OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY
Lesson 24 - Part 4
Judges – Summation

The cover of the December 2010 issue of National Geographic is the 17th century Peter Paul Reubens painting of David and Goliath. It advertises the article on "The Search for King David: New Discoveries in the Holy land." The article quotes many of the same scholars we have been charting through the last number of lessons, while taking the issues forward in time. The same scholars who dismiss the biblical history of the Israelite invasion and settlement of Canaan, also question the biblical account of King David. These viewpoints are not just in the scholarly community, they are on the pages of the magazines we buy and read from the local bookstore.

As discussed in the last lesson, my approach to this is not that of an archaeologist. My approach is that of a trial lawyer. I assess evidence, assess expert opinions (from all sides), and then try to put together a composite story that makes the best sense of the facts.

A main operation of the American court system is to re-construct history, then applying justice to "fix" the problems that occurred. The process is consistent: the lawyers research the evidence, the experts express their opinions, the experts opinions are tested both for consistency as well as bias, and the case is then presented to a jury (or sometimes a judge). After all the evidence and expert testimony is given to the jurors, lawyers are called upon to give "summation" or "closing argument." The closing argument is each lawyer's chance to summarize the evidence and advocate his or her respective positions.

That is what we are doing today. We are giving a closing argument or summation about the Israelite settlement of the Promised Land. As such, we will modify the format of the presentation slightly, offering "exhibits" rather than footnotes. The oral presentation of this lesson will also take on the nature and demeanor of a closing argument. The goal is not to bring the legal system into the church! The goal is to use a means that centuries of development and refinement has found to be extremely productive and reliable for finding accurate historical reconstruction in an effort to set out a possible scenario for the history at issue here.

To some degree, there will be repeats of some material in earlier lessons. We should also, therefore, repeat the warnings given. This is not the *only* plausible interpretation of the biblical texts. It is the one I prefer as most consistent with all the evidence. Further, I approach this as a student in these areas, not the scholar with *the answers*. Therefore I do give citations to experts for the data and opinions underlying the conclusions offered here. For many of these citations,

earlier lessons should be consulted at www.Biblical-Literacy.com, especially for the material that sets out matters covered in months gone by.

So with no further delay, "May it please the Court…"

SUMMATION

The scholastic world of biblical studies mirrors that of the world at large. There are a wealth of scholars who come from most every perspective and point of view. You find cynics and die-hard believers. There are theists, atheists, and agnostics. Most every religious denomination and group has a presence. Most every lifestyle and morality finds expression. Some have political agendas; others care nothing for politics. Many are striving for the next best thing while others are trying to ensure the validity of the past theories and ideas.

In the midst of this wide-ranging diversity come a group of us, bringing our common sense and open minds and ears (hopefully) trying to make sense of it all. Few reading or hearing this will have the personal background and experience to merit the label "scholar" in these areas. Yet we read the scholars, we listen to their arguments and theories; we consider their statements in light of the evidence. We discuss these things among ourselves, and we come to common sense conclusions.

The issue on the table is reconstructing how the Israelites became Israelites in possession of Canaan in antiquity, especially in light of the biblical narratives in Joshua and Judges. There are diverse opinions. Some say the Israelites merely coalesced from groups or tribes of various Canaanites. Others support an infiltration of Israelites after an exodus from Egypt. Some of these exodus believers think the exodus was relatively small while others think it a multi-million, Cecil B. Demille ordeal. Some think the Israelites came into Canaan conquering all who were in the way. Others think the Israelites began peacefully migrating into the area absorbing local culture and bringing a bit of their own as well.

The time period is also debated. Some place the presence of Israel in Canaan as early as the 1400's BC. Others believe it more likely in the 1200's.

I would like to do my "thinking" out loud. This is my chance to tell you where my common sense lands me after my investigations and discussions.

Simply stated, my conclusion is fairly basic: I think the evidence bears out the biblical narrative amazingly well. Those who fuss over this (or outright dismiss it) do so, I believe, out of a poor reading of Scripture. They try to impose a reading of Scripture that is not fair to the text itself.

To demonstrate the soundness of my conclusion, I would like to divide this summation into three parts: (1) the Biblical account itself, (2) the non-Biblical evidence relevant to the discussion, and (3) a final look at the arguments of detractors. Let's first reconstruct the Biblical account, starting back with the exodus and moving through the historical times of Joshua and Judges.

(1) The Biblical Account

Amongst the many foreigners in Egypt in the 13th century were descendants of a family we now call Israelites. The Egyptians would have known them simply as foreigners from the area of Canaan. The Pharaoh was unaware of their family or their history in his country. Likely the families had settled in Egypt during the Hyksos reign of Canaanites over native Egyptians. Once the Hyksos had been repelled, and Egyptian control reasserted, the Egyptians enslaved those foreigners left in their country, including the Israelites.

With the active hand of the LORD, a deliverer named Moses, trained in the house of Pharaoh, led the people out of Egypt. This happened in the around 1260 BC during the reign of Pharaoh Ramesses II, who lost his first born son, and after giving chase, also lost both chariots and soldiers.   We do not know the precise number Moses took out of Egypt, but it was likely in the range of 20,000 or perhaps as many as 50,000. The confusion of writing and understanding of the Hebrew numbering system makes it impossible to be more specific (as discussed in the lesson on this point).

After an extended wilderness stay, brought about through fear and disobedience, a new generation of Israelites, shepherds and wonderers, not soldiers, along with their livestock and possessions came into the area of the Promised Land. Moses passed away and Joshua took over the leadership of the people.

This was a tumultuous time in Canaan. Ramesses II was not the force of earlier Egyptian kings.   The Israelites were coming into a country set up in a loose affiliation of city-states. It was not one centralized government as found in Egypt. Rather there were allegiances between key towns and peoples. These were groups that banded together as needed.

Joshua crossed the Jordan from the east invading westerly. His first battle was at Jericho. The town was not huge; it might only have been a few hundred. It was already established up on a hill, with either mud brick walls from an earlier time, or other mud brick walls reconstructed as sides of homes. After an ordeal of marching round about the walls, a portion of a wall fell, enabling the Israelites to get into the interior of the dwellers there and any that did not flee were killed.

Nearby was a ruin, a village named "Ai" (which means "ruin" in Hebrew). This town was likely just a gathering of dwellings by a group on the ruin of an older

town. It did not seem like many would be needed to defeat these people. So Joshua just sent three leaders with their fighting groups. Things did not go well, 36 Israelite men were killed, devastating moral and bringing Joshua to his knees.

Once the sin behind the defeat was rooted out, the people re-grouped and staged a military win against eh village of Ai, destroying the shelters and burning the combustible things. Ai was not possessed by the Israelites, they simply took the cattle and spoil as plunder, leaving the ashes of the burned dwelling to drift in the wind. Ai, the heap of ruins, remained a heap of ruins!

Joshua then built an altar on Mount Ebal and renewed the covenant between the LORD and the people.

Word of the Israelites successes and their invasion spread through the valley and lands. Soon, the leaders of various city-states started to join forces to stop the Israelites. Not all Canaanites used this approach; a group from Gibeon decided to deceive the Israelites into entering into an alliance with them.

A number of kings banded together in war and went out toward Gibeon for the fight. Joshua mustered his forces and met the kings, defeating them and their armies. Some of the fighting Canaanites deserted the battlefields and returned to their fortified cities where their women and children were. The kings themselves were hunted down and killed. Similar battles were waged in Southern Canaan as well as Northern Canaan.

One exceptional battle was that at Hazor, the lead city (and title city) for the king in that northern region of Canaan. At this massive citadel, Joshua and his men razed the entire city, destroying it. Joshua left much unconquered. Most villages kept their local populations, although many of the Canaanite men likely died in the fighting. Before his death, Joshua divided the land among the twelve tribes of Israelites, urging them to follow God's lead and instructions, knowing as they were faithful, God would drive out their enemies.

Not all the conquest went so smoothly. The people of the tribe of Dan were originally allotted land in the western area of Canaan, including some coastal areas. They were not successful at conquering the nations there and moved to the northern part of Canaan, conquering a town named Leshem, renaming it "Dan."

With the death of Joshua, much of the work driving out the Canaanites remained. The people were likely tired of the fighting, however, and the complacency of human nature ("Gee, things are pretty good right now!") along with the absence of any good national leaders, likely led the Israelites into comfortable settlements. There were an abundance of local women left to intermarry. There were plenty of places where groups of Israelites could build small settlements and maintain their

flocks without confronting the remaining Canaanites in the bigger and stronger settled areas.

As the 1200's rolled into the 1100's it became clear that the Israelites were not the only group seeking to settle Canaan. Along the coast, the Philistines were invading. These people brought a different culture and different challenges. They threatened the Israelites and the Canaanites. In many ways, the distinctions between Israelites and Canaanites were blurred by now. Although the Israelites came into Canaan a distinct people, they had intermarried, had adopted many of the practices of the Canaanites, and had in many ways become a similar people.

Many of the Israelite settlements were in the hill country. The non-Israelites who had chariots more readily controlled the plains. Settling in the hill country was simpler and kept many of the Israelites out of the way.

Without a national government, tribal leaders ruled Israel. The Israelites were unfaithful to the LORD, most often by worshipping the local gods and intermarrying with the local women adopting their customs and culture, in defiance of the LORD's commands. As a result God gave non-Israelites control to oppress the disobedient Israelites. During times of oppression, some of the affected tribes would cry out and God would send a deliverer. The times of seeking God would quickly pass for those groups, however, as the deliverer (called a "judge") passed on.

The list of oppressors varied. The Philistines were a big presence to be reckoned with in the coastal and southern area of the land. They captured and settled Gaza and other major towns. No doubt they brought some aura of mystique as "foreigners," certainly at least to Samson, who frequented Gaza and fell in love with a Philistine named Delilah.

The time of Judges was a wicked time in Israel. The people were constantly becoming like those around them rather than shining as a holy people set apart for the LORD.

Now how does this biblical account compare with the archaeological evidence?

(2) The Archaeological Evidence

The Biblical account given above actually accords quite well with the archaeological evidence. We readily admit that not all archaeologists interpret the evidence to support the biblical storyline, but that is a matter of choice. Many findings are open to multiple interpretations. Even among those disagreeing with the Biblical narratives, they often disagree with each other over the particular interpretation given to a matter.

We need not rehash here the archaeological findings consistent with the exodus account given above. That has been done in earlier lessons. Instead, we focus on the archaeology of the settlement of the Promised Land.

An interesting note when one evaluates the expert opinions on this subject, they generally fall into three different camps:

(1) The Military Conquest Theory,

(2) The Peaceful Infiltration Theory, and

(3) The Canaanite Source Theories (for some that means a social uprising among the Canaanite lower classes, for others that means a migration from certain lifestyles and locations, into other lifestyles and locations!).

Each of these theories has archaeological evidence to support them, yet also evidence that challenges them. For example, there are certainly archaeological findings that indicate that in the late 1200's, at the time of the Israelite invasion set out earlier, that the city of Hazor was conquered and burned. Not only that, but the conquerors did not think much of the pagan idols and shrines, for they were all clearly and purposely destroyed. Yet there is not a consistent destruction at all the towns in like manner for that time period. In fact, some barely were even towns of enough size to show any presence, much less destruction!

So there is some evidence that supports military conquest, which explains why brilliant scholars like W. F. Albright pushed that viewpoint. Yet further scholarship has shown that such a conquest was not nationwide or widespread.

Similarly there is good evidence that the Israelite invasion was a peaceful process. There are a number of upstart villages that were without defensive walls, where the people were simply attempting to settle in the hill country. Yet there is still evidence of destruction of Hazor, as accorded in the Biblical narrative. Similarly, the misadventures of the Danites find particular expression in the archeological record.

So while there is evidence of some merit to the theory of a peaceful infiltration, it is not the whole story. Yet in part, the story is the story of the Bible as well. For the Bible never sets out a full military conquest. It shows both military conquest and peaceful infiltration. In that sense, both of the opinions together come closer to telling the Biblical story. Yet that is not the whole biblical story either.

For the Bible also indicates a severe problem in a huge part of the settlement history, namely that the Israelites were intermarrying and failing to keep themselves separate from the Canaanites. Of course, this explains the meritorious parts of those believing that the archaeological records indicate a blurring of identity between Israelite and Canaanite in the time period of 1200 BC.

The truth in the Biblical account is one that makes sense of the best of these theories, yet also ones that shows that any of the theories taken as an extremist might, loses its Biblical appeal as well as its archaeological one.

Let's consider some specific pieces of evidence to see whether or not they stand consistent with this story:

    (1)   The Mernepthah Stele.

In a prior lesson on the archaeology of Joshua (Part 2), we detailed the stone marker commemorating the military successes of Pharaoh Mernepthah. This is the first non-Biblical mention of Israel as an independent ethnic group. The stele, dated by Egyptologist Ken Kitchen to 1209 BC, indicates that the Israelites were known as such to the Egyptians by that time. The markings indicate that the Israelites inhabited Canaan, but were not associated with any special capital or location. They were a numberless people-group who inhabited the land.

This is thoroughly consistent with the Biblical Model. Israel never set up occupation in the major cities. In 1210 they were on the move, seeking to possess the various lands allotted.

Many of the experts who deny the historical accuracy of the Biblical account get into a squeeze with this monument. A number of these experts call the people at this time "Proto-Israelites" to emphasize that they were only loosely what would later be known as Israelites. Yet the stele does not say "Proto-Israelites" or even "Semi-Israelites." It seems remarkable to suggest that in an era where, compared to now, transportation was slow and marginal, and communication between peoples and villages was certainly not easy, that certain tribes were segregating themselves from their neighbors and all selecting this new sourceless name "Israel." Then the name is suddenly out there internationally so that the Egyptian Pharaoh (who reigned only ten years) knows it and takes it home for permanent inscription. By 1209, Israel is a noteworthy foreign enemy of Egypt's pharaoh!

    (2)   The Highland Settlements

Most all experts agree that an abrupt, noticeable, and rare shift in Canaan occurred in the late 1200's and into the 1100's BC. The archaeology clearly demonstrates

this great shift in the very area and at the very time expected under the Biblical Model. The experts agree to the shift, but differ on its causes and interpretations.

Well-known archaeologist Ann Killebrew presents a synopsis of the findings of the several hundred new villages typically associated with the Israelites and constructed in the hill country during this time:

> These newly established twelfth-eleventh century villages are characterized by modest numbers of domestic structures, usually a version of the three- or four-room pillared house; few, if any, public structures or fortifications; a proliferation of silos; the appearance of cisterns and agricultural terraces; absence of pig bones; paucity of burials; and, most notably, a very limited repertoire of utilitarian ceramic containers that continue the tradition of Late Bronze Age pottery shapes.

This settlement record is exactly what one should expect under the Biblical Model. At the precise time of Israelite settlement, we see a huge population increase in Canaan along with a tremendous construction of brand new villages. These villages were built around the needs of people who were used to a shepherding/nomadic way of life. The homes were built next to each other in an oval layout, providing a natural enclosure for livestock. The food residue shows a kosher diet as to eating swine. The architecture, while not exclusively Israelite, is the same as that seen at most other Israelite sites. The same is true for the collar rim jars.

There is no model that fits these findings as well as the Biblical Model. Some experts who defiantly disbelieve in Biblical accuracy have stretched to find a theory that explains these villages and the population increase. One of the principal archaeologists in the discoveries, Israel Finkelstein, theorizes that some semi-nomadic Canaanites in the lowlands moved to the hill country and built the villages to farm their own food because of food shortages in the fertile valley cities. Of course there is not a shred of evidence of this in the archaeological record. It is rank speculation in an effort to find a non-exodus source for this new population.

(3)   The Findings at Dan

Judges 1:34 explains that the central/western settlement of the land allotted to the Danites was not going as well as hoped:

> The Amorites pressed the people of Dan back into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the plain.

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As a result, a number of Danites decided to move elsewhere, venturing far north to the area around the town Laish (also known as "Leshem").

> And they came to Laish, to a people quiet and unsuspecting, and struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire (Jdg. 19:27).

The Danites then renamed Laish "Dan." (See also the synopsis in Josh. 19:40-48).

This ancient town (Laish/Leshem – Dan) has its ruins at the headwaters of the Jordan River on a mound now named Tell al'Qadi (also known simply as "Tell Dan"). The town's Hebrew name "Dan" was found in excavation on a bilingual (Greek-Aramaic) stone dating around 200 – 150 BC. The older name of Laish is mentioned in a list of cities conquered by the Egyptian king Thutmosis III in the 15th century BC. This evidence not only identifies the site, but also shows the accuracy of both names in the Biblical text.

Archaeological digs at the town show destruction around 1200 BC, consistent with the Biblical Model.   There was an initial rebuilding that indicates a rather simple encampment with basic food storage pits and food vessels. On the heels of the basic settlement, a more sophisticated town was built that is consistent with the other Israelite settlements. There was a wealth of pottery found (including the collared-rim jars) that is typically, although not exclusively, considered Israelite. This type of pottery is plentiful at Dan, yet rare in other areas that far north.

   (4)   The Philistine Presence

Judges details the presence of Philistines, giving cities, habits, religious deities and practices. Over the last few decades, a good deal of research has centered on the Philistines, as archaeological digs have uncovered a wealth of information. Archaeologist Amihai Mazar summarizes the data explaining,

> Decades of research on Philistine culture have resulted in a picture that appears to fit the biblical concepts of the origin of the Philistines, their settlement, and the identification and nature of the major cities of the Philistine Pentapolis ["five major cities"]… It is inconceivable that such descriptions would have been invented in the 7th century or later. (Exhibit __).

The Biblical Model is consistent with archaeology's dating of the Philistines' arrival. Egyptian sources set the date for this arrival to around 1180 BC with some specificity. The Philistines (called "Sea People") tried to invade Egypt, but were repulsed by Ramesses III in his 8th year of reigning. This date is between 1177 and 1180, depending upon an issue of co-regency for Pharaoh Amenmesses. It seems that the Sea People destroyed several towns of Canaan on their way to

Egypt. After being rebuffed by Ramesses III, the Philistines returned and settled their conquered areas of Canaan.

Discounting the historicity of the Biblical Model seems odd certainly on the issues related to the Philistines, where the record is solidly consistent. Even archaeologies finding of the five major cities of the Philistine occupation is consistent with the Biblical reference to the "five lords of the Philistines" (Jdg. 3:3).

(5) The Transjordan Settlements

According to the Biblical Model, Israel did not simply settle the west side of the Jordan River. There was land allotted to the tribes of Reuben and Gad on the east side of the Jordan (what is called the "Transjordan" area). Recent archaeological research has discovered and explored several fortified towns in the Transjordan areas that date from the Israelite settlement period.

It is important before considering this evidence to understand that until recently, the idea of any Israelite settlement in the Transjordan region during the Late Bronze/Early Iron Age (late 1200's/early 1100's BC) was considered a fairy tale reading of Joshua and Judges. Yet the digs have uncovered something altogether consistent with the Biblical Model. For example, the dig at Tall al-ʿUmayri have uncovered some amazing things.

In 2000, the most impressive remains showed levels of occupation during the critical settlement years, even though there archaeology indicates that few settlements from any people existed in that region at that time. These uncovered discoveries included the remains of a Late Bronze Age building as well as "one of the best preserved towns from the early Iron Age in Jordan. The structures are such that they were likely built by "nomadic tribal groups settling into towns and villages." (Ex. ___). One of the houses discovered held the same four-room architecture seen over and over in the Israelite villages built contemporaneously in the hill country (discussed earlier).

These digs also uncovered indications of idol worship in the 1000 to 900 BC era. Again this is consistent with the Biblical Model as the Israelites fell over and over again into the local idol worship. Idol worship would likely have existed even earlier.

In short, these excavations solidly demonstrate that the Transjordan region was not simply an area for wondering nomads. At the time of the Reubenite allotment, it was a land with several towns that could have been settled by Israelites in conjunction with a local population. This is entirely consistent with the Biblical Model.

(6)   The Unconquered Cities

In Judges 1:27 – 36 the narrative gives a list of cities that the Israelites failed to conquer: Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean, Ta'anach, Dor, Ibleam, Megiddo or any of these towns' associated villages. Ephraim failed to drive out the inhabitants of Gezer. Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron or Nahalol. These Canaanites were subjected to forced labor. Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of a host of towns, nor did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh.

Individual research into each of these sites gives insight consistent with the Biblical Model. For example, Dor was excavated under the direction of Ephraim Stern for two decades (1980-2000). The Biblical Model says Dor remained outside Israelite control until King David conquered it. Consistent with that, the archaeological record provides the name of Dor's ruler (Beder, king of the Sikils) around 1100 BC. Archaeology shows that the Sikils, not the Israelites, had conquered Dor at the beginning of the 12th century. (Ex. ___).

This detailed correctness of Judges is not limited to Dor. Israeli archaeologist Amihai Mazar conducted a review of the listed cities that have thus far been excavated concluding that,

> The list of cities that were not conquered (Judg 1:27-36) accords with the archaeological finds from the cities that have been excavated: Beth-shean, Dor, Gezer, Megiddo, and possibly also Akko and Tel Keisan… In all of these cities, Canaanite culture continued to thrive until the late 11th century B.C.E., with the exception of Ta'anach, where the material culture form the early 12th century…resembles that of the central hill country "Israelite settlement" sites.

If Mazar is right, the archaeological record fits that of the Biblical Model with the exception of Ta'anach. We should not cast aside the Biblical Model based on Ta'anach, however, for Mazar is expressing his personal opinion on the evidence of that dig. Walter Rast was the principal excavator at the site of Ta'anach. His opinion was that the site was occupied by Canaanites in the Iron I Age (the time of the Judges.)

This leaves us with compelling evidence of controlling Canaanite presence in the cities noted as unconquered at the same time that the Bible indicates controlling Canaanite presence. Ta'anach is not an exception to this. It is merely one place where the opinions differ.

(7)   The Questions of Ethnicity

Scholars constantly write over when and how it can be determined that the Israelites were a separate or distinct ethnic group. Tools for determining this uniqueness are frequently divided into considering pottery types, architectural features, food practices and religious devotion. A review of the literature and expert opinions in these areas presents stark contrasts depending on the expert followed as well as the time period of the experts' opinions.

Ultimately each of these areas has experts who believe the hallmarks of ethnicity are found in the archaeological record for "Israelites" as apart from Canaanites or Philistines. Each area also has expert support for these markers being inadequate for establishing unique Israelite ethnicity. It seems that while many "Israelite" sites have no place for idol or cultic worship, a number do. Similarly while statistically many of the pottery jars in "Israelite settlements" are of a particular type, the same type are found elsewhere. Experts use statistical analysis to prove the relative absence of pig bones at Israelite settlements, yet some evidence is also assimilated to show decreased pig consumption at other Canaanite sites. (Philistine sites are loaded with pig bones, however!) Even with architecture, there is no conclusive proof of uniqueness of Israelite buildings, although the preponderance of them were four-room wood-pillared structures. Still such structures are not found solely in Israelite villages.

These findings do not mean that there were no Israelites. To the contrary, this is the very kind of findings we would expect under the Biblical model. The Israelites were distinct people with distinct dietary habits that are reflected in the findings. That some Canaanite peoples may have had similar dietary preferences does not mean there were no Israelites! If there were pig bones at the Israelite settlements, it would mean something. An absence of bones at other sites just means that there were others who ate like the Israelites!

Similarly jars should not be determinative in a time where the Israelites were interacting, intermarrying, and trading with non-Israelites. Common pottery is to be expected.

On the issue of idols, it is interesting to note that earlier settlements reflect the attitude present at the destruction of Hazor. At Hazor, experts agree that all the idols were purposely defaced by the conquerors prior to burning the city. Similarly, the early new hill country villages were not built with cultic centers. There are, however, in some of the excavations, findings of idols. This, of course, is consistent with the Biblical Model. It is the reason given for the oppression that brought forth the judges.

THE NAYSAYERS

The main arguments against the Biblical account and archaeological evidence given above fall into two categories: reading of the Biblical text and archaeological issues. On the reading of the text, the past lessons are not repeated, but are referenced for the justification of this rendering offered. It is both a conservative and fair rendering of the texts as preserved within a framework of belief that the texts in original form were not simply reflecting mankind's musings on the divine. Rather they were God's revelation to mankind. In this sense they are Holy Scriptures.

As to the archaeology, the main points of contention involve alternate interpretations of the evidence. So, for instance, Dame Kathleen Kenyon, the well-known excavator of Jericho says the village at the time of the invasion was small and has eroded away from the four hundred years of abandonment. Yet Israel Finkelstein dismisses that interpretation with a wave of his pen!

Similarly, Amihai Mazar is troubled by the Biblical account that Ta'anach stayed under the control of the Canaanites. Mazar thinks the evidence shows the culture of Ta'anach was consistent with that of Israelite towns in the 1100's. Yet the excavators of Ta'anach believed it consistent with Canaanite in habitation as the Biblical account specifies. Again, this is an area where there is no settled scholarly opinion, but instead a multiplicity of readings, one consistent with the Bible, and one not. None of these naysayers have compelling reasons to call into question the biblical account. They simply have alternate ideas contrary to those equally competent scholars who read the evidence differently.

I suggest at this point these naysaying matters are more opinion and less fact.

CONCLUSION

The Bible has nothing to fear from archaeology. The Bible has nothing to fear from truth. We diligently search the Scriptures confident that they will teach us of God, his work in history, his hand today, and his promise for tomorrow.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury, I suggest that a fair reading of the Biblical narrative fits the findings of archaeology quite well. Truth is truth. We just need to be careful to keep truth separate from opinion!

POINTS FOR HOME

1. "*You have not obeyed my voice*" (Jdg. 2:2).

    There is an old folk song, "You gotta move, you gotta move. When the Lord, he say 'ready now,' you gotta move!" Sometimes complacency gets us in trouble. Sometimes we are happy to rest where we are, even as God is telling us to move! This is a form of disobedience, one that kept the Israelites from walking in God's blessings. Look at your life. Is God telling you to "Move!" -- to get after doing something for him? If so, don't miss the opportunity!

2. "*The people did what was evil…served the Baals…abandoned the L*ORD." (Jdg. 2:11-12).

    Archaeologists have trouble distinguishing the Israelites from the Canaanites. Why? Is it because they were the same people? Or was it because they acted and lived the same? Judges says the people began to act and live as their evil neighbors did. There is little to no difference for archaeologists to see today, because there was little to no difference in their actions and unholiness back then! You and I are to be salt and light in this world. The world should see a difference between others and us—in the way we act, the things we say, the ways we treat others, even the ways we dress. Take a long look in the mirror. Do you see someone who reflects God's character or the worlds? If you are like most of us, you probably can see both! So take a moment of personal inventory and decide to prayerfully seek God's help in becoming more like him and less like the world!

3. "*Their daughters they took to themselves as wives…and they served their gods*" (Jdg. 3:6).

    Do you have a godly spouse? Godly friends? Godly parents? If so, thank God now for them. Then later today express your appreciation to them for their commitment to the LORD. If you do not, then get some! (At least some godly friends… I am not suggesting you trade in your parents or spouse!). It is no less true in adulthood than it is in childhood, we become like those we associate with. Let us choose our friends with prayer and care. Pray for those you spend daily time with. May they bring you closer to God and may you do the same for them!

WANT MORE?

Read I Samuel and make notes of questions or thoughts. Email those to us at wantmore@Biblical-Literacy.com.