

HIGHLIGHTS OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN BIBLE LANDS

by

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CHAPTER EIGHT

DISCOVERIES IN JORDAN VALLEY, EAST OF JORDAN, AND LANDS TO THE SOUTH

THE FRUITFUL PLAIN OF JORDAN

SCRIPTURAL STATEMENT CHALLENGED

The Book of Genesis declares concerning the Plain of Jordan, where Sodom and Gomorrah were located, that it was very fruitful and well populated in the days of Abraham (see Genesis 13:10). Bible critics have denied the accuracy of this statement.

Archaeologists confirm Genesis. Dr. W. F. Albright began explorations in the Jordan Valley in the year 1922, and in 1924 he and Dr. Melvin Grove Kyle examined archaeological remains in the southern Jordan Valley. Concerning the results of these investigations Dr. Albright says:

These researches and those of Pere Mallon and other scholars, have proved that the most prosperous period of the history of this valley was in the early Bronze Age, and that the density of its occupation gradually declined until it reached its lowest point in the Early Iron II, after the tenth century B.C. Except in the Turkish period . . . this was the age of least occupation in the valley's history. Yet we are asked by some to believe that the traditions of its pristine fertility arose in the Iron Age! 1

SITES OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

Practically all Bible students agree that Sodom and Gomorrah were located either at the northern or at the southern end of the Dead Sea. The Scripture account itself, together with traditions given by later writers and the evidence archaeology has to offer, all favor the southern end as the place of their location. In the researches of 1924 Albright reports finding the site of *Bab edh-Dhra* above the southern end of the Dead Sea shores, which gives some evidence of having been a place of worship for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. There are indications of a break in civilization around 2000 B.C. A similar break of culture at approximately the same date was discovered by Dr. Nelson Glueck in a nearby section of Trans-Jordan.

As there are five streams of water running into the Dead Sea at its southern end, Dr. Albright suggests that the five cities, including Sodom and Gomorrah, were each located on one of these streams. As the waters of the sea have been increasing in recent years, it is quite probable that the sites of Sodom and Gomorrah are now submerged. 2

THE MILITARY LINE OF MARCH IN GENESIS 14

Historicity of this chapter questioned. Old Testament critics have for years attacked the historicity of the fourteenth chapter of Genesis. The existence of a military line of march such as is indicated in this chapter for the Mesopotamian coalition of kings has been denied in some circles. We shall see, however, that archaeological discoveries have compelled an increasing recognition of the value of this Scripture from the historical viewpoint.

Accuracy of Genesis 14 proved. Dr. Albright discovered archaeological evidence in the year 1929 that changed the views he formerly had about this chapter. He says:

This account represents the invading host as marching down from Hauran through eastern Gilead and Moab to the southeastern part of Palestine. Formerly the writer considered this extraordinary line of march as being the best proof of the essentially legendary character of the narrative.

In 1929, however, he discovered a line of Early and Middle Bronze Age mounds, some of great size, running down along the eastern edge of Gilead, between the desert and the forest of Gilead. Moreover, the cities of Hauran (Bashan) with which the account of the campaign opens, Ashtaroth and Karnaim, were both occupied in this period, as shown by archaeological examination of their sites. The same is true of eastern Moab, where the writer discovered an Early Middle-Bronze city at Ader in 1924. This route called "The Way of the King," in later Israelite tradition, does not appear to have ever been employed by invading armies in the Iron Age. 8

More and more scholars are forced to give up their belief in the legendary character of the Book of Genesis, and are acknowledging the historical accuracy of the account. The discoveries of archaeology have brought about this change of attitude.

THE MOABITE STONE, AND KINGS OMRI AND AHAB

The discovery and recovery of the stone. A German missionary named Klein discovered the now famous Moabite Stone in the year 1868 at the city of Dibon, located a little north of the River Arnon. Klein bargained with the Arabs for its purchase, offering \$400. Clermont-Ganneau sent an Arab to Moab to make a squeeze of it, and offered the sum of \$1800 for it. The Turkish governor of Shechem demanded that it be given him. But instead the Arabs built a fire under it and then poured cold water on it, thus breaking it into many pieces. Then they distributed the pieces to their tribesmen. Clermont-Ganneau started out to buy the pieces one by one and succeeded in getting most of them. With the help of the squeeze, he fitted them together, and today, slightly defective, it is on display in the Louvre in Paris. 4

The value of the stone. The Moabite Stone of black basalt, 4 feet high, 2 feet wide, and 14 inches thick, is rounded at the top. With its 34 lines of script it proved to be the longest inscription in Hebrew that had been discovered up to then. In this inscription King Mesha of Moab reports the revolt of the Moabites from Israel, after being subject to King Omri and King Ahab. Some scholars have maintained that the inscription disagrees with the writer of the Book of Kings; but certainly it is correct to say rather that it supplements the narrative in the Bible but does not contradict it. It refers to persons and places known by Bible writers, but gives an account of some events not referred to in the Scriptures. The Bible does not mention King Mesha's revolt, but on the other hand, King Mesha does not say anything about the campaign which the third chapter of II Kings describes. The Moabite inscription is naturally written from the Moabite viewpoint, whereas the Book of Kings gives us the Jewish point of view. 5

THE ROCK CITY OF PETRA AND ITS MONUMENTS

The mystery city. In the early years of the nineteenth century the Arabs considered the city of Petra to be a sacred place, and it was thought to be very dangerous for any "infidel" to go near it. But in 1812 the Swiss traveler, John Lewis Burckhardt, disguising himself as a Bedouin sheik, visited Petra, and came away to tell the world about some of its mysteries. For a hundred years after this, there were only a few men who attempted to visit the place. Even in the twentieth century the Arabs have succeeded in keeping modern transportation from coming very near this ancient site, but many more have gone there to report on interesting finds of an archaeological nature. 6

The old history of Petra. Originally Petra was Esau's hideout as a hunter. His descendants, the Edomites had it as part of their possession. From the days of King Saul until about 740 B.C., Judah, for the most part, dominated the whole territory of the Edomites. But from that date the Edomites became dominant, extending their territory. About 400 B.C. the Edomites were driven from the territory around Petra or else they were absorbed by the Nabateans, an Arab tribe going back to Ishmael. These Nabateans made Petra their capital, and most of the monuments at Petra are their work. They made their city a caravan stronghold. The Romans considered its wealth so important that they built two roads to make the city easier to reach. When the Roman Empire declined, Petra, the old city that at one time is estimated to have had a population of 267,000 people, was inhabited by only a few Arabs who lived in its caves. 7

Examining some of Petra's monuments. Travelers to Petra enter the place through a narrow rift of rock called the Siq, which is six thousand feet long and whose sides are tremendous. It is easy to see how a handful of men could guard the city from an enemy. After one leaves the Siq to enter Petra itself, the remains of what looks like an old temple cut from a high cliff are the first of many monuments to greet the eye. This Nabatean monument is called *El Khazna*. The color of it is beautiful, ranging from marble white under sunlight to red under moonlight, and to deep mahogany in the shadows. It has been customary to call *El Khazna* and similar monuments temples, but architectural historians have determined after much research that they were not temples but rather mausolea in memory of the dead. Some of them did contain chapels where deities were worshiped. Throughout the territory of Petra it is estimated that there are about a thousand monuments. Most of these are the work of the Nabateans, but a few are the result of Greek and Roman influence.

An old Roman amphitheater and a Roman temple are notable examples of the latter. The amphitheater was built by the Romans to seat between 3000 and 5000 people. The vicinity of Petra has two springs and these, together with cisterns, furnished water to the inhabitants. 8

Petra's high place. That which is of most interest to archaeologists is the great high place of sacrifice located on the top of a mountain of Petra. Credit goes to an American editor, Edward L. Wilson, for being the first outsider of modern times to see this ancient sanctuary. Wilson visited Petra in 1882, and at that time viewed the high place. Eighteen years later, in 1900, Professor George L. Robinson visited Petra's high place, and he was the first one to recognize the religious value of what he saw. He was able to appreciate the value of this sanctuary on the mountaintop in the study of ancient Semitic worship. 9

Rock-cut stairs assist the visitor in reaching Petra's mountain-top sanctuary. Two great obelisks twenty feet high are first seen, and the task of making them is understood to have been tremendous when it is known that the whole top of the mountain was quarried away to leave these two pillars of stone. Beyond the two pillars was a rectangular court, carved out of rock. This was 47 feet by 21 feet and was sunk in a bed of rock 5 to 9 inches. Southward from this court was a pool cut out of the rock. There were two altars, one of which was perhaps for burnt sacrifices, and the other for blood libations. What was the purpose of this high place when it was used in the long ago? It was the place of worship for the city of Petra, and also no doubt was a national sanctuary for the Nabateans. 10

Date of the high place and importance of discovery. The probable date for the cutting of Petra's high place was either just before, or shortly after, the advent of the Christian era. It was quite likely constructed on the site of the former place of worship of the Edomites. 11

The reason this high place is so important to the Bible student is that it is the best-preserved high place yet discovered, and therefore gives us a better idea of what an ancient high place was like than can be obtained anywhere else.

In the Old Testament high places are generally associated with places of elevation; they were constructed artificially, and were places of sacrifices. The asherah or sacred pole or pillar was a prominent feature of the high place. Connected with the high places there were usually chambers or rooms called "houses of the high places." They were used as dwelling places for the priests, as halls for the eating of the sacrificial meals, and also as places of immoral practices. 12

The Old Testament prophets continually warned the Jews against the heathen worship in these places, condemning everything connected with them, including the standing images [pillars] (Micah 5:13), heathen altars (Hosea 10:8), heathen drink offerings, the slaying of children for religious purposes, and gross immorality connected with heathen worship (see Isaiah 57:5-7).

1. W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1933), p. 134.

2. J. Penrose Harland, "Sodom and Gomorrah," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, V, No. 2, May, 1942, pp. 17-32; Nelson Glueck, *The Other Side of Jordan*, p. 114; Joseph P. Free, *Archaeology and Bible History*, p. 63; Frederick G. Clapp, "The Site of Sodom and Gomorrah," *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 40, 1936, pp. 323-344.
3. W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1933), pp. 142, 143. See also *Bulletin of American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 35, pp. 1-14.
4. George L. Robinson, *The Bearing of Archaeology on the Old Testament*, pp. 165, 166.
5. George A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible*, ed. of 1937, pp. 461, 462.
6. John D. Whiting, "Petra, Ancient Caravan Stronghold," *The National Geographic Magazine*, Feb. 1935, p. 130.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 129, 130; Barton, *op. cit.*, p. 563.
8. Whiting, *op. cit.*, pp. 133, 134; 136-138; 150, 151; 156; W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, p. 161; J. A. Hammerton, ed., *Wonders of the Past*, ed. 1937, pp. 83-90.
9. George L. Robinson, *The Sarcophagus of an Ancient Civilization*, p. 107.
10. Robinson, *The Bearing of Archaeology on the Old Testament*, pp. 117-122.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
12. Robinson, *The Sarcophagus of an Ancient Civilization*, pp. 158-162.

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