

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

Lesson 20 – Part 2

Joshua and the Promised Land

I am sitting here typing this lesson in front of 6 ½ feet of books that I have used in reference to best understand and relate what amounts to around ten pages of typed information. This lesson, by necessity, is an abbreviation of abbreviations.

It reminds me of the Father Guido Sarducci sketch from the 1970's where he offered his five-minute university degree. He was convinced that in five minutes, he could teach you the things that the average person would remember five years after graduating from a four-year college. For Spanish class, for example, he teaches you, "Como esta usted?" To which you reply, "Muy bien." He believes that those two phrases are all most people remember from a two-year Spanish course after five years have passed.

This lesson will not be quite like that. Our goal is not so much to give you the minimum you will remember. Rather it is to open a door to understanding the issues behind comparing archaeological findings to the data supplied in the Bible. This means exploring some of the more important finds, and discussing the interpretations of those finds. Rarely is a finding absolute in its import or meaning, and often a great deal of interpretation is involved, giving a range of possible understandings.

Another purpose behind this paper is to show a reasonable approach for assessing the lessons of archaeology in reference to the Bible. Where are there "touch points" between Scripture and archaeological finds? How can we fairly compare these touch points? In this regard, a part of this paper is to serve as a reference point and springboard for further research, should one ever desire to go beyond Father Sarducci's five-minute university!

A final note in this study concerns the history involved. In a real sense, we have two layers of history. One is the ancient biblical history that we seek to understand through archaeology. There is also a second layer of history, however, which is the history of how the discipline of archaeology has handled the relevant discoveries. Many people assume that academia always accurately reflects the state of knowledge. Unfortunately that is not always so.

In this regard our foundation lesson last week sought to clarify the historical data set out in Joshua, distinguishing it from the perceptions of the invasion story that often permeate our minds, and the writings of scholars. In the process, we made an archaeological wish list of things we would like to find in the archaeological record. Our wish list was as follows:

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1. Find archaeological evidence of the towns of Jericho, Ai, and Hazor, along with the towns listed in the summary narratives set out earlier.
2. Evidence of destruction of Jericho, Ai, and Hazor in the time frame of Israelite invasion.
3. No other mass destruction of the other Canaanite towns mentioned in Joshua narratives is necessary under the Joshua narrative.
4. Evidence of Israelites as people in Canaan by 1200 BC. (This date is based on the chronology being used in the Exodus from earlier lessons).
5. Evidence of other Canaanites in and around the towns of Canaan in the age of Israelite settlement and afterwards.

This is called a wish list because archaeology never completely answers questions. Thousands of years bring a great deal of destruction through erosion, decomposition, man's re-use of materials, earthquakes, and more. Additionally the matters preserved are often more elusive than a pirate's buried treasure. In real archaeology, X rarely marks the spot!

Archaeologists have investigated only a small portion of the Holy Land's archaeological sites. Of those investigated, rarely is more than five percent of the site actually explored. In other words, while archaeology offers insight and some answers, it will never answer every question. It is inherently limited. We keep this in mind as we look at the items in our wish list.

A final note: I write this not as an archaeologist. In that field, I am way out of my depth. At times I am critical of the conclusions and statements of some fine archaeologists who have accomplished much in their fields. My criticism certainly does not flow from the arrogance that I, a non-trained archaeologist, have answers or understanding that these experts are missing. Rather, my expertise, if there is any that I bring to bear, is that of a trial lawyer. I have spent decades testing the opinions of experts in most every field of science. I make my living by holding the experts to fair and reasonable conclusions based upon the available evidence. That is what I have sought to do here. So please excuse the brashness of my intrusion into this field!

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE OF THE TOWNS OF JOSHUA

In the book of Joshua, we see references to a number of towns and villages where Joshua and the Israelites fought against the local inhabitants. One quest for the archaeologist is determining whether these towns actually existed (were

populated) in the time frame of Joshua.¹ This chore is not always an easy one for a variety of reasons. First, many of these towns had a population that was quite small by today's standards (measuring in the hundreds and thousands rather than hundreds of thousands!) Further, there are no extant "maps" of that day that show by handy reference which city is where. In many cases, these were not towns that lived on long enough for a later identification by later independent sources. A final missing piece, which would be quite helpful, are signs that we could dig up saying, for example, "Eglon City Limits."²

Because of this, one of the primary chores of archaeologists at a dig site is to try and identify the name of the village being excavated. Sometimes that work is easier than other times, and the scholars debate often over which town may be which.

An added layer of difficulty arises because some towns are mentioned in Scripture with names that were added later. In this sense we read of "Dan" in Genesis 14:14 even though that city took its name much later than the Genesis 14:14 timeframe. Our focus, therefore, will primarily be on those towns with a ruler or in reference to a battle as opposed to simply a geographical location that might have been transposed in name for understanding by later generations.

With those limitations noted, we can turn to the various towns listed in Joshua's battles. In considering these towns, we do so in the context of last lesson's admonition about the minimal information provided in Joshua. Except for Jericho, Ai, and Hazor (the three towns where destruction is detailed), the remaining towns are not destroyed. They are merely referenced as

A WORD ABOUT DATING:

Archaeologists date the various times of history by developmental milestones. Those relevant to this study are the "Bronze Age" and the "Iron Age." These time periods cover large blocks of history. The Bronze Age in Canaan is generally deemed to be 3600 to 1200 BC. The Iron Age in Canaan is 1200 to 586 BC. To give more focus to dialogue, scholars subdivide these ages. The Bronze Age is divided into the "Early Bronze Age," the Middle Bronze Age," and the "Late Bronze Age." These divisions are further subdivided so that the Late Bronze Age, for example, has the "Late Bronze Age I (1550-1400 BC)," the "Late Bronze Age IIA (1400-1300 BC)," and the "Late Bronze Age IIB (1300-1200 BC)." Different scholars use slightly different dates for these ages. We have followed that of *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*. It has the most thorough set of essays on the digs for this lesson.

The timeframe for our theory of the invasion and settlement of Canaan puts it toward the end of the Late Bronze Age IIB.

¹ We have noted in earlier lessons that among those believing in the exodus of Israel from Egypt, there are those who ascribe to an "early date" for the exodus and those who place it later. We have concluded that the exodus likely occurred in the later time period dating it during the reign of Pharaoh Ramesses II. That places Joshua and the Israelite incursion into Canaan around 1230-1220 BC. This lesson works off that later date.

² In rare cases, archaeologists have discovered a piece of pottery or some other writing that has the name of the town inscribed. We do discuss one finding that is almost a "city limits" sign, which certainly made that town's identification easier!

battle areas in first the southern campaign and then the northern campaign. We will consider each in the order they appear in Joshua, saving Jericho and Ai for more detailed consideration in the next lesson. We will consider these within the framework of a 13th century (late 1200 BC) invasion by the Israelites. This time period in Canaan is known as the “Late Bronze Age” by archaeologists.

The Southern Campaign

Five kings (local rulers may be more fitting to our mentality) instigated this campaign against the Israelites. The king of Jerusalem was the ringleader, and the kings of Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon joined him. The coalition forces initially went out to fight Gibeon, a town allied with Israel. In response, Joshua brought the Israelites to Gibeon’s rescue and took the battle to the leaders. After routing the leaders, Joshua’s army marched against several of the leaders’ towns, destroying the populations of those villages.

Jerusalem

Joshua 10:1-2 begins recounting the Southern campaign:

As soon as Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, heard how Joshua captured Ai and had devoted it to destruction, doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king, and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were among them, he feared greatly.

This touch point with archaeology is not in dispute among scholars. Scholars uniformly agree that the town of Jerusalem existed at this time period. Excavated remains of that city show continuous occupation from the mid-3000 BC era right up through today.³

Among those scholars who question the accuracy of Joshua vis-à-vis Jerusalem, the common complaint is that the archaeological evidence shows “No destruction at the end of LB II.”⁴ This is not, however, a fair criticism of the Joshua record.

³ *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, Stern, Ephraim, ed., (The Israel Exploration Society & Carta 1993) (Hereinafter “NEAE”), Vol. 2 at 701.

⁴ Dever, William G., *Who Were the Israelites and Where Did They Come From?*, (Eerdmans 2003) at 56. Dever is actually considered, among some circles, as an advocate for more layers of truth to Israelite settlement of Canaan under Joshua than some other scholars. In his writings, Dever frequently takes the minimalists like Israel Finkelstein to task for inadequate scholarship. Yet Dever himself is also subject to claims from other scholars that he fails to account for all the evidence in his theories. Our review of Dever, granting our total void of archaeologist’s credentials, finds him lacking in several respects. A close examination of the chart he produced on pages 56 and 57 of this referenced book, for example, would have trouble standing up to cross-examination in one of our trials because of its failure to account for Late Bronze Age findings that are published from a number of digs where he concludes no such findings exist.

For Joshua never says that Israel marched against or defeated Jerusalem the city. Joshua explains that the king of Jerusalem did not want to take on the Israelites alone so he went for help, taking the battle away from Jerusalem. It is from this coalition that we find other touch points for consideration.

Hebron

Joshua 10:3 continues the coalition building explaining:

So Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem sent to Hoham king of Hebron...

The text continues to explain that the coalition fought against the Israelites. The Israelites beat the army, chased down the kings, and killed them as well. Afterwards, the Israelite armies went against some of the towns involved in the fighting. For Hebron we read in Joshua 10:36-37,

Then Joshua and all Israel with him passed on from Lachish to Hebron. And they fought against it and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword, and its king, and its towns, and every person in it. He left none remaining, as he had done to Eglon, and devoted it to destruction and every person in it.

The ancient city of Hebron is spoken of frequently in the Old Testament (more than 60 times⁵), both before and after Joshua. It was a larger town, comparatively speaking, in the Judean Hills south of Jerusalem. Archaeologists first surveyed Tel Hebron (the main site of the Bronze Age and Iron Age city) in the 1920's. American archaeologist P. C. Hammond led the first formal excavation beginning in 1964 and continuing until the Seven Day War in 1967 forced a halt. Excavations continued by Avi Ofer in 1984-1986.

The excavations seem consistent with the Joshua account, although some scholars are slow to accept that. The earliest known occupation of the area was Early Bronze Age II to III (3000 – c. 2300 BC) with continuous occupation up until the time of Joshua (Late Bronze Age). At the time of Joshua, the city was abandoned, for no known reason (i.e., there is no sign of earthquake or some similar destruction).

The 1980's archaeologist Avi Ofer wrote, "During the Late Bronze Age, the city of Hebron was abandoned."⁶ This certainly seems consistent with Joshua's account that the town's inhabitants were eliminated. Yet Ofer also quickly adds,

⁵ The Bible also calls it "Kiriath-Arba" and "Mamre." See NEAE, Vol. 2 at 606.

⁶ NEAE, Vol. 2 at 608.

"Judging from the finds, it is unlikely that Hebron was a fortified town on the eve of the Israelite settlement."⁷

While many scholars jumped on Ofer's bandwagon arguing the abandonment must have occurred before Joshua's invasion, the evidence is actually to the contrary. Most recent writings of Jeffrey Chadwick, the student of excavator Hammond who was charged with going through the excavated findings, published his results in multiple places, including a very readable article in the *Biblical Archaeological Review*. In that article Chadwick, now a renown archaeologist in his own right, sets out both the issue and the evidence:

The view that there was no Late Bronze Age city of Hebron is largely attributable to Avi Ofer. After his excavations he definitively announced that Hebron was abandoned during the entire Late Bronze Age. Curiously Ofer did find decorated pottery sherds typical of the Late Bronze Age. But he did not discern surfaces accompanying those pottery samples, and thus discounted them. Unfortunately Ofer did not have access to the Late Bronze Age evidence found by the American expedition to Hebron for comparison.

Hammond had found remains of Late Bronze Age occupation in six different areas. Hebron was in fact an active city during the Late Bronze Age, particularly in Late Bronze II. In some cases, Hammond determined that houses built in the Middle Bronze Age continued to be used in the Late Bronze Age, as shown by the pottery found in them.

A room in one structure located in Area 6 in the center of the ancient city yielded fragments of typical Late Bronze Age painted pottery and imported Cypriot "base ring" vessels. In the same room (which I designated Room 1096 in my research) Hammond discovered a Late Bronze II arrowhead and a limestone scarab bearing the prenomen of Pharaoh Ramesses II, User Ma'at Ra Setep N Ra (Ramesses' throne name). Ramesses II dominated Canaan during much of his long reign (1290–1224 B.C.E.), near the end of the Late Bronze Age. And he is often thought to have been the pharaoh of the Exodus.

Hammond also found a Late Bronze Age burial cave south of the city wall line. Designated Tomb 2, it had unfortunately been looted shortly before his arrival at Tell Rumeide. The thieves left behind only scattered Late Bronze Age pottery sherds. But those were enough to establish the date of the tomb.

⁷ *Ibid.*, at 609.

Another Late Bronze Age tomb just outside the north city wall line was cleared in 1998 by Israeli archaeologist Yuval Peleg. He found 53 burials, together with pottery vessels, bronze objects and scarabs of the Egyptian pharaohs Tutmoses III (1479–1425 B.C.E.) and Amenophis III (1391–1353 B.C.E.).

All in all, the evidence is strong that Hebron was a thriving city in the Late Bronze Age just before the time the Bible says the Israelites captured it.⁸

This is one of those cases where an incomplete analysis of the materials led to a pronouncement that was seized upon and copied by others, in spite of the evidence to the contrary. For someone like Dever to now publish that there is “no evidence” of Late Bronze Age seems clearly wrong.⁹ The latest and fullest analysis of all the evidence indicates archaeology that is consistent with the account related in Joshua.

Jarmuth

The town of Jarmuth is not mentioned as one involved in any battle. The king of Jarmuth, however, is mentioned as one of the coalition of five that attacked Israel:

So Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem sent to...Piram king of Jarmuth...saying, “Come up to me and help me, and let us strike Gibeon. For it has made peace with Joshua and with the people of Israel.” (Josh. 10:3)

Scholars uniformly recognize this town as the archaeological dig known today as Tel Jarmuth. It is just 15 miles southwest of Jerusalem, making it a sensible ally for the Jerusalem king in the coalition against Joshua and the Israelite incursion. Eight seasons of digs at the site have not fully detailed the periods of occupation there, but the results thus far have indicated a population there in the Late Bronze Age II, which is consistent with an Israelite incursion in the late 1200’s BC.¹⁰

Lachish

In addition to the kings of Hebron and Jarmuth, the king of Jerusalem also enlisted the help of “Japhia king of Lachish” (Josh. 10:3).

⁸ Chadwick, Jeffrey R., “The City of Patriarchs Slowly Yields its Secrets,” *Biblical Archaeological Review* 31:05 (Sept/Oct 2005).

⁹ Dever at 56. Dever seems to contradict himself on this point when, on page 212 of his book, he notes that Ofer’s surveys in the Judean Hills found “six Late Bronze Age sites, including remains at Hebron.”

¹⁰ NEAE, Vol. 2 at 661.

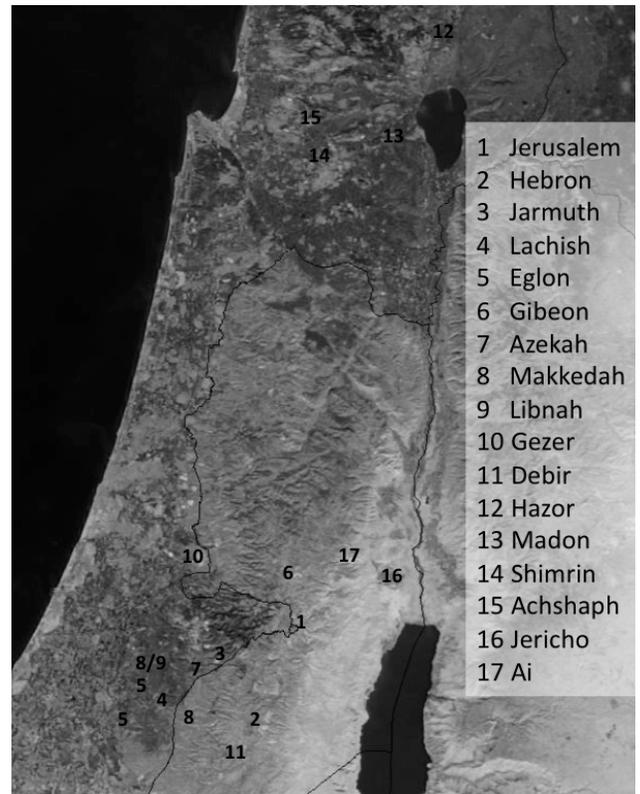
Most all scholars today accept Tell ed-Duweir as the ancient town of Lachish. In Hebrew this dig site is now known as Tel Lachish. It is 30 miles southwest of Jerusalem, 15 miles beyond Jarmuth. Lachish is mentioned not only in Joshua, but also in multiple contemporary writings from Egypt. The archaeological work has shown the town occupied during a 1200 BC time period.¹¹ This fits well within the framework of the Joshua narrative.

Eglon

The fifth king to join the coalition was “Debir king of Eglon” (Josh. 10:3).

Scholars are uncertain which Tell or mound is ancient Eglon. Some have identified it as Tell el-Hesi while others believe it to be Tel Erani.¹² Tell el-Hesi is about 7 miles southwest from Lachish. (Early on, scholars thought this site might actually be ancient Lachish.) The Late Bronze Age levels have not been excavated to any great degree. Even still, there has been “significant quantities of Late Bronze Age pottery” discovered and this site, if it is Eglon, gives all indications of existing as a town in the time of Joshua.¹³

Tel Erani lies about 5 miles northwest of Lachish. This site was repeatedly excavated from 1956 to 1961 and has given a great amount of material for examination. While scholars are not convinced this was ancient



¹¹ NEAE, Vol. 3 at 899.

¹² Negev, Avraham and Gibson, Shimon, ed’s., *Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land* (Continuum 2001) (hereinafter “AEHL”) at 150. Dever places Eglon at the ruins of Tell ‘Aitun (Tell ‘Eton) noting that “LB occupation [is] unclear.” Dever at 56. Tel Aviv University under Professor David Ussishkin has carried out limited excavations at Tell ‘Aitun. Several tombs were excavated along with a small-scale salvage excation on the site’s summit. In Ussishkin’s words,

Salvage excavations were carried out in a number of rock-cut tombs dating to the Late Bronze Age, the Iron Age and the Roman period.

Ussishkin, David, “Tel ‘Eton (Tell ‘Aitun): Excavations in Tombs and Soundings on the Site http://www.tau.ac.il/humanities/archaeology/projects/proj_past_eton.html.

¹³ NEAE, Vol. 2 at 632.

Eglon, it certainly was a thriving town at the time of Joshua. One of the tombs uncovered contained both pottery and a scarab¹⁴ that date from the time of Ramesses II (whom our lessons favor as the Pharaoh of the exodus).¹⁵ Either location, should it prove to be biblical Eglon, is archaeologically consistent with the Joshua account.

Gibeon

The coalition army of the five kings was marching against Gibeon. As Joshua relates it:

Then the five kings...gathered their forces and went up with all their armies and encamped against Gibeon and made war against it.

The people of Gibeon had earlier entered into a covenant of peace with the Israelites (through a ruse, actually) as Joshua was in the early stages of settling Canaan (Josh. 9). A touch point for archaeology would be the presence of a Late Bronze Age settlement in Gibeon in that time frame.

Gibeon is identified fairly conclusively as the dig at el-Jib, slightly over five miles north of Jerusalem. While some scholars early on disputed this identification, in the late 1950's 31 jar handles were excavated there, each with the name of the town ("gb'n") on them! Most every scholar has deemed this conclusive evidence that Gibeon has been properly identified.

The evidence to date is fairly conclusive that Gibeon was inhabited at the appropriate time for Joshua's narrative to be true. Excavations of the cemetery tombs have found pottery that date from the Israelite conquest time (Late Bronze Age) indicating occupancy at the time indicated in Joshua.¹⁶

The battle between the Israelites and the coalition forces extended "as far as Azekah and Makkedah" (Josh. 10:10). Joshua includes these towns' names simply as locators for the battle. We have already seen how the Old Testament has used later names in place of earlier ones when locating certain places (like Dan in Genesis 14:14). With these two towns, however, it seems that the references could easily be contemporary with Joshua. Both towns are minor and there is relative uncertainty which ruins might be those of these towns. Still, of the options, these towns seem to fit archaeologically within the Joshua narrative.

¹⁴ Scarabs were popular amulets that came out of Egypt. They are often easily datable because of the insignias.

¹⁵ NEAE, Vol. 2 at 421.

¹⁶ NEAE, Vol. 2 at 513.

Azekah

The dig at Tell Zakariya is generally accepted as the site for the Biblical Azekah, although it is not conclusive. In the Joshua account the battle against the five kings notes they were routed by the Israelites “as far as Azekah” (Jos. 10:10-11). As identified, the town was about 3 ½ miles southwest of Jarmuth. If the armies were fleeing the Israelites headed towards their homes, then this would certainly have been a likely direction for flight. Excavations have revealed this town was populated from about 1500 BC until after the time of Christ. So the dates for this town fit squarely within the Joshua narrative.¹⁷ Kitchen notes that the placement of Tell Zakariya on a high hill helps explain why the fighting forces surged by it with no further reference to it.¹⁸

Makkedah

Scholars are also uncertain which site is the Biblical Makkedah. Among those proposed, the two most prominent are Khirbet el-Qom and Tel Zafit. Both of these show life at the proper times, however, there is no real evidence identifying either site conclusively with Joshua’s Makkedah.¹⁹

After Joshua’s defeat of the coalition, we are given a brief synopsis of a number of towns Joshua conquered. Joshua does not say that these towns were destroyed, but it does note that the inhabitants were. Some of the towns were those of the kings involved in the coalition. Additionally some other towns were defeated, specifically Libnah, Gezer, and Debir. We now consider each of these.

Libnah

Libnah is a great example of scholars having difficulty fixing the identity of certain sites. From the perspective of just 20 years ago, many archaeologists thought that ancient Libnah was found in the ruins of Tell es-Safi (also known as “Tel Zafit”, discussed as a possible location for Makkedah). Yet now most archaeologists are convinced that Tell es-Safi was actually ancient Gath (as in “Goliath from Gath”). Today most scholars are assigning the ruins at Tel Burna as those of ancient Libnah. Tel Burna is currently being excavated by Itzhaq Shai

¹⁷ NEAE, Vol. 1 at 124.

¹⁸ Kitchen, K. A., *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, (Eerdmans 2003).

¹⁹ NEAE, Vol 4 at 1233, 1522. At least one scholar has suggested that Tel Erani (listed above as a possible site for Eglon) is actually Makkedah. See AEHL at 309.

and Joe Uziel (who also worked for a decade at Tell es-Safi). Tel Burna shows extensive settlement during the Late Bronze Age period of Joshua.²⁰

Gezer

Gezer got involved in the fighting when its king/leader “Horam” came up to help Lachish in its battle. Gezer is fairly easy to identify. Scholars found a sign almost equivalent to a “Houston City Limits” sign one might see on the highways today! The mound for the Gezer ruins is called Tell Jezer (or Tell el-Jazari). In 1871 excavations C. Clermont-Ganneau discovered an inscription on site that read “the boundary of Gezer”! There are several clear mentions of Gezer in Egyptian writings, including a famous one in the Merneptah stela discussed below. Scholars are clear that Gezer was inhabited at the time of Joshua.²¹

Debir

Debir is the last town noted in the southern campaign. Scholars are uncertain over which ruins are those of ancient Debir. Starting with W. F. Albright in the 1920’s, some have identified Tell Beit Mirsim, but more recently scholars suggest Khirbet er-Rabud is a more likely candidate.²² Both of these sites show Late Bronze Age occupancy consistent with a presence at the time of Joshua.²³

The Northern Campaign

Joshua 11 contains the information related to Joshua’s northern campaign. The Israelite’s victories in the southern part of Canaan came to the attention of Jabin, the king/ruler of Hazor. Jabin assembled together some local rulers under his control and combined their armies to march against the Israelites. These local rulers came from Madon, Shimron, and Achshaph and there were other unnamed rulers from unnamed surrounding towns.

²⁰ Uziel, Joe; Shai, Itzhaq, “The Settlement History of Tel Burna: Results of the Surface Survey,” *Tel Aviv: Journal of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University* 37:2 (Nov. 2010) at 227-245.

²¹ NEAE, Vol. 2 at 496ff.

²² AEHL at 136.

²³ NEAE, Vol. 4 at 1252. This is another place where Dever notes an inconsistency with Joshua because archaeology shows “no destruction at end of LB.” Dever at 56. Yet Dever is not doing justice to the Joshua narrative. Joshua states, “Then Joshua and all Israel with him turned back to Debir and fought against it and he captured it with its king and all its towns. And they struck *them* with the edge of the sword and *devoted to destruction every person in it*; he left none remaining. Just as he had done to Hebron and to Libnah and its king, so he did to Debir and to its king” (Josh 10:38-39).

Scripture relates that Joshua burned the town of Hazor, where the king was the inciter of the fight. The other towns faced complete destruction of the men in the town, although the towns themselves were not burned. Archaeology has given us some touch points on these villages.

Hazor

The Bible contains multiple references to Hazor starting with the campaign in Joshua 11:1-5.

When Jabin, king of Hazor, heard of this, he sent to Jobab king of Madon, and to the king of Shimron, and to the king of Achshaph, and to the kings who were in the northern hill country, and in the Arabah south of Chinneroth, and in the lowland, and in Naphoth-dor on the west, to the Canaanites in the east and the west, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, and the Jebusites in the hill country, and the Hivites under Hermon in the land of Mizpah. And they came out with all their troops, a great horde, in number like the sand that is on the seashore, with very many horses and chariots. And all these kings joined their forces and came and encamped together at the waters of Merom to fight against Israel.

Joshua and his army came to battle at the waters of Merom and, as promised by the LORD the day before, routed the combined army (Josh. 11:6-9).

Following that win, Joshua turned against Hazor, the city of the ringleader Jabin. Joshua 11:11 details that Joshua not only defeated Hazor, but he also “burned Hazor with fire.” This was something Joshua specifically *did not* do with the other towns conquered in the northern campaign (Josh. 11:13).

The ruins at Hazor were subject to extensive digging by the famous Jewish archaeologist Yigael Yadin starting in 1955.²⁴ For five years Yadin oversaw the digs at Hazor, putting his findings and experience into a well-written book, *Hazor, The Rediscovery of a Great Citadel of the Bible*.²⁵

Yadin was particularly drawn to excavate at Hazor because of the perceived Biblical inconsistency that had “Jabin the king of Hazor” sending his army into battle against the Israelites in the time of Deborah and the Judges (Judges 4 and 5). In Yadin’s words:

²⁴ Yadin was an archaeologist at Hebrew University. He was a man of several careers though. He was also the Israeli Deputy Prime Minister under Menachem Begin and a Chief of Staff for the Israel Defense Forces!

²⁵ Yadin, Yigael, *Hazor, The Rediscovery of a Great Citadel of the Bible*, (Random House 1975).

The book of Joshua clearly indicates the importance of Hazor at the time of the conquest, and viewed in isolation it is not at all controversial. Yet this same reference generated a heated debate among biblical scholars...If Hazor was destroyed and Jabin killed in the times of Joshua, decades before the period of the Judges, how is it possible that the city and its king again figured so prominently in these later battles? It was precisely the answer to this question that we wanted to elicit with the help of the spade..."²⁶

This issue will be addressed in more detail in the lessons dealing with the archaeology of Judges, but it makes its appearance in this study for a different reason. Yadin was focused on this issue and his conclusion was that the Joshua story was borne out by his excavations.

Yadin found evidence consistent with the Biblical story. There was not only clear evidence of a large population at the time of Joshua, but also a full destruction of the city by fire at that same time. Yadin details with precision,

The evidence [shows] that this huge city with a population of thousands came to an abrupt end by fire in the second half of the thirteenth century, never to be rebuilt.²⁷

Yadin believed the Mycenaean IIB pottery finds at layer of burning allows a fairly specific dating for the destruction. This burning of Hazor occurred shortly after 1230 BC, a date perfectly consistent with the exodus under Ramesses II set out in earlier papers in this class.

In Yadin's words,

The excavations provided testimony to the true course of events; and it turns out to be exactly as described in the Bible.²⁸

Those scholars who take issue with Yadin's interpretation point out that there is no conclusive evidence that it was invading Israelites who conquered and burned Hazor. Perhaps, they argue, the enemies were other Canaanites or Egyptians.

Yadin's former student Amnon Ben-Tor began new excavations in Hazor in the 1990's. These efforts led him to the same conclusion as Yadin. Ben-Tor added the evidence of destroyed and defiled Canaanite and Egyptian idols at the same time as the fire likely eliminates either group from the cause of destruction. A

²⁶ *Ibid.* at 12-13.

²⁷ *Ibid.* at 145.

²⁸ *Ibid.* at 255.

number of basalt statues of gods and kings were decapitated as well as an obvious smashing of ritual vessels found in the temples.²⁹

At this point, it seems the archaeological evidence fits the biblical narrative of Joshua almost like a glove on a hand.

Madon

Madon was the location of a king named Joab enlisted to help the king of Hazor in his fight. Outside of the Joshua narrative (11:1, 5), there is no further mention of Madon in Scripture. Scholars generally identify ruins in Galilee at Tel Qarnei Hittin as biblical Madon. A Late Bronze Age fortress was on the summit there and excavations have found pottery dating to the thirteenth century BC in the ruins.³⁰ This site, if properly identified, shows occupation consistent with the time of Joshua's narrative.

Shimron

The “king of Shimron” joined with Madon and Hazor in fighting Joshua. Scholars generally accept Tell Shimron (Khirbet Sammuniyeh) as the location for this town. The placement of the ruins is consistent with the story and they have shown, in limited excavations, remains of the Late Bronze Age era of Joshua.³¹

Achshaph

The final ruler joining forces against Joshua and the Israelites was the unnamed “king of Achshaph.” Scholars are uncertain where the remains of this town are. Some theorize it is found in the ruins at Khirbet el-Harbaj (also known as Tell Regev) and others at Tell Keisan.³² Excavations at both sites have indicated remains from the Late Bronze Age.³³

Jericho and Ai

Joshua's accounts of the battles involving Jericho and Ai will be part of the focus of the next lesson.

²⁹ Ben-Tor, A., “The fall of Canaanite Hazor—the ‘Who’ and ‘When’ questions,” in S. Gitin, A. Mazar and E. Stern (eds.), *Mediterranean Peoples in Transition*, 456-67 (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society 1998).

³⁰ NEAE Vol., 2 at 452.

³¹ AEHL at 463-4.

³² AEHL at 16.

³³ NEAE Vol. 1 at 31 and Vol. 3 at 864.

EVIDENCE OF ISRAELITES IN CANAAN BY 1200 BC.

In the museum in Cairo, Egypt is a huge granite slab (called a “stela”) that measures over 10 feet tall and 5 feet wide. The famous Egyptologist William Flinders Petrie (1853-1942) discovered the stela in 1896 at the mortuary temple of Pharaoh Merneptah in Thebes, Egypt. Merneptah was a son of Ramesses II who took the Egyptian throne upon his father’s death from 1213 – 1203 BC.

Already an old man when he assumed the throne (his father Ramesses II lived into his 90’s), Merneptah conducted several military campaigns that were recorded onto the stela for posterity’s sake. The stela recounts campaigns against Libya and the Sea Peoples with typical excess (bragging). Toward the end of the stela, a campaign into Canaan is also recorded.

This stela is significant as the first known reference to Israel³⁴ outside of Scripture. The date for the stela is 1209 – 1207 BC, depending on which scholar you read. Either way, the mention itself is profound.

Egyptologist Donald Redford has translated the Canaanite section as follows:

Tjehenu is seized, Khatte is pacified,
Pekana’an [Gaza] is plundered most grievously
Ashkelon is brought in and Gezer captured,
Yeno’am is turned into something annihilated,
Israel is stripped bare, wholly lacking seed!³⁵

³⁴ A small minority of scholars do not acknowledge that the Egyptian is properly translated “Israel.” But the consensus opinion is that “Israel” is indeed the reference. See works cited by Grabbe, Lester L., *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know it?*, (T&T Clark 2007) at 77. Noted Egyptologist K. A. Kitchen explains in excruciating detail (and with appropriate footnotes to additional authorities) the errors of those who read this as anything but “Israel.” Kitchen, Kenneth, “The Victories of Merneptah, and the Nature of their Record”, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 28.3 (2004) 259-272 at 270ff.

³⁵ Redford, Donald B., “The Ashkelon Relief at Karnak and the Israel Stela”, *Israel Exploration Journal* 36:188-200 (1986) at 197.

Aside from the fact that this places Israel in the Canaan area in the time frame of 1213 – 1209 BC, it actually conveys more upon close examination by those conversant with the ancient Egyptian used.

The Egyptian has a “determinative” for each of the parties discussed. (A determinative is a signal that indicates some characteristic of the accompanying noun.) The Canaanite towns of Ashkelon, Gezer, and Yeno’am each have the determinative signs of three-hills and a throw-stick. This design indicates a foreign territory. The throw stick means “foreigner” and the three-hills denotes a territory.

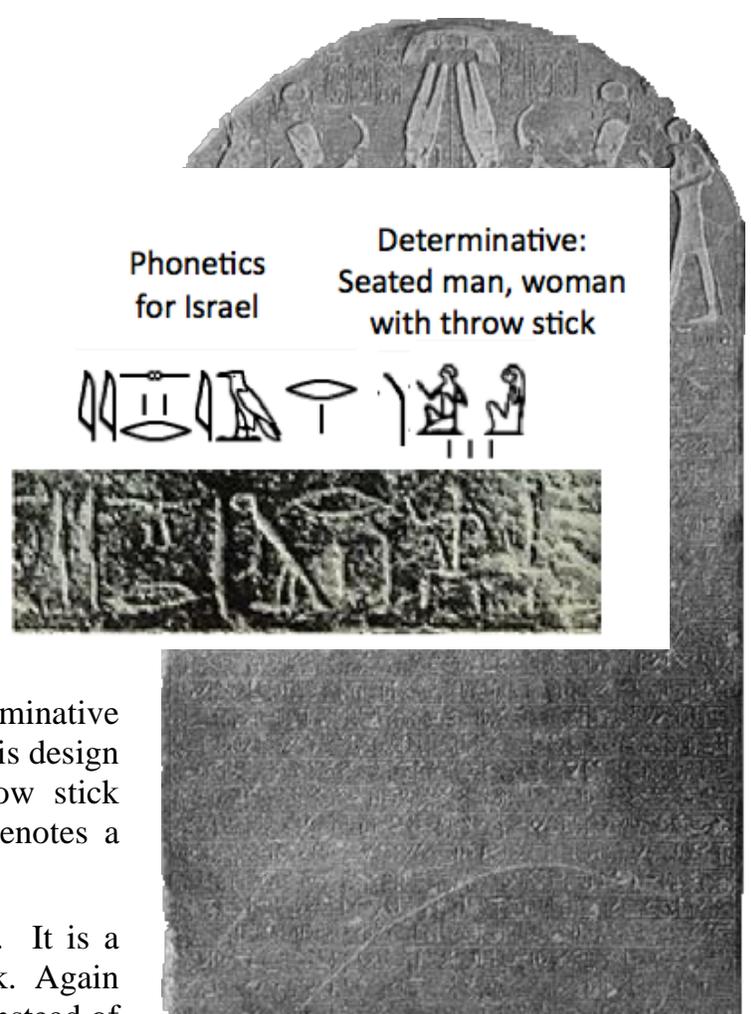
For Israel the determinative is different. It is a seated man and woman with a throw stick. Again the throw stick denotes foreigners. But instead of three hills for the designation of a territory, the Israel relief has a man and woman over three strokes. The man and woman represent people and the three strokes are plural marks that mean an unnumbered (“numberless”) people-group.³⁶ The Israel determinative denotes a people, not a fixed nation or territory that has a settled state with an urban center. This is the very type of determinative that makes sense for people in the Joshua time frame who are basically nomadic and seeking to settle in a land they are continuing to fight to possess.

CONCLUSION

What do we do with all this data? I would suggest that the main use for archaeology is to put Biblical stories and passages into a cultural context so that they can better be understood. As our vision of the physical and cultural background to the Bible expands, so does our understanding of the Bible passages written within that background.

We have seen historically that, for some, archaeology was set to be the tool that would prove the Bible. Yet time and experience has shown it to be an insufficient tool for that work. Archaeology has its own sets of inherent limitations. On top of

³⁶ Kitchen at 272.



that, there are often layers of ambiguity that leave plenty of room for interpretation.

These same limitations, however, also affect those with the opposite agenda. There are some who seek to use archaeology to dismantle the history of the Bible. This usage of archaeology as a means of “disproving the Bible” suffers the same limitations. It is in response to this attacking usage of archaeology that much of this lesson is dedicated.

Hazor becomes the consummate example. Is there absolute undisputable proof that Hazor fell as reported in Joshua? No. There is plenty of evidence, however, that Hazor fell at the time, and in the manner given by Joshua, likely by some people especially offended by the idols and deities of the Canaanites living in Hazor. In other words, while the proof of the Bible is not there, the consistency with the Bible belies the arguments of those seeking to challenge biblical accuracy.

Next week we continue this lesson digging deeper (pun intended) into the finds of Jericho, Ai, and the arguments of those who believe archaeology denies Biblical history.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. “*As soon as Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, heard...he feared greatly*” (Josh. 10:1-2).

Fear is a powerful motivator. It can make you do things common sense would prevent. The maxim is often true, “Desperate people do desperate things.” How do you respond when life’s circumstances have you afraid? Do you lash out? Do you seek allies? Adoni-zedek did both. And unfortunately for him, he was lashing out against God and God’s purposes. While the Gibeonites’ deceptive ploys should not be our model, at least they had the foresight to join forces with those executing God’s will rather than fighting against them.

Might I suggest an alternate plan of action when life causes you to fear? Seek God; seek his will; and then accept it. Now that may not resolve your fear, but it is the right course. Then see if God is not faithful to walk through whatever life throws your way. Be assured of the promise, you will *not* be subject to things beyond what you can endure.

2. “*Jarmuth...Lachish...Eglon...Shimron...Achshaph*” (Josh. 10-11).

Be honest, how many of those towns did you know before this lesson. Some of the readers will have known of them, but not most readers! They are footnotes in history, recorded in an Old Testament book and subject to some debate among a small cadre of academics in a narrow branch of archaeology. Yet according to the Bible, these were towns where God was involved in history. Scripture teaches us that God is involved in all of history, not merely these towns. There are obscure places, and people relatively unknown outside their immediate circle, but God is no less involved there than he is everywhere else. Call on God. You are part of history every day that goes by. God is in touch with you and your life whether you make a footnote in a long gone writing or not!

3. Joshua “*burned Hazor with fire*” (Josh. 11:11).

Although the best use of archaeology is to give context for understanding Scripture, there is something almost breath-taking when we see independent evidence that seems to conform so carefully with the stories of Scripture written thousands of years ago. While we can enjoy the moment, and even take encouragement from it, we must remember that our faith is in the One who is revealed in Scripture, not in the findings of archaeology, which over time shift with new discoveries and understandings. Our faith is in one who never changes, who is the same today, yesterday, and tomorrow.

WANT MORE?

Start (or keep) reading Judges. Which character do you relate to? Email me and let me know who and why! Emails remain anonymous! Email us at wantmore@Biblical-Literacy.com.