

HIGHLIGHTS OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN BIBLE LANDS

by

Fred H. Wight

Copyright © 1955

CHAPTER NINE

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE OLD TESTAMENT CITY OF JERUSALEM

IT IS AN INTERESTING FACT that through the years there have been surprisingly few discoveries in the Holy City by archaeologists. Of course the Temple area with its Dome of the Rock inside an enclosure could not be touched by excavators. Other parts located within the present walls of the city are thickly settled. Ophel, the old city of David, now lying outside those walls, is not so thickly populated, and so some excavating has taken place there. But all in all, the results of excavations in Jerusalem have not been very successful. The chief interest has been the identification of sacred places, and there is much obscurity connected with many of these sites. Notable among the discoveries are those which have to do with the water supply of the city. 1

THE JERUSALEM OF DAVID'S TIME

Discovery of Jerusalem's watercourse, and indication of how David captured Jerusalem. In the year 1867 Sir Charles Warren discovered what has since been called "Warren's Shaft." This discovery reveals how the ancient Jebusites, who held the fortress of Ophel for so many years, were supplied with water. It also explains how David and his men probably captured the city.

As there was no source of water inside their city (except the use of cisterns), the Jebusites resorted to a very clever scheme of engineering to bring the water from the spring Gihon (now called Virgin's Fountain) to a place where it would be available inside the city. A tunnel was cut from the spring's pool to a natural cave located under the city. Then from the end of this tunnel they cut a shaft going perpendicularly from the cave to a place forty feet above. From this spot a sloping passage was cut in the rock, opening out into the city. Thus the women could walk down this upper passageway to the shaft, where they could let their skin buckets down the shaft to get their supply of water, without going outside the city walls. When David desired to capture the Jebusite stronghold, he said to his men, "**Whosoever smiteth the Jebusites, let him get up to the gutter** [watercourse]" (II Samuel 5:8). Although there is some obscurity about the meaning of the word translated "**gutter**," it has been generally believed that this tunnel and shaft was the watercourse David was talking about. To ascend into the city by this means would be difficult but not impossible, as it has been done in modern times. Joab with certain of his men doubtless did it, and surprised the city and thus captured it. Other explanations have been advanced as to how the city may have been taken, but the one given above seems the most plausible. 2

The territory covered by the City of David. The Jerusalem that David captured and lived in was located on the eastern hill called Ophel and included only a few acres of ground. In his latter days King David purchased the rock on Mount Moriah and made it the site of a sanctuary, thus determining that here the temple should be erected. 3

Considerable excavation has taken place on the hill Ophel beginning in 1894 and there has been more recent activity from 1923 to 1927. The excavators included Bliss, Weill, Macalister, Duncan and others. At the north end of the old Jebusite stronghold they discovered a strong wall that had been breached. Perhaps, it has been suggested, David made this breach when he attacked the city. Back of the breach a somewhat lighter wall had been built afterwards, and this may have been the work of David. 4

Some of the excavators believe that the tower which they found above and a little way to the north of Gihon is the Millo mentioned in II Samuel 5:9: “**So David dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David. And David built round about from Millo and inward.**” If this be so, it served as the defense of the northern end of the city. 5

THE JERUSALEM OF SOLOMON’S REIGN

Extent of the city. There is every indication that Solomon extended the limits of Jerusalem to include the western hill as well as Ophel, the city of his father. First Kings 9:15 speaks of Solomon building the wall of Jerusalem. Doubtless this means that he extended the wall to encompass the western hill. Bliss discovered in the territory of the western hill the remains of a wall that evidently once connected with the fortress that was located at the southwestern corner. It would seem that this was a part of the wall built by Solomon. A school for boys is now built over the site of this ancient fortress. The rock surface under the present building gives every indication that at one time a tower stood there. 6

The buildings of Solomon. Nothing remains of Solomon’s buildings, but we do know that his great Temple was built over the rock on Mount Moriah. The Temple area he enclosed with a wall. Solomon’s palaces were situated to the south of the Temple court, and were separated from it by a wall. Then came his hall of state, where his throne room was located, and also his house of the forest of Lebanon, suggestive of a forest of the Lebanon mountains. 7

THE JERUSALEM OF HEZEKIAH’S DAY

Extent of the city. From the time of Solomon to the period of Hezekiah’s reign the territory of Jerusalem grew in area. By Hezekiah’s time it probably included the whole of the Acra area or northwestern hill. The whole city was surrounded by a wall. 8

The Siloam water tunnel. It was King Hezekiah who solved the water problem of old Jerusalem in a more complete way. Second Kings 20:20 says: “**He made a pool, and a conduit, and brought water into the city.**” It was probably done when the king of Assyria was about to threaten the city, and doubtless Hezekiah thought of the old Jebusite tunnel and shaft as a source of possible danger from an enemy.

The old tunnel of the Jebusites was continued by Hezekiah's workmen for a distance of 1800 feet through solid rock, thus bringing the water from Gihon to the south end of Ophel where the Pool of Siloam was built to receive it. He probably closed the upper end of the Jebusite shaft, and also concealed the spring of Gihon against discovery by an enemy. 9

The Siloam Inscription. In the year 1880 Jewish boys were playing in the Siloam tunnel near its lower end when one of them named Jacob tumbled into the water. He began to investigate the sides of the tunnel, and there on the east wall at a distance of about 15 feet from the pool, and 3 feet above the bottom of the tunnel, he saw an inscription. He mentioned it to his teacher, who reported the find to Professor Sayce. Sayce copied, translated, and published the inscription. It had six lines written in old Hebrew. It was probably put there by workmen who worked on the aqueduct when Hezekiah had it constructed. They wrote it to tell how the tunnel was dug. The following is a translation of the six lines:

- (1) This is the story of the boring while yet they plied the drill.
- (2) Each toward his fellow; while yet there remained three cubits to be cut, the voice of one calling was heard.
- (3) For there was a crevice on the rock on the right.
- (4) On the day the boring was ended, the stone-cutters struck, each to meet his fellow, drill upon drill; and the waters flowed.
- (5) From the fountain to the pool, for a thousand and two hundred cubits.
- (6) And a hundred cubits was the height of the rock above the head of the stone-cutters. 10

The Siloam inscription was the oldest discovered example of the Hebrew language, except the Moabite Stone inscription, until the present century. Also it is of value in answering the question of the length of a Biblical cubit. The tunnel was said by the inscription to be twelve hundred cubits long. This distance has been measured to be approximately eighteen hundred feet. Thus in the days of King Hezekiah a cubit was about 18 inches long. 11

Discovery of the source of Gihon's water. In connection with Hezekiah's use of this water, it is appropriate to relate the ultimate source of the supply. In the years 1909-1911 the Parker Expedition did some excavating at Jerusalem which revealed the actual source of the spring Gihon to be a great deep crack in the rock below where its apparent source was. One end of the crack enters the cave's mouth where the apparent source is located, but the other end goes into the bed of the valley. The water would flow into the valley except for a wall which was built, doubtless in very ancient days, and was designed to compel the water to enter the cave. The spring produced in this way is of the nature of a siphon, and is intermittent. 12

1. Frederic Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology*, pp. 172, 173, 175, 176.
2. Duncan, *The Accuracy of the Old Testament*, pp. 113-121; Adams, *Ancient Records and the Bible*, p. 104; H. H. Rowley, *The Rediscovery of the Old Testament*, pp. 37, 38; Kenyon, *op. cit.*, pp. 176, 177; Boulton, *Archaeology Explains*, pp. 37-40; Barton, *Archaeology and The Bible* (ed. 1937), p. 231. Duncan suggests that the Hebrew word translated "watercourse" might be translated otherwise and refer to a funnel-like entrance to the city through a cave, one end of which is above the Spring Gihon. Dr. Albright gives an entirely different rendering of the

Hebrew word, indicating that the Canaanite method of scaling walls by means of a “hook” was meant. For details of the latter interpretation, see Merrill Unger, *Archaeology and the Old Testament*, chapter on “Archaeology and the Reign of David.”

3. George A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible*, ed. 1937, pp. 231-233.

4. Kenyon, *op. cit.*, pp. 177, 178; Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, p. 150.

5. Barton, *op. cit.*, p. 232; Duncan, *op. cit.*, pp. III, 112.

6. Barton, *op. cit.*, pp. 233, 234.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 235-238.

8. J. McKee Adams, *Ancient Records and the Bible*, p. 322.

9. J. Garrow Duncan, *Digging up Biblical History*, Vol. II, pp. 213, 214.

10. George L. Robinson, *The Bearing of Archaeology on the Old Testament*, (New York: American Tract Society, 1941), pp. 170, 171.

11. Duncan, *Accuracy of the Old Testament*, p. 123f.; Joseph Free, *Archaeology and Bible History*, p. 41.

12. Barton, *op. cit.*, pp. 228, 229.

~ end of chapter 9 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
