

# **Archaeology and the Old Testament**

by

Daniel J. Lewis

© Copyright 2005 by Diakonos, Inc.

Troy, Michigan

United States of America

## Contents

Introduction.....	4
What Archaeology Can and Cannot Do .....	5
Archaeology in the Holy Land.....	5
Tel Excavation .....	6
How to Tell a Tel .....	6
Unpacking a Tel.....	7
Challenges in Tel Excavation .....	8
What's in a Pot?.....	9
Analyzing Pottery .....	9
Ceramic Ecology.....	11
Epigraphy.....	11
Pottery and Dating .....	12
Oil Lamps.....	12
Pottery and the Bible.....	13
Mesopotamia and Egypt .....	13
Mesopotamia.....	13
Egypt.....	17
Buildings, Fortifications and Water Systems .....	19
Domestic Buildings.....	20
Fortifications .....	21
Water Systems .....	22
The Conquest and Monarchy .....	24
Early Israelite Presence in Canaan.....	24
David, Solomon and Jerusalem .....	25
Lasting Impressions .....	28
The Northern Kingdom.....	29
The Southern Kingdom.....	32
The Exile and Return .....	34
The Babylonians .....	34
The Persians .....	36
Rebuilding Jerusalem and the Second Temple.....	36

Changes in Jewish Life After the Exile .....	38
Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls .....	39
The Debate About Qumran.....	40
The Scrolls and the Scholars.....	41
Importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls for Translating the Hebrew Bible .....	44
The Scrolls and the Sectarians at Qumran.....	47
The Community's Origin .....	48
The Community Rule.....	48
Community Life.....	50
Community Beliefs .....	51
The Community Treasure .....	52
Other Community Special Literature.....	52
The Dead Sea Scrolls and John the Baptist .....	53
The Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Possible New Testament Connections .....	55

# Old Testament Archaeology

## Introduction

Archaeology is the science and art of recovering the material remains of humankind's past. It speaks to every aspect of ancient society, including government, religion, animal husbandry, agriculture, cultural interchange and a host of other subjects. Two primary aspects fill out this discipline, the discovery and reclamation of ancient remains from surface collecting and field excavation followed by the analysis, interpretation and publication of the findings.

Archaeology connected with the study of the Bible is for the most part located in the Near East and the Mediterranean. It includes Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Greece and Italy. Though archaeological research covers all the remains of human history from all periods, the primary archaeological periods of importance for biblical study are:

**Early Bronze Age (3200-2200 BC) EB I, II, III and IV**

**Middle Bronze Age (2200-1550 BC) MB I and II**

**Late Bronze Age (1550-1200 BC) LB I and II**

**Iron Age (1200-586 BC) Iron I and II**

**Persian (586-332 BC)**

**Hellenistic (332-37 BC)**

**Roman (37 BC -- 324 AD)**

The earlier of these periods (the Bronze and Iron Ages) are demarcated by the technology of tool and weapon making. Bronze (an alloy of copper and tin) was the major technological development following stone tools and weapons. By adding a small amount of tin to copper, the strength and hardness of the metal was increased, while the melting temperature was decreased. Iron, a later development, is much harder than bronze but requires a much hotter temperature for smelting. The

transition between the Late Bronze Age (LB II) and the Iron Age (Iron I) occurred not long after the entry of the Israelites into Canaan. This transition figured prominently in the political low ebb of the Israelites as they faced the Philistines, who controlled the iron industry (1 Sa. 13:19-22). Even earlier, the Israelites were at a military disadvantage because the Canaanite nations had iron chariotry, while the Israelites fielded only an infantry army (Dt. 17:16; Jg. 1:19; 4:3, 13). Later transitions are demarcated along political lines as control of Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean shifted between Persia, Greece and Rome.

## **What Archaeology Can and Cannot Do**

Early on, many Christians hailed archaeology as the "savior" of biblical studies, depending upon material remains to buttress cherished beliefs and to provide "scientific" evidence of the veracity of the Bible.<sup>1</sup> However, a more modest goal is probably appropriate.

The most important reason why this is so is that archaeology is a discipline in process, and material remains are always subject to interpretation and reinterpretation. Yesterday's proof might become tomorrow's Achilles heel! Only fragmented material remains have survived from the past, so any interpretation of this evidence must be offered with reserve. Only a few of the ancient sites have been found, and of those identified, less than 2% have been excavated. Of those excavated, only a few have been fully excavated. Only a fraction of the material finds have been published. Hence, archaeology may corroborate certain things in the Bible by way of illustration, but it is unwise to expect archaeology to "prove" the authenticity of the Bible. There are as many archaeological findings that raise questions about biblical narratives as there are that "authenticate" biblical material. Christians should be very cautious about using words like *confirm*, *prove*, *authenticate* and *substantiate* when connecting archaeology with biblical texts. At the same time, archaeology provides a wealth of material to help us know more about ancient cultures, architecture, international relationships, war, farming and home-building, to name a few.<sup>2</sup>

## **Archaeology in the Holy Land**

Archaeology in Palestine began in the 1830s when individuals began the modern attempt to identify ancient sites. They charted the course of the Jordan from Galilee to the Dead Sea and made reports on geography, geology, topography, hydrology and zoology, especially in the Dead Sea region. Most excavation was

---

<sup>1</sup> A very popular work that follows this approach, lasting through many editions, is the *Halley's Bible Handbook*. However, while containing some valuable archaeological information, much of the work still depends upon material that is more than half a century old or older, and few modern archaeologists would take the book seriously.

<sup>2</sup> A. Hoerth, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), pp. 18-22.

minimal and amounted to little more than treasure hunting.

By the 1860s, however, more serious attempts were made by the various recently founded archaeological societies from Britain, America, Germany and France.<sup>3</sup> With the new technique of *tel* excavation developed in the digs at Troy in the early 1900s, *stratigraphy* analysis became an important tool as major digs were begun at Jericho, Taanach, Gezer, Beth Shemesh, Megiddo and Samaria. By the time of World War II, systematic recording systems were in place with *locus* numbers identifying specific work areas, complete sets of excavation plans for each *stratum*, and a clear chronology based on *ceramic typology*.

After World War II, Kathleen Kenyon of the British Museum introduced the technique of dividing excavation sites into five meter grids called *balks*, with intervening catwalks left unexcavated. Two overall methods vied for supremacy, the architectural method, with wide scale exposure of complete structures, versus balk excavation. Today, the two systems are combined and enhanced by various other scientific disciplines, such as, osteology (study of bones), botany (study of plants), geology (study of rock formations), zoology (study of animal remains) and chemistry (study of chemical composition).

## Tel Excavation

### How to Tell a Tel

Ancient sites in the Near East are called *khirbets* (a site in which some of the ruins remain visible above unexcavated ground) and *tels* (an artificial mound in which ancient remains are completely buried, usually in layers of debris from civilizations built on top of one another).<sup>4</sup> Tels are the result of people looking for settlement sites that had the advantages of water, arable land, accessibility to trade routes and defense. Since wells, springs or streams were at permanent locations, cities that were destroyed were often rebuilt on the same site by others who came later. A choice site for defense would be a rocky outcropping with an elevation above the surrounding terrain and a protected water supply. As the mound grew higher over the centuries, the strategic advantage of height increased.

Sites might be abandoned for various reasons, such as, fire, war, flood, earthquake, or the loss of a water supply. After abandonment, the prevailing winds and water erosion tended to fill in the low places. Any new group, of course, had to

---

<sup>3</sup> Palestine Exploration Fund (British) [1865], American Palestinian Exploration Society [1870], Deutscher Palastina-Verein (German) [1877], Ecole Biblique et Archeologique Francaise (French) [1890].

<sup>4</sup> *Tell* = mound (Arabic); *tel* = mound (Hebrew); in the Bible the Hebrew term *tel* describes ruins (Dt. 13:16; Jos. 8:28) and Canaanite cities built on artificial mounds (Jos. 11:13).

make the same considerations as the previous occupants regarding water, arable land, trade and defense, but they had the advantage of available used stones, and in some cases, parts of still standing walls. Tels, then, are the product of successive cycles of settlement, destruction, vacancy and new settlement. Some tels might have as many as twenty different stratas. The profile of a tel is easily identifiable by its relatively flat top. Today, there are hundreds of tels in Israel, most unexcavated. The size varies from Hazor, one of the largest at about 190 acres, to small ones not bigger than half an acre. Most tels average between seven and twenty acres.

## Unpacking a Tel

The first reality of archaeology is that excavation inevitably is destruction of the site. Hence, the excavation of the tel should be painstaking, slow, and with proper recording systems in place. The process begins with a *field survey*, which includes the production of a *contour map* superimposed on 10 meter grids (showing the shape of the land surface and the area to be excavated) and *sampling* (the surface recovery and analysis of *sherds* that might offer some general idea of what could be underground).

More sophisticated techniques may be used, such as, *cesium magnetometry*, measuring the contrast between some feature underground and its surrounding environment, *photogrammetry*, the method of providing reliable measurements through aerial photography, or *paleoecology*, the study of plant and animal life deposits from the past. Sometimes, emergency excavation or *salvage archaeology* is required if a site is endangered by vandalism, new construction or war.

Excavation grids or *balks* are then superimposed on the site, and some grids are selected for excavation, others being left for future archaeologists to do further work. The grids are marked off by metal posts. A test trench is sunk or probes are used to get a preview of what lies below the surface. Once digging begins, the site must be carefully supervised to manage both the vertical and horizontal dimensions. Volunteers may be used to dig, but each grid is under the direct supervision of a staff member, who keeps a daily journal of material finds and observations. Digging is done by hand, and depending on conditions, the tools can be as rugged as a pick, hoe or shovel or as delicate as small brushes and dental picks. Soil is removed to a dump site, and *sherds* are collected in buckets and labeled by *locus* and *stratum*. Later, the pottery will be "read" by an expert to determine its general date and/or other features.

Stratigraphy is identified by color changes and composition using the *Munsell Soil Color Charts*. If a structure begins to emerge, it is excavated carefully and assigned a locus number. Balks are kept uniform by plumb bobs and constant measurement.

Remembering that excavation is destruction, careful recording of the process is

critical, including notes and drawings (composed daily), lists of materials (by buckets), locus lists (with summary descriptions), *top plans* (drawings of the horizontal exposures with locus numbers, structures, installations, and elevation in meters) and *section drawings* (drawings of the vertical balk face showing strata). Photography plays an important role as well, and includes virtually everything *in situ* except sterile debris and sherds. Every object uncovered (except sherds) is indexed on a card listing locus, date found, and general description. The objects are cleaned, drawn to scale showing both exterior and cross-sections if appropriate, as well as photographed.<sup>5</sup>

The final work of archaeological investigation is publication. Here, the full data of the excavation is reported and reasoned interpretations given.

## Challenges in Tel Excavation

The general assumption is sound that as one works downward through the layers of civilization in a tel, one works backward in history. Nevertheless, several factors make this process more complicated than might be expected. In the first place, the strata in any given tel may not be evenly distributed. There may be an irregular sequence of deposits, structures and debris. Such irregularities might come from the unevenness of erosion or wind-shifted topsoil, but it might also come from the ancient occupants themselves.

For instance, fire pits, grain pits, latrines, garbage pits and cisterns may pierce a strata, thus confusing the dating attempt. Pits in the ancient Near East came in two standard designs, *bell pits* (up to 8' wide and 12' deep) and *cylinder pits* (sometimes as wide as 10' and as deep as 16'). Such pits obviously create major stratigraphic disturbance. Too, if building materials by a later group are extracted from a pit, or if later settlers reuse building materials from an earlier occupation, the elements from two or more periods are then mixed, skewing the evidence. *Fills*, also, can occur intentionally as well as naturally. Debris can be dumped into a depression by ancient occupants in order to level a site for future building, or debris can be taken from another part of the mound that predates the stratum upon which it is dumped. Foundation trenches intrude into earlier stratums, and rain can wash both objects and their environment from one part of a tel to another, mixing the occupational layers. Tombs and burial pits, also, intrude into earlier strata. Thus, the archaeologist cannot simply assume that a tel can be unpacked like so many blankets piled on each other.

---

<sup>5</sup> The layperson might well wonder why artifacts are both drawn and photographed. Each recording technique offers different advantages. For instance, an inscription or surface design that might not photograph well can be enhanced in a drawing.

## What's in a Pot?

When culture changed from a food-gathering society to a food-producing society, the need for storage vessels of all sizes increased dramatically. Cups, plates, bowls, jugs and cooking pots were used by all forms of civilization in Palestine. Hence, pottery is fundamental to every excavation in the Near East. First, it is composed of a nearly indestructible material, an orange-brown clay that hardens (or is baked) into a permanent form.<sup>6</sup> It does not decay, burn, corrode, evaporate or melt. Second, it is far and away the most common object surviving from the past. Because of the gradual change in style, pottery has become the most fundamental tool for developing a chronology for any particular site. It is the first resource for dating the *strata* of a tel. Pottery features were remarkably standardized during any given period, which leads to their value as a dating tool. The changes in pottery traits, such as design and shape, reflect the change in culture, since each cultural period had its own distinctive and typical pottery. By comparing pottery from several sites, the archaeologist can develop a chronology for an entire area--and ultimately, for all Palestine.

Various terms make up the jargon of pottery vocabulary, and they will be taken up in the sections to follow. Initially, however, the following broad terms will be helpful.

<i>Potsherd, shard or sherd</i>	...ceramic fragment; piece of broken pottery
<i>Diagnostic sherd</i>	...fragment that gives indication of the original vessel's style and date, usually a rim, handle or base
<i>Body sherd</i>	...fragments that do not offer much help for diagnosing the vessel's style

## Analyzing Pottery

There are four primary elements for analyzing pottery: form, decoration, ware and method of manufacture.

The *form* of pottery is its variation in shapes, rims, handles and bases. For instance, it was typical of Iron I *kraters* (large pots) to have from four to eight handles. It was typical of Iron II *kraters* to have double, deeply grooved rims, a feature unknown in the Late Bronze Age.

---

<sup>6</sup> Technically, clay is hydrated silicate of aluminum mixed with various impurities. The word ceramic, from the Greek term *kramikos*, simply means earthen, cf. R. Johnston, *ISBE* (1986) 3.914.

The *decoration* of pottery refers to the application of artistic elements to the piece either as *body decorations* (shaving, incising or perforating) or *surface decorations* (paint, washes, glazes, slips and burnishing).

<i>Paint</i>	...opaque liquid colors
<i>Wash</i>	...transparent liquid color or thin, watery coat of paint
<i>Glaze</i>	...thin, glassy coating
<i>Slip</i>	...thin surface coat of untempered clay; makes the vessel harder and easier to paint and polish
<i>Burnish</i>	...polishing pottery to seal pores and create a shiny finish

The *ware* of pottery refers to the combination of clay and non-plastics. It varies by region, depending upon available raw materials. Ware contributes to chronology, since certain periods preferred some non-plastics over others.

<i>Non-plastics</i>	...mineral or fossils added to clay (non-plastic = non-malleable)
<i>Temper</i>	...substances added to clay to harden the ware, reduce shrinkage and stop cracking, such as, straw, dung, sand, salt and grog; straw added to clay produces a more porous body, allows some water to leach through the walls of the vessel, and by evaporation, keeps the water inside more cool
<i>Grog</i>	...ground up sherds used as temper

The *method of manufacture* refers to the preparation of the clay by the potter, a procedure that changed over the centuries. In the stone ages, ceramics were formed simply by molding them with the hands. The slow potters wheel (*tournette*, or single wheel) first appeared at Megiddo in about 3000 BC. The fast wheel (double wheel, flywheel)<sup>7</sup> did not appear until the Middle Bronze Age. The manner of firing the clay also changed over time, ranging from a simple campfire to an oven to a kiln.

---

<sup>7</sup> Appears in Hebrew as a dual. (Hebrew spelling contains singular, plural and dual forms.)

*Levigation* ...mixing clay with water to rid it of impurities by moving it from one settling basin to another

## Ceramic Ecology

Ceramic ecology is the study of the technological and sociological significance in pottery making. It traces the diffusion of a pottery style throughout a region and analyzes the function of pottery in a typical household. By *neutron activation analysis*, a procedure giving the exact breakdown of trace elements in clay, archaeologists can determine whether a piece was of local manufacture or imported. Trace elements become a kind of "fingerprint." By *petrographic analysis*, the microscopic examination of thin cross-sections, archaeologists can discover data on the physical composition of the clay, which in turn provides information about ware, type of clay, temper and so forth.

## Epigraphy

Epigraphy, the study of inscriptions, plays a special role with respect to pottery, since sherds and/or pots sometimes have writing on them. *Lamelech jars*, for instance, have handles embossed with the Hebrew words לַמֶּלֶךְ (*lă-mělēk* = "to the king"), an indication that such vessels were used by Israelite royalty and/or belonged to the palace. *Ostraca* (singular, *ostracon*) are sherds with writing and were used more-or-less like modern people use paper or notepads. One of the most well known collections of ostraca are the Lachish letters, a series of correspondences, 21 in all, between military officers in Lachish and Jerusalem just prior to the destruction of both cities by the Babylonians in about 587/6 BC.<sup>8</sup> The two cities mentioned specifically in the letters, Lachish and Azekah, were military outposts for Jerusalem. Both were mentioned at one point during the siege by Jeremiah as the only two remaining forts not yet destroyed, though by the time of the letters Azekah had fallen (Je. 34:7).<sup>9</sup> These letters offer the earliest extensive body of texts in Judean Hebrew written in cursive script.<sup>10</sup>

Another important group of ostraca were uncovered in Arad, a Judean desert fortress. They give orders to the fort's commander concerning food for mercenaries,

---

<sup>8</sup> Five of these sherds are from the same vessel.

<sup>9</sup> In Ostracon IV, the writer says they are watching for the signal fires of Lachish but can no longer see Azekah. Another text refers to an unnamed prophet, who might have been Jeremiah.

<sup>10</sup> D. Pardee, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Ancient Near East*, ed. E. Meyers (New York: Oxford University, 1997), 3.323-324.

describe an Edomite threat in the Negev, and report the ascension of a new king, possibly Jehoahaz or Jehoiachin of Judah.<sup>11</sup>

## Pottery and Dating

There are several methods of dating archaeological finds, but the most common is by pottery and its evolutionary trends. Archaeologists have developed a "chart"--a pottery chronology--to show how pottery changed from one period to the next. The most recent pottery found on the floor of an excavated building is generally considered the latest period of the building's occupancy. If pottery is found under the floor, it belongs to the preceding period, unless, of course, it is found in a fire pit or some other type of hole. (In this case, pottery from a later period might be in the strata of an earlier period.) Sherds are collected in buckets, numbered, and labeled with the exact locus where they were found. Groups of sherds from different strata are excavated separately. The pottery is then examined for inscriptions, carefully washed and "read" by an expert. Restorable vessels are reconstructed, and whole and restorable vessels are registered, photographed and drawn by a staff artist.<sup>12</sup>

A good example of using pottery as a dating tool comes from the excavation of an ancient boat during a low water season on the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee. In January 1986, an ancient fishing vessel was discovered in the mud near Kibbutz Ginnosar on the northwest shore of the lake. Within the hull of the boat were discovered some 17 pieces of pottery, fragments of cooking pots, storage jars and jugs. The pottery types from the boat matched the pottery types from other excavations in Galilee found at Capernaum, Magdala, Meiron and Gamla. Since the pottery from these ancient villages could be dated quite precisely by datable coins excavated at the same time, the pottery in the boat could be fixed from the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC to the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Several pieces could be identified as coming from Kefar Hananya, a Galilean pottery manufacturing center in the Roman Period just over eight miles from the excavation site.<sup>13</sup> Later, when wood from the boat was dated by the radiocarbon method, the results matched the pottery finds, putting the vessel in about 40 BC with a standard deviation of plus or minus 80 years. Hence, the boat dates to between 120 BC and 40 AD.<sup>14</sup>

## Oil Lamps

As single types of pottery, oil lamps are especially helpful in dating, since their

---

<sup>11</sup> A. Lemair, *OEAANE*, 1.176-177.

<sup>12</sup> O. Borowski, "Sherds, Sherds, Sherds," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1982) pp. 67-68.

<sup>13</sup> D. Adam-Bayewitz, "Dating the Pottery from the Galilee Boat Excavation," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1988), p. 24.

<sup>14</sup> I. Carmi, "How Old is the Galilee Boat?" *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1988), p. 30.

changes in form, decoration and manufacture were quite pronounced. Lamps used olive oil for fuel, which lay upon the surface of an underlying layer of water. The water sealed the porous clay. A wick was inserted into the lamp, and salt could be used to produce a brighter light.

Early lamps were hand-formed, and by the Middle Bronze Age they were fashioned as saucers by pinching the sides to form four corners for wicks. Gradually, these corners developed into spouts, which were useful for pouring out unused oil and water. Eventually, lamps were formed on a wheel. By the late Roman Period, lamps were press molded in two pieces and joined, a technique that was conducive to more elaborate designs.

## **Pottery and the Bible**

Many of the biblical references to pottery making are metaphorical, such as, Jeremiah's reference to the nation of Judah as clay in the hands of Yahweh, the divine potter (Je. 18; cf. Is. 45:9; 64:8) or the Word of God as a lamp to light one's way (Ps. 119:105). The metaphorical uses, however, simply reflect upon the commonness of pottery usage in everyday life. Jesus' humorous comment that no one lights a lamp and puts it in a jar or under a straw mattress would have been received by his audience with knowing smiles (Lk. 8:16). Similarly, Jesus' story of the foolish wedding attendants who took no extra flask of oil for the long wait (Mt. 25:1ff.) or his parable of the woman who lighted a lamp to search every corner of her home for the lost coin (Lk. 15:8) were easily understood images. One can almost see the dim light and smell the acrid smoke of the upper room church service in Troas where Paul preached in a room lit by "many lamps" (Ac. 20:8).

## **Mesopotamia and Egypt**

Palestine lies on the land bridge between the two most ancient cradles of civilization, Mesopotamia and Egypt. Most of the archaeological work outside Palestine that directly relates to biblical history in the Old Testament comes from these areas. By the New Testament, of course, the geographical concentration moves westward from Palestine to the Mediterranean world of southern Europe, but for most of the biblical period one must look northeast and south to find Israel's most influential neighbors.

## **Mesopotamia**

The "land between the rivers" (the Tigris and the Euphrates) is widely acclaimed as the oldest cradle of civilization. The "fertile crescent" gave birth to the earliest cities and urban cultures in the world. The intersection between these ancient

cultures and the biblical stories began during the patriarchal period of Abraham and his family. Ur of the Chaldees (Ge. 11:31),<sup>15</sup> the thriving city of Sumerian life from which God called Abram,<sup>16</sup> dates back to the Early Bronze Age, occupied from about 4000 BC. Ur was identified by an inscription, and excavations were started in the 1850s. The most concentrated excavations were by Sir Leonard Wooley in a dozen seasons between 1922 and 1934. Architecturally, the most impressive structure was the ancient ziggurat at Ur, the best preserved in the ancient Near East and arguably the very sort of structure described in the story of the Tower of Babel (Ge. 11:1ff.).<sup>17</sup> Built as a stepped pyramid, this structure is a solid tower with a mud-brick core and fire-brick shell rising to about 70' high. It was the religious center for Nanna, the moon god. The Bible clearly states that Abram's family was pagan when they lived "beyond the River", that is, the Euphrates (Jos. 24:2). Linguists suggest that the name of Terah, Abram's father, as well as Laban, Milcah and Sarah all may be linked to the moon cult.<sup>18</sup> Several hundred clay tablets were unearthed at Ur as well as a host of smaller artifacts, such as, mosaics, musical instruments, jewelry, weapons, a potter's wheel and even a game board.<sup>19</sup> Together, they depict the place of Abraham's birth as culturally advanced and sophisticated. From Ur Abram migrated to Haran in northwest Mesopotamia (Ge. 11:31). This crossroad of trade routes was well known in the ancient Near East, but while the site has been identified, no major artifacts directly related to the Bible or Abram have been unearthed.

The excavation of Mari, an Amorite Mesopotamian city northwest of Ur occupied from about the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> millennium to 1745 BC, has offered a number of insights into ancient Mesopotamian culture. Discovered in 1934, the name Mari had been known previously from other texts, such as the Sumerian king list, which cite it as the seat of one of the dynasties after the flood. Excavated from 1934-1960 (with a hiatus during World War II), this site yielded a large ziggurat and temple complex. A royal palace from the 18<sup>th</sup> century BC featured more than 300 rooms. Especially

---

<sup>15</sup> The term "Chaldees" or "Chaldean" refers to the area of Babylonia.

<sup>16</sup> There is, of course, an alternative theory about the location of Ur that places it in Syria, not lower Mesopotamia, cf. H. Shanks, "Abraham's Ur: Is the Pope Going to the Wrong Place?" and "Did Wooley Excavate the Wrong Place?" *BAR* (Jan/Feb 2000), pp. 16-25, 60, 66-67. Here we shall follow the majority opinion that the Ur of the Bible is the Ur in southern Iraq, cf. A. Millard, "Where was Abraham's Ur: The Case for the Babylonian City," *BAR* (May/Jun 2001), pp. 52-53, 57.

<sup>17</sup> The language used to describe ziggurats seem quite close to the biblical language about the Tower of Babel. For instance, the biblical record describes the tower as one that "reaches to the heavens", while the ziggurat in Babylon is described in ancient inscriptions as "the house, the foundation of heaven and earth", cf. H. Shanks, "Scrolls, Scripts & Stellae: A Norwegian Collector Shows BAR his Rare Inscriptions," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 2002), p. 33.

<sup>18</sup> Millard, p. 53.

<sup>19</sup> Many of these artifacts were exhibited at the Detroit Institute of Arts, February-May 2001, in a tour that also brought them to the Smithsonian in Washington D.C., the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York City and the Oriental Institute Museum in Chicago.

important were the 20,000 tablets in Akkadian, and among them, 179 letters either to or from women. The Mari texts mention a people group called the *Habiru*, a semi-nomadic group roaming the grasslands of northern Mesopotamia that possibly could be related to the Hebrews.<sup>20</sup> Some texts describe ecstatic utterances as a form of divine revelation. Other texts mention known cities from the Bible, such as, Hazor and Laish in Canaan (later called Dan). In some texts, treaties were ratified by killing a donkey, a ritual not unlike the killing of animals in the blood covenant of Abram (cf. Ge. 15; Jos. 24:32).

The ancient city of Ebla, excavated since the 1960s, was occupied by a mixture of Mesopotamian and Syrian cultures, once swelling to about 260,000 people. The discovery of the royal archives containing Akkadian cuneiform tablets (more than 17,000 documents) sheds considerable light on commerce and business in the upper Levant. When first discovered, it seemed apparent that several familiar Canaanite cities were in a trading relationship with Ebla, including Hazor, Megiddo, Jerusalem (U-ru-sa-li-ma), Dor, Joppa, Lachish and Gaza. Palestine already was called "Canaan". More recently, however, a growing knowledge of early Semitic languages have made such associations doubtful.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, epigraphers believed, early on, that they discovered the names of the five cities of the plain, including Sodom and Gomorrah, though this identification is largely discounted now, also.<sup>22</sup> The texts mention a number of names that seemed similar to Old Testament names (not necessarily the biblical characters themselves, but names common to both the Old Testament and Ebla), and these included *Ab-ra-mu* (Abraham), *E-sa-um* (Esau), *Sa-u-lum* (Saul), *Is-ra-ilu* (Israel), *Ib-rum* (Eber) and *Da-'u-dum* (David).<sup>23</sup> Some of these personal names have more scholarly support than others as being similar to biblical names, but now, most scholars doubt any connection at all. So what is left? Quite a bit actually, but of a more general than specific nature. For one, the height of Ebla culture occurred about three centuries before the time of Abraham. This Syrian ancient city had strong connections with both Mesopotamia and Egypt. There was an extensive use of writing in Ebla's court. Family tombs, such as the one Abraham purchased for Sarah, were clearly part of Ebla's culture. Such factors give flesh to the

---

<sup>20</sup> The connection between the *Habiru* (or '*Apiru*'), which appear in some 200 other texts, and the Hebrews is highly debated. Members of this group appear in various roles, such as, agricultural workers, mercenaries, marauders and aliens. While most scholars reject a direct identification of the *Habiru* with the Hebrews, some accept a more indirect connection, suggesting that the Hebrews were a small part of the larger *Habiru* movement, cf. E. Blaiklock and R. Harrison, eds., *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), pp. 223-224.

<sup>21</sup> A. Millard, "Ebla and the Bible: What's Left (If Anything)?" *BR* (April 1992), pp. 24, 27-28.

<sup>22</sup> The debate over biblical connections between the Ebla tablets and the Bible can be followed in several issues of *BAR*: Mar/Apr 1979, Nov/Dec 1979, May/June 1980, Sep/Oct 1980, Nov/Dec 1980, Nov/Dec 1981.

<sup>23</sup> Millard, pp. 24, 27-28.

Abraham narratives and the Middle Bronze Age. Abraham's time is hardly a fiction! Abraham himself is clearly described as a nomadic link between Mesopotamia, Syria and Egypt.<sup>24</sup>

Also in Syria, the excavation of the ancient city of Ugarit between 1929 and 1960 has uncovered many more Akkadian texts and an emerging Canaanite alphabet called "Ugaritic." Many of the religious texts describe in detail the mythology and rituals surrounding the Ba'al and Asherah fertility cult. Some sacrificial terminology, such as, burnt offering, peace offering, trespass offering and gift offering were common to both Ugarit and the Old Testament. Social customs such as debt slavery, the ritual seclusion of a mother after child-birth and intra-family adoptions are also common to both.<sup>25</sup> Significant similarities in linguistics, style and content exist between Ugaritic poetry and the Hebrew poetry of the Bible, and this connection is especially apparent in Psalm 29, where the language describing Ba'al in an Ugaritic hymn is used to describe Yahweh.<sup>26</sup> One possible explanation of this similarity is that the biblical poet took over the language of a pagan hymn to a pagan god, who is no god at all and to whom such acclamations did not rightfully belong, and applied them to Yahweh in an attempt to subvert such pagan sentiments.<sup>27</sup> The concept of a covenant between humans and the gods is described in Ugaritic texts, which contain references to *El Berith* (god of the covenant). Ugaritic contains samples of musical terms for accompaniment, just as do the psalms. All these archaeological discoveries and more help place the ancient stories of the patriarchs as well as other parts of the Hebrew Bible in their cultural context. To be sure, some early Ugaritic "solutions" to biblical enigmas have fallen, but nevertheless, the connection between Ugarit and the land of Canaan has been well-established.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Millard, pp. 31, 60.

<sup>25</sup> Formerly, the odd passage about "boiling a kid in its mother's milk" (Ex. 23:19b;Dt. 14:21b) seemed to be illuminated by a passage in an Ugaritic, where such an act may have been a ritual connected with pagan fertility religion, cf. A. Mayes, *Deuteronomy [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 243. However, after further reflection scholars are less confident about this explanation, cf. J. Milgrom, "You Shall Not Boil a Kid in Its Mother's Milk," and R. Ratner and B. Zuckerman, "On Rereading the 'Kid in Milk' Inscription," *BR* (Fall 1985), pp. 48-58.

<sup>26</sup> Virtually every word in the Hebrew text of Psalm 29 can be duplicated in older Canaanite texts, cf. M. Dahood, *Psalms 1-50 [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), p. 175.

<sup>27</sup> P. Craigie, *Ugarit and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 68-71.

<sup>28</sup> For instance, strange passages in the Torah, like the prohibition of cooking a kid in its mother's milk (Ex. 23:19b; Dt. 14:21b), were said to parallel an Ugaritic text describing "cooking a kid in milk," a ritual supposedly connected with a pagan fertility religion, A. Mayes, *Deuteronomy [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 243. Later scholars, however, determined that the translation of this Ugaritic passage was incorrect, and it had nothing at all to do with cooking a kid in milk, cf. J. Milgrom, "'You Shall Not Boil a Kid in Its Mother's Milk': An Archaeological Myth Destroyed," *BR* (Fall 1985), pp. 48-55. In fact, the line should read, "By the fire seven times the sweet-voiced youths (answer): 'Coriander in milk, mint in curds'", cf. R. Ratner and B. Zuckerman, "On Rereading the 'Kid in Milk' Inscription," *BR* (Fall 1985), pp. 56-58.

## Egypt

While Egypt has been extensively excavated, most of the material remains are only marginally connected to the biblical accounts. The longest direct contact between the Hebrews and the Egyptians, of course, was the period of bondage after the 70 members of Jacob's family migrated to the Nile Delta during the lifetime of Joseph (Ge. 46-47; Ex. 1:1-5). Subsequently, the Bible describes the departure of the Hebrews from Egypt in the exodus (Ex. 12). Unfortunately, there is as yet no material evidence that can be firmly traced either to the Israelites in Egypt or their 40 year sojourn in the Sinai desert. (However, as Kenneth Kitchen, the eminent Egyptologist has said, "Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.") On the other hand, two eras of Egyptian history especially are important with respect to this period. One is the Hyksos Period and the other the Amarna Period.

The Hyksos were the rulers of Egypt during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Intermediate Period (ca. 1630-1539 BC).<sup>29</sup> These Semitic intruders, who formed Egypt's 15<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> dynasties, seized control of Egypt during a time of weakness. (The term Hyksos means "rulers from foreign lands.") By the time Jacob and his family moved to Egypt, it was long past the building of the great pyramids (though the family of Jacob doubtless would have seen them). It is likely that the descent into Egypt was during the Hyksos' rule and that the Semitic origin of the Hyksos had a direct bearing upon the favorable acceptance of Joseph and his family. Later, when "a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt" (Ex. 1:8), the tables were turned, and shortly the Hebrews found themselves in slavery and working on the treasure cities of Pithom and Rameses (Ex. 1:11). This "new king", more than likely, was Pharaoh Ahmose, who began the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty and the New Kingdom Period (ca. 1539-1075 BC). Ahmose, unlike his predecessors, was a native Egyptian from southern Egypt, not a Semitic. During the New Kingdom, every effort was made to expunge from the record all references to the despised Hyksos. Ahmose was worried that Semitics and other foreigners would weaken the kingdom, since they might join any invader from the north. Hence, the foreigners were put to work in government projects to build storage cities for holding Egypt's wealth. This, in all likelihood, was the beginning of the Hebrew bondage.<sup>30</sup>

This background may suggest why references either to Joseph or the Hebrew bondage or even Moses are absent in Egyptian records. Since all Semitics (and the family of Jacob was Semitic) would have been connected with the hated Hyksos, and since the record of the Hyksos was so fragmented due to the attempt to purge them

---

<sup>29</sup> While the chronology for ancient Egypt varies, depending upon the scholar, I am following the dating of F. Cryer, "Chronology: Issues and Problems," *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. Sasson (rpt. Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1995), I.660-661.

<sup>30</sup> C. Pfeiffer, *Old Testament History* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), p. 147.

from Egyptian history, it is not surprising to find no mention of biblical characters or events that almost certainly would have belonged to this Semitic period. In addition, it was not likely that the Egyptians, or for that matter any ancient empire, would preserve the record of such a serious setback as allowing a group of slaves to make a trek to freedom.<sup>31</sup>

The other important period of Egyptian history near Israel's national birth was the Amarna Period. Two pharaohs of the New Kingdom, Amenhotep III and Amenhotep IV (who adopted the name Akhenaten), developed a suzerainty relationship with several city-states in Palestine. Diplomatic correspondence between Canaanite kings and the Pharaoh were unearthed at Tel el-Amarna, Egypt covering about a 30-year period. The 349 cuneiform letters on clay tablets show a relationship between Egypt and Megiddo, Hazor and Beth Shan (northern Canaan), Shechem (central hill-country), Ashkelon, Gaza and Joppa (southern coast), and Lachish, Gezer and Jerusalem (southern hill country). About 300 of the letters are Canaanite, and of these, about half discuss affairs in Palestine. They reveal an unstable political situation in which internal dissidents and outside marauders pose sufficient threats that the kings request fresh supplies and archers for their garrisons. A principle enemy was the *Habiru* ('*Apiru*), a group also noted in various Mesopotamia records (see footnote #20). One thing is clear: there was a significant Egyptian presence in Canaan in about the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC. Supporting this evidence is a Stele of Seti I (c. 1318-1290 BC), who campaigned in northern Palestine, and the Stele of Rameses II (1290-1224 BC), both of which were uncovered in Beth Shan just south of the Sea of Galilee. The fundamental question, of course, is how this Egyptian presence relates to the emergence of a new people group in Canaan called the Israelites. Could the threat of the *Habiru* mentioned by the Canaanite kings in the Amarna Letters have anything to do with the invasion by Joshua?<sup>32</sup> Most scholars are doubtful. Archaeologically, however, the presence of Israelites in Canaan can be fixed no later than about 1200 BC, since they are named on the Merneptah Stele.<sup>33</sup>

Besides the emergence of Israel in Canaan, yet another people group arrived at about the same time, a warlike group on the southwest coast called the Philistines. In

---

<sup>31</sup> Hoerth, p. 164.

<sup>32</sup> If so, it would require an early date for the exodus in about the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC. This dating, if correlated with the reference in 1 Kg. 6:1 (970 BC for Solomon's ascension plus 480 years), gives a date of about 1450 BC for the exodus. Most scholars, however, support the later date of about 1290 BC for the exodus, since it better correlates with other historical and biblical data. Today, many critical scholars deny the biblical account of the exodus altogether, preferring instead to account for the presence of Israel in Canaan by theories of a peasant's revolt and/or a gradual emergence of the Israelites in the central hill country from among ancient peoples who already lived there.

<sup>33</sup> This inscription is the earliest direct mention of Israel in Canaan outside the biblical texts. On it, Merneptah boasts that his armies defeated various Canaanite peoples, including the citizens of Ashkelon, Gaza, Gezer and others, but of special importance for the biblical story, he boasted, "Israel is laid waste, his seed is not..." cf. J. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1958), p. 231.

about 1200 BC, a wave of Aegean peoples invaded Egypt and were defeated by Rameses III. The Egyptians called them "sea peoples," and when they were driven back from Egypt, many of them settled in the south coast of Canaan. Depictions of the defeat of the Sea Peoples are graphically illustrated in Egyptian wall reliefs from Medinet Habu. A distinctive feature of Philistine dress was their "feathered" headgear.

The best known group was the Philistines, who built a military pentapolis in the cities of Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gaza and Gath. Four of these five cities have been identified and excavated. The Bible gives Crete as the origin of the foreigners (Eze. 25:15-16; Zep. 2:4-5; Je. 47:4; Am. 9:7). Their pottery has clear Mycenaean influence, including stylized birds, spiral loops, concentric half-circles and scale patterns. Their arrival in Canaan at approximately the same time as the Israelites led to a struggle for supremacy reaching its climax in the period of Samuel, Saul and David.<sup>34</sup>

## Buildings, Fortifications and Water Systems

Architectural features found in a tel usually fall into two categories, *buildings* and *fortifications*. Buildings range from domestic dwellings to religious shrines to public buildings. Fortifications include walls, towers and citadels. Virtually no structures remain intact above ground in Palestine, so architectural remains must be uncovered. Even then, the recovery is usually of ruins so that conceptual reconstruction of structures must be based on the fragmented remains (i.e., foundations, rubble, partial walls, etc.). In many cases, the roof structures are not much beyond conjecture, though there are exceptions.

The earliest building materials were sun-baked mud bricks, which remained as the most constant basic unit for thousands of years. Local mud mixed with straw for a binder were shaped in a wooden frame and left in the sun to cure. Sometimes boulders joined with mud mortar were used for foundation courses. Especially for fortification walls, boulders (both shaped and unshaped) were laid in courses often to relatively high levels for protection. Lower courses of stone work might rise to 15' or more in height with mud brick walls continuing upward to even greater heights. By the Late Bronze Age, flat-dressed stones called *ashlars* (smoothly squared on all six sides) became popular for door jambs, lintels and wall facings, and by the Iron Age, they were used for reinforcing city walls. A technique for laying dressed masonry was developed in a pattern called "headers and stretchers" where blocks were placed in alternating pairs, one pair spanning the wall width with the short ends exposed and

---

<sup>34</sup> D. Howard, Jr., "Philistines," *Peoples of the Old Testament World*, A. Hoerth, G. Mattingly and E. Yamauchi, eds. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), pp. 231-250.

the alternate pair placed with the long sides exposed. By the Hellenistic Period, large public buildings sometimes were constructed entirely from ashlar. *Margins* are smoothed edges along the sides of ashlar, yielding a more uniform joint. The raised center of an ashlar inside the margins is the *boss*.<sup>35</sup>

## Domestic Buildings

In the Early Bronze Age, the typical domestic dwelling was the circular broad room house with a single entrance, benches along the walls, and a central post for roof support, but by the Middle Bronze Age houses became more complex, multi-roomed and with a central hall or court. By this time, most had a second story. About the beginning of the Iron Age, when the Israelites first occupied Canaan, the four room house evolved (also called the Israelite house) featuring an entry room or courtyard surrounded by three parallel rooms flanked by pillars supporting the roof. Literally hundreds of these houses have been discovered, and the architectural design lasted for six centuries until the Babylonian destruction. The ground floor had space for food processing, small craft production and stabling animals. The broad room across the back was used for storage. The second floor was suitable for dining, sleeping and/or other domestic activities. Such an arrangement was well-suited for maintaining the Torah's purity laws (e.g., a menstruating woman could be segregated without leaving the house, cf. Lv. 15:19-24). The advantage here, of course, was that once the courtyard room was entered from the outside, a person might pass into any other room in the dwelling without passing through an adjacent room. An entire range of purity laws affected the daily life of the Israelites, and with the four room concept, a ritually impure person could reside in the dwelling without contaminating the other occupants.<sup>36</sup>

Several biblical stories are illuminated by the architecture of the two story house, especially the use of upper rooms. Ahaziah, the son of Ahab and Jezebel, only reigned two years in Samaria, because he suffered an accident when he fell through the latticework of an upper room (2 Kg. 1:1-2). Elijah pronounced the death sentence on him, and he died just as the prophet said (1 Kg. 1:3-17a). Elijah himself was quartered in just such a room (1 Kg. 17:19). Much earlier, in the period of the judges, Ehud entered an upper chamber where Eglon, king of Moab, was alone (Jg. 3:20-25). Here, the Israelite hero assassinated the Moabite king, locked the doors on the inside, and escaped by the *midaron*, a Hebrew word appearing only here and probably

---

<sup>35</sup> N. Silberman, "Stones in Many Shapes and Sizes," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1989), pp. 59-60 and D. Cole, *Biblical Archaeology Slide Set* (Washington DC: BAS, 1985), pp. 11-12.

<sup>36</sup> S. Bunimovitz and A. Faust, "Ideology in Stone: Understanding the Four-Room House," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 2002), pp. 32-41, 59-60.

referring to the dump under his private latrine.<sup>37</sup>

## Fortifications

Walled cities were the basic fortification for ancient Near Eastern cities. The walls were built of mud bricks, stone or a combination of both. Outer walls in the Early Bronze Age were about eight feet thick and featured semi-circular towers at intervals to offer a protected line of fire down the wall line. By the Middle Bronze Age, the walls had become thicker to about twelve feet.

Several innovations assisted in making walled cities secure. One was the development of an elaborate gate system. The gates were the most vulnerable section of a city. The multi-chambered gates, some with a bent-axis entry and some flanked by towers, were marked improvements. The several chambers in the gates meant not only that defending soldiers could lie in wait within the gate, but also that more than one door could be closed and barred. Towers offered defenders a direct firing line upon any enemy that tried to breach the gate. The bent-axis entry prevented a long run with a battering ram, since the ram would not be able to negotiate the turn.

Yet another innovation was the casemate wall that replaced solid walls. This type of construction featured two parallel walls with short interior dividing walls at right angles that left elongated rooms within the walls. Such rooms could serve as living quarters, storage areas, or if filled with rubble, nearly impenetrable obstacles to an invader. Sometimes, private homes inside the cities used casemate rooms as additional living and storage space. A good example is the residence of Rahab in Jericho, where the Hebrew text reads that her house was located "in the wall of the wall" (Jos. 2:15). Presumably, this refers to a casemate wall.<sup>38</sup>

Inset-offset walls with recessed and protruding sections rather than straight walls enabled archers and other defenders a better view of the wall line. This feature was especially helpful in defending against scaling by ladders, undermining or breaching with a battering ram, since defenders on the walls had a clear line of fire. At the base of the walls, the defenders built sloping ramparts (with slopes as steep as 40 degrees) made of dirt layers, stones or other materials. This slope, called the *glacis*, aimed at preventing attack by battering rams, since the slope could not be easily negotiated. Usually the glacis was covered by a top layer of hard material, such as, stones or beaten earth. The upper part protected the wall foundations from sappers while the slope slowed down any onrushing enemy soldiers. An added effect was that

---

<sup>37</sup> B. Halpern, "The Assassination of Eglon: The First Locked-Room Murder Mystery," *BR* (Dec 1988), pp. 32-41, 44.

<sup>38</sup> R. Boling, *Joshua [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), p. 148.

the glacis stabilized the sides of the tel.<sup>39</sup>

Every system of defense had its Achilles heel, of course. To capture an ancient walled city, the attackers needed to find its weakest point. The Assyrian wall reliefs from Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh depict his savage attack upon the Judean fortress city of Lachish, his most prized victory in 701 BC. In these reliefs are displayed the primary techniques used against walled cities.<sup>40</sup>

One way to penetrate a walled city was to use scaling ladders to get over the wall. Local trees were cut, ladders constructed to a suitable height, and soldiers with helmets, shields and body armor were sent up the ladders. Another method was to attempt to penetrate the city gate or the wall itself. Wooden gates, of course, were vulnerable to fire (and defenders sometimes sheathed them with bronze, though this generally was not completely effective to prevent fire). The more common method, however, was to breach the wall or gate with a battering ram. Assyrian battering rams were heavy, wheeled machines covered with raw hides to protect them against fire. Siege ramps were built up to the wall prior to the attack to gain altitude and to compensate for the slope of the glacis. To illustrate the coming attack upon Jerusalem, Ezekiel once built a model of a siege ramp to show the Jewish community (Eze. 4:1-3). If the wall could not be breached or scaled, sappers might be able to tunnel under it. Tunneling was less dangerous in terms of being exposed to enemy fire, but it was a long and hard task. At the start of the tunnel, shield-bearers with body shields protected the diggers until they could get underground.<sup>41</sup> An unprotected soldier who was too close to the wall was especially vulnerable (cf. 2 Sa. 11:14-21).

If none of these methods were successful, the enemy could simply camp outside the city and cut off its food and water supply. Sieges could last months or in some cases even years. When Samaria was under siege by Ben-Hadad of Aram, food was so scarce that the going price for a donkey's head was about two pounds of silver, while a pint of pigeon dung cost a couple ounces (2 Kg. 6:25). Some even resorted to cannibalism (2 Kg. 6:26-29). In the Babylonian attack upon Jerusalem, Jeremiah describes conditions inside the city after being under siege for over a year. The stored food was spent, the city wall was broken through, and the Babylonians burned every important building in the city (Je. 52:4-14).

## **Water Systems**

Water systems deserve special attention, not only because water was scarce in

---

<sup>39</sup> O. Borowski, "Five Ways to Defend an Ancient City," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1983), pp. 73-76.

<sup>40</sup> H. Shanks, "Destruction of Judean Fortress Portrayed in Dramatic Eighth-Century B.C. Pictures," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1984), pp. 48-65.

<sup>41</sup> E. Bleibtreu, "Five Ways to Conquer a City," *BAR* (May/June 1990), pp. 36-44.

Palestine (almost no rain falls from March until October), but also because a protected water supply during siege was an absolute necessity for survival. If cities on mounds offered better protection due to the higher elevation, they also became more difficult to supply with water. As the successive rebuilding of cities occurred, creating higher and higher tells, the water source moved progressively farther away. What was an inconvenience during times of peace was a fatal weakness in times of war. Several Israelite cities developed elaborate water systems so as to have a protected water supply in times of siege. The most impressive of these were at Jerusalem, Megiddo, Hazor, Gezer and Gibeon, all of which conducted major engineering projects involving tunnels and shafts to bring water inside the city walls.

Without doubt, the most famous is the water system for Jerusalem. Originally engineered by the Jebusites, it consisted of a tunnel cut underground to the Gihon Spring on the east side of the city. David may have used this very shaft to gain entrance and capture the city (cf. 2 Sa. 5:6-8//1 Chr. 11:4-5).<sup>42</sup> Years later, Hezekiah's engineers cut a tunnel from the Gihon Spring to the western slope of the Hill of Ophel, a double-curved, graded shaft that brought water 1705' to the other side where it filled the Siloam Pool (2 Kg. 20:20//2 Chr. 32:30). An ancient inscription discovered near the end of the tunnel (the Siloam Inscription) describes how two teams worked from either end until they met underground to connect the two cuts. A somewhat similar water shaft also has been excavated at Megiddo, the latest improvements probably engineered by Ahab of Israel. A large vertical shaft inside the city wall descends by steps about 115' to the water level of the spring. An underground shaft about 200' long was dug running from the bottom of the vertical shaft under the city wall to the spring to bring water inside the city. At Hazor, Ahab's engineers also dug a vertical water shaft to a stepped tunnel that descended another 80' into the heart of bedrock, where there was a natural water table. Here, more than 130' below street level but entirely secure within the city walls, was a protected water supply. At Gibeon, the water system consisted of a 35' vertical shaft with cut steps spiraling down to a flat floor, and yet another set of stairs descending another 45' through a narrow, slanted tunnel to reach a water table inside the hill. Here, a kidney-shaped water chamber was hewn out that measured some 22' by 11'.<sup>43</sup> Each of these systems aimed at one final objective: a secure water supply both for times of peace and times of war.

---

<sup>42</sup> David's use of the water shaft to conquer Jebus has been so widely accepted that it has affected the translation of 2 Sa. 5:8, where the obscure Hebrew word *tsinnor* is usually rendered "water shaft" in English translations, cf. H. Shanks, *The City of David: A Guide to Biblical Jerusalem* (Washington DC: BAS, 1975), pp. 31-37.

<sup>43</sup> D. Cole, "How Water Tunnels Worked," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1980), pp. 8-29.

## The Conquest and Monarchy

### Early Israelite Presence in Canaan

The amount of archaeological data connecting with the Bible increases as one moves forward through Iron Age I and II. Early on, there is only marginal archaeological information about the earliest centuries of Israel's existence in Canaan. The Merneptah Stele offers independent verification that by about 1200 BC a people group called Israel could be identified in central Canaan. More debatable is the discovery of a structure on Mt. Ebal that might have been built by Joshua.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, the fierce conflagration that destroyed Hazor, one of the largest Canaanite cities in the north, may well have been set by Joshua and the invading Israelites in about the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Whoever burned the city also deliberately defaced the statuary in the palace. The largest Canaanite statue of a human yet discovered in Israel--a three foot tall basalt carving weighing more than a ton--had its head and hands hacked off while other pieces were mutilated as well. Surprisingly, no later building above the core of the palace was found, though it was unusual for residents to leave undeveloped such areas within a walled city. The Canaanite temple at Hazor was never rebuilt, either. This absence might reflect the Israelite ban (cf. Jos. 11:12).<sup>45</sup> Archaeologists debate who destroyed Hazor, but the excavators are reasonably confident that the remains match the description in Joshua 11:10-15, where the Israelites "captured Hazor" and burned the city.<sup>46</sup>

The evidence at Jericho is less clear. In an early excavation, John Garstang (1930s) believed he found evidence for a collapsed double-wall that dated to approximately 1400 BC, but when Kathleen Kenyon examined the site later (1950s), she redated Garstang's discovery to about 1550 BC (at least a century earlier than even the earliest date for the exodus). She concluded there was no walled city for Joshua to conquer! Still more recently, Bryant Wood reassessed Kenyon's redating, bringing the destruction level more in line with an early exodus date (ca. 1400 BC).<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Adam Zertal, the excavator, identified the structure as an altar and conceivably the one built by Joshua (cf. Jos. 8:30-35), cf. A. Zertal, "Has Joshua's Altar Been Found on Mt. Ebal?" *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1985), pp. 26-43. As is not unusual, his tentative identification met with objections, see A. Kempinski, "Joshua's Altar--An Iron Age I Watchtower" and "How Can Kempinski Be So Wrong," *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1986), pp. 42-53 and H. Shanks, "Two Early Israelite Cult Sites Now Questioned," *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1988), pp. 48-52.

<sup>45</sup> The Torah (e.g., Dt. 7:1-2, 16; 13:12-16; 20:16-18; Nu. 21:1-3) consigns cities inside the borders of Canaan under the *herem* (= ban), that is, they were to be totally destroyed and irrevocably given over to Yahweh rather than claimed as booty, cf. N. Lohfink, *TDOT* (1986) V.183-184.

<sup>46</sup> A. Ben-Tor and M. Rubiato, "Did the Israelites Destroy the Canaanite City?" *BAR* (May/June 1999), pp. 22-29.

<sup>47</sup> B. Wood, "Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho: A New Look at the Archaeological Evidence," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1990), pp. 44-57.

The jury is still out,<sup>48</sup> though the evidence demonstrates that there was a marked occupation gap at Jericho during Iron I, again suggesting the Israelite ban (cf. Jos. 6:24-26).<sup>49</sup>

The period of the tribal league offers little in the way of artifacts that directly connect with the biblical stories. There are, of course, artifacts recovered from Canaanite culture, and some of the most interesting came from an ivory hoard excavated in Megiddo containing nearly 400 pieces, including combs, a cosmetic bowl shaped like a duck, small caskets, game boards, and an intricately carved knife handle about ten inches long depicting two Canaanite scenes. In one scene, the Canaanite king returns victorious from battle driving a chariot in front of which march two nude circumcised captives that some archaeologists identify as Israelites. We know, of course, that the northern Israelites were subject to just such oppression from indigenous Canaanites (cf. Jg. 4-5). In the other scene, the Canaanite king sits on a cherubim adorned throne drinking from a small bowl while attended by his queen, who offers him a lotus blossom, and a musician playing a lyre.<sup>50</sup>

## David, Solomon and Jerusalem

The relatively short period of the United Monarchy under Saul, David and Solomon, like the period before it, has produced few artifacts that can be directly connected to the biblical stories. This paucity of evidence has led a few historical-critical scholars to doubt that David even existed. (They suggest he was a legendary figure on the order of King Arthur.)<sup>51</sup> However, most archaeologists--even those who do not accept the historical impeccability of the Bible--are confident that David was a real person, and several important inscriptions add archaeological weight to this conclusion. The earliest of these inscriptions comes from the excavation at Tel Dan in northern Galilee, where Avraham Biran uncovered an Aramaic stela in which the king of Damascus celebrated victories over "[Jeho]ram son of Ahab, King of Israel" and "[Ahaz]iah son of [Jehoram, ki]ng of the House of David".<sup>52</sup> This inscription is similar to one on the Moabite Stone, which also may contain a reference to the "House of David".<sup>53</sup> Kenneth Kitchen, a leading Egyptologist, believes he has found

---

<sup>48</sup> See the subsequent debate between Wood and P. Bienkowski, *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1990), pp. 45-49, 68-69.

<sup>49</sup> A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible ca. 10,000-586 B.C.E.* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), p 331.

<sup>50</sup> M. Coogan, "10 Great Finds," *BAR* (May/June 1955), p. 41.

<sup>51</sup> H. Shanks, "Face to Face: Biblical Minimalists Meet Their Challengers," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1997), pp. 26-42, 66.

<sup>52</sup> H. Shanks, "'David' Found at Dan," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1994), pp. 26-39. To be sure, a handful of post-modern scholars have debunked the reading, cf. P. Davies, "'House of David' Built on Sand," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1994), pp. 54-55, but the majority of archaeologists have no significant doubts, cf. A. Rainey, "The 'House of David' and the House of the Deconstructionists," *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1994), p. 47.

<sup>53</sup> The Moabite inscription is less certain, since the critical wording occurs on a damaged portion of the stone, cf. A. Lemaire, "'House of David' Restored in Moabite Inscription," *BAR* (May/June 1994), pp. 30-37.

the expression "the heights of David" at Karnak, an ancient Egyptian temple where the Pharaohs carved on the walls the territories they claimed to have conquered. Sheshonq I (Shishak in the Bible, cf. 1 Kg. 14:25-26), who cut a wide swath through Israel and Judah during the reign of David's grandson, left a victory inscription with over a hundred place names, and the name "the heights of David" may be one of them.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to the inscriptions, the excavations on the east side of the Hill of Ophel offer information about Jerusalem both prior to and during David's period. It should be remembered that Jebus remained a Canaanite stronghold until David conquered it in about 1000 BC (cf. 2 Sa. 5:6-10//1 Chr. 11:4-9). At the time of David's conquest, Jebus was a heavily fortified city built on a ridge with deep valleys on the east, west and south and probably a defense wall at the narrowest point on the north (only about 165' wide at this point). On the northeast side of the ridge, the Jebusites built a massive stepped-stone structure with a huge fill upon which rested a large artificial platform (about 2000 square feet), what probably was the "fortress of Zion" (cf. 2 Sa. 5:7, 9). The huge fill may well have been the *millo*, which in Hebrew means "filling" (cf. 2 Sa. 5:9; 1 Chr. 11:8). This area was of strategic importance for protecting the northern edge of the hill, which was the city's weakest point, and David continued to fortify it as did Solomon (1 Kg. 9:15, 24) and Hezekiah (cf. 2 Chr. 32:5). Just north of the stepped stone structure, Kathleen Kenyon excavated a level of collapse of well-dressed masonry blocks, and among them, she uncovered a Proto-Ionic (or Proto-Aeolic) pilaster capital over four feet wide and probably dating to the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC. It provides a fragmented witness to David's and Solomon's building projects, and it may well be the "lily" design described in 1 Kings 7:19, 22.<sup>55</sup>

Unfortunately, there are no uncontested remains of the first temple constructed by Solomon and later destroyed by the Babylonians.<sup>56</sup> However, the general pattern of the 1<sup>st</sup> temple is similar to that of other temples in the Levant, particularly the one excavated in Tell Tainat, Syria. Both had porticoes with columns,

---

<sup>54</sup> Professor Kitchen does not claim certainty, but he does affirm a high degree of probability, cf. H. Shanks, "Has David Been Found in Egypt?" *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1999), pp. 34-35. What is more certain is that Sheshonq actually invaded Judah and Israel (1 Kg. 14:25-26//2 Chr. 12:2-4), as the inscriptions at Karnak demonstrate as well as the fragment of a stela uncovered at Megiddo bearing the cartouche of Sheshonq, cf. K. Kitchen, "Shishak's Military Campaign in Israel Confirmed," *BAR* (May/June 1989), pp. 32-33.

<sup>55</sup> H. Shanks, "The City of David After Five Years of Digging," *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1985), pp. 22-38, E. Mazar, "Excavate King David's Palace!" *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1997), pp. 50-57, 74 and D. Cole, D. Bahat and H. Shanks, *Jerusalem Archaeology Slide Set* (Washington DC: BAS, 1983), p.12.

<sup>56</sup> There is, however, a case to be made for the lower courses of a retaining wall on the southeast corner of the temple mount that might date all the way back to Solomon. Clearly, there is a difference between the Herodian smooth ashlar south of what is called "the straight joint" and the older ashlar with high, rounded, unpolished bosses and irregular shapes and margins, cf. E. Laperrousaz, "King Solomon's Wall Still Supports the Temple Mount," *BAR* (May/June 1987), pp. 34-44.

a main hall and an antechamber (cf. 1 Kg. 6; 2 Chr. 3).<sup>57</sup> Though the only artifact yet uncovered that may have been used by priests in the first temple is a small pomegranate scepter head,<sup>58</sup> several other features of the 1<sup>st</sup> temple can be reasonably conjectured by similar artifacts excavated elsewhere. The four-horned altar excavated at Beersheba, for instance, recalls the sacrificial procedure of smearing blood on the horns (Ps. 118:27; cf. Lv. 4:7, 18, 25-26) as well as the image of fugitives clinging to the horns in desperation (1 Kg. 1:50-51). The iconography of griffins or cherubim depicting stylized animals with human faces and composite bodies were well-known in the ancient Near East, and the cherubim in the 1<sup>st</sup> temple, patterned after the cherubim in the Tent of Meeting, are described in ways that match the ancient Near Eastern cultural pattern (cf. 2 Chr. 3:10-13).<sup>59</sup> The style of the lampstand in the 1<sup>st</sup> temple, possibly a flaring cylindrical stand with a bowl on its top and pinches for the multiple wicks, may have been an antecedent of the more well-known menorah of the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple period.<sup>60</sup> A fascinating small find in an ancient Jerusalem burial cave, a small rolled-up strip of silver probably worn as an amulet, contained the divine name and testifies to the tetragrammaton, YHWH.<sup>61</sup>

Outside Jerusalem, Solomon fortified his borders in all directions (1 Kg. 9:15-19). The series of casemate fortresses discovered in the central Negev may well be the remnants of this defensive effort.<sup>62</sup>

The northern nation of Israel was wiped out in 721 BC while the first temple was still standing. In lieu of its destruction, refugees from the north fled southward, increasing the size of Jerusalem substantially. This is likely the reason for the building of a huge fortification wall more than 20' thick excavated in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City. The thickness and solidity of the wall no doubt was intended to repel Assyrian battering rams, and the biblical record describes Hezekiah building

<sup>57</sup> A. Mazar, p. 377 and V. Fritz, "What Can Archaeology Tell Us About Solomon's Temple?" *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1987), pp. 38-49.

<sup>58</sup> Dating to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, this single piece of ivory is less than two inches high. Nevertheless, it carries an inscription, partly corrupt, that probably reads, "Belonging to the Temple of the Lord, holy to the priests," cf. A. Lemaire, "Probable Head of Priestly Scepter from Solomon's Temple Surfaces in Jerusalem," *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1984), pp. 24-29.

<sup>59</sup> Cherubim, containing the imagery of human, eagle, lion and bull (cf. Eze. 1:10), were symbols of omniscience and omnipotence, E. Borowski, "Cherubim: God's Throne?" *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1995), pp. 36-41.

<sup>60</sup> C. Meyer, "Was There a Seven-Branched Lampstand in Solomon's Temple?" *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1979), pp. 46-57.

<sup>61</sup> Though dating to about the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, just before Jerusalem's fall, the amulet is one of the earliest inscriptions of the divine name from the 1<sup>st</sup> temple period, cf. G. Barkay, "The Divine Name Found in Jerusalem," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1983), pp. 14-19.

<sup>62</sup> R. Cohen, "The Fortresses King Solomon Built to Protect His Southern Border," *BAR* (May/June 1985), pp. 56-70. The earliest Israelite level of the fortress at Arad may date to Solomon, cf. Z. Herzog, M. Aharoni and A. Rainey, "Arad: An Ancient Israelite Fortress with a Temple to Yahweh," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1987), pp. 16-35. Other archaeologists, however, debate these conclusions, cf. I. Finkelstein, "The Iron Age Sites in the Negev Highlands--Military Fortresses or Nomads Settling Down?" *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1986), pp. 46-53.

just such a wall "outside the city" (2 Chr. 32:5), a project that earned him censure from Isaiah because he had not fully trusted in God to protect the city (cf. Is. 22:8b-11). This "broad wall" probably enclosed the area later called the *Mishneh* [= New Quarter, NIV] and the *Machtesh* [the Market District, NIV] (cf. Zp. 1:10-11).<sup>63</sup>

## Lasting Impressions

During Iron Age II (the period of the divided monarchy) more and more artifacts make direct biblical connections. The most explicit are seals and bullae<sup>64</sup> with identifiable biblical names. One of the most remarkable finds surely must be the hoard of bullae discovered in which three biblical names surfaced, *Baruch* the scribe of Jeremiah, *Elishama'* servant of the king and *Yerahme'el* son of king Jehoiakim (cf. Je. 36:4, 12, 26). A second bulla with Baruch's name on it also has been retrieved, and remarkably, this one even includes a fingerprint. If it is the fingerprint of the man whose name appears on the seal, it is without doubt the closest connection one could hope for from the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, the fingerprint of a man who actually penned part of the Bible (Je. 36:4, 27-28, 32).<sup>65</sup> In addition, two seals with titles known from the latest period of Judah's national life have been found, "[an official] who is over the house" (cf. 1 Kg. 4:6; 16:9; 18:3) and a "Governor of the City" (1 Kg. 22:26; 2 Kg. 23:8; 2 Chr. 34:8).<sup>66</sup> Other bullae or seals recovered elsewhere include one bearing the name of *Gemaryahu ben Shaphan* (cf. Je. 36:10), *Seriah ben Neriah ben Mahseiah* who was the brother of Baruch (cf. Je. 32:12; 51:59) and *Azaryahu ben Hilkiyahu* the high priest (cf. 1 Chr. 6:13; 9:11). The actual signet ring of *Hanan ben Hilkiyahu*, son of the priest who discovered the lost Torah scroll while renovating the temple, has been recovered as well (2 Kg. 22:8).<sup>67</sup> Another impressive signet bears the name of a servant belonging to the northern kingdom's final king, Hosea. Made from orange chalcedony, this seal is perforated so that it can be worn around the neck. Other seals include one belonging to a servant of Jeroboam II of Israel.<sup>68</sup> Also recently recovered is a bulla bearing the actual impression of King Ahaz of Judah (2 Kg. 16:1ff.),<sup>69</sup> no less than six others with the impression of the seal of Hezekiah,

---

<sup>63</sup> A. Mazar, pp. 420 and Cole, Bahat and Shanks, p. 15.

<sup>64</sup> A bulla (pl. bullae) is a small lump of clay with a seal impression. Bullae served as a kind of signature attached to ancient documents to secure and identify them.

<sup>65</sup> H. Shanks, "Fingerprint of Jeremiah's Scribe," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1996), pp. 36-38.

<sup>66</sup> H. Shanks, "Jeremiah's Scribe and Confidant Speaks from a Hoard of Clay Bullae," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1987), pp. 58-65.

<sup>67</sup> T. Schneider, "Six Biblical Signatures: Seals and Seal Impressions of Six Biblical Personages Recovered," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1991), pp. 26-33.

<sup>68</sup> A. Lemaire, "Name of Israel's Last King Surfaces in a Private Collection," *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1995), pp. 48-52.

<sup>69</sup> R. Deutsch, "What We Learn from King Ahaz's Seal," *BAR* (May/Jun 1998), pp. 54-56, 62.

Ahaz' son (2 Kg. 18:1ff.)<sup>70</sup> as well as the seal of Ba'alis, the Ammonite king who plotted the assassination of Gedaliah (Je. 40:13--41:2).<sup>71</sup> While the provenance of some of these seals and impressions is unknown, experts in ancient writing are generally confident of their authenticity.

## The Northern Kingdom

The rupture of the united monarchy upon the death of Solomon was a theological as well as a political crisis. David's and Solomon's centralization of the religion of Israel with the moving of the ark of the covenant and the construction of the 1<sup>st</sup> temple could no longer be upheld. Jeroboam I, the new king in the north, was not about to let his citizens cross the southern border for the pilgrim festivals (1 Kg. 12:26-33)! Instead, he established two religious centers for the northerners at Bethel (the place their ancestor Jacob had named "the house of God, the gate of heaven", cf. Ge. 28:16-17) and Dan (the ancient cult center established by the Danites in the time of the judges, cf. Jg. 18:27-31). Avraham Biran began excavating Tel Dan in 1966,<sup>72</sup> and Dan is the longest single excavation in Israel (it is still ongoing). Uncovered at Dan was an ancient Israelite high place and a masonry sanctuary along with some incense shovels, an incense stand, a oil lamp with seven wicks, some sacred pillars (biblical *massebot*),<sup>73</sup> a four-horned altar and an ashlar block with a rectangular depression probably used for libation ceremonies.<sup>74</sup> Also discovered was a bronze and silver scepter head, possibly for a priest or a king.<sup>75</sup> Of course, the find that generated the most interest was the inscription referring to the "House of David" (see page 27 and footnote 49).

The invasion by Pharaoh Sheshonq I (Shishak in the Bible) in the late 10<sup>th</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> F. Cross, "King Hezekiah's Seal Bears Phoenician Imagery," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1999), pp. 42-45, 60. This seal as well as the five others carried the fascinating iconography of a winged dung beetle pushing a ball, possibly an ancient symbol of the rising sun which often was depicted as a winged sun disk (cf. Mal. 4:2), cf. R. Deutsch, "Lasting Impressions: New Bullae Reveal Egyptian-Style Emblems on Judah's Royal Seals," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 2002), pp. 42-51, 60-61. The same winged sun disks appear on *lamelech* jar handles belonging to the period of Hezekiah. (However, for a different interpretation of the winged beetle, see M. Lubetski, "King Hezekiah's Seal Revisited," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 2001), pp. 44-51, 59.)

<sup>71</sup> R. Deutsch, "Seal of Ba'alis Surfaces," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1999), pp. 46-49.

<sup>72</sup> In 1976, the discovery of a 6" x 10" limestone tablet confirmed the identity of the site, since it contained a bilingual inscription about a person who made a vow to the "god of the Danites", cf. *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1994), p. 31.

<sup>73</sup> Sacred pillars were phallic symbols in the Canaanite fertility cult.

<sup>74</sup> H. Shanks, "Abraham Biran: Twenty Years of Digging at Tel Dan," *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1989), pp. 12-25; A. Biran, "Sacred Spaces," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1998), pp. 38-45, 70; and J. Laughlin, "The Remarkable Discoveries at Tel Dan," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1981), pp. 20-37.

<sup>75</sup> A. Biran, "Tel Dan Scepter Head," *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1989), p. 29-31. In addition to the scepter, a jar handle stamped with the name Zechariah also was found, cf. *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1994), p.32. A Zechariah briefly held the throne for about half a year (2 Kg. 15:8), but since the name Zechariah was so common, a precise link between the jar handle and the king is not possible.

century BC is recorded in 1 Kings 14:25-26, the Karnak inscriptions in Thebes (modern Luxor), and a monument excavated in Megiddo. After Shishak's raid, the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah that emerged upon the death of Solomon were left without serious interference from a superpower until the rise of Assyria. A century later, during the dynasty of Omri in Israel, Ashurnasirpal of Assyria crossed the Euphrates and collected heavy tribute from Carchemish and various cities in Syria. While Israel itself was not affected by this raid, the Assyrians became aware of the nation of Israel so that in Assyrian inscriptions from that time onward, the kingdom of Israel is referred to as *mat-Omri* (= land of Omri) or *bit-Omri* (= house of Omri).<sup>76</sup>

Also important for understanding Omri's reign in a more local way was the discovery of the Stele of Mesha (popularly called the Moabite Stone). Earlier, David had conquered Moab (2 Sa. 8:2, 11-12; 1 Chr. 18:2, 11), but when the Israelite kingdom divided, Moab presumably broke their suzerainty relationship. The Moabite stone records how Omri once more subjugated Moab, but at the end of the reign of Ahab, Omri's son, the Moabites broke free yet again (cf. 2 Kg. 1:1; 3:4-5). Jehoram, Omri's grandson, was unable to reassert his sovereignty over Moab (1 Kg. 3:6-27).<sup>77</sup>

The first two kings of the Omri dynasty, Omri and Ahab, were prolific builders. Omri built Samaria as the capital of the northern nation (1 Kg. 16:23-24), and his son continued the work in Samaria as well as places like Megiddo and Dor. At Megiddo, he built large structures that may have been stables for his horses,<sup>78</sup> an impressive water system, and various other public buildings. He also built massive fortifications at Dor, Hazor, Dan, Beth-Shean and Jezreel, and in some cases, the architecture in the various cities is so similar (e.g., the chambered gates at Dor and Megiddo) that archaeologists speculate that they were designed by the same architect.<sup>79</sup> In Samaria, especially, archaeologists discovered over 500 ivory fragments, possibly part of the "ivory house" Ahab built (1 Kg. 22:39).<sup>80</sup> A century later, Amos would castigate the northern Israelites for their luxury-loving society

---

<sup>76</sup> Hoerth, p. 308.

<sup>77</sup> The discovery and preservation of the Moabite Stone, which contains the longest single inscription uncovered to date, is a fascinating story in its own right. Bedouins brought an Anglican missionary to see the stone in the transjordan in the mid-1800s, but when Europeans tried to acquire it, the people of Dhiban, where the stone rested, heated it in a fire, dashed it with cold water while it was white hot, and cracked it into fragments. They then distributed the pieces among the local Bedouin for talismans. Scholars began obtaining the various pieces, eventually acquiring some 57 fragments (about two-thirds of the stone). It was reconstructed and now rests in the Louvre in Paris, cf. S. Horn, "Why the Moabite Stone was Blown to Pieces," *BAR* (May/June 1986), pp. 50-61.

<sup>78</sup> There has been considerable debate among archaeologists as to whether these tripartite pillared buildings are stables, barracks or storehouses, cf. J. Currid, "Puzzling Public Buildings," *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1992); "Megiddo Stables or Storehouses," and Y. Yadin, "In Defense of the Stables at Megiddo," *BAR* (Sep 1976).

<sup>79</sup> E. Stern, "How Bad Was Ahab?" *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1993), p. 24.

<sup>80</sup> Whether these ivories decorated the walls or were inlaid in furniture is debated, cf. H. Shanks, "Ancient Ivory: the Story of Wealth, Decadence and Beauty," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1985), p. 46.

epitomized in "beds of ivory" and "ivory houses" (Am. 3:15; 6:4). Ivory was a luxury item, since the principle source was the elephant, and all ivory had to be imported.<sup>81</sup>

Not long before Ahab's death, Shalmaneser III of Assyria (858-824 BC) invaded the west, believing the small city-states would be easy prey. He engaged a coalition of kings at Qarqar in 853 BC not far from Damascus. According to his annals, one of the kings he faced was Ahab of Israel, who contributed 10,000 infantry and 2000 chariots to the conflict. The fact that Ahab's forces were among the largest of any of the allied kings suggests that Israel was at this time a powerful kingdom. Shalmaneser boasted of victory, but it is telling that he did not appear in the west again for several years.<sup>82</sup>

After Ahab's death by the vengeful Jehu, a new dynasty emerged in the northern nation. Nevertheless, Jehu of Israel did not escape Assyrian domination. A dozen years after the Battle of Qarqar, Shalmaneser again raided the west, testifying to his victories on the bronze bands of the main palace gates at Balawat, where he claimed to collect tribute from cities in Syria and Palestine.<sup>83</sup> It is likely that Jehu became his vassal at this time, for one of the panels in the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser, excavated in Kalhu (biblical Calah, modern Nimrud) in 1846, shows the new Israelite king bowing low before his Assyrian suzerain and offering tribute of silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden beaker, golden goblets, golden pitchers and other items.<sup>84</sup> Menahem, a later Israelite king (2 Kg. 15:17, 19-20), also is mentioned as a vassal of the Assyrian Tiglath-Pileser III (biblical Pul) in Assyrian inscriptions which boast:

*As for Menahem I overwhelmed him like a snowstorm and he...fled like a bird, alone, and bowed to my feet. I returned him to his place and imposed tribute upon him, to wit: gold, silver, linen garments with multicolored trimmings.*<sup>85</sup>

Hoshea, the last of the Israelite kings, successfully assassinated his predecessor (2 Kg. 15:30), and Tiglath-Pileser installed him as the new king and received yet more tribute according to Assyrian records.

---

<sup>81</sup> P. King, "The Marzeah Amos Denounces," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1988), p. 37.

<sup>82</sup> This conflict is not recorded in the Bible, but an Assyrian record was discovered in the annals of Shalmaneser III, cf. Pritchard, p. 190.

<sup>83</sup> Pritchard, p. 192.

<sup>84</sup> The inscription identifies the tribute-bearing vassal as "Jehu, son of Omri". Jehu, according to the Bible, was not the descendent of Ahab but the arch antagonist of the family of Ahab (cf. 2 Kg. 10:11). However, he may well have been a descendant of Omri through another line, or else the Assyrians simply identified his kingdom by the first ruler with whom they had contact, cf. T. Schneider, "Did Jehu Kill His Own Family?" *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1995), pp. 26-33, 80.

<sup>85</sup> Pritchard, p. 193; Hoerth, p. 333.

*They overthrew their King Pekah and I placed Hoshea as king over them. I received from them ten talents of gold, one thousand talents of silver as their tribute, and brought them to Assyria.*<sup>86</sup>

Eventually, of course, the northern nation was wiped out by the Assyrians in 721 BC. Hoshea had attempted to break his vassalship with Assyria by appealing to Egypt for support (2 Kg. 17:3-6). The Assyrian response was quick and final. In Sargon II's inscriptions, after a three year siege, he claimed to be the "conqueror of Samaria" and responsible for deporting 27,290 of its citizens.<sup>87</sup>

## **The Southern Kingdom**

Though Judah, the southern kingdom, had Israel as a buffer between themselves and the encroaching Assyrians, the southern kingdom was not exempt from this threatening superpower. By the time of Hezekiah, the buffer was gone, and Judah's name begins to appear in Assyrian tribute lists along with Ammon, Moab, Edom and Byblos.

The prophets, of course, considered the Assyrian threat to be a direct judgment of God for Judah's syncretism with the Ba'al fertility cult. Excavated remains support this story of the mixing of Yahweh religion with Ba'al mythology. The name of Yahweh appears in blessings side by side with the names Ba'al and Asherah, suggesting that not everyone in Judah was committed to pure Yahwehism.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, a Hebrew blessing on a tomb wall near Hebron contained the eclectic phrase, "Blessed by Yahweh and by his Asherah".<sup>89</sup> The term Asherah refers to the female consort of Ba'al, often stylized by a symbolic tree or tree trunk. The iconography of Asherah was well-known throughout all the ancient Near Eastern fertility cults.<sup>90</sup> To be sure, some of Judah's kings did their best to expunge such syncretism from their citizens (cf. 2 Kg. 18:3-4; 23:4-20), and archaeological evidence of smashed idols supports the biblical account of religious purges. Excavations at Kitmit and Jerusalem, for instance, both yielded examples of deliberately smashed figurines.<sup>91</sup> Still, folk religion was stubborn, and while worship was supposed to be conducted at the Jerusalem temple alone, archaeologists have

---

<sup>86</sup> Pritchard, p. 194; Hoerth, p. 335.

<sup>87</sup> Pritchard, p. 195. The invasion against Samaria began under Shalmaneser V, but apparently it was completed by Sargon II.

<sup>88</sup> Such inscriptions were discovered in southern Judah at Kuntillet 'Ajrud, cf. Z. Meshel, "Did Yahweh Have a Consort?" *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1979), pp. 24-35.

<sup>89</sup> A. Lemaire, "Who or What Was Yahweh's Asherah?" *BAR* (Nov/Oct 1984), pp. 42-51

<sup>90</sup> R. Hestrin, "Understanding Asherah: Exploring Semitic Iconography," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1991), pp. 50-59.

<sup>91</sup> R. Cohen and Y. Yisrael, "Smashing the Idols," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1996), p. 49.

discovered a number of shrines and temples to Yahweh outside Jerusalem.<sup>92</sup>

Judah's kings not only are attested by the seals and bullae described earlier (see pages 29-30), but also in relics containing rosettes, the symbol of royalty,<sup>93</sup> and nearly 4000 *l'melekh* jar handles that have surfaced from the period of Hezekiah. All of them bear the stamp of either a winged scarab or a winged solar disk, additional symbols of royalty.<sup>94</sup> Burial caves dating to the 1<sup>st</sup> temple period have been excavated in the City of David, and they may have contained the remains of some of Judah's kings (2 Chr. 16:14; 32:33).<sup>95</sup> The fragment of a letter on an ostrakon excavated in Judah's Arad may even have been from the newly ascended Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah.<sup>96</sup>

While some of these artifacts from Judah's kingdom period are debatable, what is bedrock certainty is that during the reign of Hezekiah, Sennacherib of Assyria invaded Judah and put Jerusalem to siege.<sup>97</sup> In the Sennacherib prism, which dates to about 689 BC, the Assyrian overlord boasted that when Hezekiah attempted to break his suzerainty treaty with Assyria, Sennacherib invaded Judah with terrific force (2 Kg. 18:13-16). He captured 46 of Judah's fortress cities using battering rams, infantry, and siege machines, he deported more than 200,000 of Judah's citizens, and he claimed to have trapped Hezekiah "like a bird in a cage."<sup>98</sup> Assyrian lists of officials contain the titles of two of the Assyrian spokesmen mentioned in the biblical accounts (cf. Kg. 18:17; Is. 36:2), the Tartan (*tartanu*) and the Rabshakeh (*rabsaqe*). The fury of the Assyrian war machine is vividly portrayed in the bas-reliefs Sennacherib commissioned for his palace (nearly 70 linear feet of them!), which describe his conquest of Lachish, the site at which Sennacherib established his battle headquarters (2 Kg. 18:14, 17; Is. 36:1-2; 2 Chr. 32:1). These reliefs subsequently were excavated at Nineveh. Currently housed in the British Museum, the large stone panels depict the siege ramps and machines used to breach the walls. Excavations at

<sup>92</sup> E. Stern, "Pagan Yahwehism: The Folk Religion of Ancient Israel," *BAR* (May/June 2001), pp. 20-29.

<sup>93</sup> J. Cahill, "Royal Rosettes: Fit for a King," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1997), pp. 48-57, 68-69.

<sup>94</sup> R. Deutsch, "Lasting Impressions," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 2002), pp. 42-51, 60-62.

<sup>95</sup> H. Shanks, "Have the Tombs of the Kings of Judah Been Found?" *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1987), pp. 54-56. The important thing about these tombs is that they are inside the city wall, and except for the burial sites of royalty, tombs normally were outside city walls in the interests of Israelite purity laws, cf. H. Shanks, "Is This King David's Tomb?" *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1995), pp. 62-67.

<sup>96</sup> Archaeologists do not agree over this inscription, since the fragmented message does not contain the name of a king nor the full message, cf. H. Shanks, "Letter from a Hebrew King?" *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1980), pp. 52-56.

<sup>97</sup> Everyone agrees that Sennacherib invaded Judah in 701 BC, and some suggest that he also invaded again in 688 BC, cf. W. Shea, "Jerusalem Under Siege: Did Sennacherib Attack Twice?" *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1999), pp. 36-44, 64. Others object to this two-invasion theory, cf. M. Cogan, "Sennacherib's Siege of Jerusalem: Once or Twice?" *BAR* (Jan/Feb 2001), pp. 40-45, 69.

<sup>98</sup> Pritchard, pp. 199-201.

Lachish bear out this devastation.<sup>99</sup> While the Assyrians were building a siege ramp against the southwest corner of the city wall, the defenders were building a counter ramp inside the wall.<sup>100</sup> Links from a large chain were found, probably used by the defenders to attempt to disable the battering ram.<sup>101</sup> Some years later, of course, Lachish again figured in the last gasp of the nation as Nebuchadnezzar invaded and brought Judah to her national death. The famous Lachish Letters (see page 9) testify to the last two fortress cities holding out against the Babylonians, and both are mentioned by Jeremiah (cf. Je. 34:7).<sup>102</sup>

## The Exile and Return

In the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century BC, it would have been hard for anyone to envision a world where the most formidable superpower was not Assyria. Under Ashurbanipal (668-621 BC), the Assyrian empire reached its zenith. In 667 BC, the Assyrians sailed up the Nile to attack Thebes, which surrendered, and when the Egyptians later tried to rebel, Ashurbanipal destroyed Thebes in 663 BC. Hence, the ensuing political events of the late 7<sup>th</sup> century BC were all the more surprising. After Ashurbanipal's death, the empire suffered a series of weak rulers and defeats. The Babylonians drove out the Assyrians in 620 BC. Nebopolassar of Babylon destroyed Asshur in 614 BC, Nineveh in 612 BC, and killed Ashur-uballit of the Assyrian refugee government three years later. By 605 BC, Egypt, the last supporter of the Assyrian regime, was defeated at Carchemish.

## The Babylonians

Various cuneiform documents describe this shift of power from Assyria to Babylon and its consequences. The Babylonian Chronicle describes the fall of Nineveh, an event predicted by the prophet Nahum (1:1, 8, 14; 3:8-11).<sup>103</sup> Another text describes the surrender of Jerusalem to Babylonian suzerainty in 597 BC, along

---

<sup>99</sup> D. Ussishkin, "Answers at Lachish," *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1979), pp. 16-39 and H. Shanks, "Destruction of Judean Fortress Portrayed in Dramatic Eighth-Century B.C. Pictures," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1984), pp. 48-65.

<sup>100</sup> The Assyrian siege ramp was more than 200' wide at its base and extended more than 150' to an outer revetment wall. Once the Assyrians had gained the revetment wall, they extended the ramp to the main city wall, which was about 17' thick at this point, cf. D. Ussishkin, "Defensive Judean Counter-Ramp Found at Lachish in 1983 Season," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1984), pp. 66-73.

<sup>101</sup> The battering rams swung on pivots, back and forth, to batter the wall. A chain (also depicted in Sennacherib's bas-reliefs) was lowered by the defenders to catch the ram and jerk it upward, thus deflecting its force, cf. Y. Yadin, "The Mystery of the Unexplained Chain," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1984), pp. 65-67.

<sup>102</sup> R. Wright, "Lachish and Azekah Were the Only Fortified Cities of Judah that Remained," *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1982), pp. 72-73 and O. Borowski, "Yadin Presents New Interpretation of the Famous Lachish Letters," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1984), pp. 74-77.

<sup>103</sup> Pritchard, pp. 202-203.

with the deportation of Jehoiachin and the installation of Zedekiah as a puppet king (cf. 2 Kg. 24:8-17; 2 Chr. 36:9-10; Je. 22:24-30). Still another describes the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, an event well-detailed in the Old Testament (cf. 2 Kg. 25//2 Chr. 36:15-21; Je. 39, 52).<sup>104</sup> The thoroughness of the Babylonian destruction of Judah and her neighbors is well illustrated by the excavations of Ashkelon in ancient Philistia, one of the cities bearing the brunt of the Babylonian war machine. Not only is the overthrow of Ashkelon attested in the Babylonian Chronicle, the archaeological investigation shows that the Babylonians turned this major metropolis to a heap of ruins (cf. Je. 47:4-5). Among the artifacts discovered were rooftop incense stands (cf. Je. 32:29), charred wheat, smashed pottery, vitrified brick and collapsed roofs. In one of the bazaar shops, the skeleton of a 35 year-old woman who sought to hide from the attackers was found with her legs recoiled in terror and her arm upraised to protect her head. Her skull bears evidence of being clubbed to death.<sup>105</sup>

The land of Judah after the Babylonian destruction was largely uninhabited until the Persian period, a so-called "Babylonian Gap." The Babylonians did not attempt to reverse their destruction, and in their invasion they destroyed the infrastructure of trade and economic stability. Those left in the land were reduced to abject poverty.<sup>106</sup>

The city of Babylon on the Euphrates, the new home of the Jewish exiles, must have seemed glittering. Babylonian administrative records name Jehoiachin and his sons as dependents in Babylon (cf. Je. 52:31-34; 2 Kg. 25:27-30).<sup>107</sup> Excavations of the city of Babylon have yielded impressive finds that date to the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II. It was a capital with vast fortifications (an outer ring of walls about 11 miles long), streets (laid out in accordance with wind directions), canals, temples and palaces. Eight gates were located by archaeologists and partially excavated, the most famous being the Ishtar Gate with its glazed brick reliefs depicting dragons (symbols of the god Marduk), lions (symbols of the goddess Ishtar), bulls (symbols of the god Adad) and geometrical designs.<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> Pritchard, p. 203.

<sup>105</sup> L. Stager, "The Fury of Babylon," *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1996), pp. 56-69, 76-77.

<sup>106</sup> E. Stern, "The Babylonian Gap," *BAR* (Nov/Dec 2000), pp. 45-51, 76. There is some debate about the extensiveness of the Babylonian Gap, cf. E. Stern and J. Blenkinsopp, "The Babylonian Gap Revisited," *BAR* (May/June 2002), pp. 36-39, 55. Furthermore, there is some evidence of continued life at Mizpah somewhat north of Jerusalem, which suggests that some vestige of Jewish life continued after the exile, cf. Mazar, pp. 548-549; J. Zorn, "Mispah: Newly Discovered Stratum Reveals Judah's Other Capital," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1997), pp. 28-38, 66. On the whole, however, it cannot be questioned that the Babylonian devastation was thorough.

<sup>107</sup> Pritchard, p. 205.

<sup>108</sup> E. Klengel-Brandt, "Babylon," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, ed. E. Meyers (New York: Oxford University, 1997) 1.251-256. The Ishtar Gate has been partially reconstructed and resides in the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin. Glazed brick portions of the gate also can be found in the Royal Ontario Museum (Toronto) and the Detroit Institute of Arts.

## The Persians

As impregnable as Babylon may have seemed, the empire lasted a relatively short time. After Nebuchanezzar's 42-year reign, a series of weak successors culminated with the rule of Nabonidus, who spent several years campaigning in Arabia. During his absence, his son, Belshazzar, ruled the city of Babylon, as attested in the Nabonidus Chronicle. Cyrus later would belittle Belshazzar as "a weakling."<sup>109</sup>

Cyrus the Great brought the Babylonian Empire to its knees. After becoming the ruler of both Media and Persia, he began his expansion westward, eventually bringing most of the East under his control and leaving only an unsupported Babylonia. Nabonidus could hardly ignore such events, and when Cyrus attacked the city of Babylon itself, Nabonidus determined to return to defend it. He arrived too late. The city already had fallen in 539 BC as attested on the Cyrus Cylinder, a lengthy inscription on a clay barrel detailing the fall of the city, and when Nabonidus arrived he immediately was arrested.<sup>110</sup>

One of Cyrus' initial policies was to allow displaced peoples in his new empire to return to their ancestral homes to rebuild their sacred temples, also attested on the Cyrus Cylinder.<sup>111</sup> Just as predicted in the Book of Isaiah (cf. 44:28--45:1), this new policy directly affected the Jewish exiles. They were allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple (cf. Ezr. 1:2-3; 6:3-5; 2 Chr. 36:22-23). Many Jews, of course, did not return to Jerusalem, but remained in Jewish communities in Persia. A later Persian king, Xerxes, would figure significantly in the story of Esther.

Excavations in the ancient cities of Persia, especially Susa and Persepolis, have yielded impressive artifacts and architectural structures that date to the Persian period following the Jewish return to Jerusalem. These include the tomb of Cyrus at Pasargadae, the Behistun monument southwest of ancient Ecbatana, the Tripylon Relief that shows Darius on his throne with his son, Xerxes, standing behind him, the massive platform with an impressive stairway leading to the reception hall at Persepolis, various drinking horns (rhytons), a bull capital from the royal audience hall in Susa, and various reliefs depicting Persian and Median figures and life in the empire.<sup>112</sup>

## Rebuilding Jerusalem and the Second Temple

Cyrus' decree of repatriation, of course, meant that exiled Jews could return to Jerusalem and Judah. Many took advantage of this generosity, traveling back to their

---

<sup>109</sup> A. Millard, "Daniel and Belshazzar in History," *BAR* (May/June 1985), pp. 72-78.

<sup>110</sup> Pritchard, pp. 206-208.

<sup>111</sup> Pritchard, p. 208.

<sup>112</sup> J. Thompson, *The Bible and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), pp. 191-209; Hoerth, pp. 388-400.

homeland under the leadership of Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah. With much difficulty, the returned exiles rebuilt the great altar, a second temple on the site of the original one, and the protective walls of Jerusalem. Unfortunately, very little evidence of this second temple has been retrievable.<sup>113</sup> As to the second temple itself, considerable theorizing and debate have sought to fix its precise location and alignment without any clear consensus.<sup>114</sup> The Ritmeyers' theory, currently one of the most popular, puts the Ark of the Covenant squarely within the Dome of the Rock and pinpoints a rectangular depression in the bedrock as the most likely place where the ark may have rested in the first temple.<sup>115</sup> Of course, the second temple had no Ark, so the same depression would have remained empty throughout the second temple period.

One of the remaining mysteries is the fate of the ark of the covenant. To be sure, the Babylonians burned the temple, and conceivably the ark perished in the fire (2 Kg. 25:9). However, the Babylonians also retrieved all the valuable temple vessels (2 Kg. 25:13-17; cf. Da. 5:1-4), and is it likely that they overlooked a box plated with pure gold? Jeremiah predicted that after the exile the ark no longer would be remembered nor would another one be made (Je. 3:16), and as subsequent history bears out, the second temple had no ark. Nevertheless, several traditions remain about what happened to it. The oldest of these is that the ark, along with the altar of incense, was hidden by Jeremiah in a cave to remain undisclosed until some unknown future time (2 Maccabees 2:4-8). A most persistent tradition is that the ark was removed to Ethiopia, stopping along the way at an island called Elephantine in the Nile River.<sup>116</sup> This theory that lies behind the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. In truth, no one knows what happened to the ark or even if it survived.

Nehemiah, one of the Jews who did not return to Judah in the first flush of excitement after Cyrus' decree, later became deeply concerned about Jerusalem's security (Ne. 1:2--2:8). Gaining an appointment as governor of Jerusalem, Nehemiah

---

<sup>113</sup> Possibly the so-called "straight joint" (see footnote #53) dates to the early second temple period. While some scholars put the joint as early as Solomon, most attribute it to sometime between 400 and 100 BC. The temple mount's western wall ("wailing wall") dates from Herod's reconstruction of the second temple and is not one of the retaining walls built by Zerubbabel.

<sup>114</sup> One can trace features of the debate in various issues of *BAR*: A. Kaufman, "Where the Ancient Temple of Jerusalem Stood," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1983), pp. 40-59; K. and L. Ritmeyer, "Reconstructing Herod's Temple Mount in Jerusalem," *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1989), pp. 23-42; L. Ritmeyer, "Locating the Original Temple Mount," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1992), pp. 24-45, 64-65; D. Jacobson, "Sacred Geometry: Unlocking the Secret of the Temple Mount," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1999), pp. 44-53, 62-63 and (Sep/Oct 1999), pp. 54-63, 74; L. Ritmeyer and A. Kaufman, "Where Was the Temple? The Debate Goes On," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 2000), pp. 52-61, 69, 72.

<sup>115</sup> L. Ritmeyer, "The Ark of the Covenant: Where It Stood in Solomon's Temple," *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1996), pp. 46-55, 70-73.

<sup>116</sup> E. Isaac, "Is the Ark of the Covenant in Ethiopia?" *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1993), pp. 60-63; B. Porten, "Did the Ark Stope at Elephantine?" *BAR* (May/Jun 1995), pp. 54-67, 76-77.

began and completed the task of repairing the city's fortification walls (2:9--6:15). Excavations in Jerusalem by Kathleen Kenyon (1960s) and later Yigal Shiloh indicate that Nehemiah reconstructed walls in approximately the same area as Solomon's Jerusalem but did not extend them to the size they had been under Hezekiah, especially on the western slope. Remnants of the eastern wall have been excavated on the crest of the Hill of Ophel, including a square-cornered tower and portions of additional new wall elements. Nehemiah's wall is about 100' up the slope from the earlier city wall, and Nehemiah incorporated into his fortifications the upper part of the stepped stone structure (see p. 27).<sup>117</sup>

## Changes in Jewish Life After the Exile

Several features of Jewish life changed after the exile. For one thing, the Jewish remnant seems to have purified itself from its fascination with paganism. The discovery of *favissae* (singular, *favissa* = burial pit for votive objects), in which the buried figurines were deliberately broken and buried, suggest that after the return from exile, the Jews no longer tolerated cultic figurines.<sup>118</sup>

Another change was the development of synagogues, which became an enduring institution alongside the second temple and later. The precise origin of synagogues is vague. Rabbinic sources offer no certain clues, and some Jewish Targums as well as Josephus seem to imply that they were in existence from the very beginning of the Jewish people. Most scholars, however, believe that synagogues developed after the exile, possibly in Babylon after the Jews were deprived of the first temple. The Hebrew Bible does not mention them at all, unless they are implied in Psalm 74:8.<sup>119</sup> In any case, they were a well-established institution by the time of Jesus, both among the Jews and the Samaritans.<sup>120</sup> They are mentioned many times in the gospels, and a plaque called the Theodotus Inscription, found in an ancient cistern, refers to a synagogue built about 100 BC. Synagogues that existed before the crushing of the 1<sup>st</sup> Jewish revolt in AD 70 have been found at Masada, Herodium and Gamla<sup>121</sup> and possibly at Capernaum, Jericho and Migdal.<sup>122</sup>

Yet another change was in language itself. Before the Babylonian captivity, a Hebrew script now called paleo-Hebrew was used by the Jews. When the exiles

---

<sup>117</sup> D. Cole, D. Bahat and H. Shanks, *Jerusalem Archaeology Slide Set* (Washington D.C.: BAS, 1983), pp. 16-17.

<sup>118</sup> E. Stern, "What Happened to the Cult Figurines?" *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1989), pp. 22-29, 53-54.

<sup>119</sup> I. Sonne, *IDB* (1962) 4.478-480.

<sup>120</sup> R. Pummer, "How to Tell a Samaritan Synagogue from a Jewish Synagogue," *BAR* (May/Jun 1998), pp. 24-35.

<sup>121</sup> J. Rousseau and R. Arav, *Jesus and His World: An Archaeological and Cultural Dictionary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), pp. 268-272.

<sup>122</sup> The latter three are more debatable, cf. H. Shanks, "Is It or Isn't It--a Synagogue?" *BAR* (Nov/Dec 2001), pp. 51-57.

returned from Babylon, they brought back with them the new Aramaic language and the new Aramaic square script, both of which were in common usage in Persia. Two of the latest books of the Hebrew Bible contain significant sections written in Aramaic, Ezra and Daniel. Up until the time of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Jewish revolt (AD 135), Jewish scribes used both scripts, but afterwards, the older paleo-Hebrew script died out entirely (except for the Samaritans).<sup>123</sup>

The archaeology of the Old Testament concludes with the intertestamental period, when the Jewish people successively passed from the Empire of Persia to the Empire of Greece and finally the Empire of Rome. The archaeology of the intertestamental period, however, more properly belongs as part of the background of the New Testament.

## Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls

Without doubt, the most important archaeological discovery in recent times bearing directly upon the text of the Bible is the collection of manuscripts popularly called the Dead Sea Scrolls. In late 1946 or early 1947, Bedouin shepherds, while chasing a wandering goat, chanced upon what later came to be known as Cave 1 near the Dead Sea. In it, they found a number of clay jars containing manuscripts, most copied on skins but some also copied on papyrus. Shortly, the newly discovered scrolls began appearing on the antiquities market. A lengthy story of exploration, intrigue, war, the independence of the State of Israel, antiquities dealers, scholars and soldiers punctuate the full discovery and collection of the scrolls, several hundred in all recovered from multiple caves.<sup>124</sup> The various scrolls can be categorized in four groupings:

<i>Canonical Scriptures</i>	Hebrew copies of biblical books, including portions from all the books in the Hebrew Bible except Esther
<i>Apocrypha</i>	from the deuterocanonical books
<i>Extra-canonical Scriptures</i>	from the pseudepigrapha
<i>Sectarian documents</i>	apparently produced by the community itself and relating specifically to the community's beliefs and community life

---

<sup>123</sup> J. Siegel, "The Evolution of Two Hebrew Scripts," *BAR* (May/June 1979), pp. 28-33.

<sup>124</sup> Details of this story can be found in Y. Yadin, *The Message of the Scrolls* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957).

Near the site of the various caves lay Khirbet Qumran, the ruins of an ancient community uninhabited for nearly two millennia. The site was surveyed and excavated over five seasons in 1951 and 1953-1956.

Was there a connection between the scrolls and the residents of this ancient community? Circumstantial evidence has convinced most scholars that indeed there was a connection. The dating of the manuscripts by paleographic, linguistic, textual and radio-carbon techniques put them between the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and the Second Jewish Revolt. The caves containing the scrolls are in the immediate vicinity of Qumran. Furthermore, archaeological evidence of iron arrowheads and a layer of ash demonstrates that the community was violently destroyed. Based upon dated coins in the destruction level, the time of this termination can be fixed at about AD 68, during the First Jewish Revolt. The pottery in the caves matches the pottery in Qumran. The buildings at Qumran were not constructed for families, but rather, for community services (a common kitchen, common refectory, common artisan's quarter, etc.), while the scrolls describe community ideology. A large cemetery has been discovered with about 1200 graves, suggesting the burial grounds for a community. Furthermore, a rectangular building contained several inkwells, where scrolls might have been copied. In short, the manuscripts seem to explain the community, and the community seems to explain the manuscripts. Furthermore, the location of the buildings at Qumran seem to correspond to statements made by Pliny the Elder about a group of sectarian Jews called the Essenes.<sup>125</sup> All these factors combine to yield the picture of Qumran as a community of Essenes who withdrew from Jewish society and established a commune. The members wrote their own copies of the Scriptures as well as other documents, and just before they were attacked by the Roman legions, they hid their precious scrolls in the surrounding caves, doubtless hoping to survive the conflict so as to recover them later.<sup>126</sup>

## The Debate About Qumran

In spite of the commonly accepted picture described above, the question about the relationship between Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls is still under debate. The suggestion that Qumran was inhabited by monastic Essenes has been challenged, and

---

<sup>125</sup> Pliny's comments are as follows: *On the west side of the Dead Sea, but out of range of the noxious exhalations of the coast, is the solitary tribe of the Essenes, which is remarkable beyond all the other tribes in the whole world, as it has no women and has renounced all sexual desire, has no money, and has only palm-trees for company. Day by day the throng of refugees is recruited to an equal number by numerous accessions of persons tired of life and driven thither by the waves of fortune to adopt their manners. Thus through thousands of ages (incredible to relate) a race in which no one is born lives on forever: so prolific for their advantage is other men's weariness of life! Lying below the Essenes was formerly the town of Engedi, second only to Jerusalem in the fertility of its land and in its groves of palm-trees, but now like Jerusalem a heap of ashes. Next comes Masada, a fortress on a rock, itself also not far from the Dead Sea. This is the limit of Judea, cf. Natural History, V.xv.73.*

<sup>126</sup> J. Carmignac, *ISBE* (1988) IV.13-18 and W. LaSor, *ISBE* (1979) I.883-897.

alternative explanations have been offered for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that not a single fragment of a Dead Sea Scroll has been discovered in the ruins of Qumran itself. Alternative theories included the suggestion that Khirbet Qumran was a luxurious winter villa for wealthy Jerusalemites (based upon the discovery of delicate glass perfume containers, elegant stone urns, impressive column bases, and sherds of fine pottery) or that it was a military fortress (based upon the excavation of a fortified tower) or that it was a commercial rest stop for travelers in the spice trade.<sup>127</sup> Some argue that the Essenes were located not at Qumran but at Ein Gedi, some miles south of Qumran.<sup>128</sup>

Nevertheless, in spite of ongoing debate, the explanation that Qumran was the site of the community who produced the scrolls still holds the edge. The discovery of three inkwells at Qumran in a single room, which are relatively rare in any case, and more inkwells from adjacent rooms suggests that considerable writing took place.<sup>129</sup> An important ostrakon excavated at Qumran and deciphered by two of the world's leading paleographers describes the transfer of an estate to the "Community", the same term used in the scrolls to refer to the communal group.<sup>130</sup> Only time will tell if future data will confirm or raise further doubts about this majority theory.

Nevertheless, some things seem reasonably clear about Qumran. It certainly was a Jewish settlement, as the excavated ritual baths (*miqva'ot*) and multiple vessels for maintaining purity laws indicate. It certainly was a part of Judea in the late second temple period. It certainly was remote from the mainstream of Jewish civilization. It certainly was destroyed by the Romans in the First Jewish Revolt. Even archaeologists who debate the broader details can agree on this much.<sup>131</sup>

## The Scrolls and the Scholars

Since all the scrolls were discovered in the caves near Qumran over a period of several years, scholars began coding the various scrolls and fragments after the numerical sequence of the cave discoveries. Hence, 1Q is the prefix for scrolls discovered in Cave 1, 4Q in Cave 4, 6Q in Cave 6 and so forth. Other code letters

---

<sup>127</sup> H. Shanks, "The Qumran Settlement: Monastery, Villa or Fortress?" *BAR* (May/June 1993), pp. 62-65. For a refutation of the villa theory, see J. Magness, "Qumran: Not a Country Villa," *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1996), pp. 38-47, 72-73. For the "motel" theory, see A. Crown and L. Cansdale, "Qumran: Was It An Essene Settlement?" *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1994), pp. 24-35, 73-78.

<sup>128</sup> H. Shanks, "Searching for Essenes at Ein Geidi, Not Qumran," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 2002), pp. 18-27.

<sup>129</sup> S. Goranson, "Qumran--The Evidence of the Inkwells," *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1993), p. 67 and "Qumran: A Hub of Scribal Activity," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1994), pp. 36-39.

<sup>130</sup> F. Cross and E. Eshel, "The Missing Link," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1998), pp. 48-53, 69. However, it should be noted that this reading is contested, cf. A. Yardeni, "Breaking the Missing Link," *BAR* (May/June 1998), pp. 44-47.

<sup>131</sup> H. Shanks, H. Eshel, J. Magness, J. Patrich and Y. Hirschfeld, "The Enigma of Qumran," *BAR* (Jan/Feb. 1998), pp. 24-37, 78-84.

indicate aspects of particular scroll's content. 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, for instance, refers to the first scroll of Isaiah found in Cave 1. 1QpHab refers to the commentary on Habakkuk found in Cave 1 (p = peshar or commentary). 4QpSam<sup>a,b,c</sup> refer to copies of Samuel found in Cave 4. 6QD refers to the Damascus Document found in Cave 6. As scrolls were discovered, they were archived in the Palestine Archaeological Museum (since 1967, the Rockefeller Museum). Following is a summary of the more important scrolls and where they were found:

<i>Cave 1</i>	1QIsa <sup>a</sup>	full Isaiah scroll containing all 66 chapters
	1QIsa <sup>b</sup>	partial Isaiah scroll
	1QS	Rule of the Community, also called, Manual of Discipline
	1QM	War Scroll
	1QH	Thanksgiving Psalms
	1QpHab	Commentary on Habakkuk
	1QapGen	Genesis Apocryphon
<i>Cave 2</i>	18 fragmentary texts of the Old Testament; 15 fragmentary non-biblical texts, including:	
	2Q5	Leviticus 11:22-29
	2Q18	Sirach 6:14-15, 20-31
	2Q19 and 2Q20	Copies of Jubilees
	2Q24	Aramaic description of the New Jerusalem
<i>Cave 3</i>	3 fragmentary biblical texts; 11 fragmentary non-biblical texts,	
	3Q4	Commentary on Isaiah 1:1
	3Q15	The Copper Plaque, also called, The Copper Scroll
<i>Cave 4</i>	The most important cave of all, containing about 15,000 fragments pieced together to reconstruct 584 texts, 127 biblical and the rest non-biblical. They include Semitic originals formerly only known in Greek (e.g., Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs), several copies of the Damascus Document, 1 Enoch in Aramaic, several copies of the Manual of Discipline, fragments from Jubilees, fragments of Tobit, and fragments of Thanksgiving Psalms. Also among them were:	
	4QpNah	Commentary on Nahum
	4Q128-157	phylacteries, mezuzot and targums
	4Q158-186	paraphrases, Old Testament texts and pesharim
	4Q246	"Son of God" text, which speaks of one whom all shall serve called "Son of God" and the "Son of the Most High"
	4Q525	Beatitudes
	4QMMT	collection of deeds of the law

<i>Cave 5</i>	8 biblical texts and 17 non-biblical texts, including: 5Q11                 Manual of Discipline 5Q12                 Damascus Document 5Q15                 Description of the New Jerusalem
<i>Cave 6</i>	7 biblical texts; 24 non-biblical texts, including: 6Q1                    Genesis 6:13-21 6Q2                    Leviticus 8:12-13
<i>Cave 7</i>	19 tiny fragments, all in Greek, including: 7Q1                    Exodus 28:4-7 7Q2                    Letter of Jeremiah 43-44 [= Baruch 6:43-44]
<i>Cave 8</i>	4 biblical texts and one non-biblical hymn
<i>Cave 9</i>	1 papyrus fragment containing six Hebrew letters
<i>Cave 10</i>	1 ostrakon with two Hebrew letters
<i>Cave 11</i>	Similar in importance to Caves 1 and 4, its yields included: 11QpaleoLev        Leviticus 11QPs <sup>a</sup> Psalms Scroll 11QtgJob            Targum of Job 11QTemple <sup>a</sup> Temple Scroll

Since the scrolls were written in ancient Hebrew and Aramaic script, scholars needed to decipher them, a task made increasingly difficult by fragmentation, faded ink, insect destruction and so forth. In the mid-1950s, an international committee of high profile scholars was appointed under the supervision of the Jordanian government to oversee the publication of the scrolls and fragments.<sup>132</sup> Unfortunately, as things turned out, the committee operated informally without any clear rules for procedure. When the Dead Sea Scroll material was divided among them, each scholar gained proprietary rights over his assigned material, and responsibility for its publication now lay entirely to his own initiative without a time table. Even more unfortunate, unpublished materials were locked in university vaults and inaccessible to other scholars. The scholars tended to give only their own trusted graduate students access to the scrolls (for use in doctoral dissertations), and they retained the right to determine who could access the scrolls in the event of their own death.

After 30 years not more than roughly half of the scrolls were published. To exacerbate the situation, John Allegro of England, the one scholar who attempted to

---

<sup>132</sup> Original committee members included Roland de Vaux, Director of Jerusalem's Ecole Biblique, Frank Moore Cross and John Strugnell of Harvard University, and other scholars from Germany, France, Great Britain and Poland.

publish his material quickly, did not produce an adequate analysis of his texts. Criticism of his publication by others ensured that the remaining scholars on the committee would not publish any material until they could be sure it was more or less bullet-proof.<sup>133</sup> By the late 70s, Geza Vermes of Oxford University was lamenting that the tardiness of scholars would likely become the academic scandal of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>134</sup> By the mid-80s, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, following the lead of other notable scholars, began to push for the publication of at least photographs of the unpublished texts so other scholars could have access to them.<sup>135</sup> By the late 80s and early 90s, a veritable barrage of popular but stinging articles urged the Dead Sea Scroll scholars to unlock their vaults.<sup>136</sup> What eventually broke the monopoly on the unpublished scrolls was the work of two scholars from Hebrew Union in Cincinnati, Ben Zion Wacholder and Martin Abegg. Using a concordance assembled by Dead Sea Scrolls scholars in the late 1950s, a concordance that listed in alphabetical order all the words in the non-biblical texts found in Cave 4 (the richest of the caves), they entered all the data into a computer program and reconstructed the texts without ever seeing them. This reconstructed text was published by the Biblical Archaeology Society under the title *A Preliminary Edition of the Unpublished Dead Sea Scrolls--The Hebrew and Aramaic Texts from Cave Four*.<sup>137</sup> The accuracy of the reconstruction was reckoned by experts to be at about 98%.<sup>138</sup> Soon, photographs of the unpublished scrolls were released to the world--for the first time in more than 40 years!<sup>139</sup>

## **Importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls for Translating the Hebrew Bible**

Translators of the Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament) use the Masoretic Text as their primary source. The standard edition of this text, based on the

---

<sup>133</sup> H. Shanks, *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1985) pp. 4-6, 66-70.

<sup>134</sup> G. and P. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective* (London: William Collins, Sons & Co., Ltd., 1977), pp. 23-24.

<sup>135</sup> H. Shanks, "Jerusalem Rolls Out Red Carpet for Biblical Archaeology Congress," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1984), p.18 and "BARlines," *BAR* (May/June 1985), p. 10.

<sup>136</sup> H. Shanks, "At Least Publish the Dead Sea Scrolls Timetable!" *BAR* (May/June 1987), pp. 56-58; "Dead Sea Scrolls Scandal--Israel's Department of Antiquities Joins Conspiracy to Keep Scrolls Secret," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1989), pp. 18-21, 55; "What Should Be Done About the Unpublished Dead Sea Scrolls?" *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1989), pp. 18-22; "New Hope for the Unpublished Dead Sea Scrolls," *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1989), pp. 55-56, 74; "Dead Sea Scroll Variation on 'Show and Tell'--It's Called 'Tell', But No Show," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1990), pp. 18-25; "Dead Sea Scrolls Update" *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1990), pp. 44-49; "Dead Sea Scrolls Update," *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1991), pp. 64-72; "Dead Sea Scrolls Update," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1991), pp. 52-60.

<sup>137</sup> H. Shanks, "Dead Sea Scrolls Update," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1991), pp. 4; "Dead Sea Scrolls Update," *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1991), pp. 62-72; "Dead Sea Scrolls Update," *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1992), pp. 62-70.

<sup>138</sup> H. Shanks, "Computer-Generated Dead Sea Scrolls Texts 98% Accurate," *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1992), p. 70.

<sup>139</sup> E. Tov, "Fragments," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1992), pp. 69-82.

textual tradition of Jewish scholars, is the Leningrad Codex, written in AD 1008.<sup>140</sup> Most translators follow the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, the standardized reprinting of this text with textual notes. In addition to the Masoretic Text, however, other texts also bear upon the translation of the Old Testament. The most important one probably is the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible with copies as old as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. Other ancient translations include the Aramaic Targums and the versions in Syriac, Old Latin, Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian and Arabic.<sup>141</sup> Finally, Jerome's Latin Vulgate and the Samaritan Pentateuch yet offer other witnesses to the text.

Obviously, with the oldest copies of the Hebrew Text only dating back about a thousand years, a question has always lurked in the background: just how accurate was the transmission of this text? To be sure, the traditional Jewish opinion, going back at least to the time of Flavius Josephus in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, was that the Hebrew text had been transmitted through the years without change.<sup>142</sup> At least some early Christians, also, held much the same view. Origen is a good example, who used the then current Hebrew Text correct his Greek manuscripts.<sup>143</sup> Nevertheless, it was apparent that some discrepancies existed, even among medieval Jewish manuscripts. To complicate matters further, the ancient origin and development of the Hebrew language itself was a factor. Excavated ancient Hebrew inscriptions show variations in the development of the language long before the time of Jesus.<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, the ancient text was consonantal (i.e., it had no written vocalization). Jewish scholars began adding vowel points in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, and their work was not standardized until about the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD. In short, the Hebrew Text from which Bible translators worked for translating all the major English Versions until the 20<sup>th</sup> century dated only to about 1000 AD. There was no way to adequately answer the question about the accuracy of transmission other than on the basis of Jewish tradition.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls changed this picture radically. The

---

<sup>140</sup> The published copy of this text, with photographic copies of each page, is D. Freedman et al., eds., *The Leningrad Codex: A Facsimile Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and Leiden: Brill, 1998).

<sup>141</sup> Details about these texts and versions can be found in E. Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, trans. E. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979).

<sup>142</sup> "...for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take anything from them, or to make any change in them," *Contra Apion* 1.8.

<sup>143</sup> In the Hexapla (a six-columned work containing side-by-side the Hebrew Text, a Greek transliteration, the recension of Aquila, the recension of Symmachus, a text of the Septuagint, and the recension of Theodotion)

<sup>144</sup> The most apparent variation is in the style of the letters themselves. Comparisons of the Gezer Calendar, the Stele of Mesha and the Siloam Inscription, all dating to before the exile, are cases in point, cf. *IDB* (1962) 1.89-91. The so-called "square text" of modern Hebrew is much later. To follow the development of the Hebrew Text, see F. Cross, "The Text Behind the Text of the Hebrew Bible," *BR* (Summer 1985), pp. 12-25 and (Fall 1985), pp. 26-29, 33-35.

biblical fragments from Qumran were a thousand years earlier than the oldest copies of the Masoretic Text. Now, the medieval Jewish text of the 11<sup>th</sup> century could be compared to Jewish texts of the 1<sup>st</sup> century and even earlier. To be sure, the Dead Sea Scrolls were not complete texts of the Hebrew Bible. While they contained portions of every book in the Old Testament except Esther, most of these scrolls had suffered deterioration through the centuries. Some, like 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, were complete.<sup>145</sup> Others were fragmented, and the fragments ranged from scrolls containing several complete chapters of biblical books to pieces with only a few alphabetic letters. Some of these fragments were pieced together like a jigsaw puzzle to form larger reconstructed texts, but others were isolated (or at least currently have not been reconstructed). Still, the roughly 170 manuscripts of biblical texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls made possible new avenues of textual criticism. All the scrolls date to between about 250 BC and AD 68.

Several things became immediately clear. First, at the time the Qumran scrolls were copied, there was not single form of the Old Testament text regarded as absolutely authoritative for the community. This was apparent since there were textual variants between different Qumran scrolls of the same biblical book. While by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD scholars can detect an authoritative recension of the Hebrew Bible that is the ancestor of the Masoretic Text, the discoveries at Qumran reveals other text types.<sup>146</sup> Further, the biblical texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls contain variants not found in the Masoretic Text at all.<sup>147</sup> For instance, the Masoretic Text of 1 Samuel 11:1-3 does not include a preceding paragraph found in 4QSam<sup>a</sup>,<sup>148</sup> which reads:

*[Na]hash, king of the children of Ammon, sorely oppressed the children of Gad and the children of Reuben, and he gouged out a[ll] their right eyes and struck ter[r]or and dread in Israel. There was not left one among the children of Israel bey[ond the Jordan who]se right eye was no[t put o]ut by Naha[sh king] of Ammon; except that seven thousand men [fled from] the children of [A]mmon and entered [J]abesh-Gilead. About a month later...*

At the same time, it was equally clear that the agreement between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic Text was extensive. To a large degree, the Dead Sea

---

<sup>145</sup> 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> contained all 66 chapters of Isaiah, and barring a few lines broken off from the bottoms of a few columns, the complete text survived.

<sup>146</sup> F. Cross, *BR* (Summer 1985), p. 19.

<sup>147</sup> The Dead Sea Scrolls texts having the most striking variations from the Masoretic Text are Exodus, Samuel, Jeremiah and Daniel, cf. J. Fitzmyer, S. J., *Responses to 101 Questions on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Paulist, 1992), p. 41.

<sup>148</sup> F. Cross, *BR* (Fall 1985), p. 28.

Scrolls have confirmed the medieval Masoretic Text. There are many spelling differences, but the differences are largely insignificant for the meaning of the texts. Still, the Qumran scrolls demonstrate that the Septuagint was not a careless translation (some had so accused it), and Hebrew precedents were found for a number of variants between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint.<sup>149</sup>

Today, scholars still use the Masoretic Text as the foundation for biblical translation, and rightfully so, since it is a complete text including all the books of the Hebrew Bible. However, translators sometimes are willing to depart from the Masoretic Text by following Dead Sea Scrolls texts, especially if the Dead Sea Scrolls agree with other ancient versions over against the Masoretic Text.

### **The Scrolls and the Sectarians at Qumran**

In addition to their importance for the text of the Hebrew Bible, the scrolls also yield a considerable amount of information about a sectarian branch of Judaism about the time of John the Baptist and Jesus. As mentioned earlier, there is debate about the nature of the Qumran community, but the most widely accepted identification is that Qumran was the site of a sect known as the Essenes, a sectarian group also known from the ancient writings of Philo, Pliny and Flavius Josephus. According to Josephus, the Essenes were a communal group numbering about 4000. While they dedicated gifts to the temple, they rejected temple sacrifice, preferring instead to offer what they considered to be more pure sacrifices of their own.<sup>150</sup> Their dedication to Torah intensification exceeded even that of the Pharisees. Behavioral rules for the community included abstention from marriage, slavery, and private control of their own finances.<sup>151</sup> The jury is still out regarding a precise identification of the Essenes with Qumran, but whether or not such an identification will ever be confirmed, a good deal can be known about the thought, lifestyle and piety of the Qumran community.

It is clear that the group perceived itself to be "a spearhead of the divine purpose for the world."<sup>152</sup> Its members considered themselves to be the rightful heir to a pure Judaism, the fulfillment of prophecy, and the means by which God's will would be accomplished in the last days. Their communal meetings for meals and

---

<sup>149</sup> A case in point is the Book of Jeremiah. The form of Jeremiah is about one eighth shorter in the Septuagint than in the Masoretic Text. However, 4QJer<sup>b</sup> attests to a shorter recension of Jeremiah in Hebrew as well.

<sup>150</sup> The nature of these sacrifices is not completely clear. The Temple Scroll has regulations for various kinds of animal sacrifices, but it also is possible that "pure sacrifices" refer to "the offering of the lips" and "perfection of way" in place of animal sacrifices "to make atonement for the guilt of rebellion and the infidelity of sin" (1QS 9:3-5), cf. Fitzmyer, p. 75 and W. LaSor, *ISBE* (1979) 1.891.

<sup>151</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, trans. W. Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendriksen, 1987), 18.5.

<sup>152</sup> N. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), p. 205.

festivals, their ascetic lifestyle following the religious calendar and the laws of purity, and the preservation of their most precious commodity--the scrolls themselves--testify to the fact that all life was deeply religious. Their community and faith is described in the various sectarian scrolls recovered from the caves.

### **The Community's Origin**

The exact details of the community's origin are obscure. It may have begun during the period of the Maccabean revolt (the 160s BC), or it may have originated somewhat later during the time of the Maccabean leader John Hyrcanus (134-104 BC), when references to other Jewish sects, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees, begin to surface.

The origin of the community is closely connected with a person called the Teacher of Righteousness, a priest of the Zadokite family (1QpHab 2:8), who guided the community in its earliest period (CD 1:11). Though he is not directly described as the founder of the sect, he certainly was a seminal figure near the time of its origin. He was believed to have special insight into the prophetic scriptures (1QpHab 7:5). Though not named and as yet unidentified with any historical figure, he is described in detail (1QpHab 1:13; 2:2; 5:10; 7:4; 8:3; 9:9-10). No Qumran text identifies him as a messianic figure, though he was said to have been persecuted by a "wicked priest" (1QpHab 8:8-11, 16; 9:9; 11:5-8, 12; 12:2, 8; 4QpPsa<sup>a</sup>), whom many scholars believe was Judas' Maccabeus' brother, Jonathan Maccabee, who accepted the office of High Priest after the death of his brother (ca. 162-142 BC).<sup>153</sup> The High Priests who succeeded Jonathan were no better, for they also exploited the people (1QpHab 9:4-7). This disapproval of the Jerusalem priesthood was almost certainly the primary reason the dissidents withdrew into the desert. They sought to prepare the way of the Lord by studying the Torah and maintaining ritual purity so that they could be a "trustworthy house in Israel" (CD 3:19) and a "house of holiness" (1QS 8:5). In a word, the Qumran community itself was viewed as a replacement of the Jerusalem temple.<sup>154</sup>

### **The Community Rule**

Prior to the discovery of the scrolls, it had been common, particularly in Jewish circles, to view the Pharisees as "normative Judaism." To be sure, the Pharisees who survived the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Jewish revolts later came to be normative

---

<sup>153</sup> When Alkimus, considered a true priest from Aaron's family, died in about 160 BC, Jerusalem had no High Priest for about seven years until Jonathan Maccabee was appointed. The High Priesthood later was made hereditary in the Maccabean family, and this was perceived to be a usurpation, cf. D. Russell, *Between the Testaments* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), pp. 30-34.

<sup>154</sup> Fitzmyer, pp. 90-92.

Judaism, but the community at Qumran demonstrates far more theological diversity within Judaism prior to AD 70 than was formerly believed. While the community at Qumran had some points of similarity with the Pharisees, they also had some substantial differences. Like the Pharisees, the Qumran members were careful Torah observers. They bound themselves by oath to follow the Torah scrupulously as well as a Book of Meditation (*sepher hehogi*), probably to be identified with the Temple Scroll found in the caves.<sup>155</sup>

The Temple Scroll (11QTemple<sup>a</sup>) was like a second Torah. The longest single scroll discovered at Qumran (a whopping 27 feet long), it quotes many of the laws in the original Torah, but it also reformulates and sharpens them in the interests of more stringent observance. Many scholars believe that the Temple Scroll was given the same authority as the five scrolls of the Torah and served as a sort of "second Deuteronomy" for the community, that is, a sixth book of Torah.<sup>156</sup> Whether or not this is true, cultic purity was paramount! A unique feature is that this scroll often does not use the name Moses, but rather, attributes the laws directly to God who speaks in the first person without a mediator.

One thing is clear: the community at Qumran envisioned the reconstruction of the temple, and almost half the scroll is occupied with this concern. Precise architectural details are noted. The law of the Temple Scroll was to guide the community until God would usher in a future "day of creation".<sup>157</sup>

In addition to the Temple Scroll, the Manual of Discipline or Rule of the Community (1QS) outlines the rules for communal life. Several copies or fragments were found in the various caves. The manual begins with the aim and purpose of the community as well as procedures for the acceptance of new members. Among the cardinal teachings it outlines is the explanation of two spirits, the spirit of truth and the spirit of iniquity.<sup>158</sup> A code of punishment for infractions of community rules is also included.<sup>159</sup>

Several copies and/or fragments of yet another rule book, CD (the Damascus Document, also called the Zadokite Documents) laid down subsidiary rules. The text of this document already was known before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls,

<sup>155</sup> Fitzmyer, pp. 47-48.

<sup>156</sup> H. Stegemann, "Is the Temple Scroll a Sixth Book of the Torah--Lost for 2,500 Years?" *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1987), pp. 28-29.

<sup>157</sup> Fitzmyer, p. 38.

<sup>158</sup> The spirit of truth is the fountain of enlightenment, goodness, morality, humility and all that is right. The spirit of iniquity is the source of all sin, wickedness, pride, deceit, hypocrisy and the like (1QS 3:15--4:26).

<sup>159</sup> If a member lied about his wealth, for instance, he would forfeit a quarter of his food ration. If he spoke aloud the sacred name of God, he would be summarily expelled from the community with no chance of return. Various other punishments are specified for fraud, gossip, grudges, indecent speech, misconduct in public assembly, inappropriate laughter, and so forth, cf. T. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 57-60.

since copies had been discovered in the Ezra Synagogue of Old Cairo in 1896.<sup>160</sup> Together, the Torah, the Temple Scroll and the Damascus Document superintended the daily life of the community, and all members bound themselves to obey the community's rules.

### **Community Life**

The community was strictly organized according to rank, which in turn was based on spiritual and moral behavior, though members of the priestly caste were given special rank due to pedigree. The highest rank belonged to the Sons of Zadok (or Sons of Aaron). Some fifteen members, three priests and twelve men, were marked out as having special responsibilities (1QS 8.1). Also, the community had a group of judges, four from the tribe of Levi and Aaron and six from the rest of Israel (CD 10:4). In addition, there were 52 "fathers of the congregation" (1QM 2:1) and 26 "heads of the courses", that is, priests who rotated duties (1QM 2:2, 4). A "Prince of the Congregation" also appears in the community documents, though it is unclear what role he played or even if he was a living person or the anticipation of someone yet to come. Each year, the members were mustered, and a person's rank could be reduced or advanced for the next year, depending on moral behavior.

Clearly, the community had broken with the Judaism of Jerusalem and retreated into the desert to prepare the way of the Lord. The text of Isaiah 40:3, which is used in all four Gospels to explain why the ministry of John the Baptist was in the desert (Mt. 3:3//Mk. 1:3//Lk. 3:3-6; Jn. 1:23), was used by the community to describe why it was in the desert (1QS 8:12-16). Its members believed that God had specially chosen them, a choice that required their virtuous withdrawal from other Jews, who, along with the rest of the world, were considered to be the "sons of darkness", while members of the community were the "sons of light." They believed that they had entered the New Covenant described in Jeremiah 31 (CD 6:19; 8:21; 19:34; 20:12).

In general, the daily life at Qumran was Spartan. Communalism included common meals and common counseling. At the common meals, a priest would extend his hand to bless the first-fruits of the bread and the new wine prior to eating (1QS 6:4-5). While women and children could enter the community, the cemetery at Qumran indicates that not many did so. A quorum of ten was a liturgical requirement for communal activities. The community observed the Jewish holy days and Yom Kippur (1QpHab 11:7), though its calendar was different than that of Jerusalem.<sup>161</sup>

---

<sup>160</sup> Fitzmyer, pp. 28-30.

<sup>161</sup> Using an ancient solar calendar of 364 days per year and months with varying days of 30 and 31, the annual festivals at Qumran fell on exactly the same day of the week each year. Passover, for instance, always fell on Wednesday. Yom Kippur always fell on Friday. What we do not know is how the community accounted for the missing 29 hours, 48 minutes and 48 seconds of each year, cf. Fitzmyer, pp. 85-86.

The Sabbath was tightly regulated, and restrictions on such things as picking up a clod of dirt or opening a sealed vessel or walking beyond a thousand cubits outside town were typical (CD 10:14--11:18).

### Community Beliefs

To a large degree, the basic belief system of the community would have resembled Judaism at large. However, the special interpretative methodology developed by the Teacher of Righteousness, "to whom God made known all the mysteries of the words of His servants the prophets" (1QpHab 7:4-5), produced an interpretative tradition (called *peshet*), a hermeneutic that made for some unusual conclusions. On the one hand, the community's view of God was consonant with mainstream Judaism. Yahweh was the Creator, the Lord of history, the God of Israel, and especially, the God of the Qumran sect. The holy name of God was deeply revered, and not only was it not to be uttered, in some of the scrolls the Hebrew letters of the divine name are simply represented by four dots, one for each of the letters in the name  $\text{יהוה}$ . On the other hand, the community held a firm view of the predestination of all things, and probably, a double predestination for the saved and the damned (1QM 15:14-19). This divine determinism was moving history toward a fixed point. Most important, the community believed itself to be the final generation living at the very end of the age (1QSa. 1:1f; CD 1:10-13).

In particular, the War Scroll (1QM) describes the last great conflict between the "sons of light" and the "sons of darkness". An eschatological battle would soon begin, a "day of vengeance" (1QS 10:19) and a "day of slaughter" (1QH 15:17) and "judgment" (1QpHab 13:2ff.). God, his angels and the sons of light would be on one side, while Belial and the sons of darkness would be on the other. Preparations for the war are detailed, with rules about standards, trumpets, shields, infantry, cavalry and weapons. The troops of the sons of light would be organized according to Numbers 2:1--5:4, and they would be led by the archangels Michael, Raphael and Sariel. The sons of darkness would be led by Belial. Total victory, of course, was anticipated for the sons of light.<sup>162</sup> Following the judgment, the new covenant community would live a thousand generations (CD 7:6) and form an eternal house (4QFlor 1:2-7).<sup>163</sup>

Considerable attention has been given to the Qumran concept of the messiah, or more properly, two messiahs. Various Qumran texts describe the coming of a "prophet" (i.e., the prophet like Moses, cf. Dt. 18:18ff.) and a "messiah of Aaron and

---

<sup>162</sup> Fitzmyer, pp. 30-32.

<sup>163</sup> One is tempted, of course, to wonder if the thousand generations in the Damascus Document has any bearing upon the thousand years in the Apocalypse of John (cf. Rev. 20:4-6). For the Qumran community, however, the number "thousand" is derived from Dt. 7:9, where God is said to keep his covenant of love unto a thousand generations.

Israel" (1Qs 9:11; CD 12:23; 14:19; 19:10; 20:1). Most scholars read the scrolls as anticipating two messiahs, one a royal figure from the family of David and the other a priestly figure from the family of Aaron.<sup>164</sup> Though the community used the term messiah to refer to the ancient prophets, they also used the term to refer to an Anointed One(s) who had not yet appeared. One Qumran text is made up of four messianic quotations (Ex. 20:21;<sup>165</sup> Nu. 24:15-17; Dt. 33:8-11 and Jos. 6:26). Together, they refer to a prophet like Moses, a star identified as a priest, the scepter of David as a royal messiah, and a blessing of Levi (4QTestimonia).

### **The Community Treasure**

One of the most unusual finds at Qumran was what is popularly called the Copper Scroll (3Q15). Technically, it was not a scroll at all, but a copper plaque which had been tightly rolled up in two pieces so that it resembled a scroll. Because the copper had oxidized and was extremely brittle, the piece had to be cut apart between the columns of writing, and when finally opened, it revealed 12 columns of text citing some 64 places where treasures were buried--some 26 tons of gold and 65 tons of silver among other things!

Was this treasure real? The British scholar J. M. Allegro put together an expedition in 1960-61 to search for it and turned up nothing.<sup>166</sup> Since then, scholars have vacillated between taking the description at face value and relegating it to folklore. Today, most scholars probably treat the treasure as real rather than fictional. Many if not most scholars suggest that the treasure did not belong to the Qumran community at all, but rather, to the temple. Perhaps it was hidden during the period between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Jewish revolts (the 60s AD and the 130s AD respectively).<sup>167</sup> In any case, scholars are reasonably certain the amounts of treasure are not beyond the realm of reason when compared to other known treasures of the ancient world.<sup>168</sup> Equally certain, no one has yet discovered a trace of it.

### **Other Community Special Literature**

Among the Qumran documents are several unique works. These include Thanksgiving Hymns (or Psalms), commentaries or interpretations on various Old Testament writings (called the *Pesharim*), and parabiblical literature that expanded

---

<sup>164</sup> LaSor questions this conclusion, however, cf. *ISBE* (1979) 1.892.

<sup>165</sup> The proto-Samaritan Pentateuch combines Ex. 20:21 with Dt. 5:28-29 and 18:18-19 to describe the coming of a prophet like Moses, cf. Fitzmyer, p. 54.

<sup>166</sup> Fitzmyer, p. 36.

<sup>167</sup> This is the conclusion of P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., "The Mysterious Copper Scroll," *BR* (Aug 1992), pp. 34-41, 63-64.

<sup>168</sup> J. Harper, "26 Tons of Gold and 65 Tons of Silver," *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1993), pp. 44-45, 70.

the biblical texts (e.g., the Genesis Apocryphon).

The collection of Hymns form a kind of prayer book for the community. 1QH (H = *Hodayot* or "thanks"), for instance, contains some 25 psalms that resemble the canonical psalms, though they tend to be more wordy. They quote or allude to various Old Testament passages, especially the Servant passages in Isaiah. Since some psalms appear in the first person, some scholars speculate that they may have been written by the Teacher of Righteousness. Philo indicated that the Essenes composed hymns and songs to God, and if the Qumran community was Essene, these hymns are examples. In any case, the hymns serve as samples of praise literature that is unique to the first century.<sup>169</sup>

The *Pesharim* include interpretations of Isaiah, Habakkuk, Micah, Zephaniah, Hosea, Nahum and the Psalms. Each scroll cites the Old Testament text, passage by passage, and then offers a commentary on it that relates the passage to the belief system of the community. It is obvious from the style of commentary that the people who wrote them believed that Old Testament prophets spoke not only of their own times but also of the future Qumran community. Hidden meanings are deciphered, and the highest expert in finding these esoteric meanings was the Teacher of Righteousness himself. While the *Pesharim* may have had several authors, they all used the same interpretive methods of pointing out hidden meanings not obvious in a face value reading of the texts.<sup>170</sup>

Finally, the Genesis Apocryphon is a retelling of the stories of the patriarchs with embellished details. Such details include the color of Sarah's hair and the rigors of Abraham's travels.

## **The Dead Sea Scrolls and John the Baptist**

During the period when many of the scrolls were not publicly available, various conspiracy theories arose about the suppression of the texts in the interests of preserving orthodox Christianity.<sup>171</sup> Since J. T. Milik, Roland de Vaux and others of the original scroll scholars were Christians (Milik and de Vaux were both Roman Catholics, and Milik held the lion's share of the unpublished material), some speculated that information in the unpublished scrolls was being suppressed for fear it would injure traditional Christian thought. It even was suggested that the pope had ordered their suppression to avoid a theological scandal.

Now that the scrolls material has been widely available for several years, the conspiracy theories have mostly died. The scrolls have not proved an embarrassment

---

<sup>169</sup> Fitzmyer, pp. 32-33.

<sup>170</sup> Fitzmyer, pp. 33-34.

<sup>171</sup> One example is M. Baigent and R. Leigh, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* (New York: Summit Books, 1991).

to Christians or the New Testament's record of Jesus. Nevertheless, some important connections have been alleged between some aspects of the Qumran community's belief system and the development of Christianity. Probably the most important of these speculations concerns the possibility that John the Baptist might have been associated with Qumran.

John was from rural Judea (Lk. 1:39), and in the years before his public ministry, he lived in the desert in the same approximate area as Qumran (Lk. 1:80). Might he not have been influenced by the sectarians at Qumran, perhaps even deriving some of his ideas from them? On the surface, at least, the picture of the Jewish sect at Qumran living in the desert, their worldview, and their customs and laws had much in common with John. John clearly preached about righteousness (Mt. 21:32), the advent of the kingdom of God and the coming of God's day of salvation (Mt. 3:1; Lk. 4:6), themes that resonate with the Qumran community's apocalyptic expectations. His concern for righteousness and purity, symbolized in baptism (Jn. 3:25), was not unlike the same emphasis at Qumran and the ritual baptisms in the community *miqva'ot*.<sup>172</sup> The site of John's baptisms probably was not far from Qumran (Jn. 1:28; 3:23).<sup>173</sup> There was a difference, of course, in that John seems to have baptized people only once, whereas the baptisms at Qumran were repeated.

Other themes, also, provide circumstantial evidence of a possible connection between John and Qumran. John looked to the future for a more thorough purification through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:11-12//Mk. 1:7-8//Lk. 3:16-17). Similarly, the Manual of Discipline anticipates a time when "truth will emerge triumphant for the world" and God will "destroy every spirit of perversity from within his [man's] flesh, refining him [i.e., by fire] by the Holy Spirit from all the effects of wickedness. Like waters of purification He will sprinkle upon him the spirit of truth, to cleanse him of all the abominations of falsehood and of all pollution through the spirit of filth" (1QS 4:20-21). Both John and the Qumran community appealed to Isaiah 40:3 to explain their presence in the desert as a way of preparation (Mt. 3:3//Mk. 1:3//Lk. 3:3-6//Jn. 1:23).<sup>174</sup> Like the Qumran community, John

---

<sup>172</sup> The Manual of Discipline (1QS), for instance, speaks of "repentance" and "immersion", explaining the connection between the two. If a candidate was immersed but there were "stains on his repentance," the baptism was ineffective (3:1-9). "Only by a spirit of uprightness and humility" could a candidate's sin be atoned. "No one is to go into water in order to attain the purity of holy men. For men cannot be purified except they repent their evil" (5:13-14).

<sup>173</sup> J. Vanderkam, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and Early Christianity: How are They Related?" *BR* (Dec. 1991), p.21.

<sup>174</sup> The people at Qumran were called to separate themselves from the Jerusalem authorities so that they might "go to the wilderness to prepare there the way of HIM, as it is written: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of .... [the divine name is represented only by four dots], make straight in the desert a road for our God!' (1QS 8:13-15), cf. Otto Betz, "Was John the Baptist an Essene?" *BR* (Dec 1990), p. 22.

practiced asceticism in both food and dress (Mk. 1:6; 2:18; Mt. 11:18). He taught his disciples to recite special prayers (Lk. 11:1), perhaps similar to the Thanksgiving Hymns among the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QH).<sup>175</sup>

In spite of these similarities, John the Baptist is not mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Furthermore, the fact that he was from a priestly family associated with the Jerusalem temple, a temple that the Qumran community had rejected, raises a difficulty. Would not the anti-temple views at Qumran have prevented them from accepting the son of a temple priest? A possible answer comes from Josephus. If the commune at Qumran was Essene, Josephus records that the Essenes took in children to care for and instruct them in their own disciplines.<sup>176</sup> Given the age of Zechariah and Elizabeth (Lk. 1:7), the possibility that John was reared by Essenes cannot be discounted. Hence, various scholars have suggested that John was reared in the tradition of the Essenes, he may well have lived at Qumran before his special call by God, and he left the commune in order to preach near the Jordan River.<sup>177</sup> How much weight should be given to this scholarly speculation? There seems to be no historical or theological reason for rejecting such a possibility. However, speculation is just what it is, and we may never know for certain where John had any direct association with the Qumran community. We should be suspicious, however, of the radical claims that John the Baptist was the leader at Qumran and was buried there in the community cemetery.<sup>178</sup>

### **The Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Possible New Testament Connections**

Apart from John the Baptist, the relevance of the Dead Sea Scrolls for the study of Christianity includes various smaller points. Jesus Christ, of course, is nowhere mentioned in the scrolls, though some have speculated that perhaps he, too, spent time at Qumran. Support for this theory is vague, and at best the question can only be left open.<sup>179</sup> Nothing specifically Christian has been found at Qumran, though

---

<sup>175</sup> Psalms from Cave 11 (11QPs<sup>a</sup>) contain some newly composed prayers inserted into the canonical texts, cf. Betz, p. 24.

<sup>176</sup> *War of the Jews*, 2.8.2 (120).

<sup>177</sup> Betz, p. 25; W. Brownlee, "John the Baptist in the New Light of Ancient Scrolls," *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, ed. K. Stendahl (rpt. New York: Crossroad, 1992), pp. 33-53.

<sup>178</sup> *Time* magazine (August 12, 2002), in typical hype, posed the question, "Have archaeologists discovered the skeleton of John the Baptist?" Reported by the Associated Press, a University of Hartford professor, Richard Freund, who has been excavating at Qumran, released notice that possibly the Teacher of Righteousness was John the Baptist, while the remains of a skeleton buried in an east-west orientation (as opposed to all the other burials in the cemetery, which were north-south) might be him! More sober scholars have been sharply critical of this suggestion, noting: "There is not a scintilla of evidence for asserting that the bones are those of John the Baptist," and "The suggestion that these might be the bones of John the Baptist is the purest speculation, devoid of the slightest evidence." Richard Freund eventually withdrew his suggestion, cf. M. Broshi and H. Eshel, "Whose Bones?" *BAR* (Jan/Feb 2003), pp. 26-33, 71.

<sup>179</sup> Fitzmyer, pp. 108-109.

once again there has been speculation, some of it daring to say the least. In the 1970s Jose O'Callaghan claimed to have found scraps of the Gospel of Mark.<sup>180</sup> Robert Eisenman thinks that James, the Lord's brother, was the Teacher of Righteousness and St. Paul was "the Man of the Lie" (cf. 1QpHab 2:2).<sup>181</sup> He also, along with Michael Wise, claimed to have discovered a small, five-line fragment that speaks of a "pierced Messiah" (4Q285).<sup>182</sup> Barbara Thiering thinks John the Baptist himself was the Teacher of Righteousness and Jesus the Wicked Priest.<sup>183</sup> However, these avant-garde theories have won little support from the majority of other scholars, and most of them would agree with the assessment of Emory University's Luke Johnson about Thiering's assertion: "Thiering's 'history' is the purest poppycock, the product of fevered imagination rather than careful analysis."<sup>184</sup> The other theories are not much more compelling.

Much less sensational but more helpful are the linguistic insights that provide independent testimony to the meaning of various words and/or phrases that appear in the New Testament as well as the scrolls. The Qumran scrolls provide us with the original Hebrew (and sometimes Aramaic) of various Greek words and phrases, such as, the "many", the "righteousness of God", the "works of the Law", the "Sons of Light" and the "Church of God".<sup>185</sup> Both the Qumran scrolls and Paul use the title Belial for Satan (cf. 2 Co. 6:15).<sup>186</sup> Both the Qumran scrolls and Jesus speak of the "poor in spirit" (Mt. 5:3; 1QM 14:7). Both the Qumran scrolls and the New Testament give special status to Melchizedek, described in the Book of Hebrews as "a priest forever" (Heb. 7:3) and in the scrolls as an angelic being who summons God's holy ones for divine vengeance (11QMelchizedek). Both the Qumran scrolls

---

<sup>180</sup> Vanderkam, p. 19.

<sup>181</sup> R. Eisenman, *James the Just in the Habakkuk Peshar* (Leiden, 1986).

<sup>182</sup> Unfortunately, Eisenman did not publish this text in a scholarly journal, as is customary, but reported it to the New York Times, which squeezed as much sensational juice as possible from the claim, asserting that the Dead Sea Scroll shared with Christianity the notion of a slain messiah. More careful analysis, however, has shown that the "messiah" is the one carrying out the execution against his enemies rather than vice versa, cf. H. Shanks, "The 'Pierced' Text--An Interpretation Evaporates," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1992), pp. 80-82.

<sup>183</sup> B. Thiering, *Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).

<sup>184</sup> L. Johnson, *The Real Jesus* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), p. 30.

<sup>185</sup> Vanderkam, p. 19.

*ton pleion* (Gk) = "many" = *harabbim*, cf. Mt. 26:28; Ac. 6:2,5; 2 Co. 2:5-6

*dikaio syne theou* (Gk.) = "righteousness of God" = *sidqat 'el*, cf. Ro. 1:17

*erga nomou* (Gk) = "works of the Law" = *ma'dse torah*, cf. Ga. 2:16

*huloi photos* (Gk) = "Sons of Light" = *bene 'or*, cf. Jn. 12:36

*he ekklesia tou theou* (Gk) = "Church of God" = *qehal 'el*, cf. 1 Co. 1:2; 2 Co. 1:1

<sup>186</sup> Actually, the title Belial occurs several times in the scrolls, including the Thanksgiving Hymns and 4QMMT, cf. Vanderkam, p. 20.

and the gospels have beatitudes.<sup>187</sup> Both the Qumran scrolls and the Gospel of John describe God as the Creator in similar language (Jn. 1:3; 1QS 11:11; 1QH1:19-20).<sup>188</sup>

In addition, there are some similar practices between some early Christians and the community at Qumran. The Jerusalem church practiced communal ownership of property (Ac. 2:44-45; 4:32), and the Manual of Discipline has several references to the same thing (1QS 6:17-22).<sup>189</sup> At Qumran, the members shared a "pure meal" of bread and wine, commenced by the blessing of the Priest (1QS 6:4-6), and the similarity between this ritual and the Christian Eucharist is apparent.<sup>190</sup> Of striking significance is the anticipation of a figure who would be "hailed the Son of God" and called "Son of the Most High", whose "kingdom will be a kingdom forever" (4Q246).<sup>191</sup> That these majestic titles replicate the ones used by Luke to describe the birth of Jesus is an impressive parallelism (Lk. 1:32-33, 35).

In the end, however, similarities do not demonstrate direct historical connections. Fitzmyer is right to caution against "parallelomania."<sup>192</sup> What the scrolls demonstrate is that early Christianity owes some of its shape and language to its original milieu in the Jewish world of Palestine. Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls are important for their role in filling out the picture of 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish life, and especially, 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish religious thought. They remain as important components in the historical backdrop of early Christian origins.

---

<sup>187</sup> 4Q525 contains five beatitudes. While none of them duplicate those of Jesus, the literary form of sequential blessings (Blessed is the man who....) is striking.

<sup>188</sup> Both speak of God's creation of the world, saying "without Him nothing is/was made."

<sup>189</sup> The Qumran scrolls speak of the "property of the community" and that after a year's probation a candidate's "property and earnings shall be handed over to the Bursar of the Congregation who shall register it to his account...", cf. G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Heritage, 1962), p. 63.

<sup>190</sup> The rule specified that "when the table has been prepared for eating, and the new wine for drinking, the Priest shall be the first to stretch out his hand to bless the first-fruits of the bread and new wine."

<sup>191</sup> "An Unpublished Dead Sea Scroll Text Parallels Luke's Infancy Narrative," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1990), p. 24 and J. Vanderkam, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and Early Christianity: Part Two," *BR* (Feb 1992), p.21.

<sup>192</sup> Fitzmyer, p. 111.