

HIGHLIGHTS OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN BIBLE LANDS

by

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

MONEY IN OLD TESTAMENT TIMES

WEIGHING OF MONEY IN EARLY OLD TESTAMENT TIMES

As far as archaeology has been able to discover, before the seventh century B.C. the coinage system was not in use, and so when money was used in exchange for goods, it was always weighed. 1

When Abraham bought the land for the burial of Sarah it is said, **“And Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant”** (Genesis 23:16).

And Joseph’s brothers said to his steward, **“When we came to the inn, that we opened our sacks, and, behold, every man’s money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight”** (Genesis 43:21).

The beginning of coinage. Lydian coins that are usually dated about 700 B.C. are the oldest coins that have as yet been discovered. Although none have been found, there are references to coins that were doubtless in use by the Assyrians in the reign of Esarhaddon who ruled from 680 to 669 B.C. It would seem, then, that quite likely the Lydians borrowed the coinage idea from Mesopotamia. How much earlier than 700 B.C. coins were in use we cannot say, but later discoveries may throw further light on the matter. 2

Use of the “drachma” in later Old Testament times. The writers of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, refer to a gold coin called drachma (A.V., dram; I Chronicles 29:7; Ezra 2:69; 8:27; Nehemiah 7:70-72). Because the drachma was a Greek coin, Bible critics used to doubt the validity of its Scriptural reference, because, they argued, such coins would not be widely used until after the wars of Alexander the Great had spread Greek influence. But in the year 1931 excavations began at Beth-Zur, and Director O. R. Sellers discovered there six golden coins which were located in the Persian level, and these proved to be the Greek coins referred to in the Old Testament. Here was indication that such coins were used by the Jews at the very time when they were said to have been used in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. This discovery also tends to disprove the late date theory for the writing of these Old Testament books. 3

1. George A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible*, ed. 1937, p. 203.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 203, 204.
3. Joseph P. Free, *Archaeology and Bible History*, pp. 252, 253; W. F. Albright, *Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible*, p. 227.

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