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Biblical archaeology informs, baffles

Take it from local biblical professors: If you plan to apply a little archaeology to your Bible reading, proceed with caution. The field abounds with controversy.

Middle East excavations in the last 150 years or so have revealed entire civilizations "about which we knew next to nothing," according to Father Joseph Brennan, director of religious affairs at the University of Rochester. "One by one, various civilizations have been uncovered, their literature deciphered, their names of kings, their cities, their poetry, their laws."

At the same time, however, the excavations and their interpretations have pulled us this way and that, over biblical historical accuracy issues.

Many of us would like to believe Moses and the early patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) were real, that the Noah's Ark story really happened, that the trumpets sounded and the walls of Jericho came tumbling down, opening

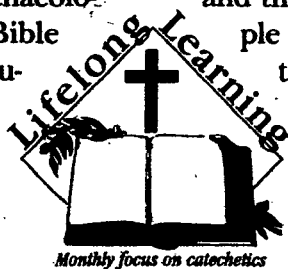
up the Promised Land. But the evidence supporting these events and the existence of these people only goes so far, and certainly dwindles as one approaches 950 B.C.

So, while many discoveries can help us to read the Bible with knowledge of ancient times, Father Brennan said, they can have another effect — similar to the confusion resulting from conflicting studies about the health benefits of foods.

Once an avid follower of archaeological research, Father Brennan is losing interest.

"You become skeptical," he explained. "For most people, people teaching spend too much time talking about background, about ancient history, the Bible, the ancient Babylonians, and archaeology. That's fine, but I think it distracts you from reading the text."

The Bible wasn't meant in the kind of reading we're accustomed to, he said. It's to be read more "the way you pick up a newspaper at Borders." **Continued on page 13**



"You can take the Bible in one hand and a shovel in the other"

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