

**THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF HAZOR
AND THE BIBLE**

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**Submitted by Phillip A. Gray
to
Dr. Rodney Eugene Cloud**

**Regions University
(Now Amridge University)
Montgomery, Alabama**

HAZOR (TEL EL-QEDAH)

Phillip A. Gray

Introduction. Who killed “King Jabin?” Was it Joshua? Or, was it really Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite? At what time was the Canaanite city destroyed? How closely does the archaeology of Hazor parallel the Biblical data? What might the excavations at Hazor tell us about the integrity of the Biblical narrative as a whole? These are just a few of the fascinating questions relating to the archaeology of Hazor.

This research will focus on, 1. the known literary mentions of Hazor, 2. the site of the ancient city, 3. a summary of the history of the archaeological research there, 4. the possible significance of the finds for Old Testament studies, and 5. the role played by the Hazor discoveries (and archaeology in general) in Biblical/Theological scholarship.

I. Literary Mentions of Hazor (Canonical and Extra-Canonical References).

Joshua 11:1 explicitly mentions “Jabin” as king of Hazor during the conquest. Joshua 11:10 indicates the city’s vast importance in Canaan. “And Joshua at that time turned back, and took Hazor, and smote the king thereof with the sword: for Hazor beforetime was the head of all those kingdoms.”¹ This event took place during the earlier days of conquest of Canaan itself.

Judges 4:2 again mentions a “Jabin, king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor.” It is later added that the captain of his host was Sisera, “which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles” (v. 21). According to the Judges narrative, the fate of captain Sisera and Hazor as a whole lay finally in the hands of a woman, Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite.

¹ All Scripture references are taken from the NASB of 1977, unless otherwise noted.

I Kings 9:15 says that Solomon levied a tax to rebuild Hazor along with other strategic outposts. II Kings 15:29 tells us that Tiglath-Pilezer, king of Assyria, came and took Hazor along with other Israelite cities.

The Egyptian Execration Texts of the 19th Century mention Hazor and its significance for the region. The El-Amarna Correspondence of the 14th Century mentions Hazor as an important political power. Also in the Mari archives from the 18th century, the city of Hazor stands out prominently.¹

Under this heading we might also include a literary mention of Hazor found at Tel El-Qedah itself. Amnon-Ben Tor and Maria Teresa Rubiato describe the findings of a few cuneiform tablets at the site. One such tablet, a foreign language dictionary, was located in 1960 by “a youngster.”² In 1996, Ben-Tor and his associates found a couple of other interesting tablets (which are similar to Amarna tablets from the 14th century). One of them mentions Hazor by name.³

II. The Location of the City. Garstang in 1926 identified the site of the ancient city at the present Tel el-Qedah (now abandoned). It lies five miles south-west of Lake Huleh in Galilee.⁴ It is located nine miles north of the Sea of Galilee.

The site is sometimes described as a (coke) “bottle shaped” mound about 130 feet high. The upper city is about 25 to 30 acres in size. On the north, there is a contiguous

¹ A. Malamat, “Hazor, ‘The Head of All Those Kingdoms’,” in *Journal of Biblical Literature* (March 1960): 12-13.

² Amnon Ben-Tor & Maria Teresa Rubiato, “Excavating Hazor, Part Two: Did the Israelites Destroy the Canaanite City?” in *Biblical Archaeology Review* (May/June 1999), in the sidebar “Voices from Hazor”:

<http://www.basarchiv.org/bswbBrowse.asp?PubID=BSBA&Volume=25&Issue=03&ArticleID=01> (accessed 6/22/06)

³ Ibid.

⁴ In *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. “Hazor,” by T. C. Mitchell.

“lower city” of about 175 to 200 acres in size (rectangular in shape).¹ The unusual lower city has an earthen rampart on its western (“uphill”) side.²

III. The History of the Archaeological Research. Prof. John Garstang first identified Tell el-Qedah as Hazor in 1926, and made trial soundings in 1928. But, he failed to uncover the true nature of the site. He assumed it was some sort of camping enclosure for horses and chariots. Only later would Yadin discover that it was an entire city in itself.³

Despite Garstang’s earlier efforts, the “systematic excavation” did not begin until Yigael Yadin’s work in 1955-1956.⁴ Virtually from the outset, Yadin was preoccupied with the problem of the dating of the late bronze/early iron age destruction level. Yadin said that Garstang had found no Mycenaean pottery in the lower city. So, Garstang had simply dated its destruction to about 1400 B.C.⁵

However, subsequent finds yielded samples of both Mycenaean IIIA and IIIB. Furumark has said that Mycenaean pottery “went out of fashion roughly around 1230 B.C.”⁶ Chronology can be pegged down for Mycenaean IIIA from el-Amarna, where it has been correlated with the inscriptions.⁷

Also, Yadin found a fourth temple in area “H” near the surface. Its beams were charred (he believed this to be evidence of the Joshua destruction). A symbol on the altar

¹ Howard F. Vos, *Archaeology in Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), 173.

² Mitchell, *NBD*, s.v. “Hazor.”

³ Ibid.

⁴ In *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 1962 ed., s.v. “Hazor,” by V. R. Gold. (It has often been remarked that almost everybody who is “anybody” in Israeli archaeology either worked with, or under, Yadin. He is considered a real pioneer in Israeli archaeology.)

⁵ However, as will be observed subsequently in this discussion, there is evidence for both a 15th century destruction and a later 13th century destruction, the former correlating perhaps with Joshua’s destruction during the conquest, and the latter with the battle of Deborah (after the Canaanite city had been reoccupied, along with the aforementioned Mycenaean pottery from that period).

⁶ Yigael Yadin, *Hazor: The Rediscovery of a Great Citadel of the Bible* (New York: Random House, 1975), 35-36.

⁷ Ibid.

was found of the “great god,” the weather god (“Hadad”).¹ Also, found in Stratum II were orthostats from at least the 16th to 15th centuries.² All the temples differ from one another (indicating that different deities were worshipped within them).

Also, in the lower city a LBII potsherd was found with a Proto-Canaanite script transliterated (“...lt.”). It is the only one found in Northern Palestine, and may be compared to the one discovered on a 13th cent pitcher that ends with “elt,” i.e., “goddess.”³

On the Tel itself, Yadin found remains of the Hellenistic period (Stratum I), remains from the Persian period (Stratum II), and evidence of an earlier massive conflagration. The pottery would date this destruction level to the time of Pekah and the invasion of Tiglath-Pileser III (corresponding to the 732 B.C. Assyrian destruction of Hazor, as described in 2 Kings 15:29).⁴

Walls were found at a little lower level, from before the time of Pekah. These were apparently tilted by seismic activity, probably the very earthquake mentioned as happening in the days of Jeroboam II (cf. Zech. 14:5, Amos 1:1ff., and 8:8-10). The pottery from this level dates to the 8th century, thus nailing down the chronology to the days of Jeroboam II in Israel (789-748 B.C.).⁵

In Stratum VII was found a destruction level by fire, dating back to the end of the 9th century. Yadin attributes this attack to the Arameans. (The Bible says that they frequently attacked the Northern Kingdom.)⁶

¹ Ibid., 81-82.

² Ibid., 112.

³ Ibid., 126.

⁴ Ibid., 147-148.

⁵ Ibid., 149-150.

⁶ Ibid., 157.

“The latter phase of Stratum IX was covered in a thick layer of ashes, indicating that the city was sacked and destroyed by an enemy.”¹ This could correlate with the attack of Ben-hadad, king of Syria in 885 B.C. during the rein of Baasha. Though not explicitly mentioned, this attack at Hazor might be inferred from 1 Kings 15:20 and II Chronicles 16:4 (which mention nearby Ijon, Dan, Abel Beth Maacah and all Kinnereth, in addition to Naphtalai). “All told, this is a classic case in which stratigraphy, pottery, historical documents, and above all, the biblical narratives enabled us to date the various cities in an absolute chronology.”²

At the south end of the Tel, a shaft and tunnel were discovered which lead to the water table below the city.³ The stratigraphy indicates that this feature was engineered in the days of Ahab in the 9th century.⁴ The tunnel consists of three main elements: 1) an entrance structure, 2) a vertical shaft, and 3) a sloping tunnel.⁵ This tunnel is like the tunnel at Megiddo, and *illustrates* how the threat from the Syrians and Assyrians was real and constant (thus, the need to be prepared for long sieges).⁶

After continued excavations, Yadin found *proof* for the Solomonic City. A casemate wall was uncovered in Stratum X. Then Yadin found “the gate connected with the casemate fortifications.”⁷ The gate had six chambers and two towers. Its dimensions were identical to those of the gate at Megiddo, a structure already ascribed (before Yadin’s finds) to the period of Solomon. The gate followed the same plan as at Gezer as

¹ Ibid., 199.

² Ibid.

³ For an interesting discussion of how water tunnels worked, see: Dan Cole, “How Water Tunnels Worked,” in *Biblical Archaeology Review* (Mar/Apr 1980): 8-29.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 244.

⁶ Ibid., 247.

⁷ Ibid., 187, 190ff.

well, probably constructed by the same masons.¹ This particular feature, if accurately identified, would “support,” “confirm,” “corroborate,” “dovetail with,” or “provide evidence on behalf of” the historicity of these events as described in the Biblical narrative.²

On the other hand, recent scholarship has been embroiled in a bitter debate about the identification of such finds and their relevance to the 10th century. Gary N. Knoppers points out that, despite the debate, “the contemporary excavators of Gezer and Hazor have sought to confirm the earlier tenth-century dates.”³ One recent source confidently affirms that the evidence for massive building projects at various sites from the 10th century is solid.⁴ Said source instances the casemate walls, the ashlar masonry, and similar designs and dimensions found at various locations in support of this identification with the Solomonic Period.⁵

Moreover, Yadin had found several votive objects in Stratum XI under the Solomonic City. We do not know if they were Canaanite or Israelite. But, this Stratum XI clearly was of a small unwallled village that was replaced by Solomon’s fortified city.⁶

IV. Significance of the Finds For Old Testament Research. To simplify and make vivid the remaining crucial issue, we ask again, who killed King Jabin and destroyed the last Canaanite city of Hazor? Yadin takes the approach of conceding an

¹ In the Zondervan *NIV Study Bible*, 2002 ed., s.v. “1 King 9:15.”

² A little more will be said about this principle below. Suffice it to say that, if this identification is correct, the verb “illustrates” (sometimes preferred by Biblical archaeologists) seems to this writer a little weak to convey the real value of the evidence at hand.

³ Gary N. Knoppers, “The Historical Study of the Monarchy: Developments and Detours,” in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*, David W. Barker & Bill T. Arnold, eds. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), 217-218.

⁴ In *NIV Archaeological Study Bible*, s.v. “The Building Activity of Solomon,” 497.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Yadin, 257.

apparent “contradiction” between the Joshua and Judges accounts with respect to the death of Jabin.¹

He explains that after the first destruction (in the upper city, which corresponds to the terminus in the lower city stratigraphically), a semi-nomadic people with a distinctive pottery resettled the site (though they did not make a new city proper).² According to Yadin’s interpretation, this find would mesh well with the resettling of the area by the Israelites after the conquest in the 13th century.

On the other hand, different dating methods are possible. For example, scattered throughout the site are clear evidences of a massive conflagration dating back to the late 15th century,³ a time conforming to the early date of the Exodus. Three temples from this time were also destroyed. Two of these were never rebuilt.⁴ Sailhamer concurs with the general suggestion of a destruction level dating back to the 15th century. He writes, “Though hotly contested among modern archaeologists, it appears that both Jericho and Hazor do, in fact, show signs of destruction at about the time of the biblical conquest (around 1400 B.C.).”⁵

Furthermore, certain deliberately damaged statues of pagan deities seem to indicate the coming in of an ethnic group quite unlike the Canaanites, from a religious standpoint. Four possibilities for who the new group might have been may be posited: 1) the Philistines/Sea Peoples, 2) another Canaanite city, 3) Egyptians, or 4) Israelites.⁶

¹ Yadin, 250.

² Ibid., 254.

³ In *NIV Archaeological Study Bible*, s.v. “Archaeological Sites: Hazor,” 322.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ John H. Sailhamer, *Biblical Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 57.

⁶ Amnon Ben-Tor & Maria Teresa Rubiato, “Excavating Hazor, Part Two: Did the Israelites Destroy the Canaanite City?” in *Biblical Archaeology Review* (May/June 1999): 38-39.

But, such destruction of votive objects was not likely done by the Canaanites or Egyptians, since the damaged statues that were found were characteristic of both of these cultures. Moreover, Canaanite rival cities were apparently not large enough at that time to take on “the head of all those kingdoms.” One can opine that the Philistines would probably not be interested in a location that far inland (and Ben-Tor says that no distinctive Philistine pottery was left there either). This would leave the Israelites as the most likely candidates, along with their cultural ill will toward such physical representations of deity.¹ (In fact, Deuteronomy 12:3 had instructed them to treat such objects in this manner.)

However, it is not necessary to suppose that these statues were destroyed during the putative destruction of Hazor by Joshua in the 13th century (given the late date of the conquest as assumed by many archaeologists). The case can be made that these artifacts indeed come from the second half of the 13th century, and that this time coincides with the Biblical narrative’s dating for the battle of Deborah and Barak.² Such an interpretation harmonizes more easily with the traditional (early) date of the exodus and conquest of the 15th century.

Yet, Yadin thinks that the account in Joshua is the “correct” account of the destruction of the city. He holds that the initial Israelite conquest of Hazor occurred in 1230 B.C., and that therefore the narrative in Judges is a “later editorial interpolation.”³

Yohanan Aharoni takes Yadin to task for positing that Judges 4 is nothing more than “a late and inaccurate gloss.”¹ The problem is, according to Yadin, Judges 4

¹ Ibid.

² In *NIV Archaeological Study Bible*, s. v. “Deborah and Barak and the Destruction of Hazor,” 350.

³ Yadin, 255.

apparently confuses the events of Joshua 11, since it mentions again King Jabin who supposedly lived earlier, yet had been eliminated during the conquest. On the basis of the evidence of the destruction of Megiddo in 1125 B.C., and the later absorption of Issachar into Manasseh, Aharoni argues that the battle of Deborah must be pushed “back at least to the early twelfth century and more probably to the later part of the thirteenth century.”² And then he adds, “If that is true, the battle of Deborah might well have preceded a late thirteenth century destruction of Hazor.”³ For Aharoni, this identification of the evidence would serve to confirm the Biblical narrative.⁴

In response to Aharoni’s article, Yadin fired back that his own view of Judges 4 as being a later and inaccurate interpolation (a view which he attributes also to Albright) is the only possible way to interpret the archaeological data. He adds, “So the verdict of archaeology is clear: the large city of Hazor, the ‘Head of all those Kingdoms’ was destroyed in the 13th century; in the 12th century there was no proper city on the site!”⁵

Kitchen explains that the second millennium Hazor “consisted of an upper citadel (on a high mound) which dominated a large ‘lower city’ on its north side.” In concurrence with Yadin and Aharoni, Kitchen agrees that both the upper and lower cities

¹Yohanan Aharoni, “Hazor and the Battle of Deborah—Is Judges 4 Wrong?” in *Biblical Archaeology Review* (Dec 1975).
<http://www.basarchiv.org/bswbBrowse.asp?PublID=BSBA&Volume=1&Issue=4&ArticleID=3&UserID=1062>(accessed 6/13/2006)

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. Though, this writer must note that it would not really confirm the narrative in its sequential unity, but just a couple of detached bits and pieces from the narrative. It is doubtful that such an approach would really be “confirmation” of the Biblical record in any meaningful sense, except perhaps as a contrary position to the minimalists who would deny the historicity of the battle of Deborah altogether.

⁵ Yigael Yadin, “Hazor and the Battle of Joshua—Is Joshua 11 Wrong?” in *Biblical Archaeology Review* (Mar 1976).
<http://www.basarchiv.org/bswbBrowse.asp?PublID=BSBA&Volume=2&Issue=1&ArticleID=2&UserID=1062>(accessed 6/13/2006)

were destroyed in a huge fire in the 13th century (likely at the end of that century).¹

Kitchen also informs us that the citadel side is labeled Stratum XIII and that the lower city is Stratum Ia).²

Ben-Tor's excavations tend to confirm Yadin's conclusions. So, "it will seem very probable (as it did to Yadin, long ago) that the massive destruction of greater Hazor was that wrought by Joshua."³

However, there is another way to interpret the evidence. It is very easy to understand the Jabin in Judges 4 as a different king from the Jabin in Joshua 11.⁴ A fragment of a cuneiform tablet discovered in 1991 addressed to "Ib-ni-[x]" may have originally said, "Ib-ni-[^dIM]," or "Ibni-Addu," a king in Hazor. The latter form with such a prefix (an apparent variant of our anglicized "Jabin") is attested in the Mari archives.⁵

Jabin I had same name as successor Jabin II in Judges 4. The Mari archives in 18th century apparently were talking about a "distant predecessor" ("Ibni-Adad," or "the god Adad has created"⁶). So, there is no reason to surmise that the two accounts are doublets, anymore than would be the other examples that Kitchen gives (Nigmads II and II and Ammishtamrus I and II in Ugarit, etc.).⁷

Edward J. Young also avers, "The Jabin of Judges 4:2 is evidently a successor of the one name here."⁸ Howard Vos' interpretation is that the destruction at the end of

¹ Kitchen, 185.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 175, 184-185.

⁵ Mark W. Chavalas & Murray R. Adamthwaite, "Archaeological Light on the Old Testament," in *The Face of Old Testament Studies*, ed. David W. Barker & Bill T. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), 94-95.

⁶ Malamat, "Hazor," 17.

⁷ Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 184.

⁸ Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B.

Stratum 1b could be from Joshua, and the destruction of 1b could be that of Deborah and Barak in the Judges.¹ And with regard to Jabin, Hoerth likewise argues that “the name was a dynastic one, long in use.”²

So, there would really be no reason to conclude that the reference to Jabin in the battle of Deborah in Judges 4 was anachronistic. Apparently, the site was first destroyed by fire under the leadership of Joshua in the late 15th century during the initial conquest of Canaan. Subsequently, in the late 13th century, it was destroyed once again by the forces of Deborah and Barak. This interpretation is permissible by the archaeological evidence and harmonizes with the chronology of the Biblical narrative itself.

The excavators finally reached bed rock in Stratum XXI in the Tel itself. This was identified as the first city of Hazor built in the first half of the third millennium B.C.³

V. Conclusion. If Yadin, Ben-Tor et. al. are correct, then Hazor is one of the great showpieces of Biblical archaeology! If our interpretation of the sequence of events and their correspondence to the empirical data is accurate, then it appears that archaeology can indeed be useful for testing (even *confirming*) the historicity of the Biblical narrative.

A caveat is in order. We are not arguing for the archaeology of Hazor somehow “proving” the inspiration of Scripture. Rather, we are pointing out that since Scripture and archaeology often deal with the very same subject matter (i.e., putative historical events, the material remains of which might yet be found), then whenever the latter

Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949, 1977), 166.

¹ Vos, *Archaeology in Bible Lands*, 173.

² Alfred J. Hoerth, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 230, n. 8.

³ Ibid.

discipline supports the historical claims of Scripture, it can be thus said to “confirm”¹ the Biblical record (*qua* history).² Other steps would be necessary in order to demonstrate the inspiration of the text (an apologetic or theological concern outside of the narrow scope of archaeology). But, as an answer to destructive Biblical criticism, for example, archaeology appears to play a vital role in the defense of the integrity of the text.

Some problems at Hazor remain, however. Yadin’s and Ben-Tor’s interpretations of the data do not support the early date of the Exodus. (Yadin would date it to about 1230 B.C.) But, as we have observed, other scholars believe that the evidence uncovered at Hazor can be interpreted as fitting in with the early date of the exodus and conquest (late 15th century).

Moreover, today the debate continues about the identification of the “Solomonic gate” and the reconstructed city with the events attributed in the Bible to the 10th century (though Ben-Tor believes the evidence is flexible enough to allow for the Solomonic period in middle of 10th century). Yet, it appears to this writer that this issue is not as vexing as the question of the dating of the earlier destruction levels and the plausible harmonization of the data with the accounts in both Joshua 11 and Judges 4. The subject of Hazor will no doubt continue to enjoy a well-deserved privileged status in Syro-Palestinian and Biblical archaeology for a long time to come.

¹ Even “prove,” if one is allowed to stipulate one’s definition of “prove” as something like “corroborate,” “support” or “demonstrate the correspondence of” the empirical data with the historical claims of Scripture.

² For a fascinating discussion of the relationship of science to Scripture (with obvious implication for the debate about archaeology and the Bible), see J. P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 200-208.

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