

Dr. Jeffrey Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 21, An Archaeologist Looks at Uzziah's Reign

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This is Dr. Jeffrey Hudon in his teaching on Biblical Archaeology. This is session 21. An Archaeologist Looks at Uzziah's Reign.

Sometimes, in archaeology, you can look at a somewhat obscure biblical text and find literally a treasure house of information that you can use when doing excavations relating to that time period. I want to take some time now and do a presentation on a king that's often overlooked in the biblical record: King Uzziah of Judah. Again, during the 8th century, this was a very eventful century, which we talked about in another lecture.

But let's look more in-depth at the reign of Uzziah and see if archaeology and the biblical text can correspond and tell us more about his reign. So, the biblical texts tell us that Uzziah reigned for 52 years, which was the second longest reign of a king of Judah, and his dates there, according to Thule, 792 to 740 BC. There was a core regency with Amaziah, his father, for some of the first part of his reign.

However, Amaziah was a hostage at some point or for some length of time in Israel, so Uzziah was reigning with advisors from a fairly early age. Uzziah's reign also paralleled his northern kingdom contemporary king, which was Jeroboam II. So, their reigns again matched each other almost the same.

Uzziah reigned slightly longer than Jeroboam II. Uzziah's reign is recorded in two sources, as in the other kings of Israel and Judah, and that's 2 Kings 14, and of course, Chronicles, which only records the kings of Judah. That's in 2 Chronicles 26.

The prophets, writing prophets that lived during the reign of Uzziah, were Hosea, Amos, Jonah, and a very young prophet named Isaiah. More than that, Amos and Zechariah, a much later prophet, recorded an earthquake during Uzziah's reign, which was alluded to also in Isaiah chapter 2. This earthquake has been studied and written on extensively and has been found, we believe, in the biblical or in the archaeological record at several sites, including Gezer and Hazor. To understand the reign of Uzziah in the archaeological record, we first must look at the history of biblical research.

And the Book of Chronicles, as we mentioned earlier in a different lecture, is a very late work. It was written in the Persian period, no earlier than the late 6th century, more likely the 5th century BC. And so, when the rise of critical thinking occurred in

Western civilization in the 17th, 18th, and certainly in the 19th century, you've got historical data that is preserved in Chronicles looked at very skeptically, or with much skepticism, I should say.

And that is because of the late date of Chronicles. How can a historian working, say, in the late or early 5th century, just to pick a date? How does he know historical data that occurred 400 years earlier? And that's a fair question. He has to have sources.

He has to have historical sources. So, we mentioned that Kings and Chronicles are both two parallel histories of the Davidic monarchy. And if there is data, if there is historical information in Chronicles that is not in Kings, then that is looked upon especially with suspicion.

Now we have several kings that have data in Chronicles that do not appear in Kings, in the Book of Kings, several kings of Judah. And Hezekiah, again, you've got defensive and other royal projects that the chronicler mentions, the Book of Kings does not. Rehoboam, we talked about his list of fortified cities in a different lecture, that appears in Chronicles, but not in Kings.

Manassas' captivity to Babylon and later building projects, again, only in Chronicles. And again, we look at the back to our subject, which is the reign of Uzziah. That also provides some archival narrative information missing from the parallel account in 2 Kings 15.

So, the question is, is this data that's not in Kings, that the chronicler, since he was writing later, could have copied, where did the chronicler get his information? Skepticism rose during the 17th century, especially from such scholars as Baruch de Spinoza, and again, who questioned the authenticity or the authorship of not only the Pentateuch but of books such as Chronicles, and especially during the 19th-century work of Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette, and developed further by Graf and ultimately by Julius Wellhausen in his famous 1883 work on the history of Israel. And this skepticism has continued into the 20th century and obviously on into the 21st as well. But it's important to also understand that the critical examination of the Pentateuch during the 19th century, the four-source documentary hypothesis theory, a lot of the preliminary work of these early scholars, mostly German, but later English and other nationalities that worked on the documentary hypothesis, looked at Chronicles and used Chronicles kind of as a test case to argue their point that how can somebody living so much, so long removed from the events, write such detailed information about events three or four hundred years earlier.

So, Chronicles was attacked from the onset when the Pentateuch was looked at critically as well. Chronicles is a historically reliable document; the Germans Martin Noth and Peter Velten, both Germans and both, worked on Chronicles. Noth, though

he was critical about the Chronicles' historicity, was not completely shut off to the idea that the chronicler had historical information.

And he believed that there were instances that the book of Chronicles had historical information that didn't appear in Kings. Velten was much more skeptical and his work on Chronicles was much more negative in the historicity aspect. We also have Hugh Williamson, a still active British scholar, and the late Anson Rainey who also wrote on Chronicles and used, unlike Velten and Noth, archaeological evidence, but in a much more limited sense.

Rainey and Williamson, a much more liberal use of archaeology, did, the later two, Williamson and Rainey, argue that the chronicler did use archival sources from the period of the monarchy. Thus, these expansions upon Kings, this additional information, there's no reason to believe that it couldn't be historical. You had to look for outside confirmation from the archaeological record.

But certainly, they left that option as a viable option that it was historical. More recently, we've had a challenge from Israel Finkelstein, among others, that argues that the Chronicles' work dates it later than the Persian period, rather to the Hasmonean period, late second to early first century BC, extremely late, and declares it essentially historically worthless. Finkelstein, again, follows in the footsteps of these early critical scholars who wrote much earlier.

We have thus before us an excellent test case to look at the archaeological evidence and the biblical text of Chronicles regarding Uzziah and see if there can be a correlation between these two lines of evidence and if they actually converge. Now, Uzziah's hegemony over Eilat, that's, again, that Red Sea port on the Gulf of Eilat, Gulf of Aqaba, is mentioned both in 2 Chronicles 26:2 and 2 Kings 14. We've already talked about Eilat possibly being identified with gluxite at Tell el-Khalifeh.

There's 8th-century occupational evidence, clear 8th-century occupational evidence, that matches a site farther north called Tamar, Ein Hatziva. Hegemony over Eilat, of course, would enable Uzziah access to Red Sea trade and a port. Since it's mentioned in both the Book of Kings and the Book of Chronicles, Rainey has suggested that this was the highlight of Uzziah's reign.

This was the biggest accomplishment that he was able to break through the Edomite stronghold here and actually open up a port on the Red Sea as his forefathers had done, Jehoshaphat and then Solomon before him. So, creating or establishing a fortified presence on the Gulf of Eilat was really the highlight of Uzziah's reign. And everything else was secondary.

That's the interpretation that Rainey uses for both of these great historical works. Now, we know that we have a very close correlation with building styles between

another fort to the north of Eilat, Tell el-Khalifeh. That's a place called Tamar, identified as Tamar.

Actually, it's Ein Hatziva. It's a modern Arabic name. And that is just south of the Dead Sea, again in the Aravah.

It has a similar gate system, similar construction, and a very large fort, almost the size of a city. That was probably a Judahite staging area, either under Amaziah or later controlled by Uzziah. The fact that the construction techniques very closely match the site of Tell el-Khalifeh to the south seems to point to a common builder.

And that would be Amaziah and, in the case of Khalifeh, Uzziah. Another site between them, Yotvata, has recently been published. That was a water source.

But, unfortunately, there's been no Iron Age IIB evidence of any kind discovered at the site, though it was certainly used and utilized during the 8th century on the road between these two forts. To the west, we have the site of Kadesh-Barnea, or Ein Kades. And we talked about this site during the lecture on the Exodus from Egypt.

This site was excavated in the 1970s by Rudolf Cohen and before that by Dotan in 1956. It was a massive square fortress with corner towers, again dated to the 8th century. According to the pottery, this seems to be a border fort or a protection of the trade routes built during, we assume, the reign of Uzziah.

In Chronicles, Uzziah also expanded west into Philistia. Again, we have to constantly ask the question: If this was written in the Persian or Hellenistic period, how would they know the importance of that and whether all of these entities and polities even existed? Well, if you look at the geopolitical map of these two kingdoms, Israel to the north and Judah to the south, they are allied. They are allies in this endeavor.

So, Judah can really only expand three ways: to the west, to the south, which they did, into Philistia all the way to Eilat, and also to the east. I would argue, too, that Judah expanded onto the central Jordanian plateau or the biblical Hami shore, according to 2 Chronicles 26 and 27. This map does not show that expansion, but they can expand north because that's Israelite territory.

So, they expand where they can. And so the Hebrew text says, he went out and he warred against the Philistines and he burst through or broke down the walls of Gath, the walls of Yavneh, and the wall of Ashdod. And he built cities, Arim, in the territory of Ashdod and in or among the Philistines.

So extensive evidence that has been noted in various reports from the Shephelah and Negev and even the coastal plain shows a strong and resurgent Judah moving, expanding to the west, building cities, repairing cities, rebuilding cities, and fortifying

them during this eighth-century period. Again, the Iron Age 2B. Now, up until this time, a lot of that work has been attributed to Hezekiah, who was another strong king of Judah late in the eighth century.

But in some of that work, Hezekiah had a much shorter reign than Uzziah. Some of that work, some of that building programs, and fortification efforts had to have taken place earlier. And that would have been during the reign of Uzziah.

Uzziah's aim to the west was to reassert a Judahite presence, not only along the Gulf of Aqaba, the Red Sea port, but also along the coast, and at least control part of that important highway from Egypt to Mesopotamia, the International Coastal Highway, or often called the Via Maris. The Chronicles description of Uzziah's Philistine campaign also provides a rare recorded campaign of a route, a campaign route taken by Judah's army. So, let's look at those three sites, starting with Yavneh.

Yavneh is a tell, a mound, fairly close to Tel Aviv. And it was not heavily excavated. There have been soundings on the site.

But near the site, an adjacent smaller hill, there was, by accident, found favisa. This is a repository pit with temple furniture or artifacts, vessels, that are ceremonially buried and smashed, of course, destroyed ceremonially after their use. And so, the Israeli archaeologist, Yav's, excuse me, Raz Kletter, excavated that as an emergency salvage excavation and published two very well-written volumes on what he found.

Now this favisa obviously implies the existence of a temple. And the date on this is late 9th, early 8th century. And a lot of Philistine influences, but also Judahite influences, which seems to indicate that this temple existed just prior to or very early in Uzziah's reign at the latest.

What that tells us is not really clear. Unfortunately, the site has not been extensively excavated yet. There has been work there, but not large-scale work.

And so, Yavne, for the time being, is still kind of a neutral site. We don't really have clear data on any kind of destruction by Uzziah in the early 8th century. The second site is Tel es-Safi, which is identified by nearly all scholars as Gath of the Philistines.

And a very prominent site. We've talked about it several times in our various slideshows here or in PowerPoint lectures. And it was destroyed very clearly in the late, we would say, late 3rd, early 4th quarter of the 9th century by Hazael of Aram Damascus.

And that's mentioned. That's recorded in 2 Kings. Now, in the mid-8th century, right towards the end of Uzziah's reign, we have a large 60-acre settlement with clear Judean material culture being erected at the site.

And, but there's no evidence of a destruction layer before that site. It was built on the ruins of the city destroyed by Hazael. So we're left with a question.

Was there a city at Gath for Uzziah to destroy? And according to this archeology, there doesn't seem to be much there before this Judahite settlement rose in 750. Now that, again, proves that Uzziah built the settlement, but did he destroy anything before he did that? Perhaps the answer lies in the name. Gath is a very commonplace name, meaning press or olive press.

And there's a lot of Gaths in, on the map of the Southern Levant. And there's another site, Gath-Gitayim, identified with a place called Tel Ras Abu Hamid to the northwest of Safi. This also may be a candidate for Uzziah's Gath and does exhibit early 8th-century occupational evidence.

Again, unfortunately, that site has not been fully published. It's got preliminary reports, and I keep on talking to the excavator, and every time I see him, he says, I'm sorry, I haven't published my report on Abu Hamid yet, but I'm working on it. So, hopefully, that will appear.

So, Yavneh has not really been excavated to the extent that we can determine if there was an early 8th-century destruction layer. Gath of the Philistines, Tel es-Safi, there is to date no evidence of an early 8th-century destruction layer. However, there is Judahite occupation during the reign of Uzziah.

So, we're left with another Gath, perhaps the Gath-Gitayim, and that may be the Gath that Uzziah actually attacked. Finally, we have Ashdod. And Ashdod was one of the five major Philistine cities, as we've discussed before.

But it has several features here that are very important to point out. First of all, there's a large six-chamber gate that closely parallels similar gates in Israel and Judah. During the reign of Solomon, those gates were found at Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer. So, you've got a gate here that is very similar to that.

There's also another gate at Tel Irah, a site in the Negev, that's also an 8th-century site with a similar gate. So, the excavator, Moshe Dothan, attributed the destruction of this gate to Uzziah because he read his Bible and knew that Ashdod had been destroyed by Uzziah, or at least part of it. But recent studies dispute this.

It appears that Uzziah actually erected this gate after occupying the city, which is clearly a Judahite-style gate. More than that, a lamelek stamped handle and Hebrew inscriptions may also hint at Judahite control. Now, at the base outside of the city, extramural area, salvage excavations have revealed an Assyrian administrative structure.

And we've had slides of that showing that as well, with two 8th century destructive layers beneath it. Now, we know that Sargon destroyed Ashdod in the later 8th century. There's also a destruction layer below this that's also 8th century.

That earlier 8th-century destruction layer, I believe, is our proof that Uzziah destroyed the city. Even though it's outside of the city, it was destroyed. And that, I believe, is our smoking gun for Ashdod.

Unfortunately, Ashdod was not properly excavated. It was poorly excavated. It's been nearly entirely published, but the publications can only do so much to correct the errors in the field.

So, hopefully, at some point, there'll be future excavations there, and we can find proper stratification and find that second 8th-century destructive layer inside the city as well as outside. Now, it says that Uzziah also created cities, Arem, and settlements in the vicinity of Ashdod and in Philistia. And so, an archaeological survey of that region has shown 8th-century occupational evidence at Yavne Yam, Rishon Litzion, Metzad HaShav Yahu, Holot Yavne, Telmor, and other sites farther south towards Ashkelon and Gaza.

So these sites, these new sites that have been surveyed and partially excavated, may have served Uzziah as new Judahite settlements around Philistia and near Ashdod. Moreover, the Chronicles text in verses 7 and 8 says that God helped him against the Philistines and the Arabians who lived in Gebal and against the Maunites. The Ammonites also paid tribute to Uzziah.

The Maunites are unknown outside the biblical text. They remained unknown until, I think it was 1970, when Chaim Tadmor read their name in the annals of Tiglath-Pileser III. They were a Bedouin group or Arabian group that the Assyrians fought against.

Again, an 8th century, late 8th-century Assyrian king. Evidence from Tal Jalul near Madaba, Jordan, where Andrews University was excavated, also seems to indicate Judahite's influence during the 8th century because of inscriptions and one concentric circle pithos handle. It also mentions that, "...and he built migdalim b'amidbar, towers in the desert, and he bore or cut out borot, cisterns, rabbim, many." So Uzziah attempted to settle and cultivate some of the Judean wilderness, the Judean desert, so to speak, east of Jerusalem.

In the 8th century, we have several fortified settlements and paramilitary type settlements with evidence of irrigation, attempts at irrigation at several sites in the Judean desert, notably Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, and nearby Ein Gedi, three sites in the Valley of Acre, and a site farther south called Metsad

Gozal. So even though the biblical text in Chronicles clearly says wilderness of Judah, in the Midbar, that's referring to east of Jerusalem, many scholars have seen the Negev settlements or Negev highlands as referred to here rather than the wilderness of Judah, which is again a mistake. Then it says, "...and his name," literally his name, which we assume we could translate fame, knowledge of his name, "...spread even to the border of Egypt, for he became very strong." I believe this quote by the chronicler is referring to our site of Kuntillet Ajrud, which we talked about earlier.

And this is that very isolated fort in eastern Sinai with both, remember, Israelite pottery and Judahite pottery. And there could have been a joint occupation here on the border of Egypt. And that's, again, an archaeological understanding of this quote saying, Uzziah's name spread to the borders of Egypt.

He was known there at the border. So most scholars believe that Kuntillet Ajrud was a simple, simply religious site that people actually traveled to as pilgrims, to make a pilgrimage for some reason, because of these epitaphs or prayers written on the storage jars inside the gate. That, I believe, is totally wrong.

I believe this was actually a border site, a trading post, and a way station along the caravan routes between the Haggahs and the Mediterranean. It was not a site of religious pilgrimage. So, you see here the title of the final report.

What does it say? An Iron Age II religious site on the Judean Sinai border, which I think is wrong. This was clearly a geopolitical border site. There's no point here that you would want to make a pilgrimage to and worship here.

It was just some soldiers writing or inscribing prayers on storage jars. That is all. Okay, Jerusalem.

Uzziah also did construction work in Jerusalem. He built towers in Jerusalem. Migdalim by Yerushalayim.

At the corner gate, Al-Sha'ar Hapinah. And at the valley gate and at the angle, Mitsoah, and fortified them. So he fortified Jerusalem and possibly completed the rebuilding of the wall that was knocked down during the reign of his father.

There again, archaeology has come through and given us some clues. Charles Warren, Kathleen Kenyon, and finally Eilat Mazar excavated a tower. Each of them excavated part of it.

A royal gateway along a slanted Ophel wall here between the city of David and the Temple Mount. And the location of the valley gate and corner gate are uncertain. And may again reflect an earlier wall expansion onto the western hill or may be part of the original defenses surrounding the city of David.

We simply don't know at present. Hopefully, that will be uncovered at some point in the future. But the corner gate seems to be, or excuse me, the one gate here along the Ophel seems to be the work of Uzziah.

There's another picture of it. This is from Charles Warren's drawings and then supplemented by Eilat Mazar's work. And here's an artist's rendition of what that gate looked like along the corner of the Ophel heading up to the Temple Mount.

Again, the work is most likely of Uzziah. To the south of Jerusalem, we have the site of Ramat Rachel. This was again excavated at various times by Benjamin Mazar and then by Aharoni, more extensive excavations, and then most recently by Lipschitz and his colleagues.

And it's noted too that late in his reign, Uzziah contracted some sort of skin disease because of his sin of trying to offer incense in the temple. And so, he had to be quarantined. He had to be set apart because he had something like leprosy, probably something different but a similar condition.

So, they built him a separate house. It's titled literally a House of Freedom, which again is probably a euphemism, actually the opposite. And so he was not in the palace.

He had to be housed elsewhere. And Ramat Rachel would have been an ideal location, which is a Judean palace between Bethlehem and Jerusalem. And looking with beautiful views to the west, the upper reaches of the Rephaim Valley, and you get a nice breeze from the coast up that valley.

Of course, there is also a beautiful view to the west or to the east over the Judean wilderness down into the rift. So this has been identified as Beit Hakerem, which I think is correct, the House of the Vineyard. Again, Uzziah was a man of the soil, so there was extensive terracing around Ramat Rachel, which could have been done with royal hands for the royal estate that surrounded the site.

And again, very early in our course, we talked about the tombstone of Uzziah that was rediscovered and published in 1931, again showing that his tomb, again buried separately from the other kings, had to be moved sometime in the turn of the era, 1st century BC, 1st century AD, and reburied. So, our conclusions are as such. The preponderance of evidence from written and archaeological sources does support an 8th-century geopolitical context for Chronicles' account of Uzziah.

The Chronicles' reference to Philistines, Ammonites, Edomites, and especially to the Metunites all reflect well-documented 8th-century polities. Likewise, Chronicles' mentions of sites such as Gerbal, Eilat, Gath, Ashdod, and Yavne are not necessarily

attested during the Late Persian or Hellenistic period. So, the person that created this would have to know a lot of 8th century topography to properly write it.

Rapid intensification and expansion of Judahite settlement in the hill country, western Shephelah, the wilderness of Judah, the Negev, and Eilat occurs throughout the 8th century, not just during the reign of Hezekiah. The destruction evidence of a six-chamber Solomonic gate at Ashdod and Judahite settlement at Tel es-Safi, as well as other sites in the coastal plain, provide evidence for 2 Chronicles 26. The continued expansion of Jerusalem to the north and west encompassing the western hill and evidence of walls and gates that may represent those mentioned in 2 Chronicles 26:9, again attest to the historicity of the text.

Joint geopolitical maneuvers with the Kingdom of Israel at Kuntillet Ajrud, or Horvat Timan, same name, along the border of Egypt, and evidence of Judahite influence at Tel Jalul, in the table-land of central Jordan, again testify to the Chronicles narrative. Consequently, there is essentially no basis for the view that the chronicler invented this account using a late Persian or Hellenistic period milieu or template. Rather, Chronicles clearly accessed but selectively utilized archival sources from the period of the monarchy to write his history of Judah.

And I might point out at the very last that Israel Finkelstein does not use the Meunites in his article that argues against the historicity of the site because he doesn't use it because it proves him wrong. There is no way somebody that late would have known about the Meunites, which are only known from the inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser in the 8th century. So that alone, I believe, shows the historicity of this text as well as the archaeology.

Thank you.

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