

Dr. Jeffrey Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 14, The Israelite Settlement in the Book of Judges

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This is Dr. Jeffrey Hudon and his teaching on biblical archaeology. This is session 14, the Israelite Settlement in the Book of Judges.

We turn now to the book of Judges, again, that comes after the book of Joshua.

We see here on the PowerPoint slide one of my favorite paintings of what really captures and encapsulates ancient Israel. And you see here a community of Israelites tending to the grape harvest in the vineyard. You've got the watchtower here where they would be careful to watch over the crops, especially during harvest, their village.

Of course, there is the terraced farming that you see here, and then grain in the valley. So, it's really a very nice pastoral scene of farmers and what the terrain and topography look like. Again, we'll unpack this in a little bit.

That's an Israelite four-room house, a typical dwelling. So, this would have been possible during the eighth century BC, maybe in Israel, maybe in Judah during a time of peace and prosperity, when they could have unwallled villages and, and, and enjoy focusing on harvest, not protecting themselves or, or having worries about foreign invaders. Now, when you talk about the Israelite settlement, this is a period, again, the period of the judges.

There are several important works. These are recent and not-so-recent works on the period of the judges. Avi Faust has kind of an anthropological approach to Israel during the time of the judges.

Excellent book. William G. Dever wrote a book, *Who Are the Early Israelites? Where did they come from?* He again follows that indigenous origins model. Israel Finkelstein's was published way back in 1988 when he was still writing good material.

He argued more for peaceful immigration at this time. Now, he's, I believe, indigenous, like the rest. Finally, Lawrence Stager wrote an excellent chapter on the Israelite settlement, *Forging an Identity*, which I believe is the name of the chapter in the biblical world.

Excellent treatment there by Stager, and an excellent book to purchase. Now, when we talked about Egypt, and we talked about Pharaoh Merneptah, and the

importance placed, this relatively minor Pharaoh plays in biblical history because he had an expedition, you could say a raid up into Canaan, and thankfully felt the need to boast about this raid, and make this monument, the stela, where he mentions, for the first time, the nation or the people, I should say, of Israel. And more than that, on the Karnak Temple portal, one of the walls of the Karnak Temple, he actually depicts all of his stela in a series of reliefs.

And Frank Yurco, again, believes that these, or Anson Rainey, believes that these figures here depicted are actually ancient Israelites. And again, the text of the Merneptah stela, roughly 1205 BC, so right at the beginning of the period of the judges, when the Israelite tribes are settling down, building villages and houses and communities, he, the kind of checks off all of these cities that he has plundered and destroyed and ravished. Then he comes to Israel, which is a, again, the determinant of there is a people, not a nation or a territory, but a people.

Israel is desolated, but her seed is not. And again, hyperbole here, not the fact that he ruined a crop or cut off their ability to procreate. He simply was using hyperbole here. Probably just ran over a few Israelite farmers with his chariots, etc.

But he bolstered that in this stela. What's kind of just kind of almost a footnote now becomes extremely important because Israel has to, even the most critical scholars, identify that Israel existed as a people in Canaan in 1205 BC. Now, they still say that this; they call it proto-Israel and use all sorts of gymnastics to try to minimize this.

But this is, this is not, this is, nothing can be done. They have to accept the fact, logically, that Israel existed as a people. So, it's very important.

And again, we talked about the fact that Merneptah may have actually had garrisons in the Holy Land, and perhaps even in Jerusalem, due to this place name. In Joshua, the waters of Nephthah, perhaps meant Merneptah. Okay, the waters of Nephthah, this might have been changed during the creation of this document in Joshua, but Merneptah may be part of that, that, that text, the waters of Nephthah, west of Jerusalem.

Now, we talked about pottery earlier, but pottery again has some ethnic identifiers. And this is, again, more important later in biblical history during the Iron Age. But even in this early period, for years, the collar rim jar has been around for years. Why is it called the collar rim jar? Well, it kind of looks like a clerical collar here, up on the top, near the rim.

Albright named it after the pottery he excavated, I believe at Tel Bet-Mirsim. However, these were identified as distinctly Israelite forms that the Israelites brought into Canaan. Well, further research over the decades since Albright used

that name has determined that many of these are found at Israelite sites, but not exclusively.

There are Canaanite sites and other non-Israelite sites that use collar rim jars. There are variations of these. There's the tall rim, which is the northern form that was found at Dan.

And we just had a student here at Andrews that did her PhD dissertation on this, this exact form, which we find a lot of in Jordan. So again, it is possible to use ethnic identifiers, but not, you can't use this exclusively to identify a site as Israelite when you find these, but they were used extensively by the Israelites. And again, to point out the fact that Israelite pottery was distinctive in some ways from Canaanite pottery, but it was very, very basic, thick, heavy, clunky, not painted, not designed with any designs, not embellished in any way.

It served a purpose, and it was practical, and that was it. So as time goes on, and we'll see during the reign of Solomon and beyond, pottery, Israelite pottery becomes very beautiful, artistic, and lovely. Here, it's not so much.

It's nice pottery, but it's a very basic kind of plain brown wrapper or a very, very simple one, but it does its job. These are various forms of cooking pots from that period in Israel, early in the Israelite settlement. Okay, we saw in that painting of the Israelite grape harvest a picture or a depiction of a four-room house.

This is another artist's rendition of a four-room house, typical Israelite housing form. And we have these at our sites in Jordan, in our Ironwood sites in Jordan. A four-room house is basically a rectangular structure with an entrance at the front and a broad room at the back.

And that broad room can have dividers, making it multiple rooms, but it has a one door here. And it's either one or more rooms here, that's considered one room. Then it has three rooms, one, two, three, facing towards the entrance.

These rooms can have to be walled separately or can just simply have pillars to demarcate their size. And so that's called an Israelite four-room house. Now again, most Israelite Iron One and Iron Two sites have this style of house.

And there are several reasons for that. Usually, these are, this is an area for cooking or animal care. Animals will be brought into the house for safety at night.

And this back here might be for storage. The roof in the winter, or maybe a two-story house like here, would be used for living quarters or sleeping, certainly at night in the summer where it's where it's hot. And you don't want to sleep with the animals because of the animal order and whatnot.

So, this is, again, served a function that way. It also served a defensive function because your back room could serve as a casemate. In many cases, it did serve as a casemate because these would be attached together to other houses and actually make a perimeter wall, casemate wall around a settlement, town, or farmstead.

So again, a lot of variations you can see, and this one has some, some cisterns or pits here that were excavated, that were excavated, but a lot of different variations. But basically, a four-room house is one broad room in the back and three parallel rooms in the front. So large four room house that's been partially restored at the site of Isbet Sartah.

This is biblical Ebenezer. And I visited the site and unfortunately, it does not look like that now. It's in it's in bad shape.

Hopefully, they've re-repaired it. But here you've got a side entrance, you can see pillars here. So one room, two rooms, three rooms, this has got partially has a wall.

And then your broad room in the back. It's a very large house here, probably for the village chief or Mukhtar, whatever you want to call the elites who lived in Ebenezer at the time of the Israelite settlement. Ebenezer or Isbet Sartah is a wonderful place to visit.

It's all built up around there now. But you stand at the site of Isbet Sartah and look to the west. And you see the well-watered coastal plain right around the source of the Yarkon River, Rasa Ein.

And that's where the Philistines were. And around the area around Isbet Sartah is hilly, rugged, and rocky. And you think of those Israelites trying to eke out a living in this very difficult, rocky terrain, mountainous terrain.

And they can look down just a mile away. Just have beautifully well-watered land, farmland that the Philistines controlled. And you can understand their idea of the haves and the have-nots that they must have formulated in their minds, wishing, I wish I had land like that to farm instead of the difficult situation I'm in.

Okay, we talked about the back broad rooms of houses serving as a casemate wall. Here's an outer wall of an Israelite settlement here, which is a casemate. And houses again would be connected to this.

This is again a reconstruction. I believe this is either Beersheba, an early strata of Beersheba, or perhaps a rod. We mentioned terracing when we looked at the slides of the Central Hill Country.

Here's another, some other examples of terracing. Again, some of these still in use. These are still in use here, probably by Palestinian farmers.

Others fell into disrepair over the centuries. But the idea again is water, water, rainfall falling on this hillside and percolating down through the terraces and watering all of these houses. This is an example of a terraced house.

This is an example of a terraced house. And there is some further information on Israelite dining. Okay, now we turn to the historicity of the Book of Judges.

And we see kind of a timeline here. A very early period of the actual conquest and settlement. And then into the Iron Age 1 and 2. that the period of time covered by the events in the book of Judges.

As we know, the Judges cycle, which is taught in all intro classes to the Old Testament, there was a cycle, a theological cycle, where Israel was, again, at peace, everything was fine, Israel sinned, and then God punished Israel, and Israel repents and cries out, a judge or charismatic leader is raised up by God, and Israel is delivered. And this cycle goes on and on, and gets worse and worse. In many ways, the book of Judges is a very depressing book because, finally, there's a civil war.

They're fighting each other rather than some sort of external threat. This is a map here showing the general area where all the major judges did their work, did their leadership. Okay, so let's look at the book of Judges as a historical source.

Judges 1 is recognized as some sort of an analytic military report that arranges events geographically and kind of telescopes long periods into brief spans of time. It's a summary account of military campaigns that cherish periods of peace, and parallels with contemporary Assyrian kings, Tiglath-Pileser, the first of Assyria, kind of an interesting connection there. And the similarity of language seems to fit well with the Early Iron Age period.

Judges 1, in contrast to other records, is that boast, rather than complaints about failures, is an anti-conquest account. It's not political propaganda. It's actually quite shameful to the Israelite people, the way they acted, the way they behaved.

So, it's not any kind of boastful account. It's very, very sobering. And that's, again, unique in the ancient Near East.

All accounts, historical accounts, are always good, not judgmental. Alright, so we have again some points about the early chapters in Judges. The children of Israel ask the Lord.

Again, their neighbors would have consulted their gods before military engagements. The people of Canaan are mentioned, as we talked about before. Arad and Hormah in the Book of Judges are mentioned as two sites in the Negev Desert.

And then, of course, also the land that remained unconquered. In the Book of Joshua, it seems like there's success after success. But in Judges, it points out that a lot of the land was not conquered.

The coastal plain and the valleys where the Canaanites were strong remained in Canaanite hands. And then there's land inheritance, *Nahalot* in Hebrew. This is land given by God, again, to a tribe, family, or clan.

We see these again reflected in later accounts, later biblical accounts. *Nisa*, a test that God gives Israel, is a test of loyalty and faithfulness to Him. So, these are all theological points in the Book of Judges.

Now, we have an interesting account in Judges 1:1-20. There was a conquest of the southern part of Judah, what would later become the tribal territory of Judah. This is a conquest and occupation of a Canaanite city by the name of Debir, or *Kiriath-sepher*, the village of the book or scroll.

This was, again, a hill country south of Hebron. Caleb, as in Joshua and Caleb, one of the twelve spies, offered his daughter *Aksah* to the man who conquered Debir. And Othniel, the first judge, took the city and was given that land and the daughter.

And Debir later became a Levitical city and went on. Now, where is Debir? Well, first of all, William Foxwell Albright excavated a site to the west of the hill country, west of Hebron, called *Tel beit-Mirsim*. We saw some pictures of it on an earlier slideshow.

And he argued, and he argued all of his life, very vehemently, that *Tel beit-Mirsim* was biblical Debir. And he seemed to believe that because the occupational history matched that of the biblical, the Debir of the biblical text. Now, scholars questioned Albright because *Tel beit-Mirsim* is too far to the west.

It's in the Shephelah, eastern Shephelah, not in the hill country. And the biblical text in Judges specifically says, in the hill country of Judah. And so the German scholar, Kurt Galling, found a site south of Hebron called *Khirbet Rabud*.

He surveyed that site and suggested that *Khirbet Rabud* was rather Debir, not *Tel beit-Mirsim*. We have to understand Albright had tremendous prestige and to disagree with Albright was putting your life in your hands, so to speak, academically, because he was such a powerful giant figure. But giant figures like Albright, as good as they were, can be wrong.

And Albright was wrong at this point. Now, in the late 60s, early 70s, Moshe Kochavi, Israeli scholar and archaeologist, excavated Khirbet Rabud, discovered two springs, the springs mentioned in Judges, and identified an occupational history that matched Debir. And so Khirbet Rabud became, most scholars accepted it by then as Debir, not Tel beit-Mirsim.

But Albright, before he died, wrote a rebuttal saying, I still believe Tel beit-Mirsim is Khirbet, or rather Debir. But now, it's widely accepted that Kochavi and before him Kurt Golling was correct. So, authority figures in archaeology, be careful.

Just like all of us, we can be mistaken and wrong. Even Albright made mistakes. Now, the next judge, a very colorful person by the name of Ehud, a Benjaminite, was raised by God to deliver the Israelites from the Moabites.

At this point in Israelite history, by the way, this is nice, Late Bronze, early Iron Age pottery here. Eglon was this very, very portly king of Moab. And he had set up shop in Jericho, not necessarily on the Tel, but adjacent to the site of Jericho near the spring and had a palace there.

And he was oppressing the Israelites. And so, Ehud was ordained by God to deliver the Israelites. And so, he was able to get past the guards and get a personal audience with Eglon.

Because he was left-handed, the sword was on the right side. And he and Eglon were alone. And he stabbed Eglon with the sword.

Eglon was so fat that he couldn't get the sword back out. The fat folds of Eglon's skin prevented that. And Ehud made his escape and led the Israelites to victory over the Moabites.

Again, Moab oppressed Israel for 18 years. This is the Balu'a Stele, found at Balu'a site in the northern Karak Plateau around, I think it was in the 1930s, that they found that. It's in the Jordanian National Museum now.

It probably dates to around the time of Eglon. But we can't connect Eglon with this. Jericho is not specifically mentioned.

It could have been Tamar because of the city of the palms. But most people believe it was Jericho. We simply don't know.

But anyway, there was a palace discovered at Jericho that seemed to be Eglon's palace. The description of the palace in the Book of Judges seems to clarify that it

was a Beit Halani palace. This is again an outline of a typical Beit Halani palace from Tell Tayinat in Turkey.

And then the door lock on Eglon's door has been recreated here. Now, there is an excellent article on this episode by Baruch Halperin, and I think the journal Bible Review. And the Hebrew here seems to indicate that very, very crude, gross thought, but Ehud escaped the king's chamber.

He didn't go out the door because the king's officials and servants were out there. He actually escaped through the privy, through the toilet, climbed down through the toilet, and got out of the palace that way. So, it is a very earthy account of the death of Eglon and Ehud's escape from that palace.

Some pictures from the time or depicting the time of Deborah and Barak in Judges 4 and 5. Here's again Mount Tabor and the Jezreel Valley. Beautiful pictures there. Again, a lot of history.

We also saw a previous picture of the spring of Herod, again, depicting the selection of Gideon's army during his time as judge. This is the Hill of Moreh, and the Midianite camp would have been in the valley here. Gideon's army would have surrounded it, broken their jars, and then attacked that night when they drove the Midianites out of that valley.

So that just gives a kind of a beautiful couple of views of two biblical events from the period of the Judges. Now, we go to the main nemesis of Israel, and that was the Sea Peoples. The Sea Peoples were a group of five distinctive peoples from the Aegean world, not necessarily from the same place, but from the Aegean world, that invaded the eastern Mediterranean seaboard during the early years of the 12th century.

This is an Egyptian depiction of a Philistine with a feathered headdress from Medinet Habu. And this is, again, an artist's depiction of what they would have looked like. Now, the Mortuary Temple of Ramses III, 20th Dynasty King, I believe, 20th Dynasty, is an incredibly, incredibly historical source for the Sea Peoples because depicted on the walls of this Mortuary Temple is a sea and land battle between Ramses III and the Egyptian army and the Sea Peoples who, again, invade Egypt by ship and by land.

The Egyptians were able to hold and push the Sea Peoples out of Egypt, but it must have been a tremendously bloody affair because it really seemed to break the back of Egyptian power. And Egypt was never the same after this battle. Here are some artist's depictions of what that would have looked like.

Egyptian soldiers battling the Sea Peoples as they arrive on their boats. And that's all depicted, and five distinctively clothed and distinctive peoples are depicted on the walls of the Mortuary Temple at Medinet Habu. Now, one of the most famous

accounts of the Book of Judges that deals with the Philistines is the account of Samson.

In chapters 13 through 16, here we have kind, hopefully, to make you smile, a Hollywood depiction of Samson back in the 1940s, 1949. Hedy Lamarr and Victor Mature play the title roles of Samson and Delilah. You notice the language here is not English.

It's actually a German edition. Samson and Delilah. That's appropriate because Hedy Lamarr was Austrian, I believe.

But that, again, was an early attempt by Hollywood to make a blockbuster movie out of a biblical story. We talked about the Philistine Temple at Tel Qasile before, or the Philistine Settlement Tel Qasile, one of the early modern Israeli excavations. I want to point out something here, and this is kind of typical of what archaeology can help us understand, and that is that this is, to date, really, there's another Philistine Temple that supposedly was found at Tel es-Safi, parts of a Philistine Temple.

I don't think that's been well published yet. I may be wrong about that, but this is a fully excavated Philistine Temple, small because this is not one of the Philistine capitals, but a smaller Philistine settlement, but still a Philistine Temple. The main feature of this temple is the fact that the roof is held up by two columns that are about an arm's length apart, and here they are here.

And if you think about that and think about the life of Samson, you immediately recognize that Samson pushed down the temple at Gaza, killed all the Philistines and himself inside that temple, and you have the same type of structure here, only on a much smaller scale, at this small Philistine town. We don't know the name of that. The modern name is Tel El-Qasile, but interesting to note that temple architecture tends to be the same in a certain specific civilization or specific ethnic group, so the temples at Gaza and the other major Philistine epicenters would have had probably two main columns holding up the roof.

So, does that prove, again, does that prove the story of Samson is true? No, but it certainly puts the story of Samson in an Iron One context during his actual life, which is very, very important. Again, a list of judges and the areas where they were active at the time of the book of Judges, the Iron One period. You can see the Israelite tribes on both sides of Jordan and then the names of the judges who participated in their activities.

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