



By Vanessa Morton

I fell in love with scriptural Jericho when I was eight years old. My teacher, Mrs. Walker, was standing next to the felt storyboard, tacking up flannel-backed cutouts of Rahab, the spies, and the city walls while she told us the story of how Jericho's walls "came a-tumblin' down."

My imagination filled in the gaps...brave Rahab gathering her family close to the red cord, the rumbling footfalls of hundreds of thousands of warriors, and the blood-chilling roar of an entire nation reverberating across the Jordan Valley. What kind of power toppled a city without even touching it?

Fast forward a few years to Wednesday night youth meetings, when our leader began to teach a faith lesson about Jericho's walls. Excited, I leaned forward in my seat, but my friends elbowed me in the ribs and snickered behind their hands about walls falling down all by themselves. A first, fragile crack splintered my young faith.

Enthralled by ancient history, I later earned a BA in history, but relegated Rahab and other heroes to that drawer in my brain's filing system labeled "Fairy Tales and Legends."

With a career and family, I quietly fed my history craving with tomes and journals until 2008, when I stumbled on Dr. Bryant Wood's report about Tell es-Sultan—the site of ancient Jericho. His analysis of Jericho's destruction matched Mrs. Walker's lesson from the book of Joshua. In that moment, my faith took flight like a wounded bird released from captivity.

Inspired by Dr. Wood's research, I buried myself in archaeology reports about the history of this strategically located city-state in the Jordan valley and its world of political and trading partners.

When Associates for Biblical Research (ABR) announced they were seeking volunteers for Dr. Wood's 2010 dig season at Joshua's Ai (near Jericho), there was no doubt in my mind I would go.



Michael Luddeni

The 2010 Khirbet el-Maqatir dig team. The author is in the red shirt near left center of the photo.



Michael Luddeni

The author hard at work at Khirbet el-Maqatir in 2010.

That season in the Holy Land took me far outside my comfort zone and resulted in the trip of a lifetime. I could talk for hours about the wild beauty of the Holy Land, or the sweaty toil of lugging archaeology tools back and forth to our dig squares every day, or the patience of our square supervisors—learned historians, all—as I mercilessly picked their brains about Jericho and Joshua’s conquest.

The event that stirred my blood, however, occurred on the final weekend of the dig. Led by Joel Kramer, Executive Director of SourceFlix and creator of the *Jericho Unearthed* DVD, a few of us piled into an SUV and headed out of Jerusalem on Highway 1 to Tell es-Sultan. During our private tour, I walked the excavated roads where Rahab might have strolled with her friends. Standing atop the ruins, I spotted palm trees encircling spring-fed oases where she may have drawn water, and further still, to the east, the silver ribbon of the Jordan River—which would have been much wider and ferocious before last century’s water projects siphoned them off for irrigation—as it rolls to its rendezvous with the Dead Sea.

My research and experiences led me to write *Moonfall: Tales from the Levant*, a novel about young people living both inside and outside Jericho’s walls, a story to both enthrall and enlighten young readers like my teen daughters, to root their faith in both fact and imagination against a tide of skepticism.

As a child, did listening to the miraculous stories about Joshua’s conquest of Canaan thrill you? Seize the opportunity to rekindle that sense of awe and create your own adventure on a dig with ABR.

How do you know if volunteer archaeology is for you? Take this quiz to help you decide:

- The latest issue of *Bible and Spade* arrives. You resist opening it until bedtime so you can read it undisturbed. #Contentment
- *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is one of your favorite movies. #Adventure
- You can list all three languages found on the Rosetta Stone. #AncientLanguageGeek
- The 900 series in the Dewey Decimal system is your favorite hangout in the library. #HistoryIsCool
- Before wearing your brand new Indiana Jones fedora, you soaked it in teabags to give it that worn look. #newbie
- Khakis look good on you! #ArchaeologyFashionista

Vanessa Morton earned a BA in History from the University of Incarnate Word. She connected with Dr. Bryant Wood via ABR’s website in 2009 and worked with him at Khirbet el Maqatir during the 2010 dig season. She is the author of *Moonfall: Tales from the Levant*, a historical, biblical fiction book about Rahab and life inside Jericho at the time of Joshua. You can learn more about her book at VanessaMorton.com.



