Jerusalem

Cosmic ASOR: Suppose a Supernatural Event Occurs in Historical Time

February 27, 2019
by Peter Feinman

Sodom and Gomorrah by John Martin (Wikipedia)

This blog marks the final one [YAY!] on the ASOR and SBL conferences in 2018.

Suppose a supernatural event occurs in historical time. By supernatural, I am referring to a natural but infrequent event that does not lend itself to daily, weekly, monthly, annual, or even Sothic cycles. These are events in historic time which are unique to the individuals experiencing them. Neither they nor anyone they know has ever experienced the event before. However similar events may have been remembered in the oral tradition from a long time ago.

A classic example would be the volcanic eruption of Mt. Vesuvius and the destruction of Pompeii. That event had an immediate impact on the people at that time. It also became part of the cultural legacy of the people. If a storyteller sets a story in Pompeii (or on the Titanic or in Atlantis), it is not too difficult to figure out that the ending will not go well for the people living there.

There were two such papers at ASOR both with biblical implications.

**Environmental Archaeology of the Ancient Near East**
The 3.7kaBP Middle Ghor Event: Catastrophic Termination of a Bronze Age Civilization

Phillip J. Silvia (Trinity Southwest University), A. Victor Adedeji (Elizabeth City State University), Ted E. Bunch (Northern Arizona University), T. David Burleigh (New Mexico Tech), Robert Hermes (Los Alamos National Laboratory), George Howard (Restoration Systems), Malcolm A. LeCompte (Comet Research Group), Charles Mooney (NC State University), E. Clay Swindel (Comet Research Group), Allen West (Comet Research Group), Tim Witwer (Comet Research Group), James H. Wittke (Northern Arizona University), Wendy S. Wolback (DePaul University), and Dale Batchelor (EAG Laboratories).

This paper surveys the multiple lines of evidence that collectively suggest a Tunguska-like, cosmic airburst event that obliterated civilization—including the Middle Bronze Age city-state anchored by Tall el-Hammam—in the Middle Ghor (the 25 km diameter circular plain immediately north of the Dead Sea) ca. 1700 B.C.E., or 3700 years before present (3.7kaBP). Analyses of samples taken over twelve seasons of the Tall el-Hammam Excavation Project have been and are being performed by a team of scientists from New Mexico Tech, Northern Arizona University, NC State University, Elizabeth City (NC) State University, DePaul University, Trinity Southwest University, the Comet Research Group, and Los Alamos National Laboratories, with remarkable results. Commensurate with these results are the archaeological data collected from across the entire occupational footprint (36 ha) of Tall el-Hammam, demonstrating a directionality pattern for the high-heat, explosive 3.7kaBP Middle Ghor Event that, in an instant, devastated approximately 500 km² immediately north of the Dead Sea, not only wiping out 100% of the Middle Bronze Age cities and towns, but also stripping agricultural soils from once-fertile fields and covering the eastern Middle Ghor with a super-heated brine of Dead Sea anhydride salts pushed over the landscape by the Event's frontal shockwaves. Based upon the archaeological evidence, it took at least 600 years to recover sufficiently from the soil destruction and contamination before civilization could again become established in the eastern Middle Ghor.

I am not qualified to discuss the science of this presentation which I did not see. What I do note is that it was one of two papers to garner some media attention. The other one was the session on changing the name of ASOR to delete the word "Oriental." While I did download the papers from that session, so far I have not decided to write about it and instead am confining myself to archaeological and biblical papers.

The reason for the media attention for this presentation was due to a word not mentioned in the abstract and as far as I know not mentioned in the session. The word is “Sodom.” Here are some examples courtesy of Joseph Lauer.

Evidence of Sodom? Meteor blast cause of biblical destruction, say scientists

Bible’s Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed by an exploding asteroid, says archaeologists

‘Fire and Brimstone’ that Destroyed Biblical Sodom Matches Findings of Cosmic Catastrophe 3,700 Years Ago

Bible’s Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed by 10 MEGATON asteroid explosion, archaeologists say

Biblical City of Sodom Was Blasted to Smithereens by a Massive Asteroid Explosion

Scientists Admit Biblical Account of Sodom is Accurate.

According to Lauer, the ASOR presentation was not the first one on the subject. Silvia and Steven Collins presented the paper “The Civilization-Ending 3.7KYrBP Event: Archaeological Data, Sample Analyses, and Biblical Implications” to the Near East Archaeological Society in November 2015. The paper had been available at Silvia’s Academia page. This event is in accord with Collins view that Tall el-Hammam at the northern side of the Dead Sea is a strong candidate for the biblical city of Sodom.

The biblical implications of the cosmic event are not that it proves the Hebrew Bible is true. It is that the memory of the event survived for centuries and could be used by a biblical storyteller just as stories today can be set at Pompeii, on the Titanic, or in Atlantis. The application of the political template I have been using works for the original core story in Gen. 19 as well.

1. The story was composed as a standalone story. It was not yet part of a Lot or Abram cycle yet alone the Book of Genesis.
2. The author took for granted that the audience knew the legacy of the destruction of Sodom. As soon as the story was set there everyone knew what the ending would be.
3. The author took for granted that the audience knew what Israelite city the city of Sodom stood for in the political polemic or allegory (Gibeah).
4. The author took for granted that the audience knew who the weak king of the city was (Ishbaal).
5. The story was composed after the following event had occurred:

2 Samuel 3:7 Now Saul had a concubine, whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah; and Ishboseth said to Abner, “Why have you gone in to my father’s concubine?” Then Abner was very angry over the words of Ishboseth, and said, “Am I a dog’s head of Judah? This day I keep showing loyalty to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers, and to his friends, and have not given you into the hand of David; and yet you charge me today with a fault concerning a woman. God do so to Abner, and more also, if I do not accomplish for David what the LORD has sworn to him, to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul, and set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beersheba.” And Ishboseth could not answer Abner another word, because he feared him.

This text had not yet been written but the breakdown in the social order implied by the text had already occurred. Ishbaal had become a figurehead king who had lost control of his military.

6. The author took for granted that the audience knew who the two messengers of Yahweh were (David and Joab).

In other words, according to this story, David offered amnesty or sanctuary to Ishbaal if he abandoned his capital city before it was destroyed. Ishbaal chose not to accept this offer. However Abner did abandon ship as he recognized that David was the superior warrior who could save Israel from the hand of the Philistines, but that’s another story.

The second cosmic story is my own presentation at ASOR.

“What Happened on October 30, 1207 B.C.E. in the Valley of Aijalon?”

Peter Feinman (Institute of History, Archaeology, and Education)

The suggestion has been made that on October 30, 1207 B.C.E. in the late afternoon in the Valley of Aijalon an annular eclipse occurred. The suggestion further has been made that this astronomical event is connected to the poem in the Book of Jashar recounted in Joshua 10. The astronomy and physics in the calculation of the annular eclipse are not the subject of this paper. Given the validity of those calculations, what historical reconstruction, if any, can be proposed that takes into account the relevant archaeological and biblical information including the Merneptah Stele, the Iron Age I hill-country settlements, Iron Age I geopolitics, the poem, and the narrative biblical texts?

I propose that the emergence of Israel as an anti-Egyptian entity generated a reaction among the Canaanite cities. Some cities shared Israel’s antipathy to Egyptian hegemony and welcomed the new entity while others were good vassals of Egypt and opposed the Canaanite cities and Israel that disrupted the Egyptian order. In other words, there is a story to be told of real-world power politics that has been lost amidst the cosmic imagery and the fight to determine whether the Bible is true. Applying the same techniques an American historian would use to understand the American Revolution may provide a more fruitful resolution of these issues.

The second cosmic story differs from the Sodom story in that Israelites, in particular Benjaminites, directly experienced it. The victory and cosmic sign became part of the Benjaminite tribal legacy, an alternative cosmic event to those of the Songs of Miriam and Deborah presumably part of the Book of the Wars of Yahweh controlled by the Levites.

What the paper only briefly alluded to is something frequently minimized in biblical scholarship: the precarious hold of Jerusalem as the capital city after the death of David. It is easy to overlook this situation if you think David and/or Solomon never existed or were at most chieftains. It also is easy to overlook if one’s focus is the temple. But it is important to realize that Jerusalem did not have a dominant position in the land of Canaan over either other Canaanite cities or Israel except for David. Then he died. So did presumably Jebusites Bathsheba and Zadok. Now what?

The questioning of the centrality of Jerusalem to Israel can be observed textually.

Jerusalem was not part of Israel:

Judges 19:10 and arrived opposite Jebus. He had with him a couple of saddled asses, and his concubine was with him. When they were near Jebus, the day was far spent, and the servant said to his master, “Come now, let us turn aside to this city of the Jebusites, and spend the night in it.” And his master said to him, “We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel; but we will pass on to Gibeah.”

Jerusalem was an enemy of Israel:
Joshua 10:1 When Adonizedek king of Jerusalem heard how Joshua had taken Ai, and had utterly destroyed it, doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king, and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were among them, 3 So Adonizedek king of Jerusalem sent to Hoham king of Hebron, to Piram king of Jarmuth, to Japhia king of Lachish, and to Debir king of Eglon, saying, 4 “Come up to me, and help me, and let us smite Gibeon; for it has made peace with Joshua and with the people of Israel.”

Bethel was a better cosmic center than Jerusalem:

Various supplements to the story of Jacob (Day 3 of the King David Bible).

By Persian times, the rivalry between Bethel and Jerusalem was déjà vue all over again.

To counter this opposition, Jerusalem relied on its old standby protector Egypt. Pharaoh’s daughter replaced Bathsheba as the dominant person in Solomon’s life. Pharaoh Solomon mimicked the ways of Egypt to the point of even building in the same locations Egypt had used to control the local populations. It is during the reign of Solomon when the rivalry among Zadokites, Aaronids, and Levites really heated up in the politics and in the stories.

The 11th-10th centuries BCE were quite active archaeologically, historically, and textually for the shifting Israelite people and polities. There still is a lot of work to do to historically reconstruct this period and to understand the formation of the Hebrew Bible. And with that thought, this review of the ASOR and SBL conferences in 2018 comes to an end.

Canaanites Vow to Build a Wall: Moses-Mob of Middle-Easterners Will Be Stopped

November 11, 2018
by Peter Feinman

BREAKING NEWS BREAKING NEWS

The numerous Canaanite kings banded together today to announce their intention to build a wall to prevent the Moses-led mob of Middle-Easterners from entering the land. The Canaanites have seen the havoc these refugees wreaked in the land of Egypt and are determined not to permit a repeat in Canaan. Spokesperson Rahab Huckabee Sanders said to the men, “The fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard what you did before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no courage left in any man, because of you” (mostly Joshua 2:9-11).

Canaanite spies dispatched to monitor the movements of the mob have reported that all is not what it seems to be. These people are not simply walking step by step on a long journey through the wilderness. Like Frodo, they traversed the wilderness on the wings of eagles (Ex. 19:4).
Furthermore, the Canaanite spies have observed drones supplying the refugees with manna from heaven. Clearly this movement has received organized help from an outside agency.

In response, the Canaanites have decided not to build a single wall across the land. Egypt tried that centuries earlier and it did not work. Instead the Canaanites will build a wall around each Canaanite city to prevent the Israelites from encroaching on their land. The first city selected for the wall was Jericho.

Putting aside the hyperbolic rhetoric portraying the refugee caravan as an apocalyptic scourge from the end of days, the event does provide an opportunity to think about how the Canaanite people actually did respond to the appearance in history of the Israelite people in the land of Canaan.

Typically, Merneptah (1212-1202 BCE) hogs the attention at this transition from the Late Bronze Age to Iron Age I due to the Merneptah Stela. His reference to Israel as a people and not settled city-dwellers has led to continual discussion about exactly who or what Israel was and where they lived. There is no indication of any alliance or relationship among the four entities named in the Merneptah Stela. Nor is there any reason to believe he listed all the Canaanites who opposed Egyptian rule. In this regard we may never know the true extent of the Canaanite Spring and how widespread the anti-Egyptian feelings and actions were in the land of Canaan even without the potential Israelite catalyst.

What was the geopolitical landscape in the land of Canaan at this time and how did Israel fit in?

Israel's appearance in history occurred during a roughly 350-year period of Egyptian hegemony in the land of Canaan. At times, various Canaanites, some known, some not known, rebelled against Egyptian rule. As Egyptologist Ellen Morris points out, Gezer and Yenoam on the Merneptah Stela had appeared before in the Egyptian records as periodic irritants dating back to the 15th century BCE. The newcomer to the Canaanite city-list was Ashkelon, a day's march from the Egyptian stronghold at Gaza, the border between Egypt and Canaan. She suggests that a city in such close proximity to a major Egyptian military base only would have rebelled if “something had gone fundamentally wrong in Egypt's maintenance of its northern empire....Ashkelon would never have attempted insurrection had Egypt been in full fighting form.” She posits that the joint attack by the [non-Arab] Libyans and the Sea Peoples on Egypt created a window of opportunity for Ashkelon given the magnitude of Egyptian forces committed to resisting those intrusions. Morris wonders if Ashkelon expected aid from Gezer and notes that these two cities had warred against Jerusalem in the Amarna Age. One may add that Israel would have been an eyewitness to these machinations among the Canaanite cities, Egypt, and the Sea Peoples. These actions involving the sons of Ham, the sons of Japheth, and the sons of Shem were part of Israel's collective memory. To isolate Israel from the surrounding political developments creates a skewed understanding of Israel's early history. Israel was not alone in its opposition to Egypt and there is no inherent reason that these different entities were not as aware of each other just as their counterparts had been aware during the Amarna Age a century earlier.

According to the archaeological surveys, around this time hundreds of small settlements appeared as new sites in the Rachel lands/West Bank/hill country. These settlements routinely are identified as Israelite. Based on that obvious conclusion, one would further conclude that these Israelites were no direct threat to Canaanites along the coast, in the Jezreel, or in the Galilee. Those areas would not be part of an Israelite polity until the kingdom of David centuries later.

Within the area of Israelite settlement, what were the primary Canaanite cities with which Israel would interact? Again the answer is straightforward. In the Middle Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age, and Iron Age I, two Canaanite cities above all others stood out within the area of Israelite settlements – Shechem and Jerusalem. As it turns out, both cities figure in the archaeological and biblical record. Combined they help create an historical reconstruction around the time of Merneptah and afterwards.

Shechem, the proverbial navel of the universe, was a pain in the royal ass according to the Amarna Letters. According to this diplomatic correspondence from the 14th century BCE, Shechem, led by its king Labayu, was always fomenting trouble with its neighbors. Labayu's actions lead to neighboring kings contacting Pharaoh for help. This correspondence is used to portray Egypt as supporting a divide and conquer approach to its vassals. As long as they paid their tribute, garrisoned Egypt's troops, and did not have any foreign alliances, who cared about their internal petty squabbles?

Pharaoh's physical presence was not necessary to resolve such internal conflicts. His depiction on a relief was not a photograph of a battle scene. He did not have to be present. The garrison forces and/or vassals who fought on his behalf signified his symbolic presence even if not a physical one. Indeed, collective action on the part of Canaanite kings without Pharaoh's direct involvement is well documented. It is unlikely that Hezekiah's military campaigns and military expenditures would have been possible without Judah having the backing of Egypt.
Signified his symbolic presence even if not a physical one. Indeed, collective action on the part of Canaanite kings without Pharaonic guidance or blessing is unlikely. The Canaanites themselves should take care of these matters involving Shechem and the habiru which they did. These actions and correspondence were a precedent for how they would react to the appearance of Israel.

For Israel, the single most welcoming area for them in all the land of Canaan was likely to be Shechem and its environs. As it turns out by no coincidence whatsoever, it is exactly to this traditional anti-Egyptian city where the biblical narrative recounts Moses telling the people to go:

**Deuteronomy 11:29** And when the LORD your God brings you into the land which you are entering to take possession of it, you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal.

**Deuteronomy 27:12** "When you have passed over the Jordan, these shall stand upon Mount Gerizim to bless the people."

The campaign promise was fulfilled by Joshua:

**Joshua 8:30** Then Joshua built an altar in Mount Ebal to the LORD, the God of Israel.

This altar has been discovered complete with pharaonic scarabs that could be used in ritual celebrations of the liberation from Egyptian hegemony. Furthermore, Merneptah's depiction of the Israelites at the Cour de la Cachette likely draws on the perceived Israelite-Shechemite link as Canaanites. In other words, there is a convergence of material archaeology, inscriptions, and biblical narrative on the peaceful settlement of Israel in the area of Shechem.

With Jerusalem, the story is different. According to the Amarna Letters, Jerusalem was a good vassal of Pharaoh. Its ruling dynasty even had been installed by the strong arm of Pharaoh. Jerusalem was used to contacting Egypt for assistance against potential threats and to allying with other Canaanite cities against upstarts like Labayu. Again there is a precedent for how it would respond to Israel.

Within the hill country where Israel settled, the most prominent area where it would be least welcome is Jerusalem. As it turns out by no coincidence whatsoever, it is exactly this pro-Egyptian city with which Israel has the most difficulty.

According to Joshua 10, Jerusalem initiates an alliance against a Canaanite city that had dared to ally with Israel.

**Joshua 10:3** So Adonizedek king of Jerusalem sent to Hoham king of Hebron, to Piram king of Jarmuth, to Japhia king of Lachish, and to Debir king of Eglon, saying, "Come up to me, and help me, and let us smite Gibeon; for it has made peace with Joshua and with the people of Israel."

Then the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon, gathered their forces, and went up with all their armies and encamped against Gibeon, and made war against it.

In the subsequent battle in the land of Benjamin, Israel prevails over Jerusalem.

According to Judges 1, Benjamin fails in its efforts to conquer Jerusalem.

**Judges 1:21** But the people of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who dwelt in Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have dwelt with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.

One may see in this version, that although Benjamin defeated the Jebusites in open-field battle, it did not succeed in capturing the city. It did however continue building settlements that increasing encroached on the city without conquering it.

The situation grew even more precarious for Jerusalem when it lost its protector. The strong Egyptian presence which had been maintained through the reign of Ramses III in the 12th century BCE abruptly ended during the reign of Ramses VI by 1139 BCE. Morris characterizes the end of Egyptian rule as “a short and bloody affair.” Her survey of Egyptian military bases in Canaan indicates that virtually every one was torched.

The local populations must have seized the opportunity of Egypt's internal weakness to rid themselves of their overlords. Without Egyptian taxation, corvée labor demands, co-option of local industries and resources, and interference in local politics, the inhabitants of Canaan must surely have believed that their lots would improve significantly.
So what did Jerusalem do now? Given the failure of Merneptah to destroy the seed of Israel, given the failure of the Jerusalem initiated alliance with its defeat in the land of Benjamin, given the withdrawal of Egypt from the land, given presence of ever-closer Benjaminites settlements including with a fort, then what was Jerusalem to do? How could Jerusalem protect itself from Israel in general and Benjamin in particular? Answer – IT COULD BUILD A WALL!

As it turns out, that is exactly what Jerusalem did. The appearance of Jerusalem changed after the withdrawal of Egyptian forces from the land of Canaan. Two monumental structures in the city from this time period have been discovered by archaeologists. The first is the Stepped Stone Structure. This terraced construction on the eastern slope of the city was built possibly as an integral part of the city’s fortification system. It is dated to the Iron I period meaning the 12th or 11th centuries BCE prior to the creation of the Israelite kingdom. The structure consists of two parts: a stone mantle and rampart built on a terracing system. Theoretically the two components could have been built separately. Such a construction project demonstrates the capabilities of the city government to initiate an organized effort on a massive scale just as it had done centuries earlier when it build the walls and gates which protected the perennial water source at Gihon.

The second building is the more recently discovered Large Stone Structure. The two structures generally are perceived to be one entity with the more extensively-preserved Stepped Stone Structure serving as a support for the mostly-vanished Large Stone Structure on the summit. This view is consistent with the biblical text referring the fortress of Zion:

II Samuel 5:9 And David dwelt in the stronghold, and called it the city of David. And David built the city round about from the Millo inward.

A natural question to ask is “Why did the Jebusites build it?” Amihai Mazar decisively declares its magnitude and uniqueness had no parallel from the 12th to early 9th centuries BCE in the Levant. Its construction was an impressive and monumental achievement. The Jebusites faced with the realization that they were on their own decided to act to protect themselves by constructing the Stepped Stone Structure and the Large Stone Structure.

The geopolitical situation following Merneptah is crucial to understanding the formation of the monarchy centuries later. Based on these events at the beginning of Iron Age I (1200 BCE), one needs to resolve the following issues at the conclusion of the period (c. 1000 BCE).

1. Why did David select Jerusalem to be his capital city? – One needs to keep in mind not just the traditional north-south conundrum routine in biblical scholarship but the inclusion into the Israelite polity of non-Israelite Canaanites. How many were Rahab Canaanites who did not fear but welcomed Israel and how many had been supporters of Pharaoh against Israel and suffered the same fate as the killed kings of Canaan?

Joshua 12:9 the king of Jericho, one; the king of Ai, which is beside Bethel, one; the king of Jerusalem, one; the king of Hebron, one; the king of Jarmuth, one; the king of Lachish, one; the king of Eglon, one; the king of Gezer, one; the king of Debir, one; the king of Geder, one; the king of Hormah, one; the king of Arad, one; the king of Libnah, one; the king of Adullam, one; the king of Makkedah, one; the king of Bethel, one; the king of Tappuah, one; the king of Hefer, one; the king of Aphek, one; the king of Lasharon, one; the king of Madon, one; the king of Hazor, one; the king of Shimronmeron, one; the king of Achshaph, one; the king of Taanach, one; the king of Megiddo, one; the king of Kedesh, one; the king of Jokneam in Carmel, one; the king of Dor in Naphathdor, one; the king of Goiim in Galilee, one; the king of Tirzah, one: in all, thirty-one kings.

2. Why did Benjamin choose to ally with its longtime enemy Jerusalem during the reign of Solomon prior to the division of the kingdom? – I suspect that with the deaths of probable Jebusites Zadok and Bathsheba and the exile of Abiathar, Benjamin thought it would dominate the Jerusalem-based kingdom by operating behind the king through Pharaoh’s Daughter. Solomon legitimated his temple through “I had dream” in Benjamin

1 Kings 3:5 At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, “Ask what I shall give you.”

but the king did not relocate the temple to Bethel as Benjamin undoubtedly would have preferred. Still for the moment the Aaronids had triumphed over the Zadokite priests.

The memories of the geopolitical context when Israel first appeared in history in the land of Canaan carried forward to when Israel became a political entity with a king. Ironically, the very wall the Jebusites built to defend the city against Israel and Benjamin became the foundation of David’s military power when he chose to make Jerusalem his capital.
REFERENCES


5. William Dever asks “If this is not Merneptha's Israel, where is it at? And if the settlers were not his Israelite people, who were they? Skeptics have no answer to these questions” (William G. Dever, Beyond the Texts: An Archaeological Portrait of Ancient Israel and Judah (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 218).


9, The structure at Mount Ebal is a scary discovery in biblical archaeology. The existence of an altar from the time of Ramses II to Ramses III consistent with the story of Joshua is too frightening to be taken seriously. Not taking the biblical account seriously historically is one of the bedrock axioms of modern biblical scholarship. On the other hand, there is no reasonable explanation why an obscure short-lived site from early Israel, like Ebal, would even be remembered yet alone included in the biblical narrative unless something of importance had happened there. Typically isolated farmsteads and watchtowers are not the focus of biblical stories and Israelite memories. If it really was an altar, who knows what else in the Bible might be true as well? For the altar at Mount Ebal, see Ralph K. Hawkins, The Iron Age I Structure on Mt. Ebal: Excavation and Interpretation (BBR Supplements 6; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012); Aharon Kempinski, “Joshua's Altar – an Iron Age I Watchtower,” BAR 12/1 1986: 42–53; Pekka Matti Aukusti Pitkänen, Central Sanctuary and Centralization of Worship in Ancient Israel from Settlement to the Building of Solomon's Temple: A Historical and Theological Study of the Biblical Evidence in Its

12. With Khirbet ed-Dawwara, the 11th-10th century date is not in dispute as much as who built this unique walled-town fort site. Israel, Jerusalem, and the Philistines all have been suggested. See Dever, Beyond the Texts, 163,170,285,370n.40; Avraham Faust, Israel's Ethnogenesis: Settlement, Interaction, Expansion and Resistance (London: Equinox Publishing, 2006), 129-130; Israel Finkelstein, “Excavations at Khirbet Ed-Dawwara: an Iron Age Site Northeast of Jerusalem,” TA 17 1990: 163–208; Nadav Na'aman, “Khirbet ed-Dawwara – a Philistine Stronghold on the Benjamin Desert Fringe,” ZDPV 128 2012: 1–9; Omer Sergi, “The Emergence of Judah as a Political Entity between Jerusalem and Benjamin,” ZDPV 133 2017:1-23. I lean towards a Benjaminitic construction that was seen as threatening to Jerusalem. It also may have been a forerunner to the Khirbet Qeiyafa fort.


Who doesn't love parade? Here in the United States, we are about to experience our annual plethora of parades. Throughout the land, We the People will celebrate our birth as a people and nation. As it turns out something similar occurred in ancient Israel when it became a kingdom. It too celebrated its birthday in history, of the creation of the people and not of the universe. The expression of that celebration lives on buried within the Hebrew Bible patiently waiting for it to be excavated if only biblical scholars would look.

The previous two blogs have addressed the topic of performance art and the Hebrew Bible (Is Morgan Freeman God? What Do Biblical Scholars Think? and All the World's a Stage: Performing the Hebrew Bible). The idea of early Israel worshiping an anthropomorphic deity is a false one due to the failure to recognize that stories were performed. Just as Abiathar informed David of the words of the Lord without being mistaken for the deity, so too the chief priest spoke the words of the Lord to the king and the audience in the performance of the royal narrative without being mistaken for the deity.

So far two types of performance have been considered. The first is the individual storyteller perhaps at the threshing floor, the traditional sacred area, regaling/entertaining an audience while delivering a political message. In American terms, at our birth, broadsides, essays, and pamphlets would be read aloud when posted at the taverns throughout the land including the reading of the Declaration of Independence. One such reading in Manhattan led to the famous toppling of the statue of King George III. One suspects that in ancient Israel, Saul and Rehoboam didn't fare ill with such storytellers either.
George III. One suspects that in ancient Israel, Saul and Rehoboam didn’t fare ill with such storytellers either.

The second type of performance was the royal staged performance. It centered on the ark and not statue of the deity. These scenes involved the king, queen, and high priest and the occasional appearance of villains and messengers performing in various roles. The meaning of stories becomes quite different when you realize the same person could perform in multiple roles over the course of the seven-day royal drama. Imagine if the person who performed as the cobra uraeus in the garden that the man and women left also performed in the same costume as the Pharaoh in the garden the multitude left in the fourth cycle. This realization changes the meaning of the original stories and highlights the connections between them that text-alone scholars separate today.

It is with this multitude who left Egypt in mind that I now turn to the processions. Biblical scholars are familiar with processions in ancient times. Typically from what we know of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, the primary role of the people then was as spectators. The same applies for the inaugural of the American President. It is the king with the chief priest and attendants who do the actual moving including with a statue. The people remain fixed watching the procession pass before them.

The American July 4 parade provides a different model...as do Memorial Day and Thanksgiving Day. Yes, an official many lead the parade but it is the people of the community who march. High school bands, local store pavilions, veterans, and other civic, cultural, social, and ethnic organizations and people march in the community parade. If you don't yourself then someone you know does – child, relative, friend. These parades with the American flag in the role of the statue of the deity help define the country. While we may take such people-based parades for granted, when they occurred in ancient Israel they were a political revolution which differentiated Israel from its neighbors.

The royal narrative continue three such processions.

**Numbers 10:35** And whenever the ark set out, Moses said, “Arise, O Yahweh, and let thy enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee.” And when it rested, he said, “Return, O Yahweh, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel.”

**Joshua 6:7** And he (Joshua) said to the people, “Go forward; march around the city, and let the armed men pass on before the ark of Yahweh.”

**2 Samuel 6:15** So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of Yahweh with shouting, and with the sound of the horn.... And they brought in the ark of Yahweh, and set it in its place, inside the tent which David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before Yahweh. And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of Yahweh of hosts, and distributed among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people departed, each to his house.

These three processions defined Israel differently than its neighbors but it was a difference which did not last for long.

Typically biblical scholars do not link these three processions. They are well aware that the text describes processions or marching in all three instances but they are not aware that they are part of a whole that they bring to a conclusion the royal narrative. Let me explain.

First, the three processions share certain characteristics in common. Each involves the ark of Yahweh. Each involves a human male lead of renown, Moses, Joshua, and David, suitable roles for a king to perform. Each includes the participation of the people.

Second, the three processions mark a shift from a king-alone narrative to a more people based one with the focal point being the Exodus, the birth of the people Israel.

They witness the moment of deliverance at the birth of the people:

**Exodus 14:13** And Moses said to the people, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of Yahweh, which he will work for you today.”

They ratify the covenant that defines them:

**Exodus 24:3** Moses came and told the people all the words of Yahweh and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, “All the words which Yahweh has spoken we will do.”
voice, and said, “All the words which Yahweh has spoken we will do.”

Exodus 24:7 Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, “All that Yahweh has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.”

So it should be no surprise that the people also are involved in the selection and rejection of the king: Saul at Gilgal, David at Hebron, and Rehoboam at Shechem.

1 Samuel 11:14 Then Samuel said to the people, “Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingdom.” So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before Yahweh in Gilgal. There they sacrificed peace offerings before Yahweh, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

2 Samuel 5:3 So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before Yahweh, and they anointed David king over Israel.

1 Kings 12:16 And when all Israel saw that the king did not hearken to them, the people answered the king, “What portion have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, David.” So Israel departed to their tents.

Considering that Israel had survived as a people for over two centuries without a king, the idea of the people (meaning clan leaders or elders) voicing their approval seems reasonable. The royal narrative incorporates the participation of the people into the performance itself.

Third, in this scenario, each of the three processions serves a separate role in the cosmic drama.

At first the ark and people venture out into the wilderness, the land of chaos. Here the ark is brought from Zion, outside the city walls as the people symbolically re-enact the wilderness journey of their ancestors following the birth of the people.

Second, the king and the people march around the city walls. Although the story being told is set in Jericho, the performance is in Jerusalem. The Israelites approach the walls of the city and the dialog ensues on the walls, possibly at the stone step structure. Now it is the Canaanite people represented by the queen who pronounce that they have heard but not seen what the Israelite people witnessed at their birth.

Joshua 2:8 Before they lay down, she [Rahab] came up to them on the roof, and said to the men, “I know that Yahweh has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how Yahweh dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no courage left in any man, because of you; for Yahweh your God is he who is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.

In its revised canonical form, these verses are analogous to the famous words of President Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg, an American sacred place when he said:

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth...

Lincoln knew that many of the people in his audience and in the Union were immigrants or descendants of immigrants who had not brought forth a new nation fourscore and seven years earlier. But by standing for the Union now, so they were linked to those who were the descendants of the people who had brought forth the new nation on this continent. So it is each time an immigrant is naturalized. Something similar happened in ancient Israel when the Canaanite people represented by Rahab who were not part of original Israel now found a place in the new kingdom of Israel.

In its final form, these verses are a rebuff to the Jebusite priesthood and its god Elyon.

Genesis 14:18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth.

This role belongs to Yahweh not Elyon and it is David not Melchizedek who offers the blessing. One glimpses here an example of Jerusalem Throne Games, the battle for power through storytelling and supplementing the original royal narrative.
Then once again the people are called to action. The symbolic meaning of the circumnavigation of the city walls should be clear. Jerusalem, the capital city represents all the Canaanite cities which have become part of the Israelite kingdom. In effect, Yahweh through his ark, his king, and his people marks his turf. The deity from the South has entered the Promised Land and asserted his claim to it. The people, not the king, then voice the change which has occurred:

**Joshua 6:16** And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, “Shout; for Yahweh has given you the city.

The city of Jerusalem had not been considered part of Israel:

**Judges 19:11** When they were near Jebus, the day was far spent, and the servant said to his master, “Come now, let us turn aside to this city of the Jebusites, and spend the night in it.” And his master said to him, “We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel; but we will pass on to Gibeah.”

Now it is. All that remains is for the ark to be installed and cosmos to be restored now with Yahweh at the cosmic center.

The third procession brings the royal narrative to a close. The ark, the king, and the people enter the city and celebrate in the feast. All is as it should be. The people rejoice and return home in peace.

Taken together the three processions form a mini-akitu. In addition, the mini-akitu from the first cycle and the final procession are part of the same story. The first cycle concludes with the blessing to the king performing as Noah; the entire royal drama concludes with another sacrifice and a blessing of the people by the king. This act of blessing by the king is a bit daring since normally such actions were considered the purview of the priests. One recalls how in the supplement to the flood story, Noah takes it up himself to bless and curse people (Gen. 9:18-29). Such actions could be considered playing with fire. Nonetheless, there appears to be no downside here to the king himself speaking in the name of the Lord.

The narrative concludes with a people at peace in celebration of life. The ark is in the tent and not the temple because the temple had not yet been built. I suspect this royal narrative was only performed once. The kingdom of Israel with its capital at Jerusalem did not long endure. How many kings had the charisma to pull off a performance like this anyway and were closely associated with the ark? There is only one choice which is why I call this royal narrative from garden to Zion performed over the seven-day New Year festival the King David Bible.

*Posted in* Biblical Archaeology and Literature

*Tags:* Ark of Yahweh, Hebrew Bible, Jerusalem

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Murderers' Row: The Trump Hall of Fame

by Peter Feinman

“Indigenous” versus “Indian”: What Word Should Be Used?

by Peter Feinman
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Quotes

Those who control the present, control the past and those who control the past control the future.

— George Orwell
Suppose a gigantic monster had spent millennia camouflaging itself as a shelf of polar ice. Now, wounded by some careless arctic explorers, the monster now seeks its revenge! Sounds like the premise of a pretty good sci-fi movie. The steady stream of bright red liquid oozing out of Antarctica's Blood Falls isn't blood at all, but a vein of extremely salty water pouring out of the rapidly melting glacier. Actually, given the implications of climate change, it might still be a pretty scary sight despite the explanation.

The Bermuda Triangle. Superstitious travelers often rank these times from Shortest Peak Wavelength in the spectrum of the cosmic microwave background to Longest: - 500,000 years after the Big Bang - 1 million years after the Big Bang - 100 million years after the Big Bang - 1.5 billion years after the Big Bang - today. During the history of the universe, what important event occurred about 0.001 seconds after the Big Bang? Most matter was annihilated by antimatter. Which of the following important events occurred earliest in the history of the universe? Space-time rapidly expanded during a brief period of inflation. During the history of the universe, what important event occurred about 0.001 seconds after the Big Bang?