

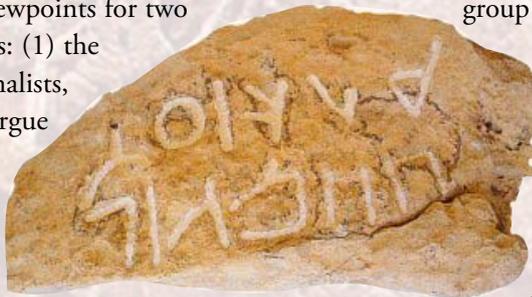
Did the Places Described in the Bible Really Exist?

Randall Younker



Tel Gezer

The historicity of the Hebrew Bible continues to be a hot topic among biblical scholars and archaeologists. In recent years there have emerged differing viewpoints for two groups: (1) the minimalists, who argue that little, if any, of the Hebrew Bible contains historically reliable



Gezer Boundary Stone

information; and (2) the maximalists, who maintain (to varying degrees) that the Bible's historical pronouncements are accurate and trustworthy. While the latter group certainly includes many evangelical Christian scholars of a more conservative perspective, its ranks also include a significant number of top Jewish and even secular-minded scholars of no religious persuasion.

One aspect of this debate involves the existence of places mentioned in the Bible. Did they really exist? After all, history takes place in "places." Locating the places mentioned in the Bible has long been of interest to biblical historians and archaeologists. The first scholar to pursue this issue in a serious manner was the American theologian Edward Robinson, a professor at the Union Theological Seminary in Boston, who undertook a couple of explorations of the Holy Land in 1838 and 1852.



El-Jib or Gibeon

gists began to excavate some of the sites they had identified. In many cases, artifacts were found in the dirt with the names of the ancient sites.

This was the case of **Gibeon** just north of Jerusalem. The Arabs called the village el-Jib, which clearly reflects the Hebrew Gibeon. As archaeologists dug the site they found jar handles with the name Gibeon inscribed on them.

Accompanying Dr. Robinson was Eli Smith, a Congregational missionary who was fluent in Arabic. As these two men traversed Palestine (as it was known then), they discovered that many Arabic place names retained in a modestly corrupted fashion the original ancient Hebrew name. As a result of their work, Robinson and Smith were able to identify some thirty-five previously “lost” sites. Today, most scholars agree that these two pioneer explorers were correct in most of their identification.

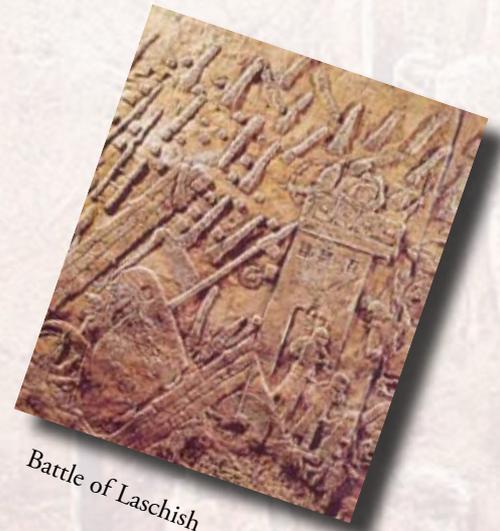
Their work received confirmation in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century as archaeolo-

Other sites, such as **Gezer** in the Shephalah (foothills west of Jerusalem), were positively identified by ancient boundary stones on which the biblical name was carved in antiquity. I had the privilege of being an assistant director of excavations on this site during the 1990 season.

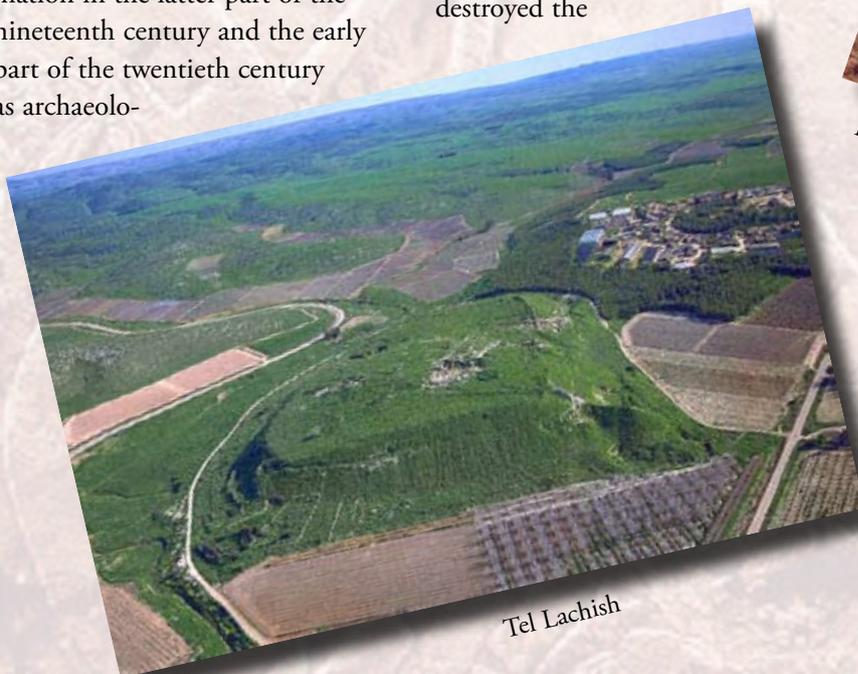
Still other sites, such as **Lachish**, have been confirmed by a convergence of the biblical text (2 Kings 18) with ancient Assyrian documents and pictures, as well as by excavation. The Bible describes how the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, attacked and destroyed the

Judahite city of Lachish during the reign of Hezekiah. This attack is described not only in Sennacherib’s annals which have been recovered from Nineveh, but is shown in vivid pictures that have been recovered from the walls of the throne room of the Assyrian king. Moreover, many details of the attack have been confirmed by excavations of Tel Lachish in Israel.

Similar site verifications could be made for other important biblical cities such as Megiddo, Jericho, Hazor, Shiloh, and Beth-Shemesh. There is no doubt about the reality of the stage upon which the great events of the Bible took place.



Battle of Lachish



Tel Lachish