

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

Lesson 30-Part 2

The Early Monarchy – Archaeology Issues Hebrew review *Aleph - Mem*

We struggled to put together an orderly event on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Dr. Weston Fields, the Executive Director of the Dead Sea Scrolls Foundation had come to Houston to speak in our Library series. Dr. Fields not only has intimate knowledge of the scrolls and their history, but he also was recently engaged in another noteworthy venture. The Jordanian director of antiquities had asked for Dr. Fields to work with an Israel Bedouin owning 70 lead books which are supposedly early Christian artifacts, perhaps the oldest extant.

Dr. Fields is not the first to give us difficulty in this Library series. It is a series that we hoped would bring in speakers that can serve the community as well as generate a level of interest in our library. The library can comfortably hold 150 people for such a lecture. Several who have lectured thus far have packed crowds that exceed the library. We have had to move these lectures into the chapel, which seats up to 275 people. A few times, we have had overflow issues, requiring us to stream audio and video into the library to service numbers in the 400's.

Our problem with Dr. Fields is we have had 1,000 people register for the event. We would have had more, but we stopped registration because the numbers are so high. Parking? A nightmare! Seating? We built an overflow tent! Reception food? A happy caterer!

Our struggle comes from the public's interest in things ancient, especially as they relate to matters of faith. Believer and non-believer alike are fascinated to see the evidences, and lack of evidences, that substantiate or bring into question, matters of faith. Every believer is encouraged by rational reasons to believe. Every non-believer is similarly encouraged by rational reasons for their "faith" in having no faith! There is another interest for the believer beyond added confidence. It is the insight into faith that comes from the study of history. History, through the lens of archaeology or ancient writings, informs our faith with context and greater layers of understanding.

It is in these senses that we have studied archaeological issues through our study of the Old Testament. As we venture into these studies, it is never to "prove" our faith or the Bible. Archaeology is not suited for either chore. Still, we probe archaeology in reference to the Bible and faith, because some choose to try to use it to *disprove* the authenticity of faith or veracity of Scripture. We think it is just

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as ill suited to that mission. Archaeology's greatest service to Scripture is informing our understanding by providing a contextual framework.

BACKGROUND

This is the second archaeological lesson dedicated to issues of the early monarchy.¹ A threshold problem in lessons of this sort is choosing which archaeological issues to dig into (admittedly, a cheap pun). Rather than seeming to self-serve an agenda by selecting the issues, we have gone to mainstream media to make the selection for us. The December 2010 issue of National Geographic featured King David on the cover. The article's lead-in posed the question:

Kings of Controversy

Was the Kingdom of David and Solomon a Glorious Empire—or just a little Cow Town? It Depends on which Archaeologist You Ask.

The article then pits the opinions and digs of Eilat Mazar, Thomas Levy, and Yosef Garfinkel against Israel Finkelstein and others. Mazar, Levy, and Garfinkel believe they are finding archaeological evidence that aligns with certain Biblical passages about the early monarchy. Finkelstein, as we have discussed in previous chapters, is the poster child for those who dispute the historicity of many Biblical events when weighed against his field -- archaeology. He is the most vocal critic in the article, continuing his assertions that there are no bases for believing these finds substantiate Biblical texts. There are five areas of focus in the article:

- The City of Two Gates (*Shaaraim*). Did this Judean border town exist at the time of David?
- The Palace of David. Has archaeology found remains of David's palace spoken of in the Bible?
- The "House of David." Is there early non-biblical evidence for a significant King David (as opposed to a tribal warlord David) found at Tel Dan?
- Ancient Copper mines. Are there mines from Solomon's era that would provide for the construction of the massive bronzing associated with and credited to Solomon's temple.

¹ This series is a full study of the Old Testament. All classes are available in audio, video, or print at www.Biblical-Literacy.com. Some of the Old Testament lessons discuss archaeology and other lessons deal with non-archaeological issues.

- The Fortified Cities of Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer. Is there evidence that these were built up and fortified during the reign of Solomon, as attested to by Scripture?

To these five issues articulated and lightly probed by National Geographic, we expand by raising a further issue less problematic to some, yet no less debated in political arenas:

- The First Temple. Did Solomon ever build a temple as spoken of in Scripture?

Obviously in a class like this, we cannot exhaustively parse all the material on these issues. Our goal is to consider the main points of evidence set out by both sides, and provide research material with citations for those who wish to study in greater depth. We will also express the conclusions that seem sensible from our study, as we consider the evidence and the opinions of others.

In a previous lesson on the House of David, we studied the Tel Dan inscription that mentioned the “house of David.” In the earlier lesson on the Archaeological Issues of the Early Monarchy, we sifted through the evidence related to Shaaraim, The City of Two Gates. In this lesson, we hone in on the palace of King David, leaving three more subjects for subsequent lessons.

THE PALACE OF KING DAVID

The Bible relates that Hiram, King of Tyre, sent the appropriate craftsmen and some materials to build a house for David. The passage in 2 Samuel 5:11 gives the limited information available in Scripture:

And Hiram King of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, also carpenters and masons who built David a house.

As National Geographic frames the debate,

Despite decades of searching, archaeologists had found no solid evidence that David or Solomon ever built anything.²

The discussion then centers on whether Israeli archaeologist Eilat Mazar found the remains of David’s palace at her dig in old Jerusalem. Mazar believes she has such evidence. Her principal antagonist in the article is the Israeli archaeologist named, appropriately enough, Israel Finkelstein:

² Draper, Robert, “David and Solomon,” *National Geographic*, Dec. 2010, at 73.

“Of *course* we’re not looking at the palace of David!” Finkelstein roars at the very mention of Mazar’s discovery. “I mean, come on. I respect her efforts. I like her—very nice lady. But this interpretation is—how to say it?—a bit naïve.”³

Part of Finkelstein’s insistence derives from his well-published beliefs that there was no real corporate Israelite existence on a level that could produce such huge public works in the early tenth century. Finkelstein casts Jerusalem at the time as a “hill-country village” and considers David akin to Pancho Villa with his followers being “500 people with sticks in their hands shouting and cursing and spitting.”⁴

This is not a new position for Finkelstein. In a 2001 popular work he co-wrote, Finkelstein asserted,

The image of Jerusalem in the time of David, and even more so in the time of his son Solomon, has for centuries been a subject of mythmaking and romance.⁵

For Finkelstein, the idea that Jerusalem was a grand city for David or Solomon is a fable. In 2002, he staked out his view that extensive archaeological fieldwork in Jerusalem has “failed to provide significant evidence for a tenth century occupation”⁶ (the time of David and Solomon). He finds “absolutely no archaeological indication of the wealth, manpower, and level of organization” required to support large armies or administer a kingdom of significance.⁷ His conclusion is that, “tenth century Jerusalem was rather limited in extent, perhaps not more than a typical hill country village.”⁸

³ *Ibid.* at 75.

⁴ *Ibid.* at 74.

⁵ Finkelstein, Israel and Silberman, Neil, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology’s New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts*, (Simon & Shuster 2002), at 132.

⁶ *Ibid.*, at 133. One of the shortcomings of Finkelstein’s popular writing is his bold statements of opinions as fact, with no explanation or footnotes, blurring the line between interpretation and evidence. For example, Kathleen Kenyon spent years excavating the relevant part of Jerusalem in the 1960’s. Many of her findings were written up after her death. Kenyon found a massive 10th Century public structure that she thought was a “casemate wall.” She dated the structure to the tenth century on the basis of pottery found on site (a standard dating method for the time and still today.) Finkelstein’s unfortunate way of expressing his opinions leaves one without this knowledge and without an understanding of why he discounts it.

⁷ *Ibid.*, at 134.

⁸ *Ibid.*, at 133.

The National Geographic article does not give many facts to help assess the claims of either camp. It does cite possible political motives, noting that the funding of Mazar's efforts comes from two organizations "dedicated to the assertion of Israel's territorial rights."⁹ Of course, that political sword cuts both ways. Certainly, there are strong political forces that wish to limit Israeli incursions and claims on territories both within Jerusalem and without.

How do we assess these claims? Our approach in this class is to first consider what the Bible actually says. We then try to get to the facts discovered thus far by archaeologists, distinguishing facts from opinions. We then try to weigh the opinions of others as we draw our own. At least, at a beginning level, this hopefully provides a framework for others to study in greater depth and reach their own conclusions.

The Biblical Claims

The Bible does not go into great detail about David's palace, as it does the palace of Solomon. We have the passage noted above which emphasized that Hiram sent carpenters and cedars from Lebanon for the house. From that we can conclude that a good deal of wood was used in the house. This is further indicated from a passage where David speaks of his desire to build a house (temple) for the Lord.

The king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent" (2 Sam. 7:2).

Yet, the house must have had substantial stone as well, likely in the foundation as well as in the house. For Hiram sent not simply carpenters but also "masons" (literally, "skilled craftsmen of stone edgings or walls.")

We also know David used the house for receiving guests and conducting the business of government. Nathan and Uriah were both received at David's house (2 Sam. 11 and 12). The house was also of sufficient size to hold David's ten concubines he left to care for his house when he fled from a coup d'état (2 Sam. 20:3). The references to David looking down from his rooftop onto that of Bathsheba's roof, indicate that David's home was in a high place of the city, which would be expected (2 Sam. 11:2).

It seems that at the time of Nehemiah, the people spoke of two different palaces in Jerusalem. Nehemiah 3:25 speaks of repairs made,

Opposite the buttress and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king at the court of the guard.

⁹ *National Geographic*, at 73.

The term “upper house of the king” certainly implies a “lower house of the king.” “Upper” and “lower” are typical terms in Jerusalem as the city is set on a hill. (We can think similarly of Manhattan where “upper,” “middle,” and “lower” each are specific terms, although not because it is on a hill. New Yorkers will talk of “going down” to the financial district or “going up” to Harlem.) Later in Nehemiah, it references the “house of David” as lower than other key features in the rebuilt town.

They went straight *up* before them by the stairs of the City of David, at the ascent of the wall, *above* the House of David, to the Water Gate on the East (Neh. 12:37).

Solomon’s language indicates these same “up” and “down” features in references to David’s house in 2 Chronicles 8:11.

Solomon brought Pharaoh’s daughter *up* from the city of David to the house he had built for her, for he said, “My wife shall not live in the house of David king of Israel, for the places to which the ark of the Lord have come are holy.”

Beyond these limited passages, however, the Bible tells us nothing else about David’s palace.

The “Millo”

To understand the current debate over the possible finding of David’s palace, we must first understand another Biblical structure. That structure is translated as the “Millo.” A handful of passages speak of the Millo in Jerusalem and its construction:

- 2 Sam. 5:9 – “And David lived in the stronghold and called it the city of David. And David built the city all around from the **Millo** inward.”
- 1 Kings 9:15 – “And this is the account of the forced labor that King Solomon drafted to build the house of the LORD and his own house and the **Millo** and the wall of Jerusalem and Hazor and Megiddo and Gezer.”
- 1 Kings 9:24 – “But Pharaoh’s daughter went up from the city of David to her own house that Solomon had built for her. Then he [Solomon] built the **Millo**.”
- 1 Kings 11:27 – “Solomon built the **Millo**, and closed up the breach of the city of David his father.”

In the first passage listed, it does not specifically say that David “built the Millo;” the passage says David built *the city* “from the Millo inward.” For a long time,

some scholars have interpreted this to mean that David built the Millo (or fortified a pre-existing Millo), and then Solomon added to it.¹⁰ Others scholars interpret this as Solomon building the Millo, which as a landmark, helped later readers identify which area of Jerusalem was David's city.¹¹ (Much like saying, "the area inside Loop 610 held Houston's earliest communities." Loop 610 was not even in the planning stages in early Houston, but this reference still makes sense to those of us who live in Houston). The other passages do speak of Solomon specifically as the Millo's builder.

In understanding the interplay of the two passages, we should note that the same Hebrew word is translated "build" in each. The word is *bnh* (בנה) and it certainly does mean, "build." The key is our understanding that the same word also means, "rebuild" or "fortify."¹² Thus, the text does not tell us in English precision whether David built the Millo from nothing or whether he rebuilt or fortified the Millo that pre-existed him. Similarly, the text does not inform if Solomon built the Millo from scratch or rebuilt/fortified a pre-existing Millo.

What exactly is the "Millo?" The Hebrew gives us a little insight, but not much! The Hebrew word for "Millo" is... "*Millo*"! The word chosen by our ESV translators is really just taking the Hebrew letters and sounds and putting them into English letters. The translators of most other popular versions do the same.¹³ The Hebrew word "Millo" is generally thought to mean a "fill of earth or earthworks."¹⁴ It derives from the Hebrew word for "fill."

Various scholars have interpreted the Millo as an artificial filling of a breach in the walls, a filling of a low space for further construction (different locations have

¹⁰ Paton, Lewis Bayles, "Jerusalem in Bible Times," *The Biblical World*, (June, 1907) Vol. 29, No. 6, at 413-415.

¹¹ Stinespring, W. F., "Some Archaeological Problems of Jerusalem," *Journal of Bible and Religion*, (May, 1941) Vol. 9, No. 2, at 92.

¹² See, e.g., Josh. 6:26, "Joshua laid an oath on them at that time, saying, "Cursed before the Lord be the man who rises up and rebuilds [*bnh*] this city, Jericho." Also Ps. 69:36, "For God will save Zion and build up [*bnh*] the cities of Judah."

¹³ For example, the New American Standard, the King James, and the New Revised Standard all use "Millo." Kenyon explains, "None of the translators of the Bible, down to those of the New English Bible, attempts to interpret the term, but simply transliterates it from the Hebrew, of which the basic meaning is 'filling'." Kenyon, K. M., *Digging Up Jerusalem*, (Praeger 1974), at 100.

¹⁴ Brown, Francis, Driver, S. R., and Briggs, Charles, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Oxford 1952).

been suggested for these fills), some kind of retaining wall, or the filling procedure for terraces that support other buildings.¹⁵

Today, if one tours the old part of Jerusalem, one can easily find a stair-stepped foundation/wall uncovered in excavations by Dame Kathleen Kenyon in the 1960's.¹⁶ Many scholars join Kenyon in thinking this supporting terrace is the "Millo" spoken of in Scripture.¹⁷ Scholars term this terraced structure "the Stepped Stone Structure." It is based on this, in part, that the New International Version steps out and translates the "Millo" as "terraces."



The terraces interpreted by some to be the "millo" referenced in the Bible. This Stepped Stone Structure rises the equivalent of 12 stories.

(Photo courtesy of James Hoffmeier)

For a long time, scholars have thought the Stepped Stone Structure was used as part of the foundation for some building. Opinions have varied from towers in the Jebusite age (before David) to some type of house (which could also be built as a defensive structure). Of course, over the ages the usage could be varied.¹⁸ Scripture does speak during the reign of King Joash of a "house of Millo:"

His servants arose and made a conspiracy and struck down Joash in the house of Millo, on the way that goes down to Silla.¹⁹

¹⁵ *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (Doubleday 1992), Vol. 4 at 835; Mazar, Amihai, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, (Doubleday 1990), at 379.

¹⁶ In 1923-1925, R. A. S. Macalister and J. G. Duncan did initial excavation work that uncovered portions of the structure. *Excavations on the Hill of Ophel, Jerusalem 1923-1925*, (Palestine Exploration Fund 4). They named the structure the "Jebusite Ramp" believing it to be part of the city's fortifications before the time of David.

¹⁷ See, e.g., Dietrich, Walter, *The Early Monarchy in Israel, The Tenth Century B.C.E.*, (SBL 2007) at 129; Kenyon, K. M., *Digging Up Jerusalem*, (Praeger 1974), at 100ff.

¹⁸ See, Vaughn, Andrew and Killebrew, Ann, *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period*, (SBL 2003), at 107.

¹⁹ It is also worth noting that scholars today do not know what or where the "Silla" was. See generally, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, (Eerdmans 1988), Vol. 4, at 510.

We are dealing in these passages with archaeological features that to the ancient reader seemingly needed no explanation. Today, these passages become prime examples of where archaeology might be of use in helping to understand and to place Biblical matters into some frame of reference or context. It gives us a chance to make informed opinions.

With this data on the “Millo,” we are now ready to consider the recent debate over David’s Palace.

David’s Palace

In 1996, Eilat Mazar, a little known Israeli archaeologist from a well-known family of archaeologists, made a bold proposal published in the *Biblical Archaeological Review*. She proposed searching for David’s palace in a previously unconsidered area. She thought the palace might exist just north of what most considered the boundaries of Jerusalem at David’s time perhaps as a part of the massive structure Kenyon had uncovered a few decades earlier (see footnote six above).²⁰

A spur to her thought was a careful reading of David’s actions when threatened with a Philistine assault on Jerusalem. In 2 Samuel 5:17 the text reads that David “went down” or “descended” from his home to the “stronghold” of Jerusalem. This suggested that on Jerusalem’s hill, David’s home was uphill from the Jerusalem fortress that had pre-existed his conquest (also known as the “Jebusite” or “Canaanite” stronghold/fortress). Mazar correctly pointed out that Kenyon had assumed that David had built his palace inside the 2000-year-old city settlement rather than outside the walls, making the new area ripe for further digging.

At first blush, the idea of a king building outside of the protective walls seems a non-starter, but understanding the immediate geography of Jerusalem in that area gives more sense to the idea. Jerusalem was built in a protected area from each direction except from the north. A building to the north of the defensive walls would, if it was built as a defense as well, actually provide a second layer of defense. Furthermore, David had made a decision that the Temple would be built on the threshing floor of Araunah, which was also located outside the defensive walls, even further north than the suspected location of David’s palace. Clearly defenses were planned to incorporate the northern area, including the temple. Therefore, the location Mazar suggested is not immediately rejected simply because it was outside the pre-Davidic defensive walls of Jerusalem.

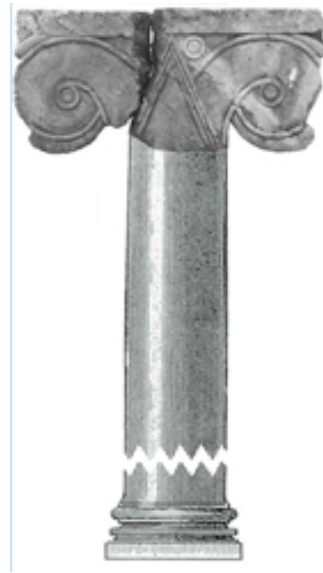
²⁰ Mazar, Eilat, “Excavate King David’s Palace,” *Biblical Archaeological Review*, (Jan/Feb 1997) 23:01.

In February 2005, almost a decade after her proposal, funding was provided and Mazar started her excavations. We do not yet have her final excavation reports, but she has given interviews and published preliminary findings. From those reports, we are able to understand the main tenets of her position that prompted the New York Times to headline:

King David's Palace is Found, Archaeologist Says.

Conducting the dig under the auspices of Hebrew University, Mazar excavated below the structures previously probed by others all the way down to bedrock. In the process, Mazar uncovered a very noteworthy, and previously unrecognized structure. She termed this, "the Large-Stone Structure." The structure had large defensive walls between six and eight foot wide in places. The structure also seemed to be part of the Stepped Stone Structure (the 12 story terrace). The "massive walls ... needed massive support, and the Stepped Stone Structure" offered that support."²¹

One corner of the structure was located near where Kenyon had discovered a five-foot long "proto-Aeolic capital" broken into two pieces. The capital is distinctly regional²² and is comparable to other proto-Aeolic capitals found in Israel and dated to the 10th and 9th centuries.²³ The capital was smoother and more carefully crafted than the other capitals found in



Israel, indicating the highest quality of workmanship.²⁴ Because of the location, Mazar opined that the capital had fallen from the Large-Stone Structure.²⁵ The capitals were found among ashlar stones (stones that are well dressed for building). Both the columns and ashlar stones

In this mixed photo/drawing of Mazar's, the two pieces of the capital are atop a drawing of a circular pillar (which may have been rectangular. The curly-cues are thought to be palm fronds or reflect a tree of life motif.

²¹ See interview at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/ancient/palace-king-david.html>.

²² All such capitals were found in Israel until the excavations in nearby Moab at Khirbet al-Mudaybi in 1999-2003. See the Moabite capitals at www.VKRP.org.

²³ Shiloh, Y., "New Proto-Aeolic Capitals Found in Israel," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 222 (Apr., 1976), p. 75.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, at 71.

²⁵ Mazar, Eilat, "Did I find King David's Palace?," *Biblical Archaeological Review*, (Jan/Feb 2006) 32:01.

indicate a building of great importance or significance.

This structure Mazar found was built on leveled bedrock, and there was no evidence of any prior settlement at that location. The fill used to level the bedrock contained a lot of pottery sherds, most of which date from Iron Age I (12th to 11th B.C.). The sherds evidence pottery that was “badly worn,” indicating to Mazar that the pottery dated from “about 1000 B.C.E., not earlier.”²⁶ This pottery was found “in the earth accumulation under all parts of the Large Stone Structure.”²⁷ If Mazar is correctly dating the pottery, then it means that the stone structure was built after this time, but the big question is how soon after!

Mazar found multiple phasing of building on the structure, and one piece of pottery (a small juglet that was imported from Cyprus that dates from the 10th or 9th century B.C.) indicates to her that the first phase of construction was around the middle of the tenth century B.C., around the time the Bible ascribes to King David.²⁸

Mazar notes this is consistent with the latest dating on the terrace, the “Step Stoned Structure.” Noting that the dating of pottery from the fill of the Stepped Stone Structure “indisputably” comes from a range of the 12th to 10th centuries B.C.²⁹

Mazar then conducts what a medical examiner might call a differential diagnosis. She notes that this large structure took massive effort, expense, planning, and craftsmanship to build. It contained many important and costly items, from the building materials to the items within the structure.³⁰ What could the structure

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Mazar, Eilat, *Preliminary Report on the City of David Excavations 2005*, (Shalem Press 2007), at 28.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Mazar, *Preliminary Report*, at 16. This is consistent with earlier reports of Shiloh, Yigal, “The City of David Archaeological Project: The Third Season, 1980,” *The Biblical Archaeologist*, (Summer 1981), Vol. 44, No. 3, at 167 (“Although the excavated section is narrow, the pottery dates this layer to the 10th century B.C. Considering all this information, we now tend to date the construction of the stepped stone structure to the 10th century B.C.”). This pottery, along with a “collared-rim” jar discovered by Kenyon in her excavations generally dates from the 12th to 11th century, although it could be as early as the 13th century. Mazar and others who believe the date to be late 10th century believe that the wide diversity of different pottery sherds from that era place the most likely date late in the era. In other words, while one might find one type of pot broken and trashed early in the era, having so many different types well-used, and then broken and discarded, more likely points to the end of the era, not the start.

³⁰ In addition to the elegant pottery, an ivory piece was found that Mazar believes to be part of a knife handle. See also interview at Footnote 21.

have possibly been? She dismissed the idea of a temple, because there is no evidence, rumor or indication from history or the Bible that a massive temple was constructed in addition to the temple built by Solomon. She dismissed the idea that the building pre-dated David's conquest of Jerusalem because of the dates of the pottery sherds used in the fill below the structure.³¹

Eliminating those possibilities, Mazar says the conclusion that makes most sense is that these are the archaeological remains of David's palace; also known later as the "lower palace" or the house on the Millo.

CONCLUSION

Has Eilat Mazar found evidence of David's palace? I am not sure even she would answer that question "yes" with 100 percent certainty. She has certainly done much to detract from Finkelstein's opinion that Jerusalem was a sleepy cow town in the 10th century. Finkelstein and others in his camp fuss with the dating that she and other scholars have brought to this debate, trying to push the structures later in time. This is because the Large Stone Structure, whether David's palace or something else, "could be accomplished only by a strong and capable ruling authority."³² If normative dating technique is correctly used here, then it explains Finkelstein's "defensive" and "desperate" tone discerned by the National Geographic writer.³³

This leaves us where we started. Biblical archaeology can do a splendid job at helping us understand terms (the Millo) and Biblical contexts. It also can open doors to those who wish to support their views of Biblical authority or lack thereof. Archaeology, however, is not a silver bullet for those wishing to "prove" the Bible, nor is it a silver bullet for those who wish to "disprove" the Bible.

There is certainly a good case that can be made that Mazar has found the remnants of David's palace. The structure could also ultimately prove to be something else. It will be interesting to get her final report and see the results from radiocarbon dating and newer excavation findings. Until then, we move to consider the other National Geographic archaeological markers at issue!

³¹ Mazar, *Preliminary Report at 18*. See also interview at Nova, footnote 21 (Nov.18, 2008).

³² Mazar, *Preliminary Report*, at 55.

³³ *Nat. Geo.*, at 87.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, also carpenters and masons who built David a house”* (2 Sa. 5:11).

A house was built for David, yet no one can point to clear remains of the house with certainty. It underscores to me the transient nature of life. In the words of Psalm 39 (attributed to David), “Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!”

Paul uses a building image to drive home the importance of how we live in these few handbreadths: “Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done” (1 Cor. 3:12-13).

I suspect 99 out of 100 people advanced in age will tell you “it goes by so quick.” The real question is how we spend the days we have before the Lord. I am not sure any house we build will be seen in 3,000 years, or maybe even 300 years! But a life lived in God’s will, doing the things of God, will have an impact into eternity.

I want to make sure I seek out God’s will for me, and that I make walking in his plans my sole priority. Will you join me?

2. *“Solomon built the Millo”* (1 Kings 11:27).

The Millo was so well known to the Jews contemporary with the writing of Kings, that it merits no real explanation. There was a filling built (or fortified) by Solomon, but scholars today struggle to understand it. Archaeology has provided a really good model for what the Millo might have been. The stepped stone structure certainly was filled, and it certainly makes sense as the Millo, yet that has come to light only within the last 50 years.

Some people are quick to find passages in the Bible that do not make sense or seem incomprehensible. Some simply cover those passages with their hands while reading and never seem to concern themselves with them. Others seek an immediate answer, perhaps even forcing one that does not really fit, for fear of remaining uncertainty or doubt. Undoubtedly, there are others who find passages without a readily apparent explanation and use those to label the Bible as error-prone and unreliable.

Perhaps sometimes the wisest course of action is to consider such a difficult matter, to do research on it, to seek ideas from others, and to find a level of faithful contentment, even as the problems are not immediately solved.

Let us commit to diligence in our studies, confident that while we may never know all the answers, we worship a God of truth who does.

3. “*See now, I dwell in a house of cedar*” (2 Samuel 7:2).

An amazing thing becomes obvious when you read through many of the scholars on these issues. They get very upset with each other, can mock each other, and can taunt each other.

Why?

Is it an overwhelming drive to ascertain and protect truth? Or might it be, at least some of the time, the prideful need to be “right” in opinions expressed and viewpoints held dear to one’s heart.

I think I want to carefully examine my motives for what I say and what I do. I want my actions to proceed from my faith in Jesus, the One who is truth and love. I want my actions to be based in truth, and my motives to be love. Not just when someone challenges my view of the world or the Bible, but even when the challenge is on something little.

May God help us show his love through the gracious ways we treat others, especially those with whom we disagree.

WANT MORE?

Hebrew review time! Do you know the first half of the alphabet? Can you say it, read it, and write it?

We will add the origin of some of the recent letters to help you identify them. We have previously given the suspected etymologies of *alef* through *chayt*. At reader request, we will add the other letters learned thus far. We have modified the following chart from one prepared by Yohanan Aharoni showing the form of letters discovered in various places, and setting them against the Greek and Latin letters that subsequently formed. This chart is useful for the various depictions of the letters as we chart back into trying to understand their originations. We must warn as we do so, that scholars are not certain in all cases exactly how the letters developed or what they originally pictured!

We have already discussed the ideas that:

- *alef* came from an ox
- *beyt* - a house
- *gimel* - a camel or throw stick
- *daleth* - a door
- *hey* – a supervisor
- *vav* – a tent peg
- *zayin* – a weapon
- *chayt* – a courtyard (?)³⁴

The new letters we recently studied, with the suggested etymologies are:

- *teyt* – a snake (?)
- *yodh* – arm/hand
- *kaf* – palm
- *lamed* – a shepherd’s staff (?)
- *mem* – water

Latin Script	Greek Script	Gezer Calendar	'Izbet Sarta	Proto-Sinaitic	Late Heb/ Aramaic
A	Α	𐤀	𐤀	𐤀	א
B	Β	𐤁	𐤁	𐤁	ב
G	Γ		𐤂	𐤂	ג
D	Δ	𐤃	𐤃	𐤃	ד
E	Ε		𐤄	𐤄	ה
V	Υ	𐤅	𐤅	𐤅	ו
Z	Ζ	𐤆	𐤆	𐤆	ז
H	Η	𐤇	𐤇	𐤇	ח
	Θ		𐤈		ט
I	Ι	𐤉	𐤉	𐤉	י
K	Κ	𐤊	𐤊	𐤊	כ
L	Λ	𐤋	𐤋	𐤋	ל
M	Μ	𐤌		𐤌	מ
N	Ν		𐤍	𐤍	נ
	Ξ	𐤎	𐤎		ס
O	Ο	𐤏	𐤏	𐤏	ע
P	Π	𐤐	𐤐		פ
		𐤑	𐤑		צ
Q		𐤒	𐤒		ק
R	Ρ	𐤓	𐤓	𐤓	ר
S	Σ	𐤔	𐤔	𐤔	ש
T	Τ	𐤕	𐤕	𐤕	ת

On the back, practice writing your Hebrew block letters. Then when you're done, email us at wantmore@Biblical-Literacy.com and let us know how you are doing!

³⁴ Those with question marks are much less certain than those without. Even those without a question mark are not always the consensus of scholars!

א	_____
ב	_____
ג	_____
ד	_____
ה	_____
ו	_____
ז	_____
ח	_____
ט	_____
י	_____
כ	_____
ל	_____
מ	_____

Do you have your Hebrew bookmarks handy? Can you write in the names of these letters? If they are a “final form,” then write the name and put –F afterwards.

א	_____	ד	_____	ה	_____	ל	_____
ג	_____	ב	_____	א	_____	א	_____
ה	_____	ו	_____	ט	_____	ז	_____
ז	_____	ח	_____	ט	_____	ח	_____
ט	_____	י	_____	ך	_____	ג	_____
כ	_____	ך	_____	ג	_____	ם	_____
ל	_____	מ	_____	ל	_____	ו	_____
מ	_____	ד	_____	ז	_____	ט	_____
ם	_____	י	_____	ם	_____	מ	_____
ב	_____	מ	_____	ו	_____	כ	_____