

City of David: Distinguishing Religion from Religious History

Traditional (Zionist) Perspective:

- “Birthplace” of Jerusalem – kingdom of the biblical David
- City lies on a narrow ridge, south of the present-day Old City of Jerusalem
 - Borders the Kidron Valley, where the Gihon Spring serves as its main water source
- 1064 BCE, King David establishes his kingdom here, conquering the Jebusites
- According to the Biblical narrative, David brings the Ark of the Covenant here, and Solomon is allegedly crowned here
- Central location for Jewish identity, seen as the embodiment of God’s covenant to the people of Israel

The City of David, as framed by the Biblical narrative:

- David leads the people, uniting Israel and Judah as one nation (2 Samuel 5:1-5)
- David brings the Ark of the Covenant – the place where God causes his name to dwell – to his city (2 Samuel 6:1; 2 Samuel 6:17)
- God promises the land of Israel to David and his offspring forever; a covenant that will become central to Israelite and later Jewish faith:
 - *...and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly... I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me... **Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.** (2 Sam 7:9-16)*
- God’s covenant to David begins to be used as a means for understanding the consequent history of Israel – adherence to the covenant as the primary framework for the Deuteronomist’s conception of theodicy and history
 - *Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the LORD and did not stop following him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses. And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook (2 Kings 17, 5-7)*

Archaeology qua response to Biblical “History”:

While a number of discoveries have been made, which seem to correlate with the descriptions in the Bible, many archaeologists now reject the Bible-centric approach to archeology, in which archaeological evidence is weighed against the Biblical narrative. For example:

- Recent discoveries of 2,700 year old fragments of pottery, ceramics, figurines that date back to the First Temple period
 - Ceramic bowl with Hebrew inscription: “ryhu bn bnh”, dating back to ~586 BCE (destruction of Jerusalem under King Zedekiah)
 - Some scholars see the name as referring to Zechariah son of Benaiah, father of the prophet Jahaziel (2 Chronicles 20:14)
 - Is this enough evidence, or is it too circumstantial?
- Eilat Mazar claims to have found the palace of King David:
 - Large public building with contemporaneous pottery and a bulla (government seal) of Jehucal, son of Shelemiah, son of Shevi – mentioned in the Book of Jeremiah!

- Pottery within dates to Iron Age I (12th-11th centuries BCE, just before David was supposed to have conquered Jerusalem)
- Foundations for the building with large boulders for wall, and pottery dating back to Iron Age II (10th-9th centuries BCE)...i.e., the time of the united kingdom!
 - YET her study was sponsored by conservative Israeli research institute, and financed by an American investment banker...potential bias?
- Warren's Shaft – the water shaft that was used by Joab to capture the city from the Jebusites, and unlock the city for the Israelite invading forces? Avraham Faust thinks so...
 - More recent excavations, however, show that the chimney is not man-made, but a natural karstic shaft, that was discovered centuries after David's conquest of the city
 - Archaeologists Reich and Shukron believe the shaft could not have been used to draw water, since it had no rope marks to indicate pulling of water, and it was a natural structure
 - Debate not just about historical veracity, but about *the link between Biblical and archaeological records*
- Low chronology approach to archaeology: Israel Finkelstein
 - Contested by newer evidence by Yosef Garfinkel
 - Judean city dating back to time of David's reign Thomas Levy
 - Thomas Levy
 - Copper-smelting operation at Khirbat en Nahas – time of Edomites, “possible” that this belonged to David and Solomon
- Old approach of Yigael Yadin, who dated pottery in accordance with the Bible, no longer acceptable...but is a complete dismissal of the Bible as a source of history possible?

God and Israel:

- City of David – holiest place for Jews, as the site where David is believed to have brought the Ark of the Covenant
 - Modern issue – women's religiosity and religious expression at the Western Wall, in traditional prayer: how can they take part in male-dominated religious worship?
- Fate of the land theologically significant – Jewish possession of the land as of the fulfilment of covenant, result of theodicy
 - Exile understood as punishment for the breaching of covenantal terms
- Eternal promise of God to David and Solomon – FOREVER
 - Spiritual and nationalist connection to the land for Jews
- Archaeological evidence as theological proof for veracity of the Bible
 - Inextricably linked with nationalistic, Zionist goals – seeking to validate Jewish possession of the State of Israel
- Christianity – Jesus as a descendant of David, Christians as inheritors of Davidic promise
- Islam – inheritors of Judeo-Christian tradition, Dome of the Rock as site of Night Journey

Discussion Questions:

- How can we reconcile the Biblical with the archaeological record? Can we discount either?
- Is it even possible to understand and experience these sites without any adherence to a lived tradition? How do our own biases and perspectives colour how we view the site?
- How do changing conceptions of the City of David implicate Jewish thought? How might new archaeological approaches pose a threat to traditional religious views?
 - Moreover, what are the political implications of this “religious” history?

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- *Also*, Bible, NRSV (specific citations listed on handout).