

WHO'S LAND IS IT?
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR A JEWISH CLAIM TO THE LAND OF ISRAEL

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Whose land is this?

On January 30, 1996, Palestinian Liberation Organization founder Yasser Arafat gave a speech before Arab diplomats at Stockholm's Grand Hotel. In that speech Arafat said:

“We plan to eliminate the state of Israel and establish a purely Palestinian state. We will make life unbearable for Jews by psychological warfare and population explosion... We Palestinians will take over everything, including all of Jerusalem.”¹

Arafat has since passed off of the world stage, yet the ambition to delegitimize and ultimately to eradicate Israel from the Middle-Eastern map has not diminished. The history of a Jewish presence in the Land of Israel and especially Jerusalem has been denied increasingly, such as this statement from the Palestinian Authority Information Ministry: “... there is no tangible evidence of any Jewish traces/remains in the old city of Jerusalem and its immediate vicinity.”²

To whom *does* the ancient Land of Israel belong? Jews? Arabs? Muslims? Christians? The Bible says that God gave the land to Abraham and his descendants, the Jewish people, forever:

I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God (Genesis 17:7-8).

¹Yasser Arafat, Retrieved from <http://middleeastfacts.com/Articles/arafat-in-stockholm.php>.

² Dore Gold, Letter submitted by Dore Gold, Israeli Ambassador to the UN, Fifty-second session, January 9, 1998, domino.un.org/UNISPAL.nsf/0/cf13a75f44dd1f55052565910051e152?OpenDocument.

But of course, not everyone believes the Bible. In fact, it has been claimed that the Land of Israel, sometimes referred to as “Palestine”, has been inhabited since time immemorial by “Palestinians”, and that there has been no historical Jewish presence in this land until the 20th Century. What is the truth? And does the answer to this question have a bearing on present and future political, religious, and military events? Can archeology shed light to help answer the crucial question: whose land is it, anyway? Some believe it can, and we will see that even in this brief discussion about what some have called ‘the most contested-for piece of real estate in history,’ there is no doubt to whom this land really belongs.

A Man and A Land

The Bible tells the story of a man named Abram, whom God told to leave his homeland in Ur of the Chaldeans, now modern-day Iraq, and to travel with his family to “the land which I will show you” (Gen. 12:1). Abram was the first person to be called a Hebrew (Gen. 14:13), meaning “one who crossed over or passed over”, with the idea of “traversing to a region beyond.” His journey would bring him to a land the Bible calls, not Palestine, but Canaan, which was inhabited by people called appropriately Canaanites. So who were the Canaanites?

Genesis tells us that Noah had three sons—Shem, Japheth, Ham—and gives the family record which would immediately follow the flood. Canaan was one of the sons of Ham:

Canaan became the father of Sidon, his firstborn, and Heth and the Jebusite and the Amorite and the Girgashite and the Hivite and the Arkite and the Sinite and the Arvadite and the Zemarite and the Hamathite; and afterward the families of the Canaanite were spread abroad. The territory of the Canaanite extended from Sidon as you go toward Gerar, as far as Gaza; as you go toward Sodom and Gomorrah and Admah and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha (Gen. 10:15-19).

Thus *the sons of Ham* would develop into people groups “according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, by their nation” (Gen. 10:20). The land of Canaan—named after Canaan, son of Ham—would extend from Sidon in modern Lebanon, down the

Mediterranean coast to Gaza, across the Negev desert to Sodom and Gomorrah at the southern end of the Dead Sea, north along the Jordan River valley to the Golan Heights and Syria, and back to Sidon. The oldest reference to Canaanites is from the archive of Ebla in modern Syria, of Tell Mardikh (dated 2350 BCE) referencing the ethnic name *Ga-na-na*. Archaeological excavations of a number of sites including Hazor and Megiddo show that the prosperity of the region reached its height during this Middle Bronze Age period, from 2200–1550 BCE. It is during this time that Abram settled in the land of Canaan (Gen. 13:12). After ten years Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar, her Egyptian maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife, who bore Ishmael (Gen. 16:3,15).

In Genesis 17:8 God reiterates His unconditional promise to Abram: "I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." In Genesis 23 Abram, now called Abraham by God, buries his then deceased wife Sarah "in the cave of the field at Machpelah facing Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan" (v.19). Isaac, son of Abraham and Sarah, would live out his life in Canaan, and in time his younger son Jacob would flee from his brother Esau to live in Syria for 20 years with his uncle, Laban. In Genesis 31:13, Jacob is commanded to return to Canaan: "I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to Me; now arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your birth." Thus with his wives Leah and Rachel, and their handmaidens Bilhah and Zilpah with all their children in tow, back to Canaan Jacob went. Here the Biblical story of Joseph, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, would be played out: his betrayal and trials, enslavement, imprisonment, restoration and exaltation to power in Egypt. Joseph's saga would be consummated through a regional famine which would ultimately facilitate the rescue of Joseph's family, as well as reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers.

The Canaanites themselves profited from their strategic position between the ancient civilizations of the Middle East—Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Minoans of Crete—to become city-states profiting from international trade along the coast, and agricultural products in the interior. It is within this context that Abraham developed his personal wealth which, though enjoyed by his progeny, would eventually be lost through bondage under Pharaoh. After four hundred years in Egypt, the family of Jacob, whom God had renamed “Israel” earlier, made their exodus from slavery at around 1445 BCE.

After a 40 year trek in the desert, Israel is ready to re-enter the Promised Land—the land God had promised to Abraham and his descendents *forever* (see Gen. 17:8):

Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan opposite Jericho, saying, “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When you cross over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their figured stones, and destroy all their molten images and demolish all their high places; and you shall take possession of the land and live in it, for I have given the land to you to possess it’” (Num. 33:50-53).

The first objective was the Canaanite city of Jericho, and it is here we will visit our first archeological dig. Because this story is pivotal to the Jewish nation’s historic entrance into the Land, and because it has been so relentlessly challenged, we will commit more time to Jericho than the other topics.

Jericho

The Scriptures tell us that God commanded Israel to completely annihilate the Canaanites, but only in a protracted campaign against specific people groups were they to “not leave alive anything that breathes” (Deut. 20:16-17). The ethical question “why were the Canaanites singled out for such severe treatment?” has perplexed scholars and laypersons for centuries. Yet, there is a reasonable answer that should satisfy anyone with a sober sense of justice and mercy.

The Canaanites had sunk to an unthinkable and incredibly low state of moral depravity to the point where they would burn their living children to death in honor of their gods (Lev. 18:21), as well as practicing sodomy, bestiality, and other assorted evil, repulsive acts (Lev. 18:23, 24, 20:3). The Scripture indicates that when the inhabitants corrupt themselves to an excessive degree, the land itself begins to “vomit” them out (Lev. 18:25, 27-30). Thus they were not only to be cut off as a punishment, but God was sending a message—to protect and prevent Israel and the rest of mankind from being further corrupted (Deut. 20:16-18)—and God would use Israel to accomplish the mission.

The story of Jericho is one of the most famous stories of the Old Testament: Joshua and the Israelites marched around the city, blew the trumpets, and the walls came tumbling down. But did it really happen that way, *and* at the time the Bible indicates?

In 1930 British archeologist John Garstang launched an expedition to excavate Jericho. His team dug until 1936 and after WWII, he published an account of his final views on Jericho.³ Garstang excavated a collapsed double city wall on the summit of the *tel*—or man-made mound and archeological site with several layers of civilizations—that he dated to the late-15th to early 14th-century B.C.E. (the Late Bronze Age). He also excavated a residential area which he named City IV, on the southeast slope of the mound, which he believed was part of the city fortified by a double wall—it had been completely destroyed in a violent, fiery conflagration. Garstang determined that Jericho came to an end about 1400 B.C.E., based on pottery found in the destruction debris. He ascribed the destruction to the invading Israelites:

In a word, in all material details and in date the fall of Jericho took place as described in the Biblical narrative. Our demonstration is limited, however, to material observations: the walls fell, shaken apparently by earthquake, and the city was destroyed by fire, about

³ John Garstang, and J.B.E. Garstang, *The Story of Jericho*, John Garstang and J.B.E. Garstang, *The Story of Jericho*. London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, Rev. ed. London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, rev. ed., 1948.

1400 B.C. These are the basic facts resulting from our investigations. The link with Joshua and the Israelites is only circumstantial but it seems to be solid and without a flaw.⁴

In the 1950's another British archeologist, Kathleen Kenyon, led a dig at Jericho which employed a stratigraphic excavation technique, in which a series of vertical trenches were dug to analyze the soil layers and the relationship to the architecture at the site. Kenyon made some amazing discoveries, determining that Garstang's City IV had an impressive fortification system, the type of which was not really understood until Kenyon's careful work at Jericho. This system consisted first of all of a 15 foot high stone "revetment" wall at the base of the mound. At the northern end of the site, remnants of an 8 foot high mudbrick parapet wall, on top of the stone wall, was found. It is likely that this parapet wall originally extended all the way around the city.

The revetment wall held in place a massive packed-earth embankment or rampart with a plastered face that extended to the top of the tel. Atop this earthen embankment was yet another city wall. Unfortunately, the upper portion of the embankment on the rest of the tel has eroded away. Today, though the upper wall that surrounded City IV when it was finally destroyed does not survive, the lower revetment wall and most of the embankment still exist and can be seen.

Despite the fact that the area where the upper wall once stood is gone, there is amazing evidence from Kenyon's own detailed report that this wall came tumbling down and, in the words of the Biblical account, "fell down flat", or literally, "fell beneath itself" (Joshua 6:20). Kenyon made three cuts through the city's ramparts—on the north, west and south. In all three cuts, she carried her excavation to the lower revetment wall; in the west cut, however, she went even beyond the revetment wall to the area outside the wall.

⁴ John Garstang, "Jericho, and the Biblical Story", p. 1222.

What Kenyon found *outside* the revetment wall in the west cut was astonishing. There, she found bricks from the city wall *above* that had collapsed. Kenyon describes how the upper wall was constructed out of red bricks, and that there was a “heavy fill of fallen red [mud]bricks piling nearly to the top of the revetment [wall]. *These [red bricks] probably came from the wall on the summit of the bank [emphasis added].*”⁵

It appears that a wall made of red mudbricks existed either on top of the tel, as Kenyon claims, or on the top of the revetment wall itself, or both, until the final destruction of City IV. The red mudbricks came tumbling down, falling over the outer revetment wall at the base of the tel. There the red mudbricks came to rest in a heap,⁶ essentially creating a ramp around the city whereby, just as the Scripture states: “the people went up into the city, every man straight ahead, and they took the city” (Joshua 6:20b).

Remnants of the final phase of City IV were also found on the southeast slope, just above the spring, by both Garstang and Kenyon. They both concluded that City IV was massively destroyed in a violent conflagration⁷ that left a layer of destruction debris a minimum of a yard thick across the entire excavation area.⁸ Again, Kenyon describes the scene:

The destruction was complete. Walls and floors were blackened or reddened by fire, and every room was filled with fallen bricks, timbers, and household utensils; in most rooms

⁵ Kathleen Kenyon, “Jericho 3,” 110.

⁶ John Garstang, “Jericho: Sir Charles Marston's Expedition,” 128.

⁷ John Garstang, “The Walls of Jericho. The Marston-Melchett Expedition,” p. 192; “Jericho: City and Necropolis,” *LAAA* 21, pp. 122-123; “The Fall of Bronze Age Jericho,” p. 68; “Jericho and the Biblical Story,” p. 1220; Garstang and Garstang, *The Story of Jericho*, p. 123. Kenyon, *Digging Up Jericho*, p. 232; *Archaeology in the Holy Land*, pp. 171, 181-182; *Jericho* 3, pp. 368- 370.

⁸ It is clear that the destruction continued beyond the excavation area, since erosion debris from upslope was colored brown, black and red by the burnt material it contained (Kenyon, *Archaeology In the Holy Land*, p. 182).

the fallen debris was heavily burnt, but the collapse of the walls of the eastern rooms seems to have taken place before they were affected by the fire.”⁹

The last observation in this quotation suggests that an earthquake *preceded* the destruction by fire, which again coincides with the Biblical account: “They burned the city with fire, and all that was in it” (Joshua 6:24).

Interestingly, the most abundant item found in the destruction, apart from pottery, was grain. Both Garstang and Kenyon found large quantities of charred grain stored in the ground-floor rooms of the houses.¹⁰ In her limited excavation area—remember, rather than excavating a broad area, Kenyon’s expedition dug trenches—Kenyon recovered six bushels of grain in one season!¹¹ This is unique in the history of what is called “Palestinian archaeology.” Perhaps a jar or two might be found, but to find such an extensive amount of grain is considered exceptional. Why? In ancient times grain was considered very valuable, and even used as a medium of exchange. The presence of these grain stores in the destroyed city is entirely consistent with the Biblical account. Jericho did not fall as a result of a starvation siege, as was common in ancient times, but rather, the Bible tells us Jericho was destroyed in a single day (Joshua 6:15,20).

Normally, successful attackers would plunder a city after capture, including valuable grain, but this is not consistent with the grain found here. The Israelites were told that “the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the Lord for destruction,” and they were commanded, “Keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction” (Joshua 6:17-18). So the Israelites were forbidden to take any plunder from Jericho, which could explain why so much grain was

⁹ Kenyon, *Jericho* 3, p. 370.

¹⁰ John Garstang, “The Walls of Jericho. The Marston-Melchett Expedition,” pp. 193-194; “Jericho: City and Necropolis,” *LAAA* 21, 123, 128, 129; “The Fall of Bronze Age Jericho,” p. 66; “Jericho and the Biblical Story,” p. 1218. Kenyon, *Archaeology in the Holy Land*, p. 171; *Jericho* 3, pp. 369-370.

¹¹ Kenyon, *Digging Up Jericho*, p. 230.

left to burn when Jericho met its end.

One other interesting note regarding the grain and the season of the event: the city fell shortly after the Spring harvest, just after Passover (Joshua 5:10). This is precisely when the Bible says the Israelites attacked Jericho: Rahab was drying freshly harvested flax on the roof of her house (Joshua 2:6); and the Israelites crossed the Jordan while it was in flood at harvest time (Joshua 3:15).

Yet with all of Kenyon's amazing discoveries, her conclusions regarding the date of Jericho's demise conflicted with Garstang's. She concluded that the wall Garstang associated with the Israelite invasion should have been dated to the Early Bronze Age some 1,000 years earlier. Thus the destruction of Jericho, which Garstang had dated to about 1400 B.C.E., occurred, according to Kenyon, at about 1550 B.C.E., 150 years before the time of Joshua.¹² Obviously this is a problem for Bible literalists. The Exodus occurred c. 1445 B.C.E., and with Israel wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, the Biblical account of the fall of Jericho would be placed c. 1405 B.C.E. If the destruction of Jericho occurred a thousand years earlier there would be no fortified city to be conquered, and the Bible story is just that: a bible story, a myth, and nothing more.

Kenyon's view would endure for another 30 years, with academic consensus going against the biblical version. Because of Kenyon's death in 1978, her research at Jericho was never fully published until the early 1980's. However, after years of research Dr. Bryant Wood, an ancient-pottery expert then at the University of Toronto released his analysis of Kenyon's

¹² Kenyon, *Digging Up Jericho* (London: Ernest Benn, 1957), p. 262; "Jericho," in *Archaeology and Old Testament Study* (AOTS) ed. D. Winton Thomas (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), pp. 265- 267; "Jericho," in *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land (EAEHL)*, vol. 2, ed. Michael Avi-Yonah (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1976), pp. 551, 564; *The Bible in Recent Archaeology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978), pp. 33-37.

data. In a Time magazine article from May 1990, Wood explains how Kenyon erred with the earlier date, and why he prefers Garstang's date of 1400 B.C.E.:

Kenyon's dating of Jericho's destruction was based largely on the fact that she failed to find a type of decorative pottery imported from Cyprus, that was popular in the region around 1400 B.C. Its absence, she reasoned, meant that the city had long since become uninhabited. But Wood argues that Kenyon's excavations were made in a poorer part of the city, where the expensive imported pottery would have been absent in any case. And he says that other pottery, dug up in Jericho in the 1930s, was common in 1400 B.C.¹³

Wood further explains:

Kenyon based her conclusions on a very limited excavation area—two 26-foot by 26-foot squares. An argument from silence is always problematic, but Kenyon's argument is especially poorly founded. In other words, Kenyon's analysis was based on what was *not* found at Jericho rather than what *was* found. According to Kenyon, City IV must have been destroyed at the end of the Middle Bronze Age (c. 1550 B.C.E.) because no imported Cypriote ware—diagnostic for the ensuing Late Bronze I period—was found at Jericho.

Dating habitation levels at Jericho on the *absence* of exotic imported wares – which were found primarily in tombs in large urban centers – is methodologically unsound and, indeed, unacceptable. Kenyon drew her comparative material from large cities like Megiddo situated on major trade routes far from Jericho. Jericho, by contrast, is a small site¹⁴ well off the major trade routes of the day.¹⁵

So, was the destruction of Jericho at the hands of the Israelites? Let's review the correlation between the archaeological evidence and the Biblical account:

¹³ Michael D. Lemonick; Katherine L. Mihok, Science: Score One for the Bible, Time Magazine; NEW YORK, Monday, Mar. 05, 1990

¹⁴ The area inside the city wall was originally about 5-6 acres (John Garstang, "The Walls of Jericho. The Marston-Melchett Expedition of 1931," *PEFQS* 1931, p. 186; "Jericho: City and Necropolis," *LAAA* 19, p. 3), while the total area, including the fortification system, was approximately twice that, or 10-12 acres (John Garstang, "The Walls of Jericho," p. 187, and "Jericho: City and Necropolis," *LAAA* 19, p. 3; Kenyon, "Jericho," *EAEHL*, p. 550 [4 hectares = 9.9 acres]). Magen Broshi and Ram Gophna list the size of the site as 1.5 ha (3.7 acres; Broshi and Gophna, "Middle Bronze Age II Palestine: Its Settlements and Population," *BASOR* 261 [1986], Table 4), but this is no doubt the estimated size of the site as it is today. A considerable portion of the tell was removed in the construction of the reservoir and the modern road.

¹⁵ Bryant G. Wood PhD, Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho? A New Look at the Archaeological Evidence; May 01, 2008. website: <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/05/01/Did-the-Israelites-Conquer-Jericho-A-New-Look-at-the-Archaeological-Evidence.aspx>

- The city was strongly fortified (Joshua 2:5,7,15, 6:5,20).
- The attack occurred just after harvest time in the spring (Joshua 2:6, 3:15, 5:10).
- The inhabitants had no opportunity to flee with their foodstuffs (Joshua 6:1).
- The siege was short (Joshua 6:15).
- The walls were leveled, possibly by an earthquake (Joshua 6:20).
- The city was not plundered (Joshua 6:17-18).
- The city was burned (Joshua 6:20).

Although the debate over *when* the destruction of Jericho occurred continues to be hotly contested, from the overwhelming evidence it is undeniable *that* the destruction of Jericho occurred just as the Bible says. Additionally, two other towns were attacked and burned in a similar fashion as Jericho: Ai and Hazor (Joshua 8:28, 11:11): the archeological evidence confirms that both towns were destroyed c. 1400, and burned to the ground. Yet, modern scholarship has attempted to deny that Joshua led a military campaign into Canaan. Rather, they have opted to craft a myth that the indigenous Canaanites joined the “Yahweh cult” and eventually became the Israelites, conveniently doing away with the Biblical account. But the evidence of Jericho, Ai and Hazor speaks to the contrary, and testifies that Joshua did fight the battle of Jericho and other towns in Canaan. Thus by 1405 B.C.E., the Jewish people were back from Egypt, and were present in the Land.

Inscriptions

In the last century there have been several finds in Israel which contained inscriptions painted on pottery, set in mosaics, or carved into stone. Of these, many are taken from Biblical texts, thus lending credence to the historicity of the Scriptures, and verifying the presence of the Jewish people in the Land.

House of David

That Israel’s King David ever existed has been challenged for decades; archeological evidence was non-existent until the discovery of the “House of David inscription” found at Tel Dan in northern Israel. In 1966 Israeli archeologist Abraham Biran found fragments of a large

inscribed basalt stele in the square located in front of the Israelite city gate complex. The ninth and eighth centuries BCE saw military conflicts between the kings of Israel and the expanding kingdom of Aram-Damascus (1 Kings 15:20). Thus the stele was erected by one of the Aramean kings of Damascus who captured Dan—although which king has not been ascertained as yet. It is probable that two kings of Israel and Judah who ruled at the same time are mentioned: Jehoram, king of Israel and Ahaziah, king of Judah, are referred to as a king of the House of David. These two kings were allies and were defeated by Hazael, king of Aram-Damascus (2 Kings 8:7-15, 28; 9:24-29; 2 Chronicles 22:5). The stele is one of the most important written finds in Israel and the first non-biblical text which mentions the House of David by name.¹⁶

Siloam Inscription of Hezekiah's Tunnel

The Siloam Inscription is a passage of inscribed text originally found in what is called Hezekiah's Tunnel, which feeds water from the Gihon Spring to the Pool of Siloam in Southeast Jerusalem. The tunnel itself was discovered in 1838 by Edward Robinson¹⁷, yet the inscription, being concealed by millennia of mineral deposits, was not discovered until more than 50 years later. In (715-687 B.C.E.), King Hezekiah, fearful that the Assyrians would lay siege to the city, blocked the spring's water outside the city and diverted it through a channel into the Pool of Siloam:

[Hezekiah] planned with his officers and his warriors to stop the flow of the springs that were outside the city; and they helped him. 4 ...they stopped all the springs and the wadi that flowed through the land, saying, "Why should the Assyrian kings come and find water in abundance?" (2 Chr. 32:3-4, NRSV)

¹⁶ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs website; Archaeological Sites in Israel – Dan - The Biblical City; 29 July, 1998; <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Early+History+-+Archaeology/Archaeological+Sites+in+Israel+-+Dan+-+The+Biblical.htm?DisplayMode=print>

¹⁷ Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*[1990], 484.

The rest of the deeds of Hezekiah, all his power, how he made the pool **and the conduit and brought water into the city**, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? (2 Kings 20:20, NRSV)

The inscription records the construction of the tunnel, how the work began at opposite ends and proceeded until the stonecutters met in the middle. Where the two sides meet is an abrupt right angled join. It is suspected that Hezekiah's engineers depended on an acoustic sounding technique to guide the tunnelers, which is exactly what is described in the Siloam Inscription. The passage reads:

... the tunnel ... and this is the story of the tunnel while ...the axes were against each other and while three cubits were left to cut? ... the voice of a man ...called to his counterpart, (for) there was ZADA¹⁸ in the rock, on the right ... and on the day of the tunnel (being finished) the stonecutters struck each man towards his counterpart, ax against ax and flowedwater from the source to the pool for 1200 cubits. and 100 cubits was the height over the head of the stonecutters ...

At the time of the discovery of the inscription Jerusalem was under the control of the Ottoman Empire. In 1891 Turkish authorities secretly cut the inscription from the wall of the tunnel, breaking it into fragments. These were, however, later recovered by the efforts of the British Consul at Jerusalem, and have since been placed in Istanbul Archaeology Museum.

Here again, the historical record in the Scriptures is corroborated by an historical record written in stone, thus verifying a Jewish presence in the land of Israel nearly a thousand years before the time of Jesus of Nazareth.

The New Testament Era

The last century saw some amazing finds which affirm characters and events recorded in the New Testament writings. One of the more dramatic of these was the inscription found on the Mediterranean coast at Caesarea Maritima containing the name Pontius Pilate. Built by Herod

¹⁸ ZADA is a word either illegible or unknown to modern Hebrew translators.

the Great c. 30 B.C.E., Caesarea was the seat of power of Judaeen Province during the period Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of the region. Pilate also maintained a residence at Antonia Fortress in Jerusalem where during Passover—when Jerusalem’s population increased dramatically, producing the possibility of outbreaks of rebellion against Rome—Pilate could be present to discourage a rebellion before it started.

For years critics maligned the New Testament because no archeological record affirming the existence of Pilate had ever been found. This all changed in 1961, when a limestone block was found at an excavation of the ancient theater at Caesarea. On the block is a dedication to Tiberius Caesar Augustus, with the inscription reading: “The prefect of Judaea, Pontius Pilate, erected the Tiberium (temple in honor of Tiberius Caesar) to the August Gods.”

It has been deemed as an authentic archaeological find due to the area in which it was discovered: the coastal town of Caesarea. All four gospels make mention of Pilate as playing an integral roll in the trials, scourging and crucifixion of Jesus. In a final attempt to “wash his hands” of the matter of condemning a known innocent man, the NT accounts indicate Pilate opted for politics over conscience—a political move from which he never recovered. Church historian Eusebius wrote that Pilate suffered misfortune in the reign of Caligula (AD 37–41), was exiled to Gaul and eventually committed suicide there in Vienne.¹⁹

The counterpart to Pilate is Joseph Caiaphas. Along with his father-in-law Annas, Caiaphas was co-High Priest of Israel and head of the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish court, from 18 - 36 AD. It is Caiaphas who made the statement in John 11, “...it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish” (v.49-51), in effect prophesying Jesus’ vicarious death. Josephus also refers to him as “Joseph who was called Caiaphas of the

¹⁹ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiae* ii: 7

high priesthood.”²⁰ In 1990 a first century ossuary, or “bone box,” was discovered, with the words inscribed “Yehosef bar Kayafa,” translated as “Joseph, son of Caiaphas.” Excavator Zvi Greenhut of the Israeli Antiquities Authority recovered the artifact, which is now on display at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

Though we’ve barely scratched the surface, these are but just a few examples of hard evidence which corroborates the Tanakh (Old Testament) and the New Testament, both written by Jewish authors. That the Jewish people have had a continuous, nearly 3400 year presence in the land of Israel is irrefutable. So what is Palestine, and who are the Palestinians?

What is Palestine?

Around 132 C.E. the Romans, who had destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 C.E., began to rebuild the city to be dedicated to Roman Emperor Hadrian and the Roman god Jupiter. Not surprisingly, when the construction began on the Temple mount, there was an uprising by the Jews to prevent the desecration. Led by Shimon Bar Kochba, whom many considered to be the Messiah at the time, the revolt was successful at first. But more Roman legions were brought in, and by 135 C.E. more than 1,000 Israelite villages were destroyed, 500,000 Jews were killed, and thousands were sold into slavery. The Bar Kochba rebellion was crushed, and to add insult to injury, the Romans angrily renamed Israel after her ancient enemies the Philistines: Provincia Syria-Palestina. From that time forward, the Jews and anyone else living there were called Palestinians.

The Roman Empire would become “Christianized” under Constantine in 313 C.E., and in 638 C.E., “Christian” Jerusalem fell into the hands of Muslim conquerors. With this conquest Arabs came in from Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and other places. Jerusalem was to become a center

²⁰ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 18:95

of Islam, and the Temple Mount a home to Muslim holy sites the Dome of the Rock (690 CE), and the Mosque of Omar (705 CE). Over the centuries Jerusalem has changed hands: Crusaders, Muslims again, Ottomans, the British, and the Jordanians: all the while Arabs and Jews lived in the land called Palestine. Yet in all of history there has *never* been a sovereign nation called Palestine, much less such a nation with the capital city of Jerusalem; nor has there ever been a Palestinian currency, language, or culture. Though there is Islamic archeology in the Land, there is nothing that can be described as historically ‘Palestinian.’ Interestingly, while Jerusalem is mentioned in the Bible more than 800 times, not once is it mentioned by name in Islam’s holy book, the Quran. Is it not strange that such emphasis on a Land and city is made by the proponents of a religion whose primary text doesn’t even recognize its existence?

Yet today, one hears the rhetoric that the Palestinians are the **original inhabitants of Palestine**, and the “Zionist Jews” have stolen and are occupying land that has never belonged to them. As writer Dave Hunt reasons:

Even if there had been a land of Palestine occupied by Palestinians, the Arabs could not have descended from them...God promised the land to Abraham before Ishmael was born. It already had many inhabitants. So how could Arab *descendants of Ishmael* (born to immigrants centuries after Canaan had been settled) be at the same time “*descendants*” of the *original inhabitants* of the Promised Land? Impossible!²¹[emphasis added]

Hunt clarifies further:

Ishmael himself was not descended from Canaan’s original inhabitants. His father, Abraham, was from Ur of the Chaldees, and his mother Hagar, was an Egyptian. Neither of them was among the “original inhabitants of Canaan,” nor even remotely related to such a people—nor could any of Ishmael’s descendents be so related.²²

Archeology Denied

²¹ Dave Hunt, *Judgment Day! Islam, Israel and The Nations*, 83.

²² Hunt, *ibid.*

In the multiple strata of Israel's archeology, one finds evidence of the Crusader, Islamic, Roman, Greek and Persian periods; yet a continuous Jewish presence in the Land is confirmed by archeology that predates them all.

Tragically, archeological study is being suppressed and archeology itself is being destroyed by Islamic authorities, the very people who claim that it is their heritage. In Hebron, where Abraham and Sarah are buried, an Islamic shrine is built over the cave of Machpelah. No Jews are allowed to enter, much less conduct a study of the site.

On the morning of October 7, 2000, Israel withdrew the small contingent of IDF border policemen who had been guarding the site of the Tomb of the Patriarch Joseph, located in Shechem in Samaria, the Arab town of Nablus. What happened next is shameful:

Based on the agreement of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to safeguard the location, in accordance with their obligations under the Oslo Accords to protect holy sites, Jewish and Christian, and ensure access by all, the PA also pledged to prevent any vandalism and to return the Tomb to its original state after the violence settled down. The PA pledge was brazenly violated about two hours after the Israeli evacuation, when a Palestinian Arab mob entered the Tomb compound and began to systematically destroy everything in sight. Within two days, as an Associated Press dispatch reported, "the dome of the tomb was painted green and bulldozers were seen clearing the surrounding area," as the Palestinian Arabs sought to transform the biblical Joseph's resting place into a Moslem holy site.²³

So much for peaceful coexistence. But wait, there's more. In 2007 the Temple Mount's Islamic Wafq custodians employed a new archeological technique: bulldozers and other heavy equipment, to dig a massive trench on the Temple Mount. Claiming the work was necessary to replace electrical cables outside mosques on the site, bulldozers dug a trench 1,300 feet long and five feet deep, extending to most of the periphery of the Mount. In the process the Muslim diggers came across a wall that Israeli archaeologists believe may be remains of an area of the Jewish Second Temple known as the woman's courtyard—from the time of Jesus.

²³ Palestine Facts Website, http://www.palestinefacts.org/pf_1991to_now_alaqsa_josephstomb.php

Allowing the use of bulldozers at any sensitive archaeological site is extremely unusual, particularly at the Temple Mount, which experts say contains sealed layers of artifacts as shallow as two to three feet below the surface. Because of religious and political sensitivities, the Mount has never been properly excavated. Heavy equipment could easily damage any existing artifacts, say experts, who assert the area should be excavated slowly and carefully by hand.²⁴

Conclusion

We have seen that the Biblical accounts coincide with the archaeological record, from Jericho and Joshua's Canaanite Campaign, to Israel's kings and tunnel works, to inscriptions identifying key characters from the New Testament. These are just a few, but compelling examples of the continued Jewish presence in the Land of Israel for the past 3,400 years. Thus according to archeological and historical evidence, there can be no doubt for any fair minded person—no matter what political or religious persuasion—that Israel, and Jerusalem, belongs to the Jewish people.

Archaeology continues in Israel as we speak, and new finds are discovered and published every year confirming the accuracy of the Biblical record. Be that as it may, in the interest of education and enlightenment, peaceful co-existence and understanding, may we humans commit ourselves to seeking the facts and let them lead us wherever they will, ultimately to the truth. Salaam, and Shalom.

²⁴ Aaron Klein, WorldNetDaily.com, Claim: Israel covering up Temple Mount destruction. Archaeologists accuse government of 'major crime,' allowing Muslim authorities to pulverize antiquities, October 22, 2007. Website: <http://www.wnd.com/?pageId=44149>

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