

# ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE - THE CONQUEST AND JUDGES

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In **Deuteronomy 8:9** God promised Israel they would prosper in the land of Canaan. Included in this pledge of prosperity was the prospect of mining copper from the hills. Some once thought the idea of finding copper in Canaan was merely hopeful thinking. However, archaeologists have found large mines in the area, including ruined furnaces and heaps of copper slag. (Joseph Free & Howard Vos, Archaeology and the Bible, p.104). It is amazing how often people criticize some detail in the Bible, only to later find the Bible has been right all along.

Some curiosity has existed as to why God would forbid Israel to cook a young goat in its mother's milk. (**Exodus 23:19, Exodus 34:26, Deuteronomy 14:21**) Discovery of the Ras Shamra tablets provides a reasonable answer to the question. The tablet speaks of a pagan ritual wherein a devotee wishing to garner favor from a deity would slay a young goat in milk and present that as an offering. (Ibid, p. 105)

The Bible speaks often of the Hittites (**Genesis 15:20**, etc), especially during the patriarchal and early Mosaic periods. **Joshua 1:4** and many other passages mention the Hittites among the nations Israel would displace when they conquered Canaan. Skeptics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century doubted whether the Hittites ever existed since no certain record had been found of them outside the Bible. However, in 1876 mention of the Hittites was discovered on ancient clay tablets. (Randall Price, The Stones Cry Out, pp. 82-83). Additional discoveries during the 20<sup>th</sup> century left no doubt as to the existence of the ancient Hittite Empire. Even their ancient capital city has been found. (Joseph Free & Howard Vos, Archaeology and the Bible, p. 108). It is amazing that such sweeping and confident charges could be made against the Bible, not based on any evidence that has been found, but because the relatively new science of archaeology had not yet managed to find an ancient empire. This story well illustrates the fact that just because archaeology has not unearthed data that corroborates biblical claims does not mean that data won't be found later.

**Joshua** records Israel's conquest of Canaan. Many scholars believe this happened around 1450 BC. Several tablet letters have been retrieved from Amarna Egypt. Many of these letters, believed to date near the time of the conquest, tell of a people called the Habiru invading Canaan and many cities falling. Many scholars believe these Habiru, also called Apiru, should be identified with the Hebrews. (Ibid, p. 116). Others insist the Habiru are some other nomadic group from Mesopotamia. (see "Habiru" at Wikipedia). Some believe the Hebrews were lumped in with other nomadic groups since they had similar ancestral origins and were also nomadic at that time. What other groups were known to invade and conquer Canaan at this time besides the biblical Hebrews? It seems most reasonable that the Amarna letters serve as stunning confirmation of Israel's conquest. At the very least they confirm Canaan's condition being as the Bible describes it during their time. (See Tell El-Armarna Letters in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia).

In **Joshua 6** we read of Israel's conquest of Jericho. There are several facts we may observe. The city was fortified at the time Joshua attacked. (**Joshua 2:5, 7, 15, Joshua 6:5, 20**) The city was destroyed by fire. (**Joshua 6:24**) The walls collapsed at the time the city was destroyed. (**Joshua 6:20**) The destruction occurred during the time of spring harvest. (**Joshua 2:6, Joshua 3:15, Joshua 5:10**) The siege against the city was short. (**Joshua 6:15, 20**) The grain was not plundered. (**Joshua 6:17-18**) The inhabitants had no opportunity to escape with food or riches. (**Joshua 6:1**) All of these facts have been verified in archaeological digs of the ancient city. Furthermore, radio-carbon dating has revealed the destruction took place at Joshua's time. (Randall Price, The Stones Cry Out, pp. 152-153).

In **Joshua 11:10-13** we learn that Joshua burned the Canaanite city of Hazor. The ancient city has been discovered and excavated, including the Canaanite strata from Joshua's time. That layer reveals the city at that time was burned with intense fire. There is a thick stratum of ashes with evidence clay vessels melted and some stones exploded in the blaze exceeding 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit. (Ibid, pp. 149-150).

**Judges 1:10** mentions the leaders of Hebron, Ahiman and Talmi. One means of authenticating the validity of a story is to compare the names with the times the story is said to have happened. The biblical names mentioned in connection with this story have been found outside the Bible. The Ras Shamra Tablets mention these names as Canaanite names from that same time. (Free & Vos, p. 119). While that doesn't fully confirm the story, it shows the story is plausible as the names used are valid Canaanite names.

**Judges 1:23-25** says Israel destroyed Bethel early in the period of judges. **Judges 1:27, 29** mentions Bethshan, Megiddo and Gezer as towns Israel did not conquer at that time. These facts have been verified by excavations at all the above mentioned locations. It was found that Bethel was indeed destroyed early during the period of judges and the others cities were not. (Ibid, p. 119)

**Judges 9:45-49** tells of when Abimelech burned the temple of the Shechemite god Berith. Confirmation of this was found in excavations that revealed a building identified as the "House of Berith". Pottery evidence showed it had been built around 1300 BC and was burned about 150 years later. (Ibid, p. 121)