THE BOOK OF JOSHUA, PART II: EXPECTATIONS OF ARCHAEOLOGY[1]

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Introduction

Continuing discussions about the relationship of Joshua to the archaeological findings at sites such as Tell es-Sultan (Jericho), et-Tell (Ai), el-Jib (Gibeon), and Hazor require additional clarification, since some vital issues have not been adequately considered. One of the problematic issues discussed in my previous article is the use of nonevidence.[2] For example, J. Maxwell Miller has used the nonevidence of the archaeological excavations at et-Tell to conclude that the biblical story is erroneous.[3] The use of nonevidence is methodologically unsound and, therefore, says more about the present state of archaeological interpretation than it does about the biblical story. In addition to the use of nonevidence, three other fundamental issues that need to be probed due to commonly suggested conclusions about biblical stories are site identification, the predictive nature of archaeology, and the question, "Can archaeology prove the Bible?"

Site Identification

On the problem of site identification, consider Miller's conclusion that the archaeological site et-Tell is the Ai of Josh 7-8:[4]

The name (*hā'ay*, 'the ruin') and the topographical implications of Gen. 12. 8 indicate that Ai was a noticeable ruin situated east of Bethel and separated from the latter by a mountain. Et-Tell is the only really conspicuous tell in the vicinity immediately east of Bethel, as the Arab name 'et-Tell' ('the tell')

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[1]This paper is a revised and expanded version of research directed by William H. Shea, to whom it is dedicated in honor of his sixty-fifth year. Cf. David Merling, Sr., *The Book of Joshua: Its Theme and Role in Archaeological Discussions,* Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 23 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1997), 238-262.

[2]David Merling, "The Book of Joshua, Part I: Expectations of Archaeology," *AUSS* 2001 (39): 61-72.

[3]J. Maxwell Miller, "Archaeology and the Israelite Conquest of Canaan: Some Methodological Observations," *PEQ* 109 (1977): 88.

[4]As stated in my previous article, I have used Miller as a sounding board for this article because he has written widely and eloquently on the relationship between archaeology and the Bible, and his ideas have been explicitly and implicitly accepted by many scholars. Personally, I admire him as an individual and as a scholar.

suggests, and it meets all the topographical requirements of both Gen. 12.8 and Josh. 7-8.[5]

It seems that the writers of the book of Joshua took special pains to assure the readers which Ai was indicated in this story, because they included the phrases "which is near Beth-aven," "east of Bethel (Josh 7:2)."[6] It would seem that the Ai of this story was not immediately identifiable to the readers of Josh 7, even if they knew where Bethel was located; otherwise the biblical writers would not have needed to add the clause "which is near Beth-aven.[7] Yet, archaeologists have not agreed upon a location for Beth-aven. Some have proposed that Beth-aven was not a place, but a pejorative name for Bethel, with which Miller agrees.[8] The question that Miller has not adequately answered is, For what pejorative purpose would the appellation "house of taboo," as Miller translates Beth-aven, serve the biblical writers? It is, after all, Ai that was to be attacked, not Bethel, mentioned many times before and after Josh 7:2; yet, this is the only time Bethel and Beth-aven are associated in the same verse. Bethel was not a significant city in the Joshua stories. It is even more telling that after this account Bethel and Ai are never mentioned again as "twin cities." It makes more sense to assume that "Beth-aven" is a place name that is yet to be identified. When and if Beth-aven is identified, the Ai of the book of Joshua may be identified with more certainty.

What is intriguing is that at the conclusion of the Ai story, which ends with Ai being burned, is the introduction of Mount Ebal. "Then Joshua built an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel, in Mount Ebal." The use of זא to introduce this sentence is by design for emphasis.[9] Such a close, uninterrupted connection of stories between Ai and Mount Ebal would, in any other context, suggest that the Ai of Josh 7-8 was located in close proximity to Mount Ebal (Josh 8:30). There is no transitional "So Joshua and all Israel traveled to Mt. Ebal." The destruction of Ai and the offering on Mount Ebal are run together. What textual evidence is there that Ai and Mount Ebal are not to be located close to each other?[10] Of

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[5]Miller, 88.

[6]Other than Josh 7:2, Beth-aven is mentioned only in 18:12 and in 1 Sam 13:5; 14:23.

[7]To assume that in all of Canaan there was only one "house of god" (Bethel) is simplistic.

[8]Patrick M. Arnold, "Beth-Aven." *SBD*, 1:682; J. M. Miller and Gene M. Tucker, *The Book of Joshua* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 62.

[9]"Then, whether expressing duration or inception (=thereupon). . . . Seldom used except where some special emphasis is desired" (*BDB*, s.v. זא).

[10]I am aware that in the LXX the account of Mount Ebal, located in the MT in Josh 8:30-

course, some could argue that the close proximity of Ai and Mount Ebal in this chapter was the result of poor editorial work. On the other hand, it is just as likely that Ai of Josh 7 and Mount Ebal were geographically near to a site named Bethel.[11]

Miller *assumes* the et-Tell/Ai connection because et-Tell is "the only really conspicuous tell in the vicinity immediately east of Bethel."[12] On the other hand, nothing within the biblical narrative indicates that Ai was a "conspicuous" tell. What evidence is there that Beitin is the Bethel of the book of Joshua? Neither the book of Joshua nor Genesis provides sufficient data to accurately locate either site. Archaeologists and biblical scholars often assume more than the evidence dictates when using site identification data.[13]

The relationship between archaeology and the book of Joshua is unclear even on the location of the biblical sites, yet these assumptions are some of the absolutes from which archaeologists begin their evaluations of the book of Joshua. Miller assumes the connection between Ai and et-Tell must be accurate, simply because archaeologists agreed beforehand

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35, is placed after Josh 9:2. Unfortunately, the reason for the difference in location of the Mount Ebal pericope is uncertain. Perhaps the LXX translators were uneasy with the seemingly close geographical association of Ai and Mount Ebal, which did not fit with their understanding of the locations of these sites; thus, this section was moved to a "better" transitional location in the book, supposedly giving the Israelites an opportunity to leave Ai, go to Mount Ebal, and return to the central hill country in time to interact with the Gibeonites; see also Emanuel Tov, "The Growth of the Book of Joshua in the Light of the Evidence of the LXX Translation," in *Studies in Bible*, ed. Sara Japhet (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1986), 326.

[11]I am always surprised that archaeologists have so completely accepted the Bethel/Beitin correlation for every biblical period. Nothing in the Abrahamic stories implies a location for either Ai or Bethel (Gen 12:8), unless one considers a location south of Shechem to be diagnostic (Gen 12:8). By reading the Abrahamic stories one gets the impression that Bethel was not a "city." A "city" is mentioned only in the context of Luz (Gen 28:19). No city details are ever given nor is any other person mentioned besides the main character. It is a place where altars are built and the patriarchs offer sacrifices. It would be inappropriate to assume that Abraham built his altar in the center of a pagan city.

To automatically assume that Abraham's offering site was the same place as an Iron Age city of Bethel is a major assumption. While Beitin may be the Bethel of Judg 21:19, note that the passage does not mention Ai, although there is parallel archaeological evidence between et-Tell and Beitin during the Iron I period, implying that Beitin and et-Tell were occupied during the time of the Judges (James Leon Kelso, "Bethel,"*The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (henceforth *NEAEHL*), ed. Ephraim Stern [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993], 1:194; Joseph A. Callaway, "Ai," *NEAEHL* 1: 44-45). Note also that Bethel and Ai are never mentioned together in any biblical passage after the Josh 7-8 account.

[12]Miller, 88.

[13]H. J. Franken, "The Problem of Identification in Biblical Archaeology," *PEQ* 108 (1976): 6, 7.

that Joshua's Ai and et-Tell are one and the same place;[14] yet, the main connection between these two sites is an untested hypothesis.

The Predictive Nature of Archaeology

Another common assumption made by archaeologists is that they can determine beforehand what they will find, based on ancient sources.[15] For example, Miller assumes that since the text mentions a "gate" (Josh 7:5), Ai was a "fortified city." While this is one possible conclusion, it is not a necessary one. At Megiddo (Stratum IX), a free-standing gate has been found in the Late Bronze Age strata. Rivka Gonen states: "Freestanding gates, though not a common phenomenon, are not inconceivable, for gates served more than a defensive function. The gate was the ceremonial entrance, the town showpiece, and the focus of trade, public gatherings, litigation, news reports, and even cult."[16] Likewise, Late Bronze Age Hazor had a gate without a connecting wall.[17] If the stories of the book of Joshua reflect Late Bronze Age realities—when city walls may possibly have been prohibited by the Egyptians for military reasons—ceremonial gates could still be expected.[18] One could even argue that a ceremonial gate is implied in the story of Ai, since at the end of the story the gate is used for public testimonial purposes and the king was buried at the entrance of the gate (Josh 8:29).

That there were ceremonial gates not associated with walls during the Late Bronze Age does not, however, necessarily suggest that the Ai of Josh 7 and 8 had only a ceremonial gate. The Late Bronze Age free-standing gates at Megiddo and Hazor only underline the possibility of a trap into which scholars, using unsupported assumptions about the Bible and the finds of archaeology, can fall. One cannot, by the story of Ai, conclude anything about the gate at Ai, whether large and imposing or small and tenuous. All that the biblical story tells us is that Ai had a gate. No wall is mentioned. All we know from archaeology is that at et-Tell, no gate or city was found corresponding with the Late Bronze Age. A similar situation exists between the book of Joshua's story of the conquest of Jericho and the archaeological finds.

The current consensus among archaeologists is that the results of

[14]Ibid.

[15]Miller, 88.

[16]Rivka Gonen, "The Late Bronze Age," in *The Archaeology of Ancient Israel*, ed. Amnon Ben-Tor (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 219.

[17]Rivka Gonen, "Urban Canaan in the Late Bronze Period," in *The Archaeology of Ancient Israel*, ed. Amnon Ben-Tor (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 69, 70.

[18]Gonen, "The Late Bronze Age," 219.

excavations at Tell es-Sultan do not support the common assumptions about the account from the book of Joshua concerning the conquest of Jericho.[19] On the other hand, archaeological data do indicate that some people were living at Jericho, or at least nearby, during the Late Bronze Age, as walls and buildings found there by Kathleen M. Kenyon indicate. The Jericho Late Bronze Age settlement also came to an end by destruction.[20] Unfortunately, much of the evidence from Late Bronze Jericho was lost via erosion and previous excavations.[21] In my opinion, the general details of the Jericho story (Josh 6)—that the Israelites at some point in their formative history attacked Jericho, that the walls of the city were breached, and that one family from that city was allowed to live—do not necessarily disagree with the results of Kenyon's excavations. I suggest that the differences between Joshua's conquest of Jericho and the archaeological findings are not so much due to Jericho's lack of walls, but are due to the artificial expectations of those who interpret the account from the book of Joshua.

One important issue in archaeology that has remained untested is the predictive dimension of archaeology. To conceive of only one scenario from either the biblical story or the archaeological data may evidence insufficient reflection. Fredric Brandfon is one of the few who have perceived the dynamic possibility of archaeology. He wrote:

> It is just as likely that a sequence of events, such as the invasion of Canaan first by Israelites and then by Philistines, would leave many different traces in the stratigraphic record all over the country. It is also possible that a sequence of historical events may leave no traces in the stratigraphic record at all. Or it may be the case that the stratigraphic traces which were originally left behind by events have been eroded by natural forces or destroyed by later stratigraphic processes. It seems most likely that, in excavating strata of the land of Israel at the time of the Conquest or settlement, all of these possibilities will be found as each site yields its own stratigraphic sequence. The archaeologists must therefore contend with the fact that the inference of historical events—invasion of Canaan first by Israelites, then by Philistines, for example—is far from self-evident or self-explanatory from a stratigraphic standpoint. Again, the archaeological evidence does not *dictate* the historical "story" that can be told from it.[22]

[19]Thomas A. Holland, "Jericho," in *ABD*, 3:736; Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Excavations at Jericho, The Architecture and Stratigraphy of the Tell, Text*, ed. Thomas A. Holland (London: British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem, 1981) 3:371; idem, "Jericho: Tell es-Sultan," in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. Ephraim Stern (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 680.

[20]Kenyon, "Jericho: Tell es-Sultan," 3: 680.

[21]Kenyon, *Excavations at Jericho*, 371.

[22]Fredric Brandfon, "The Limits of Evidence: Archaeology and Objectivity," *Maarav*

A possible solution to the lack of Late Bronze Age walls is the one posited by Kenyon that the LBII inhabitants of Jericho may have used the walls of the MBII city.[23] While her suggestion is possible, it is equally possible that the Jericho that the Israelites attacked had walls that were a single line of unbaked mudbricks or were composed of a small circle of mud-brick houses built side by side. According to Josh 2, the wall of Rahab's house was built on the wall of the city, which does not say much for massive defensive features.[24] A wall composed of houses would almost surely have been lost to the ravages of time, especially with 600 years of open erosion before settlement of a new village in the Iron Age. This loss would especially be likely if the village of Jericho was inhabited for only a short time before it was attacked and abandoned. Wright states:

> The Jericho of Joshua's day may have been little more than a fort. It was the first victory in Western Palestine for the invaders, however, and the memory of the great city that once stood there undoubtedly influenced the manner in which the event was later related.[25]

Note that even though Wright himself was suggesting some allowance for the Jericho story, he too wrote about the "great city." It is this kind of unsupportive assumption forced onto the biblical account that produces difficulties between Jericho and the other book of Joshua stories and the archaeological evidences.

Just because Jericho or Ai is identified as a "city" does not imply more than what the *ancient* people called a city. Modern Western civilization cannot help but interpret the word "city" with certain presuppositions. Note how Barkay places the emphasis on *our* (meaning modern readers') interpretation of city: "We tend to define cities as large sites, well fortified, where the building density is greater than in sites termed villages. In biblical times, however, any place built by royal initiative or housing a representative of the central authority, even a small site or isolated fort, was called a city ('ir)."[26] Although Barkay's reference is to the Ir2-3 periods, his words seem even more applicable for earlier, less politically structured periods, when a regional power

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4 (1987): 27, 28. G. Ernest Wright came to similar conclusions in "What Archaeology Can and Cannot Do," *Biblical Archaeologist* 34 (1971): 73.

[23]Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Archaeology in the Holy Land* (New York: Norton, 1979), 208.

[24]I have written further on this in "Rahab: The Woman Who Fulfilled the Words of YHWH," in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Literary Approach*, ed. David Merling and Heidi M. Szpek (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, forthcoming).

[25]G. Ernest Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 80.

[26]Gabriel Barkay, "The Iron Age II-III" in *The Archaeology of Ancient Israel*, ed. Amnon Ben-Tor (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 329.

was not in control. A city (or king) was what the ancients considered a city/king, not what modern readers envision.

Shishak referred to the Arad fortress as a "city" or "town" in his list of "cities" conquered;[27] yet the Iron Age fortress at Arad was never larger than 50 x 55 m.[28] Unless we can recreate with exactitude the meaning of the biblical writers' words, only the widest possibility of meaning to the few details of the stories of the book of Joshua should be allowed. Otherwise, we may be transposing twenty-first-century expectations onto the data, while thinking we are interpreting the book of Joshua.[29]

As an archaeologist, I am more sympathetic to the role of

[27]James Henry Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt: Historical Documents*, vols. 1-4 (London: Histories & Mysteries of Man, 1988), 711, 716.

[28]Miriam Aharoni, "Arad: The Israelite Citadels," *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. Ephraim Stern (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 1:82.

[29]Consider Table 1, which lists the statements from the book of Joshua concerning each conquered site. Note the lack of detail. Should not so few specifics give pause to archaeologists excavating sites which they believe are mentioned in the book of Joshua?

Table 1
Sites Destroyed by Joshua with Specific Reference to Their Destruction*

Site	Reference	Description
Jericho	6:20	wall fell in its place (וַתִּפֹּל הַחוֹמָה תַּחְתֶּיהָ)
	6:24	burned the city with fire (וְהָעִיר שָׂרְפוּ בָאֵשׁ)
Ai	8:19	set the city on fire (וַיַּצִּיתוּ אֶת־הָעִיר בָּאֵשׁ)
	8:28	Joshua burned Ai; made it a heap forever (וַיִּשְׂרֹף יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶת־הָעָי וַיְשִׂמֶהָ תֵּל־עוֹלָם)
Makkedah	10:28	utterly destroyed it (them) (הֶחֱרִם אוֹתָם)
Libnah	10:30	nothing specific about city destruction**
Lachish	10:32	nothing specific about city destruction**
Eglon	10:35	nothing specific about city destruction**
Hebron	10:37	he utterly destroyed it (וַיַּחֲרֵם אוֹתָהּ)
Debir	10:39	nothing specific about city destruction **
Hazor	11:11	he burned Hazor with fire (וְאֶת־חָצוֹר שָׂרַף בָּאֵשׁ)

*Madon, Shimron, and Achshaph (Josh 11:1) could conceivably be added to this list. It seems, however, that the pronoun "them" (Hebrew אוֹתָם) of הֶחֱרִם אוֹתָם (Josh 11:12) does not refer to these cities, but to the kings, since the "kings" are the closest antecedent to this pronoun and אוֹתָם is in the masculine form of the pronoun. In any case, nothing specific in the text is said about the destruction of Madon, Shimron, or Achshaph.

**Josh 10:37, 39 could be seen as implying the total destruction of Libnah, Lachish, Eglon, Debir, but there is no specific statement in the text that describes the destruction of these cities.

archaeology than some might be; on the other hand, one cannot stress too much that archaeology, even if done in the most scientific manner, will always remain somewhat subjective. This "art" is limited by the amount of data that can been collected, the skill of the archaeologist, interpretive models, and the limited number of explicit textual explanations.

In 1982, Schoville estimated that only about thirty of more than 5,000 archaeological sites had been "scenes of major excavating."[30] Certainly, since "almost 98 percent of the major ruins of Palestine remain untouched by an expedition," archaeologists should be tentative about final conclusions.

Can Archaeology Prove the Bible?

When archaeology and a Bible story do not seem to support each other, the problem may be that the archaeological evidence found, as interpreted, does not mesh with the biblical account, as interpreted.[31] Miller wanted to conclude that the book of Joshua is incorrect about its story of Ai, and for one to suggest that either or both sets of data be altered was to introduce a "looseness in objective controls."[32] Miller's conclusions are reasonable, but not necessarily correct. Most often one thinks of "proving" the Bible as an apologetic tool.[33] On the other hand, the process of "proving" the Bible has two aspects. Those who accept archaeology as a means of "testing" the truthfulness of a biblical story have much in common with those who set out through archaeology to "prove" that the Bible stories are true. Both have absolute confidence in the unwritten premise that people thousands of years after an event can read a story of that event and clearly predict what kind and/or amount of artifactual data will be recovered that will confirm or disprove the account.

At the same time, the ancient event for which evidence is sought may not be some major architectural feature that took years to build but, as in the case of Ai (Josh 8), an event presented as occurring in one day, of whose specific actions we have no knowledge. There is a gap between the historical text and the archaeological data.[34] This gap is what H. J.

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[30]Keith N. Schoville, *Biblical Archaeology in Focus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 157.

[31]Roland de Vaux, "On Right and Wrong Uses of Archaeology," in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century,* ed. James A. Sanders (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), 70.

[32]J. M. Miller, *The Israelite Occupation of Canaan,* ed. J. H. Hayes and J. M. Miller (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 90, 213-284.

[33]de Vaux, 68.

[34]Larry G. Herr, "What Archaeology Can and Cannot Do," *Ministry,* February 1983, 28.

Franken called the missing "straight link" between the two.[35]

Some scholars have misunderstood the nature of archaeological data, falsely assuming that archaeology is somehow more scientific than biblical studies. This misunderstanding is based on the correspondence theory, which supposes that there is no difference between what is found and the description of what is found.[36] When one understands that archaeological finds are the true data and the description of archaeological data is theory, then the gap between the book of Joshua and archaeology is not so severe. The correspondence theory confuses theory with fact and thus confuses itself with "truthfulness." An alternative to the correspondence theory is the coherence theory, which "defines truth not as the relationship of statements to facts but as the relationship of statements to each other. . . . The criterion for truth becomes intelligibility and not verifiability through external checkpoints."[37] Such a change in philosophy puts the archaeological and biblical data in a better-defined relationship. Brandfon writes:

> A good many Syro-Palestinian archaeologists no longer claim that their excavations prove or disprove biblical events. Instead, archaeological evidence has been shown to have a wide variety of applications to the study of the past, none of which involves verifying biblical or other historical statements. Rather than claiming that the excavated evidence corresponds to biblical or other statements about the past, archaeologists have claimed that their discoveries may be understood as a context for biblical history, that is a matrix of data into which historical statements may fit.[38]

Kamp and Yoffee have spoken for the essence of this position:

> All classes of archaeological data (including texts) are complementary; none may be examined as if explanations of the interrelations among sociocultural phenomena may be generated directly from materials that have been recovered in the present. Rather, the task is to model the behavior that produced these surviving remnants in a coherent pattern so that data that have not survived may also be logically deduced.[39]

All evidence of archaeology and the Bible must be coalesced to arrive at any proximity of understanding of the past. To allow archaeology to rule over the biblical stories, or historical criticism to guide archaeology, or for either of them to ignore the thematic purposes of the biblical

[35]Franken, 4.

[36]Brandfon, 36.

[37]Ibid., 35.

[38]Ibid., 36.

[39]K. A. Kamp and N. Yoffee, "Ethnicity in Ancient Western Asia During the Early Second Millennium B.C.: Archaeological Assessments and Ethnoarchaeological Perspectives," *BASOR* 237 (1980): 85, 86.

writers is to talk long and miss much (neither of which is a new problem).[40]

Archaeology is a tool that can greatly help the biblical scholar better understand the background of the Bible stories. For example, scholars today have an increased understanding of who the Philistines were, due to archaeology,[41] because the Bible provides only a limited view of who they were. Archaeology can, on occasion, provide external evidence of individuals.[42] Likewise, archaeology can provide houses and temples and cities (including their defensive features) where biblical characters might have lived;[43] yet, archaeology has limitations. As Miller himself has suggested, archaeologists often believe that archaeology can accomplish more than it actually is able to.[44]

The area where archaeology is least helpful is meshing with historical events.[45] Events, including city destructions, are usually short-lived. The Bible provides too little detail to be of much help to the archaeologist.[46] Due to the many destructions clearly identifiable and almost predictable at Middle Bronze Age IIC and Late Bronze Age IIC sites, some might question this conclusion. But in the same way, should we not expect to find Late Bronze destruction layers at sites, where destructions are suggested by literary sources (e.g., the book of Joshua)? One can only answer that question by first looking at the Middle Bronze Age IIC and Late Bronze Age IIC destructions. In fact, we do not know anything *historically* substantive about the nature of the Middle Bronze Age IIC or Late Bronze Age IIC destructions. Were Middle Bronze

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[40]Sir Frederic Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology* (New York: Harper, 1940), 17.

[41]Trude Dothan, *The Philistines and Their Material Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

[42]Nahman Avigad, *Hebrew Bullae from the Time of Jeremiah: Remnants of a Burnt Archive* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1986), 28, 29, 139; *ANET*, 320, 321; Avraham Biran and Joseph Naveh, "An Aramaic Stele Fragment from Tel Dan," *IEJ* 43 (1993): 93.

[43]Avraham Biran, ed., *Temples and High Places in Biblical Times: Proceedings of the Colloquium in Honor of the Centennial of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion: Jerusalem, 14-16 March 1977* (Jerusalem: Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1981); Miriam Aharoni and Ronny Reich Kempinski, eds., *The Architecture of Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1992), 193-222.

[44]J. Maxwell Miller, "The Israelite Journey through (around) Moab and Moabite Toponymy," *JBL* 108 (1989): 154; Franken, 10.

[45]Wright, "What Archaeology Can and Cannot Do," 73.

[46]L. T. Geraty, "Heshbon: The First Casualty in the Israelite Quest for the Kingdom of God," in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall*, ed. F. A. Spina, H. B. Huffmon, and A.R.W. Green (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 30.

Age IIC and Late Bronze Age IIC destructions caused by one-day events, as the book of Joshua suggests of its battles, or were they produced by prolonged sieges or repeated attacks which indeed reduced each city to absolute ruin? While the evidence of Middle Bronze Age IIC and Late Bronze Age IIC destructions may seem compelling, it must be remembered that archaeologists cannot agree even on who or what caused these destructions, even though dozens of sites have produced contemporary destruction layers.[47] If archaeology cannot conclusively answer basic questions about who or what caused the Middle Bronze Age IIC and Late Bronze Age IIC destructions, how can we assume that it can answer the complex questions we are asking archaeology to verify about the book of Joshua?

The Book of Joshua: Redemptive History

The reason the writers of the book of Joshua gave so few details is that they intended the stories to be read for religious purposes, not for historical details.[48] The biblical writers saw history as the working out of YHWH's plans and purposes. Even when events did not go as YHWH promised, the results were seen as the working out of his will (cf. Josh 1:5 with Josh 18:2, 3). This "theological perspective"[49] caused the biblical writers to interpret historical events as theological events and to record them for theological purposes with theology as their primary emphasis. "Theological perspective" does not deny truthfulness. It refers only to viewpoint, selectivity, and detail.

The biblical writers were not writing so that centuries later modern researchers could prove or disprove what they wrote. They selected events and subjectively described those events to demonstrate their point of view by providing only minimal details that would convey their message.

Regarding events, the biblical writers not only limited their choices of reported events to those they deemed most helpful for their message, but they also limited their recording of the events to only those parts that met their objectives. The entire episode of the actual destruction of Ai is presented in three Hebrew words: וישרף יהושע את־העי ("And Joshua burned

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[47]James M. Weinstein, "The Egyptian Empire in Palestine: A Reassessment," in *BASOR* 241 (1981):1-28. The origin of the destructions of the LB/Ir1 period are equally problematic; see also Michael G. Hasel, *Domination and Resistance: Egyptian Military Activity in the Southern Levant, 1300-1185 B.C.* (Boston: Brill, 1998), 1-7; Wright, "What Archaeology Can and Cannot Do," 73.

[48]David Merling, "The Book of Joshua: Its Structure and Meaning," in *To Understand the Scriptures: Essays in Honor of William H. Shea* (Berrien Springs: Institute of Archaeology/Horn Archaeological Museum, 1997), 7-27.

[49]Schoville, 154.

Ai," Josh 8:28). This statement does not tell us that the gate was destroyed. It does not tell us how much of the site was burned. It does not tell us that any specific building on the site was destroyed. It does not even inform us that there was a building on the site. For all we know, those living at Ai were living among the ruins of the previous Middle Bronze Age city, and the fire set burned the grass/weeds that covered its surface. After all, its name "the ruin" might have been a literal description.

As Miller suggested about Coote and Whitelam, those who think archaeology has disproved any Bible story are wrong.[50] Biblical scholars can be thankful to archaeology that they have been and are continuing to be forced to reevaluate their interpretation of the text. An assumed picture of the Israelite conquest on the scale of modern military invasions is expecting more from the biblical story than the information provides. William G. Dever rightly called this process of archaeology a bringing of the Bible to the real world of the past.[51] That ancient cities were similar in size and function to modern cities is a (misleading) idea brought to the Bible. Disproving any or all of one's preconceived ideas about the stories of the book of Joshua does not detract at all from the book's reliability.

Archaeology cannot determine the trustworthiness of theology or, as Dever wrote, "create or destroy faith."[52] Roland de Vaux states similarly: "This spiritual truth can neither be proven nor contradicted, nor can it be confirmed or invalidated by the material discoveries of archaeology."[53]

Dever has placed the debate about the relationship of archaeology and the Bible in its proper perspective and has also spoken to my hypothesis: "The failure was that of those biblical scholars and historians who were asking the wrong questions of archaeology."[54] To ask archaeology the wrong questions (i.e., to prove or disprove the historicity of the biblical stories) forces archaeology to provide answers about the text that it cannot possibly provide. Neither archaeology nor the Bible is specific enough to provide answers about those questions.

[50]J. Maxwell Miller, "Is It Possible to Write a History of Israel Without Relying on the Hebrew Bible?" in *The Fabric of History: Text, Artifact and Israel's Past*, ed. D. V. Edelman, JSOTSupp 127 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 96.

[51]William G. Dever, *Archaeology and Biblical Studies: Retrospects and Prospects* (Evanston, IL: Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, 1974), 28.

[52]Ibid., 42.

[53]de Vaux, 68.

[54]William G. Dever, "'Will the Real Israel Please Stand Up?' Archaeology and Israelite Historiography: Part I," *BASOR* 297 (February 1995): 63.

Conclusion

One cannot disprove literary evidence by nonevidence (the not-finding of archaeological support), and one cannot concretely support Bible stories with nonspecific archaeological finds.[55] The most one can say is that if an excavation does not provide evidence of a building phase at the time a biblical story supposedly took place, one should not automatically assume the biblical story is erroneous. Other explanations abound.

On the other hand, a major study needs to be undertaken to test the limits of archaeology with regard to ancient literature. Such a study, I believe, will go far in correcting the tendency to misuse archaeology as a means of proving or disproving the stories from the book of Joshua.

Until such a study is completed and tested by the archaeological community, the book of Joshua should be allowed the widest latitude in meaning, without preconceived ideas being forced upon it. In the past, readers of the Bible have expected too much from both archaeology and the biblical record. Archaeology is the scattered collection of what has been found, while the Bible is the scattered record of what fit the biblical writers' theological purposes. Rarely should one expect that these two agendas would intersect. When they do, scholars and the general public applaud, but such cases are rare.

Some blame the Bible for its weakness, while others blame archaeology for its limitations. Real blame lies in false expectations. The assumption that archaeology and the Bible will regularly interact is based on an unrealistic "prove-the-Bible" mentality. Those who discount the Bible stories because of archaeological data are working in a "prove-the-Bible mode," just as are those who set out to prove the Bible to be true. Neither group has realized that archaeology and the Bible provide different information, which cannot always be compared and is most often elusive. Information from the Bible and archaeology is parallel, not intersecting; it supplements and complements, but rarely intersects. We must go beyond a "prove-the-Bible" (or "disprove-the-Bible") synthesis in order for true understanding to emerge.

In the end, the relationship between the Bible and archaeology is fluid, not static. Each can help us better understand the other. Neither can, or should, be used as a critique of the other. They must exist separately and be combined cautiously.

[55]See my "The Book of Joshua, Part I: Its Evaluation by Nonevidence," *AUSS* 39 (2001): 61-72.