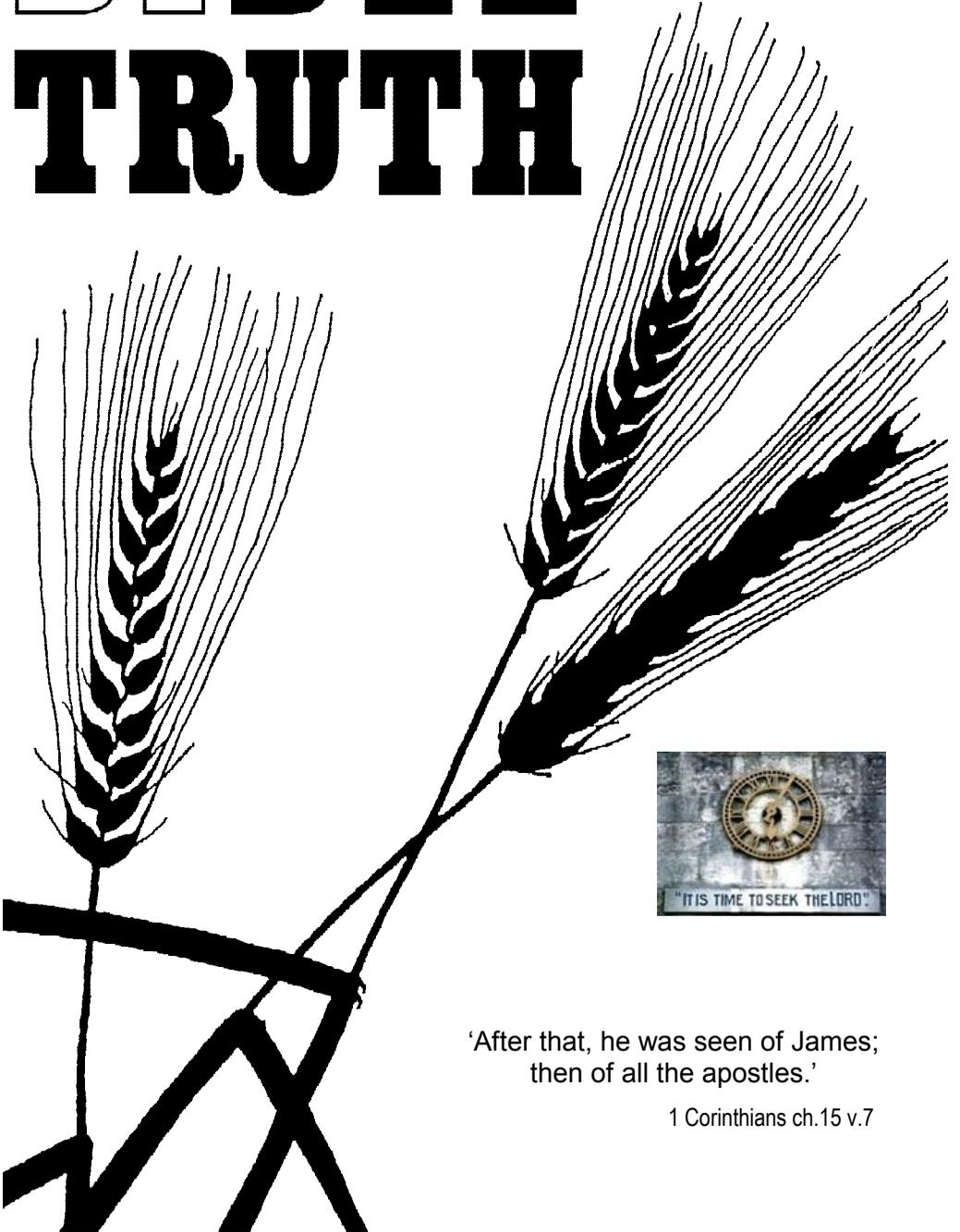


BIBLE TRUTH

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'After that, he was seen of James;
then of all the apostles.'

1 Corinthians ch.15 v.7

Samson

Portrait of a flawed hero?

by Rosemary Northway

Could a recent archaeological find be proof of his existence?



Stone seal dating from the 12th century BC depicting an unarmed man in combat with a lion.

Photo: Raz Lederman, courtesy of Tel Beth Shemesh Excavations

Archaeologists from Tel Aviv University have reported the discovery of a 15mm circular stone seal dating from the 12th century BC depicting an unarmed man in combat with a lion. The seal was found in the course of excavations at Beth Shemesh* (Heb. House of the Sun), in the Sorek Valley, between the cities of Zorah and Eshtaol and some 19 miles west of Jerusalem.

In the Book of Judges, these two cities and the surrounding countryside are the setting for the story of Samson, the thirteenth and last Judge of Israel in the years after the death of Joshua. Famed for his superhuman strength, which depended upon his retaining his long hair, Samson is credited with some remarkable feats, including the killing of a young Asiatic lion with his bare hands. The account of this and its consequences is given in Judges ch.14 vv 5-20.

The date attributed to the seal, together with the site where it was excavated, accord with the place and period indicated in the Biblical narrative as the backdrop to Samson's life and activities.

**Note, Beth Shemesh is spelt in a variety of ways*

While the archaeologists, Drs Shlomo Bunimovitz and Zvi Lederman, do not identify the figure as Samson, they make the point that it suggests that a story was circulating around that time of a lone hero who fought a lion without using a weapon, as opposed to being a member of a well-armed lion hunting expedition.



Seal and its rolled-out impression. Made of agate it depicts King Darius of Persia hunting lions (British Museum)

There are enough similarities between the illustration on the seal and the details of Samson's lion-slaying adventure to indicate a possible link between the two.



Assyrian bas relief showing lions being fought both on horseback and on foot. (British Museum)

The discovery does not prove whether Samson was either a legendary or a historical figure, but as Professor Bunimovitz says: 'It helps to anchor the story in an archaeological setting'.

