**Alfred Hoerth and John McRay, Bible Archaeology, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005. 288pp.**

By Donald C. McNeeley

Tidewater Bible College, Virginia Beach, Virginia.

This book is highly appealing to the visual senses, with over 280 full-color maps and photographs. Rarely are the two-facing pages without at least one photo or map, sometimes, both pages contain just pictures and maps. The abundance of pictures has two consequences. First, the reader is visually titillated and impressed by the beautiful artifacts that make up the archaeology of the Bible. Secondly, the book is a reasonably easy read requiring about 8-10 hours to complete at a leisurely pace. This does not mean that the authors have ignored the educational utility, but it would be easy for a reader to skip reading the text and look only at the pictures. That said, the authors have combined the images with comment boxes providing substantial detail not covered in the main text. If the reader reads the text and reviews the pictures, maps, and the associated comment boxes, the reader will obtain an excellent overview of biblical archaeology.

Starting with a general introduction to archaeology and the Bible, the authors take the reader on a trip into the scripture using geographical areas of the Ancient Near East and the Mediterranean Sea area: starting in Mesopotamia and ending in Italy. Each chapter demonstrates that the Bible is associated with various geographic locations and those living in those locations. This concept is reinforced by chapter titles that use the following format "location" and the Bible, e.g., Persia and the Bible, Greece and the Bible, etc. While this may be somewhat confusing to a person used to only reading the Bible, I found it interesting that, in many ways, the scripture can be seen as a series of events in these various locations. This methodology also provides an exceptional text for the classroom environment, especially for a home-schooled high school student.

The most significant advantage of the book's structure is its pictures, charts, and maps. As the reader progresses through the text, the scenes and locations come alive because of the frequent images. For instance, when the authors discuss "Egypt and the Bible" as expected, there are pictures of the pyramids and the sphinx. There are also pictures of Egyptian life gathered from the tombs and other events, for example, the making of bricks. Additionally, the ebb and flow of biblical interactions are laid out in a manner that might not be as readily seen through a reading of the Bible by itself. Demonstrating when the events from scripture appear in the "location" is extremely helpful when trying to understand the overall cultural context the scripture was composed.

This text is a welcome addition to anyone's library. As stated on the book cover, this is "An Exploration of the History and Culture of Early Civilization," and reading the book explores the culture and history surrounding the Bible. I strongly recommend this valuable and must-have asset to all interested in the Bible.