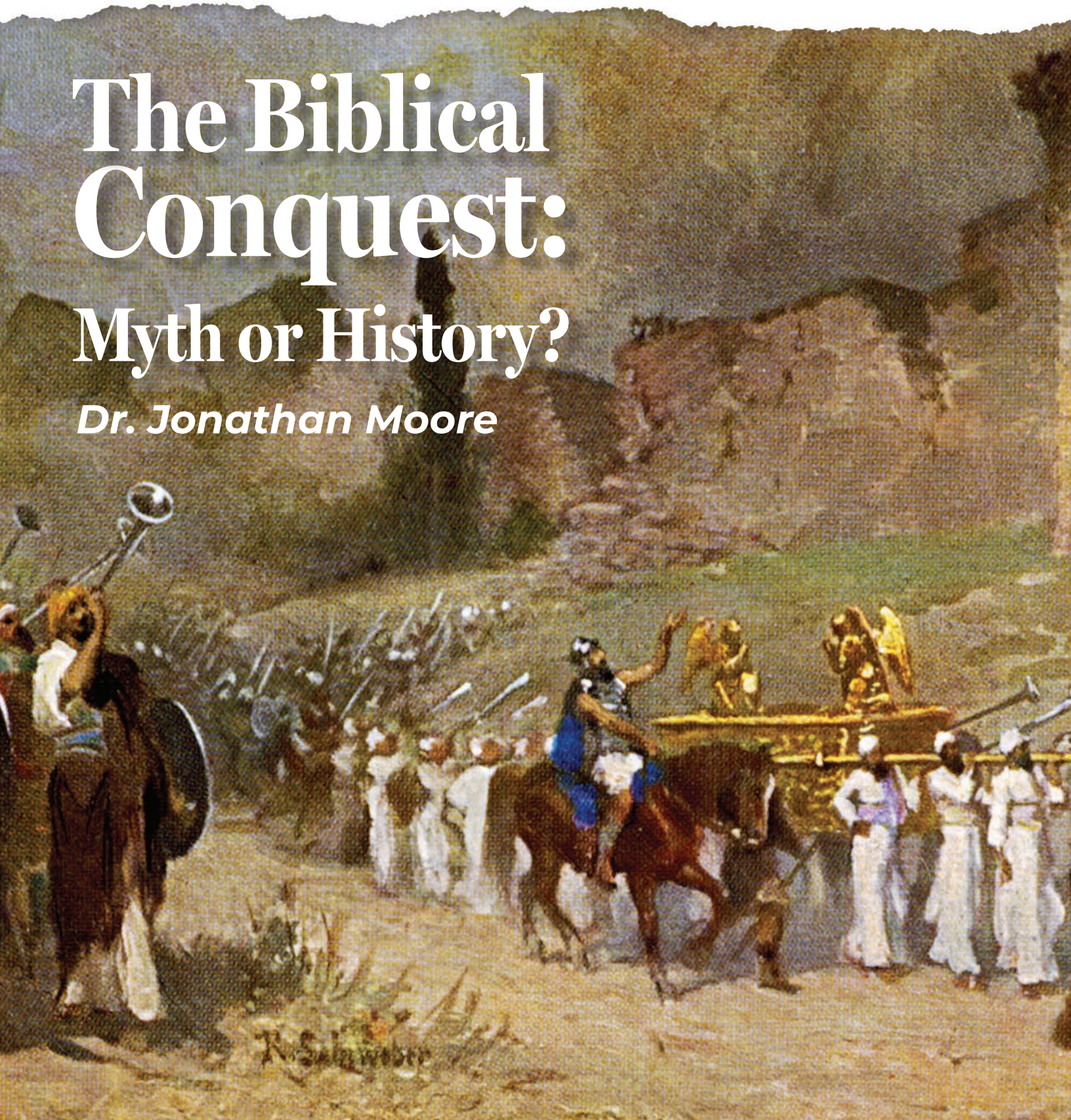


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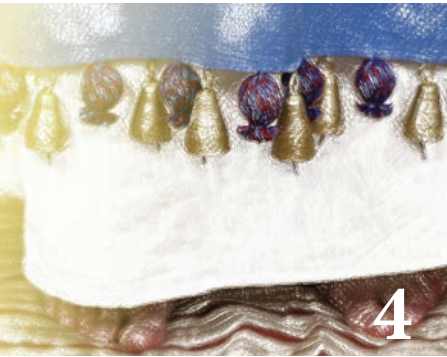
The Biblical Conquest: Myth or History?

Dr. Jonathan Moore



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The biblical account of the destruction of Jericho (15th century BC) as recorded in the Old Testament book of Joshua. Illustration based on the original canvas by Robert Leinweber (1845 - 1921).

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Beneath the Surface

Scott Lanser

Many years ago, while I was serving in leadership with a local branch of the YMCA, I overheard the director make a comment that has stuck with me through the years. We were awarding several of our teen members for various achievements they made while participating in our urban drop-in center, a wonderful outreach that impacted hundreds of students for over a decade. The director told the young people and my staff that each one of us who achieves in this life is standing on the shoulders of others who have encouraged and nurtured us during our journey. He wasn't deprecating the essential qualities of personal responsibility and healthy self-reliance, but was reminding us that all around us there have been and currently are those who have been a part of what we have achieved and who we have become. He had in mind primarily parents and close relatives (though, sadly, many of the students we served had families that had failed them), but he also had in mind teachers, mentors, counselors, and friends as well. In that moment I immediately thought of those who had nurtured me: my loving and devoted life partner, Wendy; Pastor John Harris; my youth leader, Ron Pershall; Jim Wegert, who brought me on staff at the "Y"; Pastor Paul Martin; Professors Earl Osborn at Lancaster Bible College and Robert A. Peterson at the former Biblical Theological Seminary; and so many others. And that list keeps getting longer and longer.

During my years serving with Associates for Biblical Research, I have been deeply blessed to have had the patient and supportive encouragement of ABR's founder, Dr. David Livingston (now in glory), and of Dr. Bryant Wood, currently ABR's head of research. Their examples of godliness and integrity have transformed the way I lead others today. Am I standing on the shoulders of those who have come before me? Clearly, yes! How can I see it in any other way? And I am reminded in this present moment of the Scripture that urges us to give "honor to whom honor is due" (Rom 13:7), because I would never have arrived where I am without the loving help and devoted commitment of so many others.

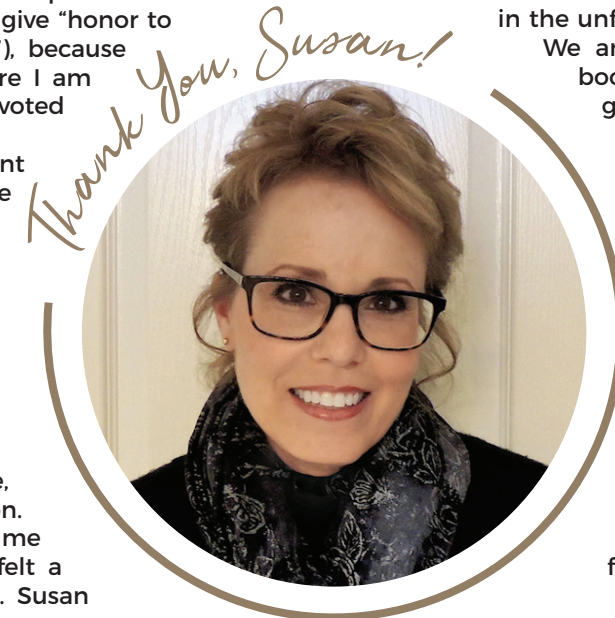
As I pen these words, I want the ABR family to know that one member of the ABR team who has been selflessly serving with us for several years is stepping down from her duties. Susan Gliatta, who began serving ABR as an occasional volunteer and who eventually took on much more expanded duties as the design and layout specialist for *Bible and Spade* magazine, has announced her resignation. When Susan first shared with me her intentions to step down, I felt a profound sense of personal loss. Susan

has been a wonderful friend and compatriot in serving our Lord Jesus with the ABR ministry. In her years of service Susan has become one of our family; she has felt the growing pains of the ABR ministry, and of bringing our flagship publication, *Bible and Spade*, into the 21st century. Susan improved everything she touched, from the cover to the advertisements on the back page... and everything in between! How do I adequately thank someone who has given so much so that the lives of every member of the ABR family have been blessed? We are grateful for her service and sacrifice and will miss her very much.

There is good news connected with this announcement, however, and I'm happy I can share this with everyone today. Just recently Hosanna Milbrath, a talented graphic designer from Georgia, was invited to join the ABR team and has become the new design and layout specialist for *Bible and Spade* magazine. Hosanna's skills and experience will benefit the ABR ministry and will help continue Susan's excellent work in transforming and improving *Bible and Spade* for the future. We are grateful that Hosanna is now part of the ABR family!

We do indeed stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us, as we have benefited in incredible ways from their lives. In Scripture, of course, we learn that we are ultimately standing on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and Jesus is the chief cornerstone. The beauty of the kingdom of God is that the foundation is designed to strengthen and support the lives of those members who will come afterward, in the unfolding of time and God's purposes.

We are reminded of this reality in the book of Hebrews as it describes the great "cloud of witnesses" (12:1) who have gone before us and whose testimony is part of that great foundation. Also significant is the testimony of the members of the body of Christ now living and with whom we serve shoulder to shoulder in the ministry of the gospel. Today, I'm standing on the shoulders of Susan Gliatta, who has set a pattern of excellence, not only in the work she has done, but also in the beauty of Christ's character that she exemplified during her time of devoted service for ABR. Thank you, Susan.





We Hear You

Gracious Comments of Appreciation for the Ministry of ABR

I've been in connection with your wonderful organization for about a year now and have been so grateful for all the resources you provide in defense of the truth and an orthodox understanding of the Bible. The Lord has provided your research to me at an essential time in which I started to investigate more of the world of biblical archaeology. In fact, after I subscribed to Biblical Archaeological Review (and read various books) I noted the level of compromise and progressivism present within the world of biblical archaeology, something quite disturbing to observe. We thank God so much for ABR and the uncompromising and "unfashionable" position you continue to uphold. I think I express the thought of many in wondering if you're the only real group out there in the biblical archaeological world holding to a firm position on biblical inerrancy and plenary inspiration.

Being aware of ABR's work gave me so much confidence that there are good answers out there from conservative and maximalist scholarship in response to the false and disconcerting information I was encountering. So often such scholarship would openly contradict biblical inerrancy and the divine inspiration of the biblical text. These things could be very detrimental to those new to the faith and their confidence in the Scriptures as the literal Word of God in its entirety.

Thank you so much for taking the time to consider my comments. I'm praying very much for the Lord's continued blessing over your organization as you continue to stay totally devoted to God's unchanging Word. May God be glorified through your work, and may He lead you into all truth as you draw nearer to Him!

—Ryan

The Mount Ebal curse tablet (defixio)
Credit: Michael C. Ludden

Urging ABR to Continue Doing Sound Scientific Investigation

In the past couple of days, I have watched two episodes of your television show, Digging for Truth, as well as the breaking news reports regarding the Mount Ebal curse tablet.

Thank you for your work. As scientists, you speak my language. Keep finding the truth and speaking the truth. It was John Wycliffe who said, "I believe that in the end the truth will conquer."

I support your work and just became a member of ABR. God bless you!

—Adam

Did a Child Write the Inscription on the Curse Tablet (Defixio) from Mt. Ebal?

I just finished watching episode 202 of Digging for Truth. This is extremely fascinating stuff, and the program is very well done! I have a quick question/comment about the Mt. Ebal curse tablet (defixio). This will probably prove my complete ignorance about archaeology, but is it possible that this isn't in proto-Hebrew script at all? Is it possible that it could be a child's writing? For instance, while the adults were up there doing what they were doing, could it be that the defixio is the work of a child that happened to be up there? Anyway, if my question is stupid hopefully whoever is reading this got a good laugh at least!

—Craig



A reply from ABR's president, Scott Lanser

Thank you for your question, a question that is likely shared by many others who do not have a background in paleography (the study and interpretation of ancient writings and forms of writing).

Paleographical scholars have been studying the extant examples of proto-Hebrew, which consists of the developing forms that were transitioning from pictographic language—particularly Egyptian hieroglyphs—into alphabetic script. Proto-Hebrew is distinguished from the later Paleo-Hebrew, the forms and structure of which came about after further development and use of the language. The letters on the defixio (curse tablet) display many of the known characteristics of ancient, incipient Hebrew alphabetic forms, so the inscription is likely proto-Hebrew. This discussion does get rather complicated and can be difficult to follow, but I can say with clarity that the inscription on the curse tablet is by no means the result of "child's-play". It was inscribed using a small stylus and was etched (if you will) into the lead tablet. Some of the main reasons why the letters run "to and fro" across the surface likely are the extremely limited space for writing, the crude stylus and writing surface used, and the lack of established rules for word order, sentence structure, and the formation of the alphabetic characters.

I do hope you find this brief explanation helpful.

An Artifact Depicting the Face of God?

I saw on the Biblical Archaeological Review website a picture of an artifact with a strange face, and the article cover said, "Is this the face of God?" I was wondering if you know anything about it.

—Robert

A reply from ABR's president, Scott Lanser

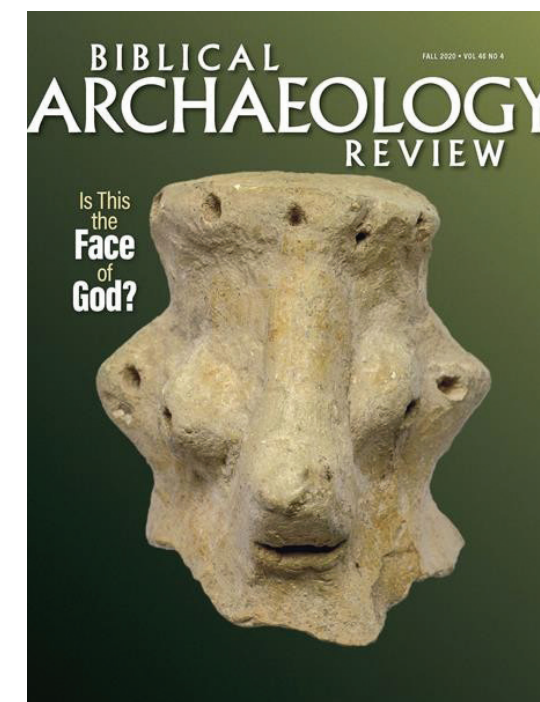
If I've correctly identified the article you referred to, it is by Dr. Yosef Garfinkel,* an Israeli archaeologist that we regard very highly. In a post in the Biblical Archaeology Society's blog, Megan Sauter summarizes the discovery discussed by Garfinkel:

In his article "The Face of Yahweh?" published in the Fall 2020 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Yosef Garfinkel of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem reveals the head of an anthropomorphic male figurine excavated from the site of Khirbet Qeiyafa in the Kingdom of Judah. The head dates to the tenth century B.C.E.—the time of King David. Garfinkel believes

that this figurine head represents a male deity. Given its location, it may even denote the Israelite God, Yahweh.**

I believe it's important to make a couple basic comments. First, I would observe that such speculation as that above often does little to promote efforts to draw carefully considered conclusions from the facts before us. The discovery of an anthropomorphic head is an important find from Khirbet Qeiyafa, but there is no clear idea regarding the identification of this artifact. Could it be an idol worshipped by Israelites in disobedience to God's command? Possibly. But was this head intentionally severed from the full object in obedience to God's instruction to destroy idols (Nm 33:52)? This is an interpretive matter. Is it a representation of Yahweh? Highly unlikely, but conceivably possible. So, we are left with just speculation.

Second, sometimes God's people see reports of such discoveries and take offense that an archaeologist would suggest that Israel worshipped false gods. Indeed, the Scriptures are crystal clear that the problem of idolatry was present (rampant?) in Israel during the Iron Age (the era of the kings of Israel and Judah). We must always follow what the Spirit of God has recorded in the inspired text and understand that archaeology is a fallible (yet important) servant of students of the Bible.



* Yosef Garfinkel, "The Face of Yahweh?," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 46, no. 4 (Fall 2020): 30–33, <https://www.baslibrary.org/biblical-archaeology-review/46/4/2>.

** Megan Sauter, "Is This the Face of God? Male Figurines from Ancient Judah Might Depict the God of the Bible," *Bible History Daily* (blog), *Biblical Archaeology Society*, July 31, 2020, <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/is-this-the-face-of-god/>.

HISTORY SPOTLIGHT

Rope-a-Dope?

Dr. Michael Caba

There I was, sitting in church, listening to a fine sermon. The music had been soulful, the preacher was now in great earnest expressing some lofty divine dogma—all was good. Then out of the blue I heard it declared once again, the very thing I had listened to so many times in various Christian settings—namely, “They even tied a rope around the priest before he went into the Holy of Holies so that they could pull his body out in case he died in the midst of his duties!” Wow, such a need for reverence and careful dealings when entering the inner sanctum of Judaism! Indeed, it really is a great story, except for one rather important detail: the story is based upon very dubious sources. That’s right, regardless of how many times you may have heard it, if a priest got dopey and committed some grievance in the Holy of Holies, there very likely was no rope by which he could have been retrieved.

To see how a tale like this could have gained such widespread traction, we can begin by noting a slight resonance with a scriptural text—namely, Exodus 28:34–35, which reads, “The gold bells and the pomegranates are to alternate around the hem of the robe. Aaron must wear it when he ministers. The sound of the bells will be heard when he enters the Holy Place before

the Lord and when he comes out, so that he will not die” (NIV). Along with this, the 2010 edition of the NIV Study Bible included a note for this verse that said, “According to Jewish legend, one end of a length of rope was tied to the high priest’s ankle and the other end remained outside the tabernacle. If the bells on his robe stopped jingling while he was in the Holy Place, the assumption that he had died could be tested by pulling gently on the rope.”¹ To be fair, the study Bible also said, “It is unknown if this legend has any historical validity.”² Further, the

revised 2020 edition deletes the note altogether,³ which is entirely appropriate given that there is no reference to any scheme involving a rope tied to the priest “in any ancient source, including the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus, the Apocrypha, the Mishnah, the Babylonian Talmud, or the Jerusalem Talmud.”⁴

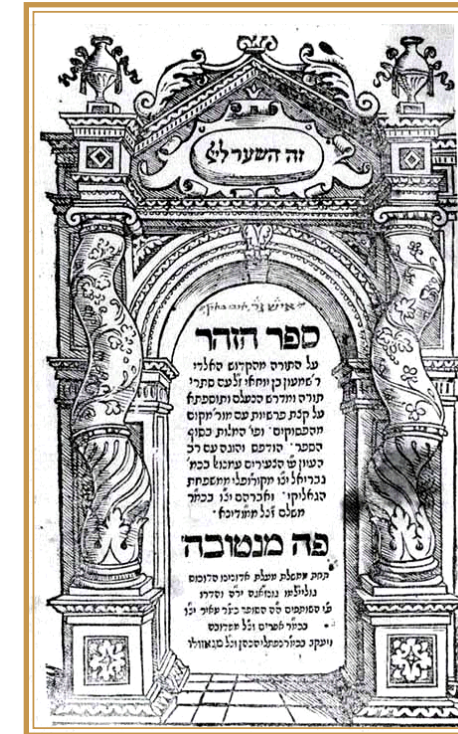
It is, of course, impossible to trace the exact lineage of a story such as this, but it appears that the first known reference to the rope actually occurs in the Zohar, which is a Cabbalist⁵ text: “They raise their hands towards him in prayer. A knot OF ROPE of gold hangs from his leg, FROM FEAR PERHAPS HE WOULD DIE IN THE HOLY OF HOLIES, AND THEY WOULD NEED TO PULL HIM OUT WITH THIS ROPE” (capitalization in the original).⁶ However, it should be noted that the Zohar is a 13th-century-AD text that is not a historical rendition of events; instead, it is a mystical text that “pretends to be a revelation from God.”⁷ Thus, while absent from any ancient source, the rope story appears to have arisen in a mystical, nonhistorical text from the late Middle Ages, well over a thousand years after the destruction of the temple.

The exact route the story followed into the Christian community after its probable inception in the Zohar is not known with certainty. One possible pathway, and the earliest known Christian source that mentions the story, is the commentary on the whole Bible by 18th-century theologian John Gill, in which he references the Zohar and says, “The Jews say, that a cord or thong was bound to the feet of the high priest when he went into the holy of holies, that if he died there, the rest might be able to draw him out.”⁸ John Gill was a predecessor to Charles Spurgeon in London and also strongly supported George Whitefield. Given these connections, it is easy to see how such a story, despite the lack of any ancient corroboration, could spread so far and wide in the Christian world.

Today we are blessed with a plethora of resources, both Christian and Jewish, that call the rope story into question. One of the best examinations is by Rabbi Dr. Ari Z. Zivotofsky, who says, “In summation: Despite the paucity of rabbinic sources, the notion that the

Kohen Gadol [high priest] wore a rope around his ankle when entering the Kodesh Hakodashim [Holy of Holies] is widespread. The historical evidence of such a rope or chain seems dubious and the halachic acceptability of such an arrangement is questionable.”⁹

Now, to be clear, I am not suggesting that the repetitious proclamation of this story is of weighty theological consequence to the Church; really, it’s more of a gnat than a camel. Further, it is very often impossible to prove a



The title page of the first printed edition of the Zohar, 1558. The printing of the manuscript caused it to rise in popularity among the Jewish population in Mantua, Italy. Credit: Public Domain/Library of Congress



The Holy of Holies, as illustrated by the 1890 Holman Bible. Credit: Public Domain

negative; that is, it is impossible to prove that there was no rope. Because of this, this article does not definitively declare the story to be a myth; instead, I have described it as “very likely” a myth. In any case, such dubious stories should not be used in conjunction with the divine Word.

Finally, for those interested in historical accuracy—and we all should be—perhaps a change of tactics is in order. Given the very low probability that the story is true, it may be time to be proactive against it. Accordingly, I suggest that whenever and wherever you hear it, you politely let the speaker know, preferably in private, that the story is very likely a myth. Further, I would like to recommend that we all preemptively let people know of the story’s suspect nature if we are teaching on the subject of the temple or related matters; in effect, we should get ahead of the curve. To assist in these efforts, permission is hereby granted for you to download, print, and distribute this article in full by visiting the following link on the ABR website: <https://biblearchaeology.org/images/Rope-a-Dope.pdf>

THE HISTORICAL RELIABILITY of LUKE'S GOSPEL

PARTS 7 AND 8 | DR. MICHAEL CABA

This series examines the historical reliability of the New Testament book of Luke by comparing this book to other ancient textual sources and the archaeological record. Supplemental information of additional interest is often given as well.

Caiaphas

One of the eight persons mentioned in Luke 3:1-2 is Caiaphas the high priest. There are a number of references to Caiaphas in historical sources, and one is part of an inscription on a recently discovered burial ossuary of his granddaughter Miriam. In addition to mentioning Miriam, the inscription refers to both Caiaphas and his son Yeshua. This discovery was announced in 2011 in the *Israel Exploration Journal*.¹



The Miriam ossuary, used with permission from Dr. Boaz Zissu, the Chair of the Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology at Bar-Ilan University, Israel.

The text, which is located along the upper front rim of the ossuary, is translated from Aramaic into English as "Miriam daughter of Yeshua son of Caiaphas, priests of Ma'aziah from Beth 'Imri."²

Further, another ossuary inscribed with the name "Caiaphas" was found in Israel in 1990 and announced in an article in the *New York Times* on August 14, 1992.³ It can now be seen in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Though the identification is not entirely certain, this ossuary is commonly thought to belong to the high priest Caiaphas himself, as the bones found within belong to a 60-year-old man.



The Caiaphas ossuary at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Credit: Todd Bolen/BiblePlaces.com

Of additional interest is the fact related by the first-century Jewish historian Josephus that Caiaphas was also known by the name "Joseph" (*Antiquities* 18.4.3).

Because of his high profile in the New Testament, Caiaphas has often been depicted in various works of art over the centuries. One famous portrayal is located in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, Italy (just west of Venice). The interior of the chapel was painted by the early Renaissance painter Giotto ca. 1305. Though not as developed and awe-inspiring as later High Renaissance art (ca. 1500), this painting achievement represents an early attempt to portray perspective (depth) and a more natural, lifelike



world—an attempt from which later artists would learn and progress. For those interested in historical studies, and particularly art history, the chapel is well worth the visit.

Caiaphas is the seated figure who is rending his garment at the testimony of Jesus as related in Matthew 26:65. Credit: Jose Luiz Bernardes Ribeiro, Wikimedia Commons

John the Baptist

John the Baptist is one of the eight people mentioned in Luke 3:1-2. In this passage John is actually referred to as "John the son of Zechariah," a reminder of the priest who met an angel in the temple who foretold of his son's birth. The full story of Zechariah's experience in the temple is found in Luke 1:5-25, with the conclusion of John's birth narrative being in verses 57-66.

John had an extensive ministry introducing Christ and His messianic kingdom to the nation of Israel (Jn 1:19-42; etc.), though he was eventually martyred for his faith, as recounted in Mark 6:14-29.

In addition to John's portrayal in the New Testament, the first-century Jewish historian Josephus describes John, his ministry, and his death. Here is a portion of what he wrote:

Now, some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist; for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism... (*Antiquities* 18.5.2)⁴



The remains of the Machaerus palace. Credit: Todd Bolen/BiblePlaces.com

Later in the same passage, Josephus indicates that John was imprisoned and murdered at the hilltop fortress of Machaerus. With steep sides surrounded by deep ravines, the stronghold presented a difficult

Continued on page 8

Continued

target to attack. Still, the Jews who defended it during the First Revolt against Rome (ca. AD 70) eventually surrendered rather than face the full Roman military onslaught.

As a final note, a *National Geographic* article from June 18, 2012, explores the claim by some that actual bones from John the Baptist have been preserved in a church in Sofia, Bulgaria.⁵ Obviously, this claim is pretty far-fetched, but the article is an interesting read in any case.

For similar correlations between the biblical text and ancient sources, see www.bibleandarchaeology.com.

“
**JOSEPHUS INDICATES
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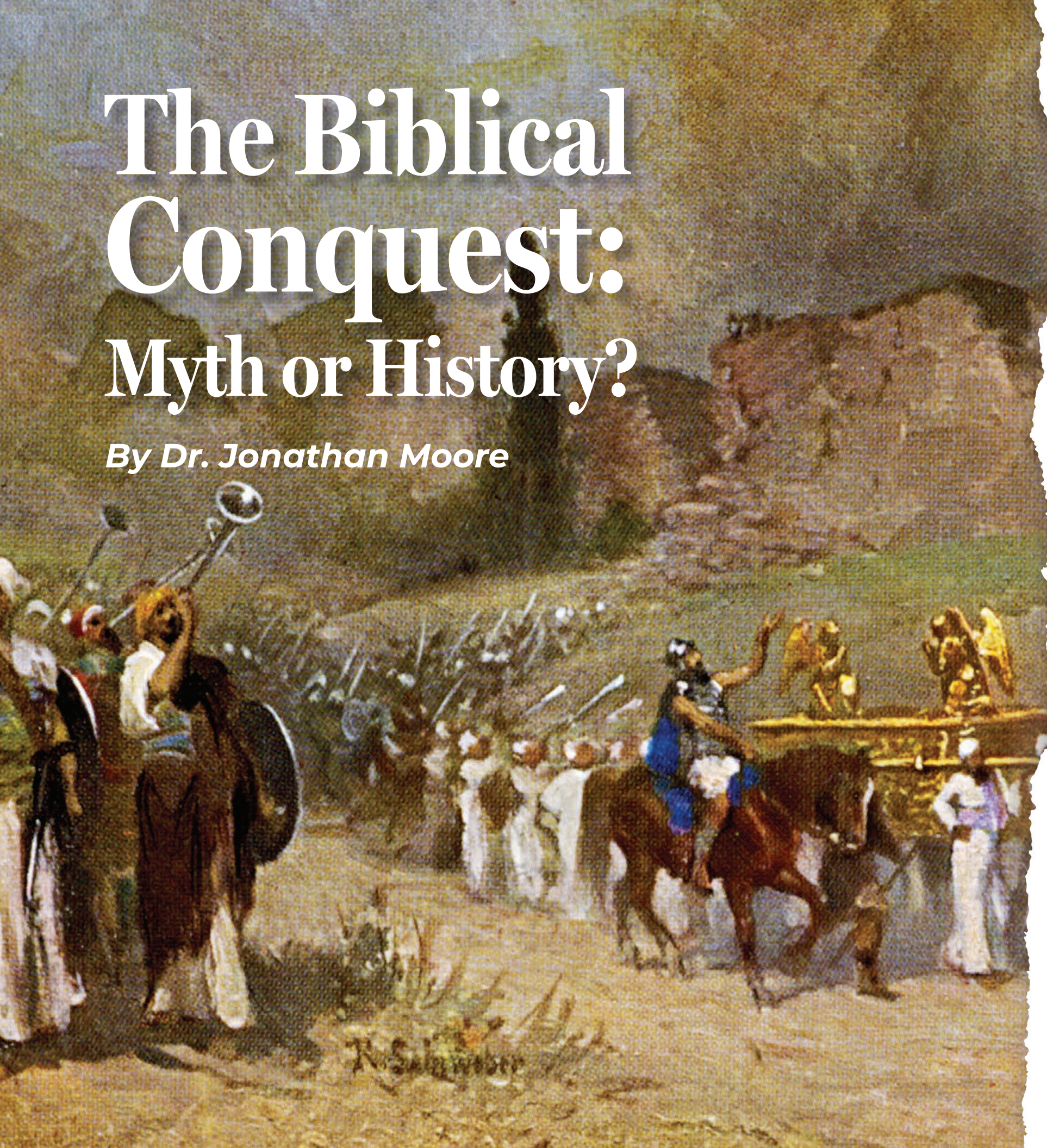


A map of the province of Judea depicting the location of Machaerus. Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Machaerus, looking from the east, overlooking the Dead Sea. Credit: Todd Bolen/BiblePlaces.com

The Biblical Conquest: Myth or History?

By Dr. Jonathan Moore



INTRODUCTION

We live in an amazing time in history when almost every month another discovery is unearthed that in some way validates the details of the biblical text. Yet, despite the mounting evidence for the Bible's authenticity, skepticism and challenges to the historicity of the biblical text remain prevalent in the halls of academia. Our universities and mainstream media have largely embraced a minimalistic philosophy that continues to designate the biblical text as an agenda-driven treatise that cannot be trusted objectively since—they allege—biased authors wrote it long after the events it describes. Even some in Christendom have waved the white flag of surrender and gone as far as to declare that archaeology has proven that the Exodus and Conquest did not happen as the Bible describes.

According to our postmodern culture, truth is relative and unobtainable unless it is delivered by people of “science” as opposed to those who can only posit arguments of “faith.” What many fail to understand is that every unearthed piece of pottery or bone requires an interpretation that is inevitably filtered through one's presuppositions. In many cases, it can take several years for the often-differing interpretations to be parsed and weighed to determine which is better supported by the evidence.

It is my objective to always remember the scriptural mandate found in 1 Peter 3:15: “...always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” And I would contend, as one who has studied archaeological and apologetic matters carefully while completing my PhD and working in the field for several years, that it truly takes more faith to reject the biblical account of the Conquest than it does to accept the historicity of the events recorded in Joshua and Judges.

I have targeted the five specific sites of Jericho, Ai (Khirbet el-Maqatir), Mount Ebal, Hazor, and Shiloh to best demonstrate substantial archaeological evidence for the biblical account of the Conquest during the Late Bronze Age, ca. 1400 BC.

Jericho

When the Israelites arrived at Jericho ca. 1406 BC, the MB IIC/III fortification system was already several hundred years old, but despite this and Jericho's modest population (estimated to be no more than 4,000 people), the city presented a major obstacle between the Israelites and their inheritance.¹



Tell es-Sultan, ancient Jericho, scarred with trenches from digs spanning the last 150 years.
Credit: Associates for Biblical Research

Over the last 150 years, archaeological excavations at Jericho (modern Tell es-Sultan) have overwhelmingly challenged the historicity of the biblical accounts about Joshua and the entire Israelite Conquest. In the 1930s, John Garstang dated the destruction of Jericho to the end of LB IB (ca. 1400 BC),² which is in harmony with the biblical date. However, in the 1950s, Kathleen Kenyon dated Jericho's destruction to the end of MB IIB/III (ca. 1550 BC),³ which conflicts with the biblical date. The overall scholarly consensus chose Kenyon's dates over those of Garstang and continues to support her views. As one analyzes the data to fairly substantiate the historicity of the biblical account of Jericho and the biblical date for the fall of the city, the evidence must be untethered from dogma if one is to determine the truth.

Ceramics

When Garstang excavated Jericho, he hypothesized a 15th-century-BC destruction at an area of the site that is called "City IV," in part because of the pottery found in the destruction debris, scarabs recovered from nearby tombs, the absence of Mycenaean ware,⁴ and the lack of reference to the city of Jericho in the Amarna Letters (1399–1300 BC).⁵ Based on her own ceramic analysis and a lack of imported Cypriot bichrome ware (a type of pottery that is characteristic of LB I sites), Kenyon ignored the evidence for the LB I dating and claimed that Jericho suffered a cataclysmic destruction ca.

John Garstang at the Jericho excavation site, studying a Middle Bronze Age jug. Credit: Palestine Exploration Fund

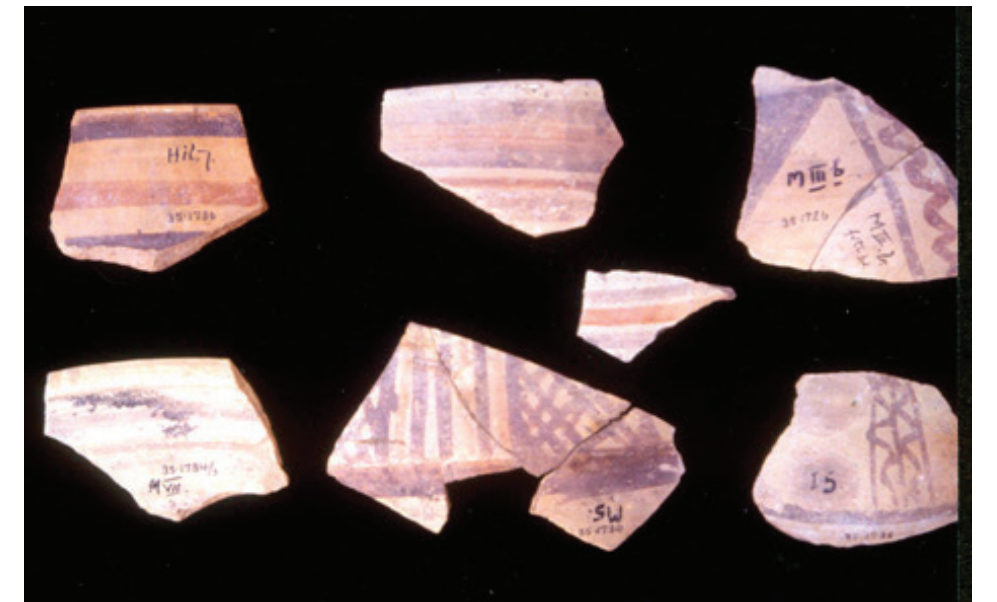


Kathleen Kenyon exploring the Jericho dig site.
Credit: Palestine Exploration Fund

1560 BC and was not reoccupied until a very brief occupation in the 14th century BC.⁶ However, Bryant Wood's reanalysis of the ceramic data from Jericho demonstrated that there are many parallels (many of which were, inexplicably, found by Kenyon's own team⁷) between pottery from Jericho and pottery known to date to the Late Bronze Age from other late-15th-century LB I sites.⁸ Wood furthermore noted numerous misinterpretations made by Kenyon and

thus opened the door for interpretations that are better supported by the facts.⁹ Jericho's most recent excavator, Lorenzo Nigro, also acknowledges that Jericho was occupied in the Late Bronze Age.¹⁰

Cypriot bichrome ware is a type of pottery originating from Cyprus, characterized by its black and red color patterns. Due to the lack of authentic Cypriot bichrome ware at the site, Kenyon concluded that the date of Jericho's destruction should be moved back to 1560 BC. Kenyon failed to take into account that there were examples of imitation, locally made bichrome pottery found at the site, implying that the original dating given by Garstang, and affirmed by Bryant Wood, is the correct interpretation of the ceramic data. Credit: Associates for Biblical Research



Scarabs

In 1941, Garstang recovered a continuous series of Egyptian scarabs extending from the 13th Dynasty to the 18th Dynasty (18th century to early 14th century BC). The tombs northwest of Jericho yielded important scarabs pertaining to the pharaonic reigns of Hatshepsut (ca. 1504–1483 BC), Thutmose III (ca. 1504–1450 BC), and Amenhotep III (ca. 1412–1370 BC). Two royal signet rings bearing the insignia of Amenhotep III also confirm that the cemetery was in active use up to the end of the LB I period.¹¹ Based on this evidence, the fall of the city could not have occurred before the reign of Amenhotep III (ca. 1412–1370 BC).¹²

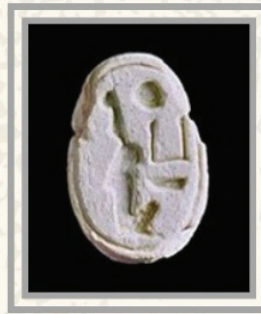
Wall Collapse

According to Joshua 6:20, after the walls of Jericho fell, the Israelites “went up into the city, every man straight before him.” Thus, the biblical account intimates that the outer wall collapsed down the slope of the hill on which the city was built, creating a ramp by which the Israelites entered the city. When Kenyon analyzed the fall of the substantial fortification walls (what she described as “the main collapse”), she found a wall of red mud bricks that likely had sat



SCARABS FOUND AT JERICHO

These scarabs discovered at Jericho provide important markers for the historical chronology of ancient Jericho.



HATSHEPSUT

(ca. 1504–1483 BC)

Hatshepsut, one of only a few female pharaohs, was the fifth pharaoh of the 13th dynasty of Egypt. Scholars debate the exact year her rule began, but it is known to start in either 1478 or 1479 BC, and last until her death in 1483 BC.

THUTMOSE III

(ca. 1504–1450 BC)

Thutmose III was only two years old when he inherited the throne, ruling as coregent with Hatshepsut for the first 22 years of his reign. Upon her death, he regained the status of Egypt's only pharaoh and reigned an additional 32 years. Thutmose III is regarded as one of Egypt's great warrior kings.



AMENHOTEP III

(ca. 1412–1370 BC)

Amenhotep III ruled Egypt from 1386–1349 BC. The period of Amenhotep's rule is known to fall during the height of Egypt's prosperity, international dominance, and artistic production.

Credit: Ashley Talamantez

upon the top of the revetment wall until the final destruction of City IV.¹³ Nigro contends that the collapsed MB III defensive system was refurbished in the Late Bronze Age by adding a mud-brick wall on top of the surviving crest of the Cyclopean

ABR artist Gene Fackler created this artistic image depicting Jericho at the time of the Conquest of Joshua. Note the upper and lower city areas divided by the upper wall. Beneath is the lower mudbrick wall built atop the stone retaining, or revetment wall (also known as a glacis). There is clear evidence in the archaeological remains of the lower mudbrick wall having fallen to form a ramp into the city. Credit: Gene Fackler

Wall.¹⁴ These red mud bricks tumbled over the outer revetment wall that lies at the base of the tell.¹⁵

Conflagration

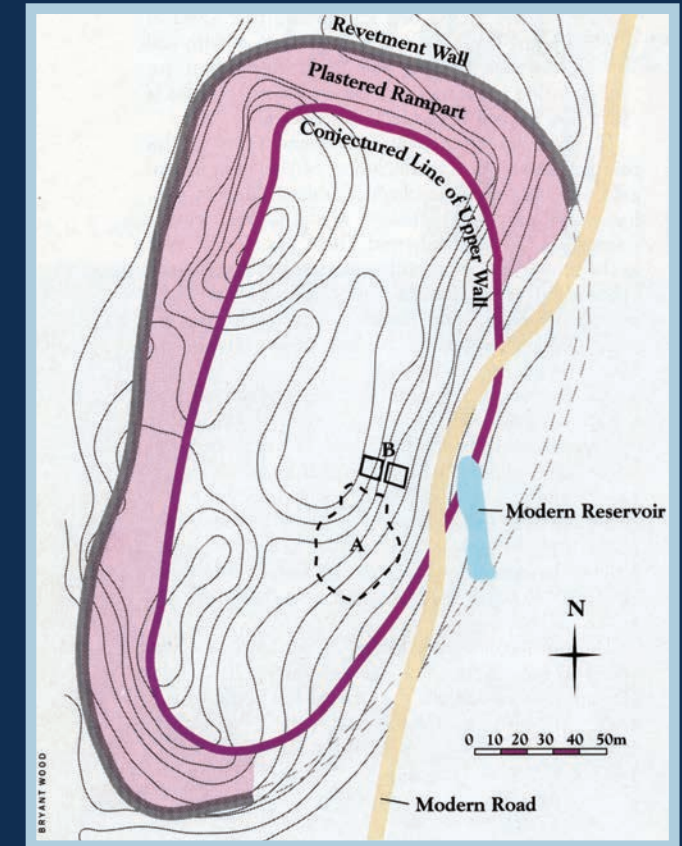
Joshua 6:24 indicates that the Israelites “burned the whole city and everything in it” (NIV). Kenyon affirmed that “the destruction was complete.”¹⁶ She described in detail a layer of burned ash and debris over three feet thick.

Unused Grain

The biblical record states that Jericho fell after only seven days (Jos 6:3–5, 6:15–16), and the Israelites were instructed not to take any item from the city for themselves, but only to take the gold and silver and the bronze and iron objects for the treasury of the house of the Lord (6:17–19, 6:24). Both Garstang¹⁷ and Kenyon¹⁸ found large quantities of burnt grain in the ground-floor rooms of the houses, including six bushels discovered in one season. The amount of grain stored after harvest provided food until the next harvest, making it an extremely valuable target for plundering armies, but in this instance, the conquerors had no interest in securing it.¹⁹ This unusual amount of grain indicates that there was no extended siege and no plundering of this valuable commodity, aligning with the biblical details of Jericho's conquest being one week in duration and the contents of the city not being taken for spoil.



A total of six bushels of grain were discovered amidst the charred debris of City IV at Jericho, giving an important clue to the city's demise. Its end could not have come as a result of a siege, because that would have exhausted the city's food supply. Instead, the attack must have occurred suddenly, soon after the spring harvest – two crucial details that match the account in the Book of Joshua. Credit: Palestine Exploration Fund



City IV at Jericho—the city that all scholars agree was violently destroyed—was a fortified enclave. The city's outer defenses consisted of a stone retaining (revetment) wall at the base of the tell that held in place a high, plastered rampart. Above the rampart, on top of the tell, was a mud-brick wall that served as Jericho's city wall proper. The approximate line of this wall is indicated by the pink line. In the 1930s, British archaeologist John Garstang excavated a residential area, marked “A,” just west of the perennial spring that supplied the city's water and that now fills the modern reservoir. A significant portion of the tell was destroyed to make way for a modern road. Signs of a fiery destruction and his dating of the remains led Garstang to conclude that the Israelites had indeed put the city to the torch about 1400 BC, in harmony with the biblical narrative. Kathleen Kenyon, Garstang's successor at Jericho, excavated the area marked “B.” Her conclusions dated Jericho's destruction to about 1550 BC, 150 years earlier than Garstang's date. This destruction, she concluded, was far too early to ascribe to the Israelites. By the time the Israelites appeared on the scene, she argued, there was no walled city at Jericho.

Credit: Dr. Bryant G. Wood

Wall Houses

Ernst Sellin and Carl Watzinger found several domestic structures from the final phase of City IV on the north side of the tell where a short stretch of the lower city wall did not fall as everywhere else.²⁰ A portion of that mud-brick wall was still standing to a height of over two meters, thereby confirming the existence of houses in Jericho that correspond with the depiction of Rahab's house in Joshua 2:15.

Weighing the Evidence

Considering the ceramic typology, the scarab dating, and the many biblical parallels discussed above, the skepticism that exists among archaeologists and biblical historians regarding a Jericho City IV destruction ca. 1400 is unfounded. The congruence between the material finds and the biblical account should persuade scholars to at least remain open to the possibility that this destruction was caused by the people who claimed (with exquisite detail) to be the perpetrators.

Ai

Following the destruction of Jericho, Ai was the second place the Israelites attacked after entering Canaan (Jos 7:1-8:29). That places the destruction of Ai shortly after the spring of 1406 BC. However, while everyone agrees on Jericho's location, the location of Ai remains the most contested in Joshua's account of the Conquest.

For nearly a century, the location of Ai has been uncritically fixed at et-Tell. However, excavations at et-Tell have revealed that there was no occupation at the site in the Middle Bronze and Late Bronze periods, so it would have been unoccupied at the time Israel entered Canaan.²¹ Though most scholars still believe et-Tell is the correct location for Ai, et-Tell fails as a candidate for Joshua's Ai since it has no Late Bronze occupation, no militarily significant hill to the north, no shallow valley to the north (see Jos 8:11, 8:13), and no ambush site nearby that would provide cover from both Ai and Bethel (8:9, 8:12-13).²² On the other hand, based on its strategic location and the archaeological findings highlighted below, the site of Khirbet el-Maqatir better fits the biblical description of Ai.

Fortification

Bryant Wood and Scott Stripling identified a small MB III-LB I fortress (active ca. 1500-1400 BC) at Khirbet



A digital reconstruction of Ai, based on the archaeological findings at Khirbet el-Maqatir. Credit: Tom Miller

el-Maqatir that occupies an area of ca. 2.5 acres (1 ha), fitting with the biblical description of Ai as a small city (smaller than Gibeon: Jos 10:2).²³ But despite its smallness, the bastion at Khirbet el-Maqatir was strongly fortified, with the foundations of the north and west walls being about 13 feet (4 meters) wide.²⁴ According to Joshua 8:11, the Israelites "arrived in front of the city; and they camped on the north side of Ai" (NASB). The principal, and likely the only, gate of the fortress at Khirbet el-Maqatir was in the north or northeast face of the wall. Thus, Khirbet el-Maqatir correlates exactly with the biblical account of Ai.

Evidence of Destruction

At the end of the LB IB period, ca. 1406 BC, a conflagration consumed the city of Ai as recorded in Joshua 8. Though pockets of ash were found throughout the site, the most impressive evidence of the conflagration was the abundance of refired LB IB pottery. Stripling notes, "The pottery's hardness was unlike anything encountered at other sites in Israel or Jordan. A potter fired the vessels once in a kiln and then apparently, they were exposed to extreme heat a second time when the Israelites burned the fortress."²⁵



Glyptic Finds

In 2014, excavation at Khirbet el-Maqatir yielded a decapitated bronze ram's head in a LB I context, within a few meters of the scarabs mentioned below, and at the same elevation.²⁶ Similar decapitated figurines from the Late Bronze Age have also surfaced at Tell el-Qedah (Hazor),

A severed bronze ram's head was discovered at Khirbet el-Maqatir. According to the biblical account, the Israelites were commanded to cut down the idols they encountered during their conquest. Credit: ABR

Continued on page 18

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AGES & OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

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BIBLICAL PERIODS	ARCHAEOLOGY PERIOD	DATE, B.C.	SIGNIFICANT EVENTS
PERIOD OF THE PATRIARCHS	Early Bronze I ¹	ca. 3100-2900	Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in 2067 at the end of the EB III period
	Early Bronze II	ca. 2900-2600	
	Early Bronze III	ca. 2600-2050	
	Early Bronze IV	ca. 2050 ² -1900	
Egyptian Sojourn 1876-1446	Middle Bronze I (IIA)	ca. 1900-1750	Second Intermediate (Hyksos) Period 1668-1560 ⁴ Subjugation of Canaan by Thutmose III in his 22nd year, ca. 1485
	Middle Bronze II (IIB)	ca. 1750-1650	
	Middle Bronze III (IIC) ³	ca. 1650-1485	
PERIOD OF THE JUDGES 1400-1051	Late Bronze IA ⁵	ca. 1485-1446	Exodus, Spring 1446
	Late Bronze IB	ca. 1446-1400	Wilderness Wanderings 1446-1406
	Late Bronze II (IIA)	ca. 1400-1305	Conquest 1406-1400
	Late Bronze III (IIB) ⁶	ca. 1305-1187	Campaign of Seti I, ca. 1305
			Philistine invasion in the 8th year of Ramses III, ca. 1187
UNITED MONARCHY 1051-932	Iron IA	ca. 1187-1140/30	Saul 1051-1009
	Iron IB ⁷	ca. 1140/30-980	David 1009-969
	Iron IIA ⁸	ca. 980-841	Solomon 971-932 Campaign of Shishak 925 Jehu coup 841
DIVIDED MONARCHY 932-587	Iron IIB	ca. 841-701	Fall of Samaria 723 Campaign of Sennacherib 701
	Iron IIC	ca. 701-587	Fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians June/July 587
EXILE	Babylonian Period	ca. 587-539	
RETURN	Persian Period	ca. 539-332	

1. Dates for the Early and Middle Bronze Ages generally are those of Douglas Petrovich (https://www.academia.edu/4167872/Archaeological_Ages_in_the_Levant).
2. Kris J. Udd, Has Radiocarbon Artificially Raised Bronze Age Dates? *NEASB 58* (2013): 9.
3. The end of the Middle Bronze Age is correlated with the campaign of Thutmose III in ca. 1485 (*Qashish* [2003]: 327).
4. Egyptian dates are those of Douglas Petrovich in *The World's Oldest Alphabet: Hebrew as the Language of the Proto-Consonantal Script* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2016): 234.

5. For general agreement for LB IA, see *Yoqne'am III* (2005): 243, and for general agreement for late MB and LB, see *Tel Beth-Shean II* (2007): 12.
6. The end of Late Bronze Age is correlated with the invasion of the Philistines in ca. 1187.
7. Iron Age IB dates are those of Amihai Mazar in *The Ancient Pottery of Israel and Its Neighbors from the Iron Age through the Hellenistic Period 1*, ed. S. Gitin (2015): 7.
8. Iron Age II dates are based on Amihai Mazar, The Debate over the Chronology of the Iron Age in the Southern Levant: Its History, the Current Situation and a Suggested Resolution, in *The Bible and Radiocarbon Dating—Archaeology, Text and Science*, eds. T.E. Levy and T. Higham (2005): 14.



This tiny Egyptian stone scarab seal was discovered by ABR at their excavation at Khirbet el-Maqatir in Israel. The scarab pictures a falcon-headed sphinx accompanied by two heliographs; the seal dates to the reign of Pharaoh Amenhotep II (15th century BC). Its discovery helped date the destruction of the site to the Late Bronze Age, bolstering the case for Khirbet el-Maqatir being the biblical location of Ai – the second city defeated, captured and burned by the Israelites at the beginning of the Conquest of Canaan as described in Joshua 7 and 8. Credit: ABR

Continued

another site that the Israelites plundered and burned.²⁷

Additionally, two datable scarabs were found about 98 feet (30 meters) east of the gate. The first scarab emerged from inside the fortress, near the gate, ca. 0.79 inches (2 cm) above bedrock in a sealed LB IB locus. Engraved on the base of the scarab is a falcon-headed sphinx with two hieroglyphs, *ankh* (“life”) and *neter* (“god”),²⁸ indicating a date during the 18th Dynasty of Egypt, specifically the reign of Amenhotep II (ca. 1455–1418 BC).²⁹ The second scarab possesses Egyptian hieroglyphs that are surrounded by eight sets of concentric circles and features two crude hieroglyphs in the center.³⁰ This type of scarab is typical of the time of



Scarab from the Hyksos period of the early 15th Dynasty of Egypt. Credit: ABR

the Hyksos period when “foreign rulers” reigned in Egypt in the early 15th Dynasty. The second scarab was also discovered within the fortress and near the gate, but unlike the first scarab, it came from a locus that had been disturbed by looters. Dating to about 1668–1485 BC (MB II–III), the second scarab is consistent with the MB III time frame that ABR established for the founding of the fortress based on ceramic evidence.³¹

Weighing the Evidence

Khirbet el-Maqatir’s location, pottery, and glyptic finds all support its identification as the Ai of Joshua 7–8. Significantly, prior to the influence of modern scholarship, local tradition placed Ai at Khirbet el-Maqatir, a fact often overlooked by previous investigators. As Ai was one of only three cities burned by Joshua, the establishment of Khirbet el-Maqatir as Ai and the results of the site’s excavation may help settle once and for all the problem of the “lost” cities of the Conquest, and consequently help refocus the ongoing and often contentious discussions regarding Near Eastern comparative chronology.

Mount Ebal

After the Israelites burned Ai as described in Joshua 8:1–29, Joshua assembled the Israelites on the slopes of Mount Ebal and read aloud the Law of Moses there (8:30–35). Earlier, Moses had directed, in regard to this event, that half the people were to face Mount Gerizim across the valley, and half were to face the summit of Mount Ebal (Dt 27:11–13). Deuteronomy 11:29 records that Moses instructed Israel to “set the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal.”

When Adam Zertal conducted excavations on Mount Ebal from 1982 to 1989, he happened upon a rectangular structure measuring 28.7–29.5 by 23 feet (8.75–9.00 by 7 meters) and made of uncut stone. He initially determined that the installation was filled with earth, ashes, broken pottery of the Iron Age I period, and animal bones.³² In addition to this Iron Age I rectangular structure (in Stratum 1), Zertal also identified an earlier structure underneath that consisted of “a circle made of medium-sized field stones laid on bedrock and located at the exact geometric center of the [later] structure.”³³ These findings convinced Zertal that “beyond question, our site is a cultic center.”³⁴ Though Zertal, a religious agnostic, had no intention of substantiating the historicity of the Bible, he eventually became an ardent supporter of at least some form of a historic

Conquest event. The older, round altar structure, initially thought by Zertal to be an Iron Age I altar, was later identified as a LB IIA altar by Stripling and the ABR (Associates for Biblical Research) team.³⁵

Lead Tablet

In 2019, Stripling reexamined Zertal’s dump piles from Mount Ebal using a unique and thorough method known as wet sifting. The most spectacular find of this project was a small, folded lead tablet dating to 1400–1250 BC that Stripling recognized as a *defixio*, or curse tablet. It measured approximately one square inch (2 × 2 cm), and little was visible on its surface to the naked eye, but when epigraphers employed advanced 3D tomographic scans on the object, the following proto-alphabetic inscription was revealed on the “Inner B” surface of the inside of the tablet:

*You are cursed by the god yhw, cursed.
You will die, cursed—cursed, you will surely die.
Cursed you are by yhw—cursed.*³⁶

Animal Bones and Altar

As Richard Hess³⁷ notes, approximately 96 percent of the bones from Mount Ebal, most of which were found around the altar, came from sheep, goats, cattle, and fallow deer, correlating well with the picture of early Israel’s worship suggested by biblical law codes and the narratives of Joshua, Judges, and the books of Samuel. This evidence renders the round altar fully consistent with a kosher, non-agrarian cultic site. Additionally, it should be noted that 100 percent of the stones of the round altar were unworked, in accordance with the requirement of Joshua 8:31.³⁸

Weighing the Evidence

With the discovery of the curse tablet, Stripling and his team have shaken the foundations of the minimalist scholarly community across the world. As Tom Metcalfe puts it,

If the date can be verified, the inscription on the curse tablet would push back the earliest-known date for literacy among the ancient Israelites by several hundred years; until now, the earliest



Caption: Mount Ebal from the Southeast
Credit: Public Domain

evidence was the Khirbet Qeiyafa Inscription, dating from about the 10 century B.C., according to researchers at Israel’s University of Haifa.³⁹

Without a doubt, the material evidence from Mount Ebal alone makes a powerful case for the historicity of a 15th-century-BC Conquest. Stripling summarizes the simple logic often clouded by the scholarly establishment:

“We have an ancient text saying that the Israelites arrived around 1400 [B.C.], and then we have evidence of them on a mountain where the Bible says that they were, writing a language that the Bible says that they used.”...“I think a fair-minded person might be willing to draw the conclusion, inductively, that there were Israelites there.”⁴⁰

Hazor

The biblical text contains two accounts concerning Hazor in the times of Joshua and the judges. The first account, found in Joshua 11, depicts the downfall of an alliance of kings in the northern hill country, culminating in the death of Jabin, king of Hazor, and the burning of his city. Later, as Judges 4 describes, Deborah and Barak battle against Sisera, the general of Jabin, king of Hazor. These accounts of Hazor describe two distinct events separated by over 150 years, both involving a regime whose leaders employed the dynastic title of Jabin.⁴¹ Excavations at Hazor have revealed two destruction layers, one in the 15th century BC and one in the 13th, and this bolstered contentions with proponents of the late date (13th century BC) for the Exodus/Conquest. But when all the Hazor evidence is weighed properly,

there is compelling evidence that Joshua and the Israelites were responsible for a destruction in a 15th-century-BC stratum at Hazor (Stratum 2/XV).

Conflagration

Amnon Ben-Tor's excavations in Area M on the northern slope of the tell revealed strong evidence of a LB I (15th-century-BC) conflagration.⁴² Evidence of burn lines, along with the presence of other residual burned areas measuring up to half a meter in some places, conveys the distinctive signs of a significant destruction by fire. Evidence of conflagration in both the upper and lower cities confirms that LB I Hazor indeed was destroyed by a great fire, and that the "cultic centers seemed to have been singled out for especially harsh treatment by the conquerors in the 15th century BC."⁴³

Cultic Desecration

The large number of deliberately mutilated statues found in Stratum XIII (LB IIB / 13th century BC) also aligns with an Israelite-led attack. Ben-Tor notes that this kind of cultic destruction reflects what he calls "religious desecration."⁴⁴ Sharon Zuckerman indicates that these religious desecrations point to "a systematic annihilation campaign, against the very physical symbols of the royal ideology and its loci of ritual legitimation."⁴⁵ Numbers 33:52 and Deuteronomy 12:2-3 record explicit commands to destroy pagan religious installations, idols, and statues. Yigael Yadin and Ben-Tor⁴⁶ and Ben-Tor and Maria Teresa Rubiato⁴⁷ argue that the intentional nature of the desecration points to Israelite action, and even Kenneth Kitchen observes, "Neither the Egyptians, Canaanites nor Sea Peoples destroyed LB Hazor—the early Hebrews remain a feasible option."⁴⁸

Weighing the Evidence

Though evidence suggests the Israelites initially continued a seminomadic, pastoral lifestyle during the early settlement of Canaan, they left a fascinating fingerprint at Hazor with the cultic desecration of the city's idols and statuary as well as with the 15th-century-BC burn layer. In short, the excavations at Hazor provide solid support for the historical reality of the Conquest. Considering that the Hazor of Joshua 11 fell ca. 1400 BC and that around 166 years passed between Joshua's Conquest and the judgeship of Deborah, it follows that the impressive destruction around 1230 BC corresponds well with the time of Deborah and Barak, who likely attacked Hazor in order to kill King Jabin (Jgs 4:24) after having defeated Sisera further south in the Jezreel Valley (Judges 4-5). (The 13th-century-BC destruction may

also correspond with some other event unidentified by the Bible—e.g., an attack by Merneptah.) While some pieces of the Hazor puzzle may be missing and some of the experts examining the archaeological data have misinterpreted the finds, the discoveries at the site beautifully align with a 15th-century-BC Conquest.

Shiloh

Though Shiloh was not one of the cities directly tied to the military conquest of Israel, it remains a very important site that provides relevant data regarding the Conquest's historicity. It was at Shiloh that the Israelites set up the tent of meeting (Jos 18:1) and divided the land among the seven tribes who had not yet received land allotments (18:2-10). Shortly thereafter, Shiloh became a center for the tribes for both deliberating difficult matters (Jos 22:12) and celebrating an annual feast of the Lord (Jgs 21:19). Shiloh became the first permanent dwelling place for the tent of meeting and the ark of the covenant (Jos 18:1) when the Israelites moved from Gilgal.⁴⁹ In the Iron Age I period, Eli and his sons officiated at the tabernacle in Shiloh (Jgs 18:31; 1 Sm 2:12-14), and it was there that God spoke to the prophet Samuel (1 Sm 3).

The results of previous and ongoing excavations at Shiloh have helped to illuminate important chronological issues concerning the process of Israelite settlement after their entry into Israel. While digging at Shiloh in the 1980s, before his views shifted into the realm of minimalism, Israel Finkelstein acknowledged a historical Exodus/Conquest that he asserted took place no earlier than the second half or end of the 12th century BC.⁵⁰ However, Shiloh's current excavations under Stripling's leadership paint a completely different picture, indicating an Israelite arrival at Shiloh at the transition from LB I to LB II. Though volumes could be written on the history of Shiloh and the excavations that date back to the 1920s, our focus will narrow in on the Late Bronze material evidence that speaks to the arrival of the Israelites at the transition from LB IB to LB IIA.

Pottery

From the outset, Late Bronze pottery has been found throughout the excavation site, in the southern, western, northeastern, and northwestern sectors. The Danish found Late Bronze pottery in caves, houses, and walls during their 1926, 1929, and 1932 excavation seasons and in Trench Bb during the 1963 season.⁵¹ From 2019 to 2022, Jordan McClinton and Scott Stripling reanalyzed Finkelstein's published

pottery,⁵² comparing it against published parallels from other sites to see if there was a case for a continued settlement at Shiloh throughout the end of the Late Bronze Age. The reanalysis of the Area D pottery assemblage began with McClinton and Stripling examining all of Finkelstein's Late Bronze pottery plates from his final excavation report and comparing them with well-known Late Bronze sources published by Ruth Amiran⁵³ and Seymour Gitin.⁵⁴ Based on parallels from these sources, McClinton and Stripling determined that 43 out of Finkelstein's 181 original pottery forms represented either LB IIA or LB IIB forms, thus refuting the conclusion that the site of Shiloh was abandoned in the latter part of LB IIA and through LB IIB.⁵⁵

Evidence of Religious Center

After four seasons of excavation at Shiloh, Associates for Biblical Research has revealed significant evidence of the Israelite cultic system that was carried out at Shiloh for over three centuries.⁵⁶ Substantial numbers of sacrificial animal bones and cultic vessels dating to this time have been found by Stripling and the ABR team. Among the bones found at Shiloh site-wide, the number of pig bones averages about four percent in the pagan strata (Strata 8-7) but less than 0.5 percent in the Israelite strata (Strata 6-3). Concerning a Stratum 6 *favissa* (cultic bone deposit), Stripling notes, "Osteological analysis indicates that these animals were slaughtered at a younger age than at parallel sites....Also, bones from the animals' right side (53 percent) outnumbered bones from their left side (47 percent)."⁵⁷ All these findings reflect biblical commands for sacrifices in Leviticus.

Additionally, in 2018, ABR excavated a small ceramic pomegranate in Square AH29.⁵⁸ Pomegranates were a clear motif of the tabernacle and later the temple. After this finding, Stripling identified a second pomegranate from among the objects excavated by the Danish. Both belong to Stratum V (Iron Age I).⁵⁹ These sacred objects may have

hung from the hem of a priest's robe or served as decoration for cult stands.⁶⁰ Excavations in the Levitical city of Yokneam yielded similar ceramic pomegranates, indicating a connection to the cultic activity of the Israelites.⁶¹

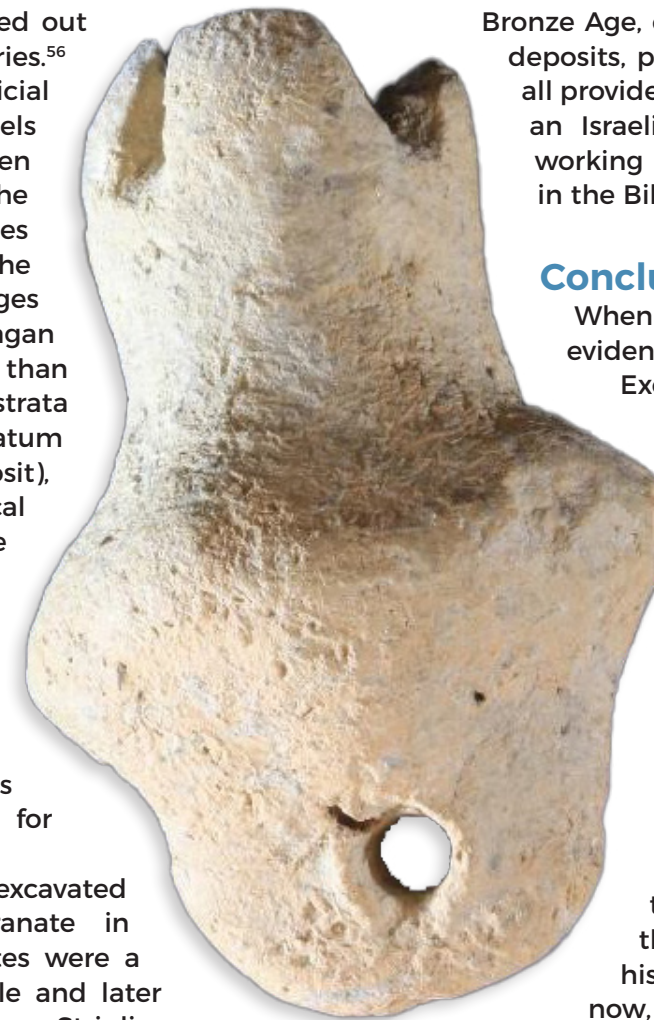
Furthermore, in 2019, Area H1 excavations produced two stones that likely served as horns on a sacrificial altar. The first horn (Object 1615) was found in a wall of an Early Roman-period structure, where it had been in secondary usage, and the second horn (Object 1185), also seemingly reused by Early Roman builders, lay only two meters to the south, in Square AH30. As the altar was a foundational component of the tabernacle's sacrificial system, the presence of altar horns at Shiloh further establishes verisimilitude for the biblical account.⁶²

Weighing the Evidence

The ceramic analysis points to Shiloh's establishment as a cultic center beginning in the Late Bronze Age, ca. 1400 BC. The animal bone deposits, pomegranates, and altar horns all provide clear evidence that there was an Israelite cultic system active and working in Shiloh exactly as reported in the Bible.

Conclusion

When one carefully surveys the evidence for the historicity of the Exodus and Conquest, that evidence should dispel any notion that the biblical account of the Conquest belongs in the realm of myth or legend. Archaeology cannot prove that the Conquest happened, but it certainly has not proven that it did not happen, and when you look at the evidence gleaned from the biblical text and from analysis of the archaeological data, I think it takes more faith to be a skeptic than to read the book of Joshua as a reliable historical document. As of right now, the intersections between the Bible and archaeology lend credibility to the historical narrative recorded by the biblical authors.



The pomegranate found during the 2018 ABR Shiloh excavation. Credit: ABR



New Insights on Israelite Religious Practice

Boyd V. Seevers, Kelsey M. Kuball, and Gabrielle E. Lingenfelder
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INTRODUCTION

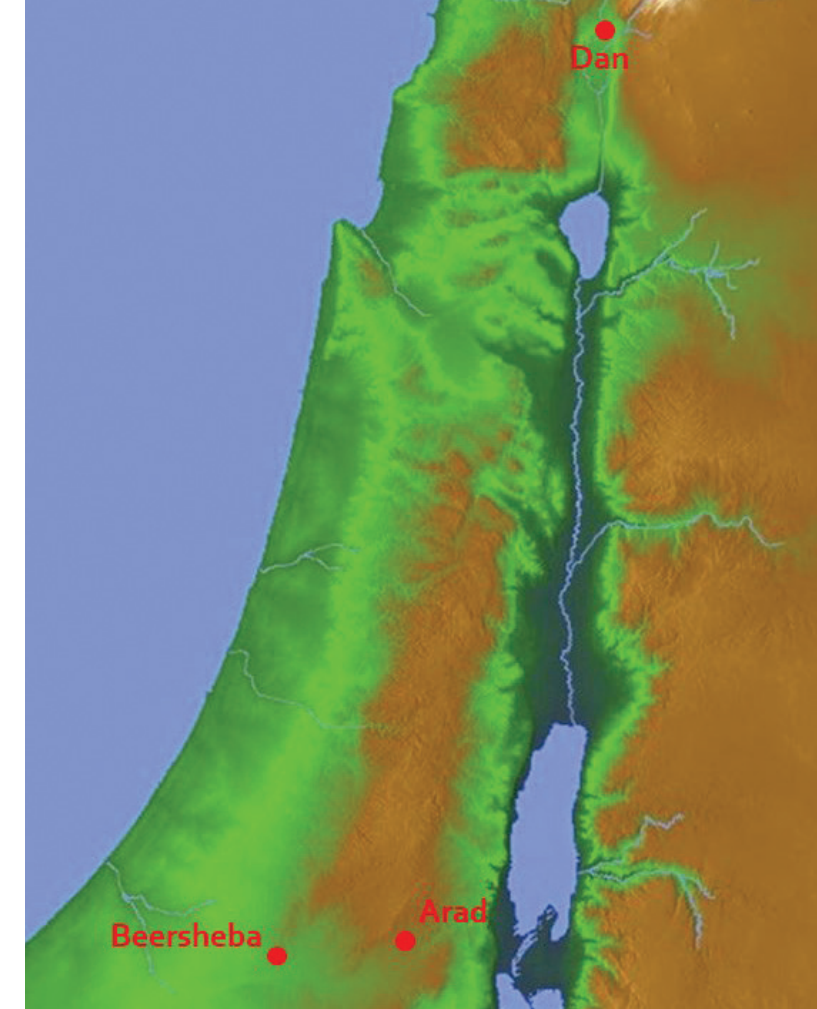
For many years, major archaeological finds in Israel that shed light on Israelite religious practice during the time of the divided monarchy were rather limited. They included multiple religious centers at Dan, a dismantled large horned altar at Beersheba, and an Israelite temple at Arad. In recent years, however, the list of finds has grown meaningfully and now includes multiple places of worship at Khirbet Qeiyafa (a town associated with David), another Israelite temple at Tel Moza, a ritual feasting hall possibly connected to Elisha at Tel Rehov in northern Israel, a gate shrine at Lachish, and even residue of cannabis from the temple at Arad.

This article will summarize the biblical information describing orthodox and unorthodox religious practice during the Israelite monarchy, as well as information about the previously known finds from Dan, Beersheba, and Arad. It will then describe the new finds mentioned above and summarize what the new information tells us about Israelite religious practice during the time of the divided monarchy (Iron Age II).

Orthodox and Unorthodox Religious Practices

Generally speaking, the Pentateuch describes how the ancient Israelites were supposed to practice their religion after they settled into Canaan, and subsequent historical and prophetic books include information about how they did and did not follow those guidelines. The Pentateuch describes Israel's national covenant with God, including prescribed religious practices. It further states that when the Israelites conquered Canaan, they were to expel the Canaanites and demolish their places and objects of worship (Ex 23:24; Dt 12:2-4), lest the Israelites be tempted to follow other gods. Israel was supposed to worship YHWH at a single location (Dt 12:5-6)—ultimately the Solomonic temple in Jerusalem.

Sadly, Israel quickly and repeatedly failed to obey these commands. Disobedience and idolatry began with the golden calf at Mt. Sinai (Ex 32) and continued during the Conquest of Canaan (Jgs 2:11-14). Even Solomon built places of worship for other gods (1 Kgs 11:5-8), helping to set the stage for continued idolatry during the divided monarchy. Jeroboam I built illegitimate worship centers at Dan and Bethel (1 Kgs 12:26-33), and later kings continued forbidden practices, including using worship centers at city gates and even practicing child sacrifice (2 Kgs 23:8, 23:10). Although a few godly kings such as Hezekiah and Josiah carried out religious reforms (2 Kgs 18:4, 22:3-23:25), Israel's continued and rampant idolatry (Ez 8:5-18) eventually led God to punish the nation with conquest and exile (2 Chr 36:14-20).



Sites with earlier major finds illustrating Israelite religious practice.

Previously Known Finds

Up until recently, major finds reflecting illegitimate Israelite religious practice during Iron Age II were limited to multiple worship centers at Dan, a dismantled altar at Beersheba, and an Israelite temple at Arad, plus numerous smaller finds like figurines, cult stands, and incense altars. Together these provided a limited supplement to the biblical texts describing Israelite religious practice during the divided monarchy.

At Dan in the far north of Israel, an excavated religious complex from the tenth through eighth centuries BC appears to match the biblical account of a religious center at Dan erected by King Jeroboam I (1 Kgs 12:26-30) following the division of Israel. The excavated complex consisted of an open-air enclosure that contained a sacrificial horned altar; a large podium for a “high place” or a temple,



The religious complex at Dan, with a place for an open-air altar on the left and with a platform where the golden calf would have stood on the right.

Photo from <https://holylandphotos.org/>.

which apparently was the location of Jeroboam's golden calf; and side chambers for feasting and administration.¹ In addition, excavations uncovered multiple contemporary worship centers in and around the city's gate (cf. 2 Kgs 23:8). These included a total of 14 standing stones (elongated natural stones set on end and often serving as a focal point of worship) in three locations, votive vessels such as lamps and incense bowls, and bones of sacrificial animals.² The eighth-century-BC prophet Amos likely had these worship centers at Dan in mind when he condemned idolatrous worship practiced there as well as at Beersheba in the south (Am 8:14).

Excavations at Beersheba did not uncover remains of a temple, but rather the carefully hewn stones of a large sacrificial horned altar that may have been used



Horned altar from Beersheba, reconstructed in the Israel Museum. Photo by Boyd SeEVERS.

in a temple or open-air shrine. The altar had been dismantled and the stones reused for the building of municipal storehouses in the late eighth century BC.³ Although 2 Kings 23:8 notes that Josiah (late seventh century BC) desecrated high places (*bāmōt*) as far south as Beersheba, the dismantled altar more likely connects to the religious reforms of Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:3–4, 18:22) approximately one century earlier.

At the nearby southern city of Arad, excavations did uncover an Israelite temple. It consisted of a large courtyard with a sacrificial altar; a broadroom “holy



High place at city gate at Dan with three standing stones. Photo from <https://holylandphotos.org/>.

place”; and a smaller, raised “holy of holies” flanked by two incense altars, with one or two standing stones nearby.⁴ Inscriptions excavated at Arad mention “the house of Yahweh” and known Jewish priestly families, suggesting that the temple directed worship to Israel’s God. Excavators originally dated



The Arad temple's “holy of holies,” as rebuilt on site. It includes replicas of two standing stones in the back, plus two incense altars that had residue of incense burned when the temple was in use. Photo from <https://holylandphotos.org/>.

the temple to the tenth through seventh centuries BC,⁵ but later analysis suggested a shorter life span, perhaps just during the eighth century BC.⁶ The complex was desacralized (purposefully taken out of religious use),⁷ as shown by the altars having been laid on their sides and covered in plaster, perhaps during the reforms of Hezekiah (2 Kgs 23).

Temple at Arad with altar on right in courtyard; broadroom “holy place” to its left; and smaller, raised “holy of holies” in upper left. Photo from <https://holylandphotos.org/>.

Together, these finds at Dan, Beersheba, and Arad provided limited but meaningful evidence corroborating what the Bible says about a number of illegitimate ways the Israelites worshipped during the divided monarchy—using high places, gate shrines, and even a temple outside of the Solomonic temple in Jerusalem. In the last few years, however, the body of evidence for such illegitimate Israelite religious practice has grown considerably, as described below.

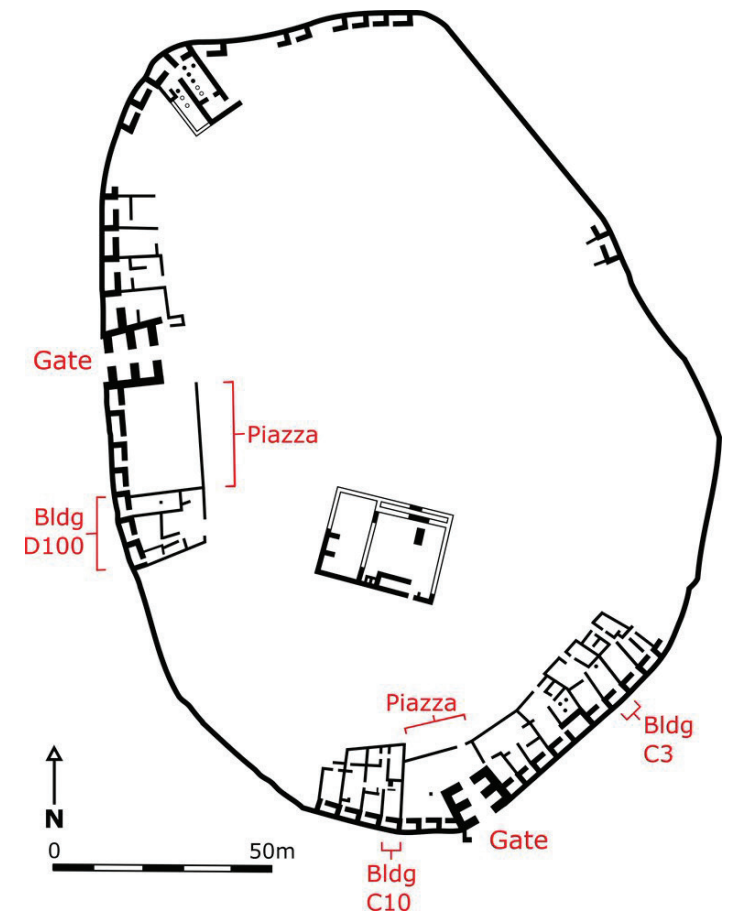
Recent Finds

Cultic Rooms at Khirbet Qeiyafa

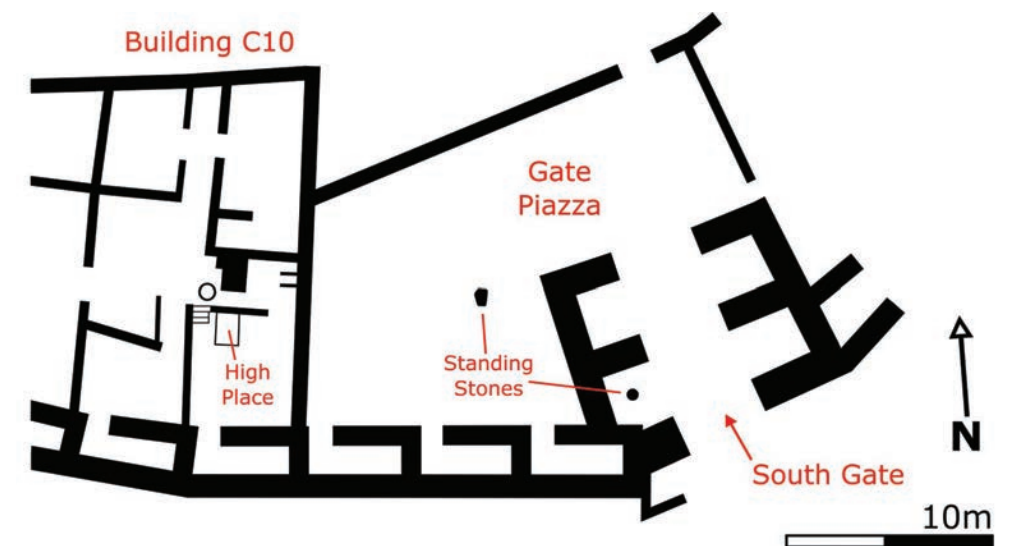
(Early Tenth Century BC)

The earliest of the more recent evidence comes from Khirbet Qeiyafa, dated to ca. 1020–980 BC. According to the excavators, this well-built, strongly fortified town on the border of Philistia was apparently established at the time of David and destroyed a few decades later by Philistines from nearby Gath.⁸ Although the finds at Qeiyafa did not produce a temple, they did include three groupings of rooms and associated structures where religious activity took place. Finds in these groupings included seven aniconic (without images) standing stones,⁹ clay and stone portable shrines, libation vessels and installations, basalt altars, and a male figurine.¹⁰ Two of the rooms were located next to each of Qeiyafa’s gates and associated piazzas (large but confined areas where large groups could gather). These two religious complexes apparently facilitated public worship, while the third site (Building C3) was in a private, domestic structure and would have served smaller numbers.¹¹

The public worship center in and adjacent to Building C10 near the southern gate was arguably the main worship center at Qeiyafa, since it was the most developed and was located next to the city’s main gate. Religious objects from this worship center included two large standing stones, one 150 cm (5 ft.) high and weighing more than a ton, erected in the middle of the piazza, and the other 110 cm (3 ft., 7 in.) high, in the southwest gate chamber. Building C10 adjoined the piazza and included a high



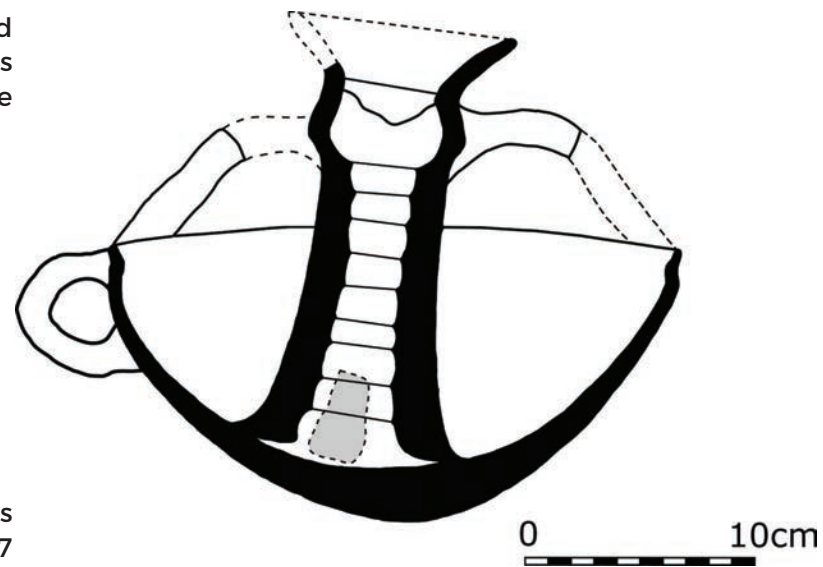
Plan of Khirbet Qeiyafa showing religious sites at each gate, plus at Building C3. Drawing by Ruth H. Marsh, based on Yosef Garfinkel, Saar Ganor, and Michael G. Hasel, “Introduction,” in *Khirbet Qeiyafa*, vol. 4, *Excavation Report 2007–2013: Art, Cult, and Epigraphy*, by Yosef Garfinkel, Saar Ganor, and Michael G. Hasel, ed. Martin G. Klingbeil, with contributions by David Ben-Shlomo et al. (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2018), 4, fig. 1.3.



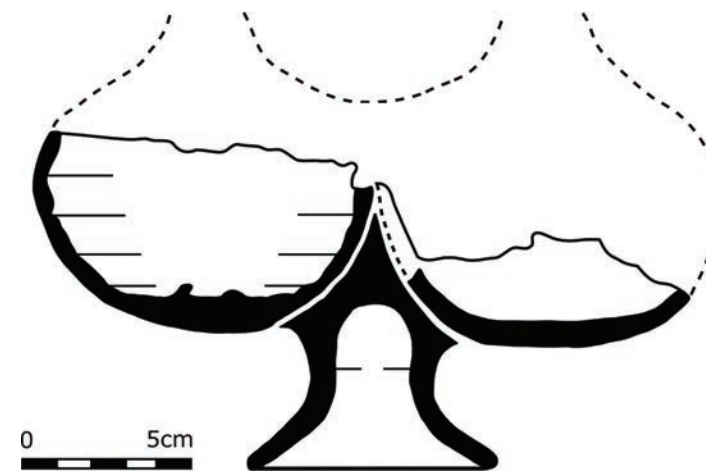
Religious complex adjacent to southern gate at Khirbet Qeiyafa. Drawing by Ruth H. Marsh, based on Yosef Garfinkel and Michael G. Hasel, “The Sanctuary Buildings,” in *Khirbet Qeiyafa*, 4:47, fig. 2.57.

place and fragments of elaborate stone and clay house shrines resembling buildings and apparently intended for holding divine symbols. Other religious finds from this building included fragments of pottery cult stands, a very large cup-and-saucer vessel probably used for libations,¹² and many cooking installations likely associated with religious feasting.

The smaller, apparently private religious center in Room G of Building C3 east of the southern gate included a number of features connected to religious activity. These consisted of a bench with a sinkhole for draining liquids used in religious functions; two standing stones, 80 cm (2 ft., 7 in.) and 25 cm (10 in.) high, next to a large, flat stone used as an offering table; and a limestone basin (the adjacent casemate room designated "Room H" contained a second limestone basin).



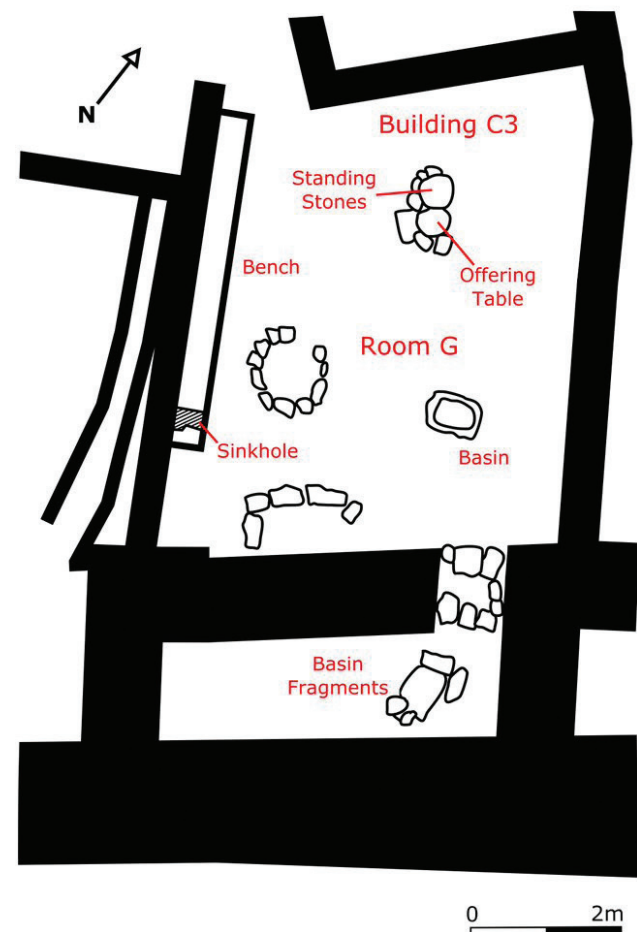
Large cup-and-saucer vessel used for libations, from Building C10. Drawing by Ruth H. Marsh, based on Igor Kreimerman and Yosef Garfinkel, "The Cup-and-Saucer Vessels," in *Khirbet Qeiyafa*, 4:188, fig. 12.2.



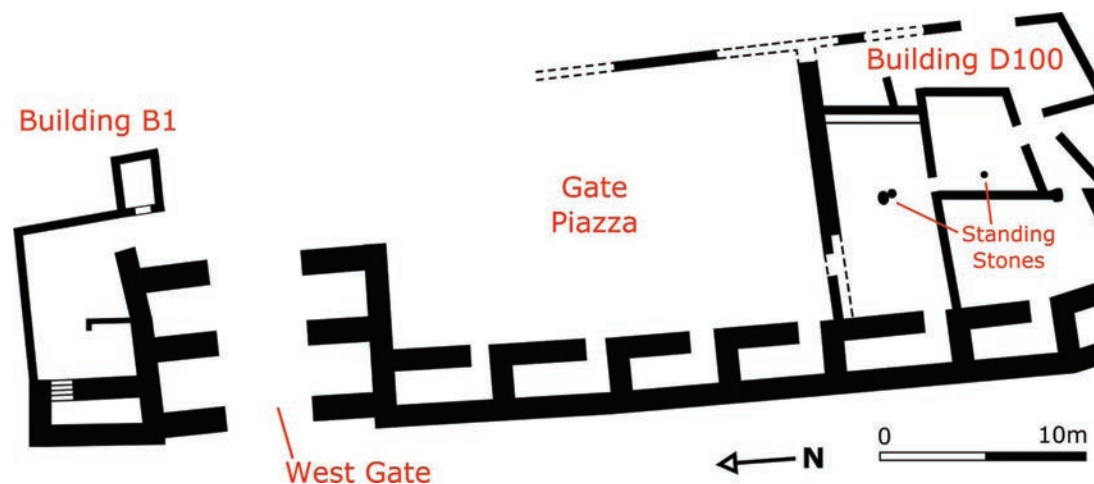
Twin-cup libation vessel from Building D100. Drawing by Ruth H. Marsh, based on Garfinkel and Hasel, "The Sanctuary Buildings," 39, fig. 2.45.

The public worship center in Building D100 and the adjoining piazza next to the western gate included two standing stones, 90 cm (3 ft.) and 130 cm (4 ft., 3 in.) high; a bench; a twin-cup vessel for making libations, similar to one found in Building C3; and three long iron sword blades and an iron knife blade that were possibly used ceremonially.

In Building B1 north of the western gate, excavators found evidence of desacralization. A standing stone had been placed upside down and completely enclosed into a wall, demonstrating a similar repurposing to that of the dismantled and reused altar at Beersheba. This suggests desacralization by the Judean residents of Qeiyafa sometime during its brief time of occupation. By contrast, most of the altars and other religious artifacts at Qeiyafa were



Private worship center in Room G of Building C3. Drawing by Ruth H. Marsh, based on Garfinkel and Hasel, "The Sanctuary Buildings," 17, fig. 2.3.



Religious complex near western gate at Khirbet Qeiyafa. Drawing by Ruth H. Marsh, based on Garfinkel and Hasel, "The Sanctuary Buildings," 47, fig. 2.57.

smashed and scattered at the destruction of the city (cf. Ex 34:13).

What do these extensive religious finds at the site tell us? The many finds suggest that the Judean inhabitants of Qeiyafa used the buildings, installations, and related small finds for religious libations and other offerings, and for food preparation and religious feasting. The lack of concentrations of animal bones argues against animal sacrifice at the site.

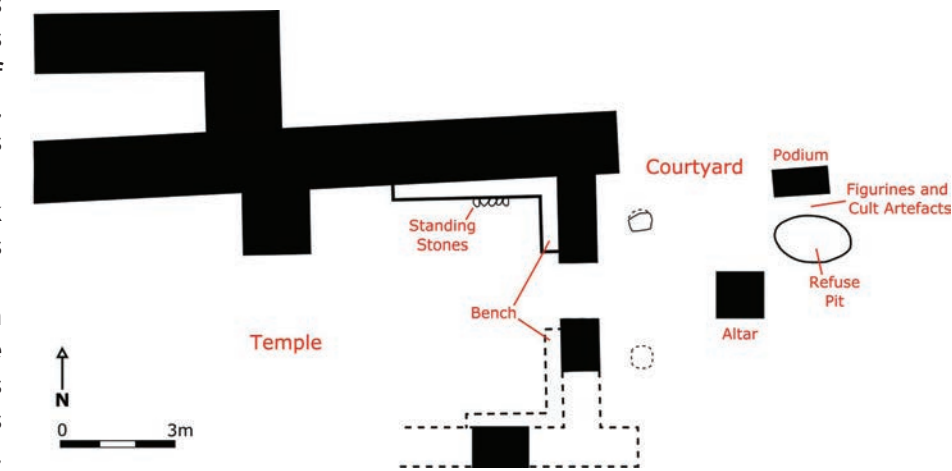
Which god(s) did the residents of Qeiyafa worship? Since standing stones were sometimes acknowledged by prophets (Is 19:19–20; Hos 3:4), and the standing stones at Qeiyafa bore no engraved imagery, the Qeiyafa stones may have represented YHWH. However, the two portable shrines in Building C10 may suggest two gods, perhaps male and female, since such shrines often housed symbols of gods.

Israelite Temple at Tel Moza

(Late Tenth to Early Sixth Century BC)

In the center of Israel, just a few miles west of Jerusalem, Tel Moza lies on a slope overlooking a fertile region with ample soil, plentiful water sources, and temperate weather. These conditions, along with the remains of silos, storage buildings, and storage jars, suggest that Moza likely served as a granary and supplier to nearby Jerusalem during Iron Age II. However, the most striking feature found at Moza was an apparent temple.

The Iron Age temple structure was likely constructed ca. 900 BC, and it remained in use until the early sixth century BC.¹³ The temple's pattern—the long-room or Syrian style—is typical for the period, including serving as the pattern for the contemporary Solomonic temple in nearby Jerusalem. The massive temple at Moza was built in a long-room plan along an east-west axis. A portico served as the entrance on the east, and one pillar base out of a presumed pair of pillars flanking the entrance was preserved. The



Temple and associated structures at Moza. Drawing by Ruth H. Marsh, based on Shua Kisilevitz, "The Iron IIA Judaite Temple at Tel Moza," *Tel Aviv* 42, no. 2 (2015): 152, fig. 1.

building lacks the southern wall, but if it mirrored its counterpart on the north, the building would have been ca. 18 m (59 ft.) long and 13 m (43 ft.) wide. The main room had two different types of flooring but no partition wall to divide the two parts. For the eastern part, which formed the main chamber, the floor consisted of packed plaster and earth, and for the western part, which was slightly elevated and thus likely represented an inner chamber, the flooring consisted of fragmented stones. Benches lined the northern and eastern walls of this main room, and five fieldstones set against the northern bench probably served as standing stones.

The courtyard east of the entrance had a packed-earth floor and contained an altar, a refuse pit for remains from ritual sacrifice (earth, ash, bones—some burned and some with butchery marks),¹⁴ and a stone podium. Fragments of religious objects surrounded the podium, including a small pomegranate-shaped pendant, fragments of decorated cult stands, and four figurines—two anthropomorphic (male heads, similar to the one found at Qeiyafa) and two zoomorphic (horse and riders). Such figurines would become common in later Iron Age II but were rare at this stage.

A couple aspects of the temple at Moza stand out. First, the temple and related finds, while unexpected in an orthodox biblical context, all conform to long-standing religious traditions of the ancient Near East. Second, the bones in the refuse pit (mostly from sheep and goats, corresponding to biblical law concerning animal sacrifice), the style of the temple complex, and the temple's proximity to Jerusalem all suggest that the operation of the temple at Moza may have been sanctioned at least to some degree by the centralized government in Jerusalem. Thus, the temple at Moza joins the temple at Arad in testifying that Solomon's temple was not the only Judean temple directed to YHWH during Iron Age II, and the temple at Moza shows that Solomon's temple was not even the only one in the region.

Inscriptions and Feasting Hall at Tel Rehov (Tenth–Ninth Century BC)

The apparent time when the temple at Moza was established is also the approximate time to which significant finds at Rehov, much farther north in Israel, have been dated. Along with a large apiary (honey production facility) and religious remains consistent with traditional Canaanite culture,¹⁵ Rehov produced inscriptions possibly connected to the Israelite prophet Elisha and the Nimshi clan that included King Jehu (2 Kgs 9), as well as a feasting hall possibly connected to Elisha and his activities as a prophet.

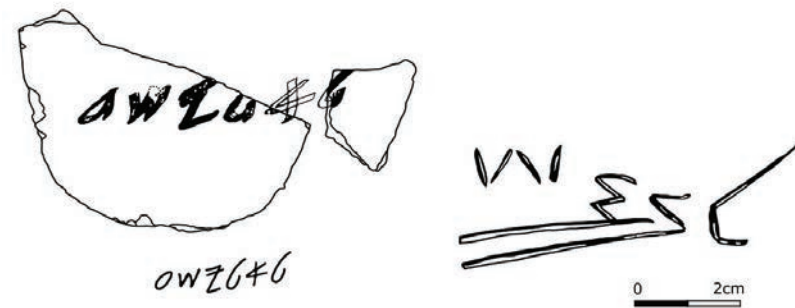
The Elisha inscription was written in red ink and appeared on two pieces of an ostracon, both found in one of the rooms of Building CP (discussed below). Although one cannot know if this Elisha was the biblical prophet, the famous Elisha son of Shaphat was born in this region,¹⁶ was active during this period, and was involved in the ascension of Jehu son of Nimshi to the Israelite throne (2 Kgs 9). A contemporaneous inscription with the name Nimshi (or Nemesh) was also discovered at Rehov on a storage jar in the



In black: sites with recent major finds illustrating Israelite religious practice.

apiary. Since the name “Nimshi” was connected to Jehu’s father (1 Kgs 19:16) and grandfather (2 Kgs 9:14), it was likely the name of a family or clan.¹⁷ Its appearance in the apiary suggests that the family may have owned that major industrial enterprise.

Continued on page 30



*“Elisha” and “Nimshi” inscriptions from Tel Rehov. Drawings by Ruth H. Marsh, based on Shmuel Ahituv and Amihai Mazar, “The Inscriptions from Tel Rehov and their Contribution to the Study of Script and Writing during Iron Age IIA,” *Maarav* 20, no. 2 (2013): figs. 10, 5.*

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6:30–9:30 PM**

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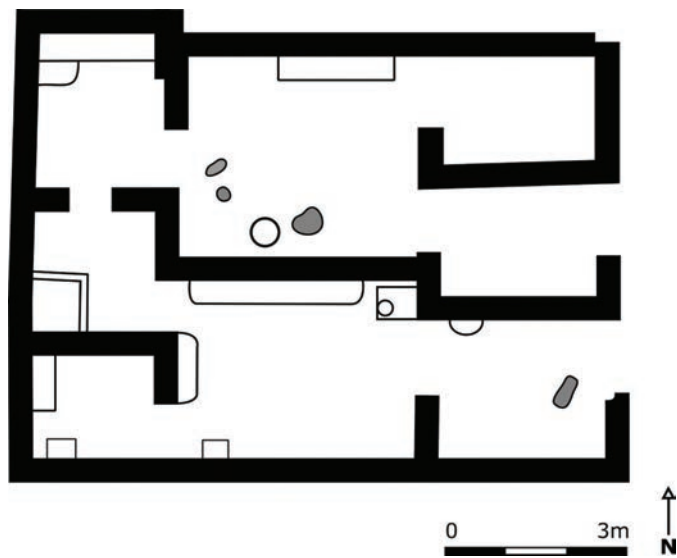


Dr. Jason Lisle
Keynote Speaker

Dr. Jason Lisle is a Christian astrophysicist who researches issues pertaining to science and the Christian Faith. A popular speaker and author, Dr. Lisle presents a rational defense of a literal Genesis, showing how science confirms the history recorded in the Bible. Brought up in a Christian family, at a young age he received Christ as Lord. Since then, Lisle has always desired to serve the Lord out of love and gratitude for salvation, and to spread the Gospel message to all people.

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Building CP—the “house of Elisha” at Tel Rehov. Drawing by Ruth H. Marsh, based on Nava Panitz-Cohen and Amihai Mazar, “Area C: Stratigraphy and Architecture,” in *Tel Rehov: A Bronze and Iron Age City in the Beth-Shean Valley*, by Amihai Mazar and Nava Panitz-Cohen, vol. 2, *The Lower Mound: Area C and the Apiary*, with contributions by Guy Bloch et al., *Qedem 60 (Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2020)*, 58, fig. 12.21; 148, fig. 12.50.

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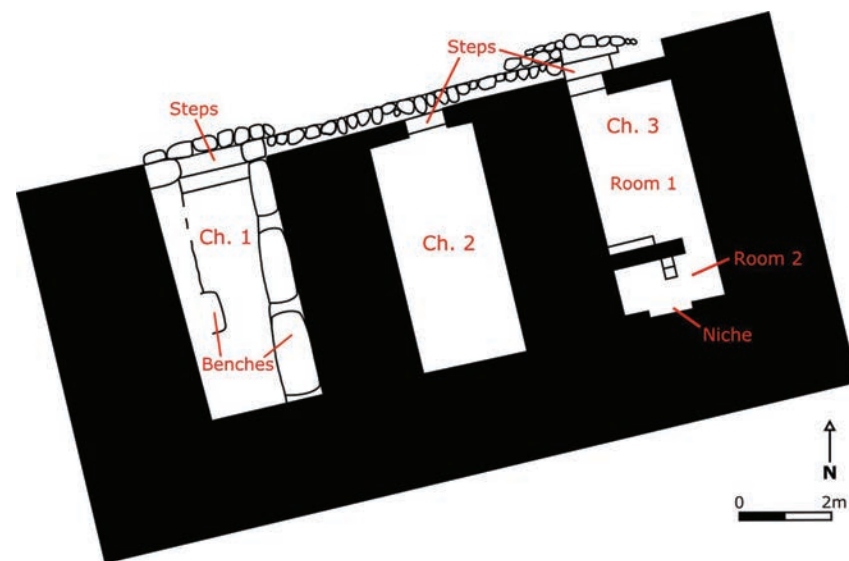
Building CP—nicknamed the “house of Elisha” because the inscription was discovered in it—consisted of eight rooms divided between two wings, with benches running along several of the walls and a large hall in the center of each wing. Numerous religious objects were found in the building, such as two four-horned clay altars that flanked the doorway and apparently were used for conducting some sort of ritual when entering or leaving the room, as well as fragments from one or more additional horned altars, an incense burner, a mold for casting female figurines, and 24 astragal bones (a type of bone often used for divination). The building also contained a large number of vessels for cooking and serving food. Thus, the building seemingly served to host religious activity that included communal banqueting and feasting (cf. 1 Sm 9:19–24), and the Elisha inscription suggests the possibility that the biblical prophet may have been an important part of this activity.

Gate Shrine at Lachish (Eighth Century BC)

Dating somewhat later than the finds at Moza and Rehov, a recently excavated eighth-century-BC gate

shrine at Lachish (southwest of Jerusalem) provided an example of a high place at a gate (2 Kgs 23:8), as well as another apparent example of the religious reforms of King Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18).

In ancient Israel, gate complexes were essential to a well-fortified city, offering protection from attacking armies as well as providing communal space for public activities such as legal proceedings (Ru 4:1; Jos 20:4) and worship. Second Kings 23:8 gives the only explicit biblical reference to worship at city gates (Josiah “broke down the high places of the gates”). In like manner to Dan and Qeiyafa, Iron Age II Lachish revealed remains of a gate shrine. Hezekiah apparently desecralized the Lachish gate shrine before the city fell to Assyria in 701 BC.¹⁸



Southern half of Lachish inner gate. Gate shrine is in the lower right of Chamber. 3, with Room 2 containing the niche and double altar. Drawing by Ruth H. Marsh, based on Saar Ganor and Igor Kreimerman, “An Eighth-Century B.C.E. Gate Shrine at Tel Lachish, Israel,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 381 (May 2019): 213, fig. 2.

The shrine consisted of two rooms plus a niche at the back. The larger, outer room included a narrow ledge on its southern wall, on and around which lay much broken pottery that apparently was once offering vessels. Excavators also found four arrowheads and a slingstone in the room, which were presumably shot by Assyrians from the street into the chamber at the fall of the city.

The smaller, inner room was entered through a doorway on the east. The center of the back (southern) wall of the inner room included a niche, and this was opposite a stone structure that the excavators interpreted as a double altar, each with four horns. The altars could have been used for libations or



Room 2 of the gate shrine, with niche on left and double horned altar on right, after excavation of pit in back with toilet seat. Photo from Ganor and Kreimerman, “Gate Shrine,” 217, fig. 10. Used by permission.



The double altar in Room 2 with only the horn in upper left preserved (upper image), and the toilet seat found lying in the pit (lower image). Photos from Ganor and Kreimerman, “Gate Shrine,” 219, fig. 11b; 220, fig. 15. Used by permission.

burning incense, but they had been put out of use when seven of the eight horns were smashed. Apparently at the same time, a pit was cut in the floor on the western side of the inner room and a carefully shaped square stone with a keyhole-shaped hole cut into it was mounted above (though it eventually fell in). The excavators interpreted this stone as a toilet seat installed to defile the shrine (compare Jehu’s desecration of a temple of Baal by turning it into a toilet—2 Kgs 10:27). Somewhat surprisingly, the sediment immediately below the seat did not show evidence of fecal remains, suggesting that the stone was not a toilet seat, or that it was installed symbolically before the room was sealed, or that it was used as a toilet only for a brief time.¹⁹

The Lachish gate shrine’s structure—a larger and a smaller room, with a niche at the back center of the smaller one—is similar to the arrangement of the larger Israelite temple at Arad in that both places of worship seem to feature increasingly smaller spaces with increasing holiness, much like what is found in Solomon’s temple.²⁰ Given its desecration before the Assyrian conquest in 701 BC, the gate shrine at Lachish joins the desecralized cultic objects at Arad and Beersheba in likely bearing witness to Hezekiah’s religious reforms in the eighth century BC.



Elisha Inscription

Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal
2 Kings 2:1

“And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it and he cried, “My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” And he saw him no more.

Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. And he took up the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. Then he took the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water, saying, “Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?” And when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.” (2 Kgs 2:11–14).



Credit: BiblePlaces.org
Alexander Schick/bibelausstellung.de

This exquisite close-up image shows a potsherd inscription with the name “Elisha” written in large letters and in red ink. The artifact was discovered at the site of Tel Rehov in the Jordan Rift, about 7 miles (11 km) northwest of Elisha’s hometown of Abel-meholah. Because of this geographical proximity and the fact that the inscription dates to around the prophet’s lifetime, it is possible the inscription may refer to the Elisha mentioned in the biblical accounts in First and Second Kings. Indeed, some archaeologists believe that this identification is clearly warranted.

Cannabis at Arad Temple

(Late Eighth to Early Seventh Century BC)

The final example of a recent find reflecting Israelite religious practice during Iron Age II comes from the eighth-century-BC Israelite temple at Arad in southern Israel discussed earlier. When the excavators uncovered the temple in the 1960s, they noted the presence of residue in depressions on top of each of the two incense altars flanking the entrance to the “holy of holies” (fig. 6). Testing of the residue at the time of the excavation produced quite limited information—that the residue likely included animal fat.²¹ More recent residue analysis, however, revealed that frankincense (sanctioned for Israelite religious use in Lv 2:1–2, 2:15–16, 24:7; Nm 5:15) was burned on the larger of the two altars and that, surprisingly, cannabis (not mentioned in the Bible) was burned on the other. This evidence of cannabis at Arad is the first discovered in ancient Judah and provides the earliest example of cannabis’s use in the ancient Near East.

Additionally, similar testing on roughly contemporaneous Philistine religious objects such as chalices, bowls, and juglets indicates that religious use of hallucinogenic materials was practiced in Philistia as well, although slightly earlier. Residue analysis on religious implements such as chalices (likely used for burning incense) at Tell es-Safi (Gath; 11th and 9th centuries BC) and other Philistine sites showed various types of hallucinogens. At Tell es-Safi, the testing showed evidence of trimyristin, which is abundant in plants known to cause hallucinogenic effects, as well as evidence of animal fat.²² At Yavneh, the items bore residues of floral oils that could



A view from above one of the altars from Arad showing evidence for the burning of incense. Scripture provides the Lord’s instructions for Israel in Exodus 30:34–37 for the use of incense in worship. Credit: Public Domain

have come from nutmeg or jasmine that had been heated by burning animal fat, as well as residues of scopolin, which is found in mandrakes and various types of henbane.²³ The evidence of these hallucinogens raises the question of how widespread their use may have been in contemporary religious practices in Philistia and Israel, and perhaps nearby societies as well.

Summary and Conclusion

These recent archaeological finds add substantially to the physical evidence for several types of Israelite religious practices during the time of the divided monarchy. The remains at Moza apparently reflect animal sacrifice, as the earlier finds at Dan, Beersheba, and Arad did. Offerings of libations seem especially indicated by the finds at Qeiyafa, but they likely occurred in many other places as well. Similarly, burning incense was seemingly widespread in ancient Israel and elsewhere, but the new evidence of hallucinogens at Arad and in Philistia adds an interesting new wrinkle to what we know about the materials that were burned. Numerous standing stones are now known from Qeiyafa and Moza, as at

The “Holy of Holies” has been reconstructed and is on display at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. The two altars shown in the photo reveal clear evidence of the use of frankincense and cannabis in worship. Credit: Public Domain

The Lord said to Moses, “Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (of each shall there be an equal part), and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy. You shall beat some of it very small, and put part of it before the testimony in the tent of meeting where I shall meet with you. It shall be most holy for you.

EXODUS 30:34–37

Dan and Arad before. And finally, the evidence for feasting connected to religious activity is much clearer now because of the finds at Qeiyafa and Rehov.

As much as these archaeological finds tell us, they often don’t tell us which gods were being worshipped, and sometimes it is unclear even whether the worship was considered orthodox for Jews at the time. In particular, the standing stones, as physical remains, are difficult to interpret. At Qeiyafa, one standing stone was apparently desacralized by the Judean inhabitants, but the others seemingly remained in use. Even in the Bible, standing stones were sometimes permitted (Gn 28:18; Ex 24:4; Is 19:19), but they were often condemned (Dt 16:22; Lv 26:1) and were destroyed during religious reform (2 Kgs 18:4, 23:14). Additionally, the temples at Arad and Moza may have been used to worship YHWH, but the multiple standing stones at Moza and the desacralization of the temple at Arad seem to suggest that these temples were unorthodox, at least to some degree. Hopefully additional finds in the coming days will add to this body of evidence about Israelite religious practice during Iron Age II and help resolve some of these issues.

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