

The Emergence of Israel in Syrian-Palestine; the Archaeological Perspective of History and Religion of Israel

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Abstract

Historians find it difficult to explain some phenomena that might not be empirically proven by scriptures hence opt to seek answers from other sources such as archaeology. This study sought to examine the emergence of Israel in Syrian Palestine from the archaeological point of view. On one hand, the study analysed the Old Testament writings vis-à-vis the existence of Israel in Syrian-Palestine since the Patriarchal age and on the other hand, consults archaeology for the same reason. This is because an internal examination of the Old Testament writings cannot yield its full results apart from the application of the external evidence supplied by archaeology; nor, can the results of archaeology be profitably assimilated without a painstaking and critical examination of the historical documents in an attempt to ascertain the fact that the land in which modern Jews occupy is the ancestral land given to their forefathers rightfully by God as recorded in the Old Testament writings. The study found out that there is interlink between archaeological findings and Biblical narrative concerning Israel's occupation of Palestine. The study was qualitative in nature and employed both descriptive and phenomenological approaches

Key Words: Bible history, Archaeological findings, Hebrew identity, Israel's Occupation.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Despite near consistent Arab opposition, Israel's claim for recognition has historically enjoyed relatively widespread international support. Historically, Becker (2011) narrates how Zionist leaders engaged in efforts to acquire political recognition for restoring sovereignty. It is the Balfour Declaration of 1917 by Great Britain that welcomed the idea of a Jewish national home. Only five years later, the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine transformed the goal of reconstituting a Jewish nation-state from a policy preference into an international legal obligation.

In the wake of strong Arab opposition to the goal set forth in the Mandate, Becker (2011) has it that the international community ultimately responded not abandoning the goal of Jewish sovereignty but by endorsing the concept of partitioning Palestine into two states - one Jewish and one Arab, a model that remains the conceptual basis for today's two states solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

Despite the 1948 occupation, the history of the Jews is told in the books of the Hebrew Bible Old Testament. Farrington (2002) surmises that it is likely they were written no earlier than the sixth century BC, sometimes cataloging events from centuries before. She warns, however, that tales of this age must be viewed with caution, but confirms that there is archaeological evidence that roots the Old Testament in fact. The Bible reveals God's plan of salvation for the human race after the fall. After Adam's sin, God promised to save humanity through His begotten Son (Gen. 3:15), but this plan never became explicit until God called Abraham to be the father of faith. According to Gen. 12:2-3, God made promises to Abraham; and among them was occupying the land of Canaan. The Bible records that after several years, Abraham's descendants occupied the land of Canaan and it became theirs. This is evidenced in the Books of Joshua and Judges. The study anticipated to find out whether or not the land in which modern Israel occupies is the same land given to their ancestors through the evidence supplied by archaeology.

1.1 The Statement of the Problem

The emergence of Israel in Syrian-Palestine is a matter of major concern to world peace. This issue has caused numerous world leaders to continue to uphold the notion of Israel as a Jewish state. This is evidenced by the support of US presidents Bush, Obama, and Trump, along with that of several European figures. According to Becker (2011), even Palestinian negotiators, including Yasser Arafat himself, have not always resisted acknowledgment of Israel's Jewish character, and from 1988 onward they have tied the justification for Palestine sovereignty to the Palestinian resolution, which itself embraced parallel Jewish sovereignty.

However, some Palestinians have raised substantive objections against recognition of Israel as a Jewish state. The Jews, on the other hand, believe that the land in which they occupy today is their ancestral home given to Abraham by God. Such tenacious positions as these between the two nations have caused dire consequences and strained relations not only between them but also among allies in terms of peace, security and stability.

In an attempt to address this problem, many studies have been conducted to prove this point. However, whenever the Old Testament writings are being used as a reliable source of history vis-à-vis the occupation of the Jews in Israel, more issues arise partly because the Arabs don't believe some sections of the Bible. It is on this note, therefore, that the study endeavoured to investigate the ancestral home for the modern Jews by consulting archaeology not only as externally empirical evidence but also as a reliable source of making a historical inquiry. Thus, critical examination of the Old Testament writings and archaeological evidence are amalgamated to provide herein clear information about the study.

1.2 Analysis of Biblical Tradition in tracing Israel's Occupation

This section conceptualized Biblical tradition used in writing the history of Israel in an attempt to trace the origin of Israel's occupation in Syrian-Palestine. Additionally, different theories that articulate the occupation of Israel in Syrian-Palestine were analysed to provide accurate information regarding the subject under discussion. Consequently, Burney (1919) in *The Schweich Lectures for the British Academy* summarizes that the Book of Joshua is composed out of the same four elements that we find in the Pentateuch, namely, J, E, D and P. According to Burney (1919), these four documents agree that the twelve tribes entered Canaan together from the east, under the command of Joshua, and that he defeated the coalitions of Canaanite kings both in the south and in the north.

On this same point, Burney (1919) argues technically that:

D and P narrate that Joshua captured all the cities of the land (Jos. 10:28-43; 11:10-12:23), and gave these cities to the tribes of 1 Israel (Jos. 13-22). J and E record no such extensive conquests, and in a number of passages J asserts that cities were not conquered which D and P claim were taken by Joshua; e. g. Jerusalem (Jos. 12:1. 10; 15 63), Gezer (10:33 D; 12:12 D; 21:21P; 16:10J), Taanach and Megiddo (12:21D; 21:25P; 17:11-18J). J also says that several cities were taken by other persons than Joshua; e. g. Hebron by Caleb (15:13 J; 10:36; 11:21 D), Debir by Othniel (15:15-17 J; 10:38; 11:21; 12:13 D), the Highland of Israel by the tribe of Joseph (17:14-18 J; 11:16-20 D ; 12 18-24 D ; 15:4-8 P). J and E also agree that the Canaanites were not annihilated, as represented by D and P (10:40; 11:19). In Jos. 13; 15:63; 16:10; 17: 12; Jud. 223; 35, J tells us that the Canaanites "dwell in the midst of Israel unto this day," and in the legislation of J (Ex. 34:11-13) it is assumed that they are still a menace. E also says of the Canaanites, "I will not drive them out before thee in one year, lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee; by little and little I will drive them out from before thee" (Ex. 23:29; Jud. 3 4 E). It will be recollected that most of the strip of the country east of Jordan is pictured as already won, and as promised by Moses to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half Manasseh, on the condition that they show their willingness first to assist their brethren in the conquest of the territory west of Jordan. According to the Book of Joshua (3:1-4; 6;7:1-8; 9:3-26; 12:11; 15:35), after the passage of the Jordan, Jericho, in the Jordan valley, is invested, and speedily falls; an advance is then made against Ai, on the eastern side of the Hill-country, and, after an initial repulse, this city is also captured. These successes lead the inhabitants of Gibeon, and three neighboring cities, Kephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath-jearim -all situated in the central part of the Hill-country still farther west to send envoys to Joshua who passes themselves off as belonging to a far-distant country and thus succeed in obtaining an alliance with Israel.

The above argument is apparently in favour of the view that proposes that Israel might have occupied the Syrian-Palestine during the time of Joshua. While these claims might have some truth in them, however, more critical analysis needs to be done to provide adequate information on account of the problem under investigation. In this case, the study sought to find out how archaeology treats this subject in the process of addressing the substantive conflict between the Arabs and the Jews vis-à-vis Israel's occupation in Syrian-Palestine.

In relation to the above narration, Burney (1919) summarises that in the southern Hill-country the tribe of Judah, with certain Kenizzite (Caleb, Othniel) and North Arabian (Kenite) elements which were subsequently reckoned as part of the tribe, and with the tribe of Simeon, makes its way by gradual conquest, especially in the Negeb. He, however, observes that the above said tribe of Simeon is debarred from expansion into the western maritime plain by the Philistines with their iron chariots and has in the Hill-country to the north the Jebusite stronghold of Jerusalem still unreduced, and dominating the district in its vicinity. The study endeavoured to evaluate the emergence of Israel in Syrian-Palestine from the archaeological perspective. However, this section specifically discussed the Biblical tradition in depth to underscore the current state of affairs in the Middle East.

In a further examination of Biblical tradition by Burney (1919) he writes that in later times the population of this northern district remained largely foreign. He gives an account of a district found in Isaiah (8:23) concerning the circuit of the heathen and is elsewhere distinguished as 'the circuit' (Joshua 20:7, 21:32; 1 Chron. 6:61; 1 Kings 9:11), i.e. the Galilee of New Testament times. Burney's view is that this document is of immense value for the topographical information which it affords, and as an indication of the districts occupied by the different tribes at a period when Israel became practically dominant in Palestine and the tribes had been welded into a nation. Such views cannot be dismissed, but treated with utter consideration. In this regard, the opinion of the study is that the Biblical account of Israel's occupation of Palestine justifies their occupation of modern Israel.

The study concurred with Burney's analysis in his literature, when the names of places, for example, Jordan, Jericho, and the Red Sea, as were mentioned during ancient times, so are the same names of places today. This suggests that even the mention of names of persons or ethnic groups such as the Jews occupied Syrian-Palestine land ancient period and that even their name as a tribe (Jew) and their cultural and religious practices remain the same unto this day.

1.3 Ethnicity and Ethnic Boundary Markers in Early Israel

This section handled the aspect of ethnicity as one of the external evidence in trying to identify Israel as an ethnic group in Syrian-Palestine that emerged during the ancient period. According to Hutchinson and Smith (1985), ethnic identity serves as boundary markers between members belonging to Israel and members belonging to some other possible group during the Late Bronze-Iron Age transition and in the Early Iron Age.

In order to underpin Israel's ethnic identity in Syrian-Palestine, the question of a common name must be investigated. On this note, Dever (2008) states, "The Bible itself is replete with expressions which distinguish the Israelites from other groups inhabiting the land". However, this statement is too general. Dever (2008), in this case, substantiates further that while the exact ethnic composition of Canaan during Late Bronze Age-Iron Age I is not clear, the Bible speaks about such groups as the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and the Jebusites (e.g. Judg. 3:5). In relation to the above analysis, Dever (2008) affirms that there was an entity called Israel somewhere in the region of Canaan about 1200 BC, and there is no doubt that an Egyptian, Assyrian and Hittite identity existed in a wider ancient Near Eastern context. Against this context, Thompson (1992) is of the view that there are very good reasons to conclude that a group which was called Israel was existing in Canaan during Late Bronze Age-Iron Age I.

The Bible teaches about the common ancestry of the Israelites. Wenham, (1999: 116) informs that stories that the Israelites are descendants of patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph form a backbone of Israelite self-consciousness according to the Hebrew scriptures. Wenham concludes, therefore, that it is less likely that an Israelite would have distinguished himself or herself from people of the other groups on the basis of phenotypic differences.

Wenham (1999) is of the view that the stories about the patriarchs and the Egyptian sojourn and slavery and the subsequent Exodus provide a foundation for a shared history. As already indicated above and as is well known, the origin and historicity of these stories is much disputed, but Hoffmeier (1997) argues that there is the possibility that a group of slaves had escaped from Egypt and entered the land of Canaan during the time of the early Israelites, whatever the historical circumstances surrounding them might be as opposed to what the biblical sources attest. The above details concerning the slaves who escaped from Egypt to Canaan, apparently the Israelites was the main aim of discussion of the study. On this note, therefore, considering the historical circumstances surrounding the Exodus that attest to historical memories of a common past, among the Hebrew, the study concluded that there was an ethnic group called the Hebrew who emerged in Canaan or Syrian-Palestine.

Apart from historical memories of a common past as indicated above, the question of a common language and culture is underlying. Hoffmeier (1997) has this to say, "It is unlikely that language, which is always intertwined with culture, is an issue as Hebrew is a Semitic language and is likely to have had mainly dialectal differences with other languages in the area". The researcher was of the view that this argument needed to be treated with a lot of consideration. The study considered Hebrew as a Semitic language and therefore originated from Syrian-Palestine.

Religion is one of the reliable sources of information that might help in addressing the problem of this paper; however, it must portray religious practices which might aid in answering the questions relevantly to the on-going. Therefore, this paper seeks to inquire about the kind of religion practiced by Israel and whether or not their religiosity might expedite in solving the underlying. Notably, Gnuse (1999) states, "The Bible clearly distinguishes Yahwism from the surrounding religions". According to both Kuntillet, (1990) and Holladay, (1987) Yahwism was practiced by a distinct group called the Hebrew, and archaeological evidence from the time of the monarchy confirms cases where YHWH was put on a par with another deity. This argument is in support of the idea that the occupation of the Jews in modern Israel is not an alien idea in the Middle East since time immemorial. Having considered the above information, the position of the study on this fact is that the Biblical teaching about Israel's occupation of the Syrian-Palestine in the Books of Exodus, Joshua, and Judges is the most reliable and valid.

Continuing with aspects of a common culture, there have been attempts to determine whether any external aspects of Israelite culture can be detected from the archaeological record. As mentioned above, Dever (2008) has given good reasons which affirm that the archaeological record speaks for a distinct Israelite identity in Early Iron Age I. Moreover, Dever suggests:

The archaeological record speaks for the birth of a new identity. First of all, there is an increase in a rural settlement, with a population explosion most notably in the hill country. There is continuity in technology, and in art, religion and language. While all the new features could be interpreted as simply an indication of an increase in rural settlements, a comparison of the situation during Iron Age I and II suggests otherwise. Most notably, during Iron Age II, the settlement becomes more urban and centralized, the population expands, systems and public works expand, and settlement layouts indicate a more stratified society with more uneven wealth distribution.

In connection with the above discussion, thus, the cumulative evidence is suggestive. According to *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, some kind of new unit was born in the highlands, distinctive from what was before and after it, and distinctive from what was around it in the lowlands. In addition, it is striking that the picture that the archaeological record gives is basically in line with the biblical descriptions of pre-monarchical society, especially as portrayed in the book of Judges. The study felt that the archaeological records examined above suggested that they were in concord with the information provided in the Old Testament writings concerning Israel's occupation in Syrian-Palestine.

Circumcision was another important aspect of common culture the study took into consideration vis-à-vis establishing the emergence of Israel in Syrian Palestine. Thompson (1992) attributes the practice of circumcision to the biblical tradition saying that circumcision was a boundary marker (Gen. 17; 1 Sam. 31:4). Contrary to this view, however, King and Stager (2001) argue that one may not assume that all people around Israel were uncircumcised, and the biblical tradition itself seems to hint that not all Israelites were necessarily circumcised in actuality (Josh. 5:1-9). They hold that the usual reservations about the origin and date of the circumcision tradition also apply, and circumcision is pretty much undetectable based on material remains. They contend, therefore, that circumcision may have been a boundary marker in early Israel, but if so, it is difficult to say to what extent.

A sense of solidarity among at least part of the people constituting the same ethnic identity is yet another factor to consider. Thompson (1992) writes referring to the Israelites, "Such solidarity existed during the pre-monarchical period. In particular, leaving aside the books of Exodus-Joshua, according to the books of Judges and Samuel the Israelites could assemble together if threatened. Such solidarity would, of course, be an indicative feature distinguishing those who belong to Israel from those who do not." The study focused on the information concerned with archaeological evidence to establish whether or not the occupation of the Jews in modern Israel was justifiable and that the information provided herein may solve the issues between the Jews and the Arabs in contemporary Syrian-Palestine.

2.0 Occupation Theories of the Israelites in the land of Canaan

This section discussed different theories concerning the occupation of the Israelites in the land of Canaan. The following occupation theories were discussed: the single conquest theory, the peaceful infiltration theory, and the peasant uprising theory.

2.1 The single conquest theory

The recent research conducted by Junkkala (2006) reveals that the conquest theory is associated with John Albright. In this case, Albright (1981) demonstrates that the book of Joshua is accepted as the historical basis and the archaeological data are used to support the Joshua account of the occupation of the land. In other words, the conquest theory involves the massing of the twelve tribes of Israel and their invasion of the Land of Canaan. Albright (1981) denotes further that in this theory, Joshua and his forces attack the land killing all the Canaanite inhabitants and taking over the land. Albright based his conclusions on the biblical account and the results of excavations that he conducted in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. He attempted to correlate the archaeological evidence of destructions at key sites such as Hazor, Jericho, and Ai, with the biblical text, primarily the book of Joshua (Albright, 1981).

Although the single conquest theory is closer to the historical norm and is clearly based on the biblical accounts as they appear in Joshua and Judges, there are critics of the theory. Junkkala (2006) argues that the archaeological evidence currently available both supports and degrades the claims of this theory. Thus the evidence uncovered at key sites does not support destructions in accordance with the biblical text. However, the main aim of this analysis was to find out whether or not the Jews are justified to live in modern Israel, the land they claim to have been given to their ancestors by God.

The research findings by Coyt (2000) indicate that excavations of the cities associated with the Battle of Gibeon have led scholars to conclude that destructions occurred concurrently with the period of the conquest for the cities of Lachish, Eglon, and Debir. He further denotes that those excavations indicated cultural shifts for Gezer, Debir, and Arad. Although these data points are not a majority of the involved sites they do provide limited corroboration. According to Coyt, a holistic evaluation of the information indicates a battle for the south associated with the Battle of Gibeon that broke that Canaanite power in the region and supports the conquest theory. This view has already been supported by Albright in the study.

2.2 The peaceful infiltration theory

The peaceful infiltration theory is associated with the German author Albrecht Alt (1967). The infiltration theory is based primarily on text criticism and statements in various parts of the Old Testament that refer to migratory peoples coming and going on a fairly routine basis. Alt read elements in the books of Chronicles, Samuel, and Kings as supportive of the Judges narrative while interpreting the same elements as disproving the Joshua narrative. This theory assumes that the tribes of Israel entered the Land of Canaan from the Trans-Jordan and from the region of Kedesh-Barnea to the south. In the theory, both populations migrated deeper and deeper into the land over a period of many years inter-mingling and eventually supplanting the Canaanite society. He viewed the battles portrayed in the books of Joshua and Judges as the final, or combat, phase of lengthy occupation. Alt believed that the eventual creation of the Israelite State was in reaction to the oppression of the Philistines, which seems to imply an element of social revolution.

Albrecht, (1967) came up with a theory that was based primarily on the biblical text and related to the hill country where no archaeological evidence was yet available but later Aharoni (1957) conducted pottery surveys of the upper Galilee in 1957 to test Albrecht's theory. In his research, Aharoni found evidence that showed a long and peaceful settlement process that lasted for centuries, at least in that region. The above mentioned evidence by Aharoni (1957) is perceived by Coyt (2000) as interpolated to support his two-wave version of the conquest theory; however, the same raw data could also appear to support Albrecht's infiltration theory.

According to Noth (1990), the infiltration theory begins with small, largely un-associated groups of semi-nomadic people that roamed into the unoccupied lands of Canaan and lived on the fringes of Canaanite society. Furthermore, Noth (1990) not only theorized that the Israelite tribes might not have existed prior to their establishment in the land, but he believed that the tribal names were actually regional place-names that became associated with the semi-nomads that lived in that particular region. Noth believed that each of the tribes came to occupy its place in the land by its own, unique path. In doing so each tribe developed its own historical tradition of occupation. Because the events in the book of Joshua occur in the region associated with the tribe of Benjamin, Noth postulates that the tribal traditions of Benjamin were later adopted and evolved to become the Israelite traditions related in the book of Joshua. Noth also believed that the few Canaanite cities that were destroyed during the period were likely not destroyed by the Israelites. He believed that those cities were destroyed by inter-city rivalries, by the Egyptians, or by the Philistines.

In relation to the above argument, Zertal (1991) summarizes saying that beginning in the Late Bronze Age, the Israelites did cross the Jordan River and entered the Land of Canaan where they co-existed peacefully with the Canaanites. Then, in four main phases of expansion, the Israelites pushed further west into Canaan. Zertal adds that the second and largest push westward correlates with the accepted date of the Israelite invasion of Canaan. The study holds that the archaeological evidence of destructions uncovered at key Canaanite sites cannot be easily attributed to other forces other than the Israelite militants.

2.3 The Peasant uprising theory

This theory holds that both the Israelites and the Canaanites were present and disbursed throughout the land but positioned at the bottom of the social-economic ladder as peasants. According to Zertal (1991), both the Israelites and the Canaanites were rebelled for unknown reasons and put off their oppressors, the ruling class. In this way, the Hebrew society overcame the Canaanite society from within. The surviving Canaanites were simply assimilated into the Israelite society.

Zertal (1991), presents the second version of the peasant uprising, the social revolution theory. It states that the Canaanite peasant populations of the region rebelled in an internal social revolution against their ruling class. Following their rebellion, the peasant Canaanites fled east and settled in the eastern hill country. Variants of the theory exist with and without the insertion of the Israelites but the core issues remain the same. The refugee Canaanite peasants evolved to become what we now know as the Israelites. He relies heavily on extra biblical references such as the Amarna Letters and their references to semi-nomadic troublemakers to support his case. In his theory, the semi-nomadic rebels and the Canaanite peasants evolve after the social revolt to become the Israelites that would eventually build the united Israeli kingdom. In my view, the argument above is in support of the fact that Syrian-Palestine is the ancestral land for the modern Jews.

Conclusion

The study examined archaeological evidence from different authors in an effort to find out the emergence of Israel in Syrian-Palestine. Different occupation theories were also discussed to bring about concord between the said archaeological evidence and the Old Testament writings. Among the salient occupation theories discussed include the single conquest theory, the peaceful infiltration theory, and the peasant uprising theory. Other aspects of life, for example, religion and culture, have also been discussed to qualify Israel as a distinct ethnic group in Palestine since the Patriarchal period. Based on this internal examination of the Old Testament writings and evidence from archaeology, the study has suggested the possibility that a group from Egypt gained a foothold in the Canaanite highlands and assimilated and amalgamated local peoples over the course of ensuing centuries. In this way, Israel came to exist. Based on the literature review, the study found out that there is interlink between archaeological findings and Biblical narrative concerning Israel's occupation of Palestine. Therefore, the study concluded that

modern Israel is the ancestral land for the Jews and they have the right to its occupation and ought to coexist with the Arabs whom they share common ancestry and heritage.

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