembled the interior of the local church building (compare the artworks of medieval artists who painted nice scenes of the nativity with the skyline of 15th century Wittenberg, Augsburg, or Brussels in the background).

Trotting through the desert, walking beside the River Jordan one realizes that this is not the world of Harry Anderson, the great American artist whose paintings were formative for our childhood's imagination of the biblical world (Uncle Arthur's Bedtimes Stories), nor the scenes so affectionately developed by the Sabbath School teacher on the felt-board. Still today, the world of the orient provides everywhere substance enough for creating authentic pictures while reading the biblical text. One is surrounded by the world in which God has revealed Himself, a world in which God's Son has spent his human life.

The realization that the Biblical world is a real world stimulates a longing for a real God. This sense of nearness to God is irresistibly induced when we travel into the desert, especially Wadi Rum in southern Jordan, or the Sinai peninsula. These deserts offer some of the most impressive landscapes in the Middle East with its picturesque rocks and the bright colours of the sky and the sand. While watching the sun set we open Scripture and read about Moses' experience in Midian, Israel's wanderings of forty years in the desert, and how Jesus spend 40 days in the desert to be close to his heavenly Father. We begin to get an idea why the desert is the place of meeting God and doing a long-term self-study. When the sun has disappeared behind the horizon it becomes instantly dark. Then, it seems as if the starry sky breaks down over you. It is hard to capture in words a sense of awe and admiration when you gaze up, with no city lights to spoil the view; just raw beauty. No wonder that God uses the night sky to substantiate His promises to Abraham.

Participating in an archaeological dig provides a first-hand experience of the material culture of the biblical world. This material culture refers to artefacts, i.e., any object made or modified by a human culture (e.g., pottery, tools, figurines, jewellery, seals, inscriptions, clothing, art-work), or other features such as architecture, burials, cisterns, etc. It is quite a moment when you excavate and finally hold in your hands a

pottery vessel from the time of Abraham or the judges. The last time people touched it was thousands of years ago. Archaeology allows you to feel, to touch, to smell, to taste the biblical world.

Walking through a Moabite house or sitting in front of Ruth's kitchen lets you re-live biblical times. Clay images of gods and goddesses suddenly put a face to names such as Baal, Asherah, Kemosh (the national God of the Moabites), and other deities of the Ancient Near East. The recovery of carbonized food remains, plants, pollen, bones, and the evaluation of such organic material gives insight into the diet of people living in biblical times. The close investigation of skeletons recovered in burials reveal the diseases they suffered from and under which circumstances those people died. Again, one realizes that the biblical world is a *real* world.

Biblical Archaeology works in an interdisciplinary way in its quest to clarify cultural processes which constituted human life in the past, especially during biblical times. It encourages a dialogue between ancient traditions and contemporary cultural heritage. In doing so, it creates a sensitivity and respect for cultural differences and particularities in ancient times, as well as in contemporary society. By clarifying these processes Biblical Archaeology contributes to a student's self-definition and self-understanding in coping with today's issues.

3.6 Sensitive Reading of the Bible

When you return home after this experience you read your Bible with different eyes. While visiting various places that are mentioned in the Scriptures you gain a feeling for the geography, the distances, the stench of the animals, the climate, etc. When Jesus tells the parable of "a certain man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves" (Luk 10:30ff.) you know the area, you know the distance. The parable of the ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom comes to life for you know how these lamps during the time of Jesus looked like and how they functioned.

One of my favourite trips in Jerusalem is a hike through the underground water tunnel carrying water from the Gihon Spring in the Kidron Valley outside the Old City to the Pool of Siloah inside Jerusalem. In preparation for the expected Assyrian invasion, King Hezekiah began preparing Jerusalem should the city come under siege.

The springs outside the city were stopped up and the Gihon Spring was redirected through a tunnel cut through the limestone bedrock into a new pool made at the south end of the city (2 Chr 32:30).

One of the most impressive events that take you back to the time of the Bible is the celebration of the Samaritan Passover. This biblical festival has, for over two thousand years, been observed on Mt. Gerizim and until today the Samaritans continue to gather there to offer the sacrifices prescribed in the Torah. The service starts near the time of sunset. After a time of singing and praying a signal is given and the head of each household reaches for his knife to slice the throat of his family's lamb. As soon as this is done, the Samaritans all begin clapping, congratulating each other and celebrating. More than thirty sheep are being slain, about one for each larger family. Then the sheep are skinned and put on a pole and carried over to one of the 2-3 meter deep roasting pits to be cooked for most of the night. Such sacrificing is a very bloody affair. The men, who wear white garments, are covered with blood everywhere. What a contrast: white garments and bloody red hands and stains (cp. Isa 1:18). To the ancient Israelite God's imperative "But be sure you do not eat the blood, because the blood is the life," must have left a profound impression of the cost of the sin that required such a sacrifice (for a description of the Samaritan Passover, see e.g., Bolen 2001).

Standing at the Wailing Wall and walking through an underground pathway along the western wall of King Herod's Temple platform one marvels at the incredible huge stone blocks that form the foundation for the massive walls. Now you can understand the unbelief and resistance of the disciples when Jesus announced: "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down" (Mat 24:2).

Visiting with the Bedouin allows a view into the world of the patriarchs and ancient Israel. Although today, many of the Bedouin of Jordan have traded their traditional existence for the pursuits and the conventions of the modern world that have irrevocably altered the nature of life for the Bedouin, and for the land they inhabit, nonetheless, Bedouin culture still survives in Jordan where there is a growing appreciation of its value and its fragility. They have maintained a way of living, social structures, customs and manners, values and norms that have not changed over the last four thousand years. The most easily recognized aspect of a Bedouin is his tent, his family with many children, and his herds consisting mainly of sheep and goats, but also sometimes camels. A Bedouin tent is customarily divided into two sections by a curtain;

one section, reserved for the men and for the reception of most guests, the other, in which the women cook and receive female guests (remember Sarah who stood behind the curtain and laughed; Gen 18:10-12). Having been welcomed into a Bedouin tent, guests are honoured, respected, and nourished with copious amounts of fresh, cardamom-spiced coffee or tea. On special occasions the guest is treated to a *mansaf*, a lamb seasoned with herbs, lightly spiced, cooked in yoghurt and served with huge quantities of rice. The dish is served on a huge plate. On top of the rice and the meat sits the roasted sheep head, its fat-tail between the jaws attesting to the fact that fat is a valuable entity (cp. the role of fat within the sacrificial system of the Old Testament).

When you read of the Israelites marching through Edom and Moab you know almost every stone of this area. Deut 2:24 reads: “Arise, set out, and pass through the valley of Arnon!” When I first read this passage I imagined the Israelites crossing a lovely valley with green pastures. What a difference to reality: Wadi al-Mujeb (the biblical Arnon valley) is a deep canyon with steep walls, no real road to cross. What a feat to cross with so many people and animals! When you read the story of the Exodus you know how the Israelites have felt; you also have experienced the same heat and the same thirst; you can sympathize. You relive the past, the past becomes present. You realize: the Bible is not a book that fell suddenly from heaven right into the printing press of a Bible Society at the beginning of the 19th century—it is a living testimony from ancient times that God uses still today to reveal Himself.

Sensitive reading of the biblical text is not only sympathizing or empathizing, not only knowing the heat of the desert or how a sheep smells, it is also wrestling with the text and grappling with its meaning. Experiencing the biblical world *in situ* lets you ask questions which you were not aware of before. One example should suffice: the large numbers of Israelites at the time of the Exodus.

Num 1:46 records the census taken among the Israelites after they had left Egypt. The total number of men able to carry weapons is counted as 603,550; to this figure you have to add at least an equal number of women. Adding the children and older folks you arrive at a total population of the Israelites in the desert of not less than 2.5 to 3 million people (we have not yet added the millions of animals). This large number creates many problems. How would you organize a camp with so many people in the desert? What about the sanctuary service requiring thousands of sacrifices each day? The biblical text (Deut 7:1) underlines the superiority of Israel’s enemies compared to their own size and ability. Why that? The Israelites would have

outnumbered their opponents many times. When the Israelites entered the land they first occupied only the central hill country. How could such a small piece of land endure and nourish such a large number of people and animals (see further Merling 1999, Zerbst 2005). These and other questions come to your mind. God did not lead his people in a vacuum. They came in contact with other nations; they left their prints in the sand of history; they were real people in a real world. Thus, biblical history has to be “sensible.”

The last point is concerned with hermeneutics. Visiting the biblical world, coming in contact with the material culture of the biblical world through archaeology lets you realize that the Bible is not a book of the 21st century but a testimony from ancient times. This testimony is first of all directed toward the people of that time. It is part of this ancient time, this ancient society, has its *Sitz im Leben* in the concrete context of the Ancient Near East. When God speaks He speaks into the respective time and society. He speaks the language of the time, He uses the pictures that those people were accustomed to and were able to appreciate. Understanding the culture surrounding Israel helps us to understand Scripture.

During regular devotions and personal discussions, we reflect upon these issues. Students are encouraged to express their feelings and opinions and wrestle with these questions. It is not uncommon that we talk till late night (it is beautiful to sit under a clear starry sky with a full moon and comfortable temperature, smelling the desert) although knowing that we have to get up early next morning at around 4 a.m. Experiencing this biblical world creates a new arena for faith. The students relate to their religious traditions in new ways; Bible passages gain new meaning. Some of the participants are confronted with matters of faith for the first time. They ask different questions than students coming from a Christian context. They are a welcome stimulation and challenge. One of the secular students later labelled our dig “a Christian dig”. What he meant was not that we were using “Christian” dig methods or a “Christian” way to analyze ancient pottery. He was impressed with our Christian worldview that permeated our daily life.

3.7 Proper Research

In some countries, Adventist theologians have not been accustomed to interacting with other theologians on an academic level or publish their research results

(if they did research at all). This has created an inferiority complex, on the part of the teacher as well as the student. Being involved in a research project, doing research together with the teacher, and seeing the research results being published in professional journals instills confidence that what we do is not a hobby or a game but proper research; and that proper research is even possible within Adventist circles.

4. The Teacher

Much what has been said above in regard to the student applies to the teacher as well. I have gone through the same challenges as a student participating in a small-group archaeological expedition (I am very grateful to my teacher that he took on the challenge to take me to the Bible Land). This experience has had a profound impact on my life. Not only did I discover my passion for Near Eastern Archaeology, I read the Bible with different eyes thus stimulating a new and deeper interest in the Word of God.

Taking a group of students to the Bible Lands, living so close together, spending so many days together does not correspond to the regular student-teacher relationship. It is not the occasional mingling with students outside of class during school-sponsored events or infrequent invitations into one's home for dinner. The realization that you spend this unusual large amount of quality time together with your students in a setting outside the environment of the institutional campus and formal classroom makes you aware of your responsibility. You become a model of a particular lifestyle to your students ("Christian" dig), providing him/her with an example to follow. You do no longer play only the "role" of "teacher." You become a human being with all your strengths and weaknesses; you become vulnerable; you become an open book to your students. This can be a painful but also a valuable experience. Sometimes deep friendships develop out of such an expedition. The closer and more personal the relationship between the student and the teacher, the more likely is that the teacher can have a significant impact on the life of the student. You can become a mentor for the student beyond his time at the respective educational institution (for more on the relationship between teacher and student, see Balmer 2001).

5. The People

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a relatively small country situated at the junction of the Levantine and Arabian areas of the Middle East. The country is bordered on the north by Syria, to the east by Iraq, and by Saudi Arabia on the east and south. To the west is Israel and the occupied West Bank, while Jordan's only outlet to the sea, the Gulf of Aqaba, is to the south. Jordan is a constitutional monarchy with a representative government. The reigning monarch is His Majesty King Abdullah II. As Transjordan the country became part of the British mandate of Palestine in 1920, gaining independence in 1946. It was renamed Jordan in 1949. Jordan's population is estimated at nearly 6 million (July 2006 estimates).

Approximately 78 percent of Jordan's people reside in major cities. Amman, the capital, comprises 38 percent of the country's population. Jordan's stability in a turbulent region has attracted large numbers of refugees and temporary residents from neighboring regions such as the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Lebanon.

There is a great contrast between urban and rural living standards. Urbanites enjoy basic services, such as drinking water and electricity in their homes, with schools and clinics in close proximity to their residences. In urban areas, 99 percent have electricity in their residences; in the rural areas, the figure is 81 percent. For drinking water, the figures are 92 percent and 78 percent respectively. About 10 percent of the people reside in Palestinian refugee camps, where living conditions are congested. In rural areas, around 25 percent live in stone and mud houses; a diminishing number (less than 5 percent) follow the traditional life of the Arab Bedouin, living in tents and tending camels, sheep, and goats.

Islam is the prevalent religion in Jordan where Sunni Muslims comprise 92 percent of the population, Christians comprise 6 percent of the population (majority Greek Orthodox, but some Greek and Roman Catholics, Syrian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Protestant denominations, among them a small group of SDA believers), and others comprise 2 percent of the population (several small Shi'a Muslim and Druze populations; 2001 estimates).

Generally speaking, there exists a good collaboration between Christians and Moslems in daily life. Numerous friendly ties exist between Christian and Moslem families. The government tries to make efforts towards equality of both faith communities. From speaking with many Christians in Jordan I get the impression that

most Christians don't have the feeling that they are met by hatred or discrimination. Yet, listening to sermons during Friday prayer in various villages and towns—especially outside Amman—different voices can be heard: “Christians and Jews are groups that are against Islam; they don't have faith; Christians have had a bad influence on society, and the Muslim community has to fight them.”

King Abdulla II. is insisting on the role of Christian Jordanians in building the society, and in overcoming the cultural conflict that arose after the 9/11 attacks. He invites Christian Jordanians to share in the responsibility of presenting the positive and real image of the Arab and Muslim world, based on the Muslim-Christian coexistence in Jordan. Crucial in this effort is the question how Christianity is perceived.

The village we live in is a pure Christian village. No Muslim people live there. The next Muslim village is some distance away. There is no call to prayer five times a day. A small church with big speakers that play a tape of the ringing of bells calls the faithful to the service. Only a handful of old women attend regularly. It appears as if Christianity does not really play a big part in the life of the people. When it comes to Muslims many speak derogatorily and disparagingly of them; they make fun of the Muslim tradition of the *mu'adhin* calling to prayer. Christianity is often reduced to the possibility of eating pork (some of the Christian villagers breed pork!) and drinking alcohol. Many Muslims in Jordan perceive Christianity as the life style of the tourists and as the norm of TV content, and equate it with pornography and alcohol.

There is a great need of a proper representation of Christ and Christianity in Jordan. We do not live ourselves in Jordan. We have the responsibility to convey a clearer picture of what Christianity is all about. What we do or speak does not only say something about us but also about Christianity. Being aware of this creates precious possibilities in the Christian as well as in the Muslim context.

We are required by law to have a state representative with us all the time. This means that the representative—who is usually a Muslim—becomes part of the group. He experiences first-hand what it means to be Christian. Again, this places a great responsibility on the group. It allows the students to concern themselves with people of Muslim faith and oriental culture.

When I first came to Jordan and worked with the local people I was shocked by their apathy towards their own history and cultural heritage. They destroy ancient sites due to modern street planning; they use ancient temples as quarries to gain building material for their houses. When we finish the season and leave to return home, they

come and start digging. What are they looking for? Gold! They have no idea why we are here. In employing local people to work in our project we not only give them an opportunity to support their families with some additional income but also contribute to the awareness of their own history and cultural heritage.

6. Conclusion

Small-group archaeological expeditions create unique opportunities for both students and teacher. Traveling to the Land of the Bible, being exposed to the material culture of the Bible through archaeological fieldwork, visiting biblical places, meeting with the local people provides a new understanding and a new reading of God's Word. Interacting with the participants of the dig, the workmen, the Bedouin, the people of the village and many others, both of Christian and Muslim faith, fosters the development intercultural, religious, and political sensitivity. Being aware of the responsibility of representing the Christian faith in a Muslim context encourages a self-evaluation of values, positions, and norms. On returning home, one is no longer the same person that left six weeks before.

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