

Fundamental Issues in the Study of *Tanakh*  
By Rav Amnon Bazak

Shiur #6h: *Tanakh* and Archaeology (continued)

**G. The Unified Kingdom**

We will now address the final period that we will be reviewing here – the kingdom of David and Shlomo, known as the period of the "unified kingdom" (11th-10th centuries B.C.E.). Here, too, there are many facts that are universally agreed upon, and scholarly discussion turns mainly upon the interpretation of those facts.

All agree that in Eretz Yisrael during the period of the monarchy (referred to by archaeologists as the Iron Age II), there was a real upheaval, with a new culture growing upon the ruins of the Canaanite cities. This culture is characterized by a higher quality of construction (use of hewn stone, pillars, etc.) and sophisticated ceramics. Fortified cities appeared, along with public structures and water supply systems, all showing evidence of a centralized government. This construction stands out prominently against the background of the meager, scattered construction of the Iron Age I. Another undisputed fact, with significant implications for the entire discussion, is the absence of any external findings (such as Egyptian, Assyrian or Babylonian inscriptions) during this period.

The main question is when these changes took place – i.e., when the transition from the Iron Age I (identified, as we have noted previously, with the period of the Judges) to the Iron Age II occurred. The classic view of biblical archaeology (known in this context as the "High Chronology") connected this phenomenon with David and Shlomo, whose political and economic power is attested to in *Tanakh* – most particularly in the extensive construction projects undertaken by Shlomo throughout the country (*Melakhim* I 9:15-19), including Chatzor, Megiddo, and Gezer. This view rested partly on artifacts discovered at the sites of the excavations of the three aforementioned locations. In addition to impressive buildings some identical structures were found at the various locations consisting of large, six-chambered gates, with three chambers on each side of the opening. In each instance, the finding indicates the Iron Age II. As a result, these structures came to be known as "Solomon's Gates."<sup>[1]</sup>

However, in recent years this evidence has been rejected by some scholars.<sup>[2]</sup> The gate at Megiddo is connected to the wall built above the palaces, and since the wall thus dates from a period later than the palace, these scholars have assumed that the gate, too, is from a later period. They argue that additional six-chamber gates have been discovered in various cities (including Ashdod, Lakhish and Tel Ira) which were unquestionably later than Shlomo's period. In addition, they claim that the gates attributed to Shlomo cannot be dated, since the archaeological findings provide only a relative chronology (i.e., which came earlier and which came later), but absolute dating is possible only where there is some objective external datum. Since

these scholars cast doubt on the reliability of the biblical narrative, they argue that the text cannot be relied upon for determining the dating of "Solomon's Gates," and hence there is no archaeological proof that they were built in Shlomo's time.

Finkelstein and Silberman add further questions about the attribution of the construction in these cities to Shlomo:

1. There is a disparity between the construction works evident in other cities, and the paucity of findings in Jerusalem and its environs. Admittedly, the entire area of study is plagued by the objective problem that no archaeological excavation is permitted on the Temple Mount itself, and therefore no evidence can be found supporting any dating of the First Temple. However, excavations in and around Jerusalem have not yielded significant findings from the 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.; the general impression is one of a "typical mountain-region village," with a sparse population living around it.<sup>[3]</sup>

"Can it be possible that a king who built such splendid hewn-stone palaces in the capital city, ruled over his kingdom from a small, remote, backward village?"<sup>[4]</sup>
2. In addition, there are many similarities between the palaces discovered at Megiddo and the palace in the city of Shomron, which was built during the period of Omri and Achav, at the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. This would seem to indicate that they were built around the same time. Thus, these scholars conclude that the construction of Megiddo must also have been undertaken later on, during the time of Omri.<sup>[5]</sup>
3. Carbon 14<sup>[6]</sup> samples from major sites attributed to Shlomo, such as Megiddo and Chatzor, indicate more uniform dates for the destruction of these cities – and hence also for their construction by the kings of Israel. Finkelstein and Silberman contend that these tests represent the "final nail in the coffin of the theory of the Solomonic period."<sup>[7]</sup> On the basis of these arguments and others, they conclude that the beginning of the Iron Age II must be postponed by a hundred years ("Low chronology"). Thus, all the trappings of an opulent and well-developed kingdom are stripped from Shlomo's period and attributed instead to the period of Omri. The period of David and Shlomo can now no longer be regarded as a "golden age". Instead of the tremendous unified kingdom described in *Tanakh*, Finkelstein proposes a view of Yehuda as a small, sparse and isolated rural society. To his view, it was admiration for the figures cast by David and Shlomo that led the authors of the Books of *Shemuel* and *Melakhim* – some three hundred years later – to transform their small sovereign territory into a legend of a huge united kingdom, attributing the entire construction enterprise of the House of Omri to King Shlomo.

The first argument, regarding the disparity between Jerusalem and other settlements, is based on an absence of findings for the reliability of the biblical account. Yair Hoffman has noted in this context, that "the attempt to draw conclusions from the absence of artifacts is highly questionable, for archaeological and epigraphic findings are sometimes extremely serendipitous."<sup>[8]</sup>

Beyond this objection, there is evidence in support of the biblical description that presents the "Low chronology" with some challenges:

1. An important basis for the discussion is an inscription found at the Temple of Amun at Karnak, in Egypt, describing Shishak's<sup>[9]</sup> invasion of Eretz Yisrael, which brought destruction to several cities. The campaign, somewhere around the year 925 B.C.E., was waged primarily against the Northern Kingdom of Israel, yet also affected the region of the Negev.<sup>[10]</sup>

This inscription in and of itself represents real proof of the reliability of the narrative in *Sefer Melakhim*, since the campaign is mentioned there explicitly:

"And it came to pass in the fifth year of King Rechav'am that Shishak, king of Egypt, came up against Jerusalem. And he took away the treasures of the House of God, and the treasures of the king's house, and he took all; and he took away all the shields of gold which Shlomo had made" (*Melakhim I 14:25-26*).<sup>[11]</sup>

In *Divrei Ha-yamim* the account is expanded upon. We read that Shishak came up to Jerusalem

"with twelve hundred chariots, and sixty thousand horsemen, and the people were without number who came with him from Egypt – Luvim and Sukkiyim and Kushim" (*Divrei Ha-yamim II 12:3*),

and thereafter:

"And he took the fortified cities which belonged to Yehuda, and he came to Jerusalem" (*ibid 4*),

But after Am Yisrael repents, following the call by Shema'ya the prophet, they are promised that Jerusalem will not be destroyed:

"I shall grant them some deliverance, and My wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. Nevertheless, they shall be his servants, that they may know My service and the service of the kingdoms of countries" (*ibid. 7-8*).

Thus, Shishak suffices with the plunder but does not destroy Jerusalem. His campaign is described in *Tanakh* only in this context.<sup>[12]</sup> Although Jerusalem is not mentioned in the Karnak inscription,<sup>[13]</sup> the existence of the Kingdom of Yehuda may be deduced from the route of the campaign:

"The route of the campaign differs from everything that we know about Egyptian campaigns to Kena'an during the period of the New Kingdom, and the fact that the campaign reached the region of Kiryat Ye'arim, to the north of Jerusalem, testifies to the existence of a political entity in the Judean mountains that was of great significance in the eyes of the Egyptians. Such an entity could only have been Shlomo's kingdom, and Shishak's campaign should be identified as an attempt to intervene in the political goings-on in the Land of Israel following Shlomo's death, out of concern that a strong Israelite kingdom might harm Egyptian interests."<sup>[14]</sup>

The inscription about Shishak's campaign also contributes to the discussion surrounding the question of construction during the period of the unified kingdom.<sup>[15]</sup>

The inscription features about seventy unknown locations in the Negev region. This datum sits well with the discovery of dozens of settlements in the Negev, each surrounded by a double wall, the great majority of them belonging to just one period, no later than the 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. These sites, which, apparently, existed up until Shishak's campaign, are similar – in terms of both their architecture and the ceramics used in them – to other sites from the same period in the north of the country. The many sites of uniform pattern would seem to testify to a strong kingdom that existed in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and invested concerted effort in building a network of fortifications in the kingdom's border regions.

For this reason, these sites can serve as an archaeological anchor, dating the type of ceramic found in them to the 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. The ceramics in some of these locations parallel the layers of excavation at Chatzor and at Megiddo which were, in fact, attributed to the time of Shlomo, and thus we confirm the connection between the six-chambered gates in these cities and the kingdom of Shlomo.

The impression that arises here is that Megiddo was indeed built up extensively by Shlomo, and later destroyed by Shishak, as Ben-Tor suggests. At Megiddo a fragment of Shishak's victory stele was discovered, and this too indicates the importance of the city during the 10<sup>th</sup> century, for it is difficult to imagine that Shishak would have constructed a victory stele in a village devoid of any importance.<sup>[16]</sup>

(to be continued)

Translated by Kaeren Fish

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[1] The subject is developed by Yigael Yadin; see, for example, *Chatzor*, pp. 187-205.

[2] See: D. Ussishkin, 'Was the "Solomonic" city gate at Megiddo built by King Solomon?', *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 1980, pp. 1-18.

[3] Finkelstein and Silberman, p. 140.

[4] *Ibid.* p. 147.

[5] Finkelstein and Silberman, p. 331; Finkelstein and Silberman, *David u-Shlomo*, pp. 256-259. The authors are aware of the internal contradiction in their attitude towards *Tanakh* (they reject its historical reliability concerning David and Shlomo out of hand, while at the same time accepting its reliability concerning the construction of Shomron by Omri) but do not see this as a problem. To their view, "One may certainly doubt the historical veracity of one verse while accepting as valid a different one" (*Reshit Yisrael*, p. 331). This is rather a weak argument, for even if one is able to understand the logic underlying the considerations for accepting some or other specific point, it is still very difficult to accept a view that proposes accepting the reliability of one

chapter of *Tanakh*, down to the tiniest details, while rejecting completely all that has been described in preceding chapters, regarding them as later legends.

[6] The system of carbon dating was developed in 1950 by Nobel laureate Willard Frank Libby. The dating method is based on the fact that carbon is found in various forms, including the main stable isotope ( $C_{12}$ ) and an unstable isotope ( $C_{14}$ ). Through photosynthesis, plants absorb both forms from the atmosphere (in the form of carbon dioxide), and animals then feed on these plants. When any plant or animal organism dies, it contains a ratio of  $C_{14}$  to  $C_{12}$ , but this ratio decreases at a regular rate because the level of  $C_{12}$  remains constant, while the  $C_{14}$  decays. Carbon-14 has a relatively short half-life of 5,730 years, meaning that the fraction of carbon-14 in a sample is halved over the course of 5,730 years due to radioactive decay. Thus, a comparison between the carbon-14 and carbon-12 in any organic matter yields a fairly accurate estimate of its age.

[7] Finkelstein and Silberman, p. 258. Despite these decisive pronouncements, the conclusions that they present are open to question. Amnon Ben-Tor, director of the excavation site at Chatzor, has noted that six significant layers of construction have been discovered, the last of them dating unquestionably to the destruction of Chatzor at the hands of Tiglat Pelasar in the year 732 B.C.E.. Given this, even if each layer represented only 40 years, we would arrive at the conclusion that the layer of construction which Yadin attributed to Shlomo does indeed date to the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. Finkelstein's proposal that the period of Chatzor begins only in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, would mean that only an extremely short period can be attributed to each layer. Such an example "does not appeal to common sense" (A. Ben-Tor, "Archaeologia-Mikra-Historia", in: *Ha-Pulmus al ha-Emet ha-Historit ba-Mikra*, p. 23). Finkelstein and Silberman's position is also questioned by other scholars; see A. Mazar, p. 108.

[8] Y. Hoffman, "Historia, Mitos, u-Politika," *Ha-Pulmus al ha-Emet ha-Historit ba-Mikra*, p. 31.

[9] In these inscriptions he is called "Shoshenk." The identity of Shoshenk with Shishak is universally accepted (see Finkelstein and Silberman, p. 70).

[10] On the inscription and its significance see B. Mazar, *Kena'an ve-Yisrael – Mechkarim Historiim*, Jerusalem 5734, pp. 234-244; N. Na'aman, "Masa Shishak le-Eretz Yisrael be-Re'i ha-Ketovot ha-Mitzriyot, ha-Mikra, ve-ha-Mimtza ha-Archeologi", *Tzion* 53, 5758, pp. 247-276. For the relationship between Shishak's campaign and the biblical narrative, see Y. Elitzur, *Yisrael ve-ha-Mikra*, p. 152-156.

[11] Even Finkelstein and Silberman (p. 166) agree that this "fragment provides, perhaps, the earliest corroboration between the external historical sources and the biblical account." Nevertheless, they find it difficult to accept the reliability of the biblical narrative, even in this context. They attempt to claim that since there is no independent documentation of the chronology of the kings of Egypt during that period (the chronology is determined as per the biblical narrative about Rechavam), "Shoshenk's campaign could have been undertaken at almost any time from the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. until its end, and not necessarily during the rule of Rechavam" (*David u-Shlomo*, p. 72).

[12] It seems that the main purpose of the inclusion of this story of Shishak is to show the damage to the Temple, within a Sefer that comes to describe the process leading from the building of the Temple to its destruction (see also A. Grossman, "Ha-Shimush

be-Reka ha-Histori be-Hora'at Nevi'im Rishonim," *Ma'ayanot 11 – Hora'at ha-Mikra*, Jerusalem 5746, pp. 292-294).

<sup>[13]</sup> Finkelstein and Silberman (n. 16) refuse to accept the biblical record of Shishak having sufficed with the plunder, without going up against Jerusalem. They write, "The stubborn striving to adapt the biblical narrative to the Karnak inscription has led some scholars to hypothesize that Jerusalem was saved from destruction by virtue of a heavy ransom, and is therefore not included in the official list of cities that were conquered." It is difficult to understand why this eminently reasonable hypothesis falls under the category of a "stubborn striving". In any event, Finkelstein and Silberman argue that the reason why Jerusalem and the Judean region in general are not included in the inscription is because Jerusalem was at that time a small, sparse mountain village that would not have interested Shishak. We shall address this point further later on.

<sup>[14]</sup> A. Mazar, p. 108

<sup>[15]</sup> The following paragraph is based on Meitlis, pp. 203-205, and see the sources cited in the notes ad loc.

<sup>[16]</sup> See A. Bornstein, "Ha-Im Nifredu Darkei ha-Archeologia u-Mekorot Tanakh? Al ha-Vikuach he-'Chadash' al Mamlekhet David u-Shlomo," *Talelei Orot* 8, 5758-5759, p. 262.