

Ivory discovered at the sites of ancient Samaria and Nimrud confirm some of the details mentioned in the Bible about the material prosperity experienced during the latter part of the northern kingdom of Israel.



“All your words are true”—Psalm 119:160 NIV

Ivory discovered by archaeology at Samaria and Nimrud confirm what the Bible says.

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever”—1 Peter 1:24,25 NIV

The Bible documents the age-old trade and use of ivory. The unified 12 tribe kingdom under Solomon’s peaceful 40 year reign gained great material prosperity.

“The king [Solomon] had a fleet of trading ships at sea along with the ships of Hiram. Ince every three years it returned, carrying gold, silver and ivory, and apes and baboons”—1 Kings 10:22 NIV

The above and other scriptures testify to the availability of ivory in ancient Israel. In fact, throughout the ancient Near East, ivory was treasured as a medium for artwork.

“As for the other events of Ahab’s reign, including all he did, the palace he built and adorned with ivory, and the cities he fortified, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel?”—1 Kings 22:39 NIV

Using ivory in the manner referred to above is indicative of the economic prosperity enjoyed during Israelite king Ahab's reign. Excavators have discovered ivory inlays in some of the buildings of ancient Samaria which were in use at that time period of Israel's history. Impressive remains of a palace from the time of Omri and Ahab have been located on Samaria's fortified height. Ostraca written in ancient Hebrew dating to the time of Jeroboam II have been found, as well as many ivory plaques that are reminiscent of **“the palace [Ahab] built . . . adorned with ivory” (1 Kings 22:39 NLT)**.

“I will tear down the winter house along with the summer house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished,” declares the LORD [Yahweh]—Amos 3:15 NIV

The prosperity enjoyed during apostate, idolatrous king Ahab's reign was built, at least to some degree, through oppression of the poor and disadvantaged.

“You levy a straw tax on the poor, and impose a tax on their grain . . . oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts”—Amos 5:11,12 NIV

The reference to **“houses adorned with ivory” (Amos 3:15 NIV)** is confirmed by the discovery of what is called **“the Samaria Ivories”**, which is a collection of hundreds of pieces of artwork, including over 200 fragments found in the rubbish heap of a building on the city's acropolis. This 'ivory building' is associated with the Israelite king Ahab, who reigned from circa 874 BCE to circa 853 BCE, and who built his **“palace . . . adorned with ivory”** in Samaria. An alabaster jar found with the largest of the ivories and incised with the name of the Egyptian Pharaoh Osorkon, who reigned from 874 BCE to 850 BCE, is contemporary with Ahab. Other ivories have been discovered from all over Palestine and Mesopotamia dating to the same period general time period, and resemble the Samaritan artifacts in craftsmanship and style.

The artistic features of these ivories appear to have originated in Phoenicia, which is an area strongly influenced by Egyptian motifs and artwork. Characters from Egyptian mythology are very common in this collection, which also includes ivory plaques incised with Hebrew script. These were most likely inlays for palace furniture, like those mentioned in **Amos 6:4**.

“You lie on beds adorned with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves”—Amos 6:4 NIV

This scripture also testifies to the material prosperity enjoyed by some in Samaria during this time period.

What is interesting is that a large collection of carved ivories was discovered in the palace area of Nimrud an Assyrian city on the east bank of the Tigris river. These ivory carvings were artistic masterpieces in the form of human figures, animals (both real and mythological), plants and abstractions. Many of these artistically carved pieces were originally covered in gold. There were also found many objects that were used for practical purposes. One ivory piece, for example, was the handle of a fly-whisk, or a fan, and another carving was used a blinder for a horse.

In 1961 fragments of an ivory plaque were unearthed at Nimrud. It is surprising, in light how far removed this site is from Israel, that this plaque had a Hebrew inscription. Because this plaque is in a broken condition, a complete and definite translation isn't possible.

Notwithstanding this, the plaque appears to have phrases, such as **“the great king” (2 Kings 18:19 NIV)**, evidently referring to the king of Assyria, and **“may Yahweh shatter”**. The plaque dates to around 750 BCE and was either part of the tribute given by the Israelites to the Assyrians, or taken as booty by the Assyrian army after the after Assyrians had destroyed Samaria in 722 BCE.

The ivory discovered at the sites of ancient Samaria and Nimrud give us more evidence of **the Bible's Authenticity**. In stark contrast to fictional works and false religious works,

such as the ***Book of Mormon***, the more that time passes, the stronger the evidence that accumulates supporting the truthfulness of the Bible.