Tall al-ʻUmayri 2008

Archaeologists from the Madaba Plains Project digging at Tall al-ʻUmayri have discovered additional sections of a building with two rooms dedicated to the worship of ancient deities. The building, which contained five rooms and dates to ca. 1500 BC, was preserved almost three m high and was built of stone topped with mud bricks for the second story. The builders carved a small niche into a mud-brick wall and placed standing stones into a thick layer of plaster. Excavators found pottery gifts still lying in the niche next to the standing stones. Worshippers entered the structure from the east through a monumental gateway and passed by a large standing stone, probably representing an ancient god, set into a plastered base as they walked into the inner room for worship at the niche. The structure probably served as a temple, but no one has been able to identify the names of the gods or just how they were worshiped. The people who constructed the building were probably ancient Amorites who lived at the site before the Ammonites.

Tall al-ʻUmayri is a rich Bronze and Iron Age site which began about 3000 BC and lasted until the Persian Empire around 500 BC. At the very beginning of the history of ʻUmayri, a dolmen tomb was built of huge stones in the shape of a large box. While thousands of dolmens exist from southern Jordan around the Mediterranean and Atlantic Ocean, only a handful have remains in them, including the ‘Umayri dolmen. This year a building associated with the dolmen was also found. As far as we know, an associated building has shown up nowhere else.

The largest settlement at the site is 4500 years old, from the middle of the Early Bronze Age. Farmers from the area banded together for protection to form a sprawling conglomeration of house compounds and narrow streets. However, the most important period of occupation at the site

(con’d on p. 2)
Andrew Vaughn believes that even though Judah was almost completely destroyed, there was enough of the kingdom left to be rebuilt. If this was the case, then Hezekiah was “partially” successful.

Sennacherib almost completely destroyed Judah. This destruction is graphically represented by the siege ramp found at Lachish (Level III). The Assyrian Annals say he laid siege to 46 cities in Judah. The Shephelah, where many of these sites were located, was the breadbasket of Judah. When Judah was strong it was reflected in the strength of the Shephelah. Archaeological surveys indicate that during the first part of Hezekiah’s reign the Shephelah was very strong, but after Sennacherib’s campaign there was a dramatic drop in development. The consensus view is that Judah didn’t grow again until Josiah’s reign and then not as much because the Shephelah didn’t grow. However Vaughn doesn’t believe this was the case.

He sees a significant problem with viewing Hezekiah as a complete failure. First, Hezekiah was the only ruler in the area who escaped with his life. Sennacherib was not known as a gracious conqueror; he killed anyone who revoluted. The reason Sennacherib didn’t kill him was because he couldn’t. Hezekiah began a large economic build up several years before Sennacherib came to Judah. It is incorrect to view the LMLK jars as an isolated occurrence at the end of the 8th century BC. They are important for understanding Hezekiah’s reign. Their distribution is evidence of a kingdom-wide infrastructure based around strong cities.

Vaughn believes that Hezekiah began to prepare the kingdom in 715 BC. While doing so he also improved Jerusalem. He reconstructed a stronger city wall, as evidenced by the “Broad Wall,” that excluded extramural settlements. Second, the siege of Lachish and other fortified cities drained the Assyrians to the point that Jerusalem could be saved. Third, Manasseh could not have taken part in the building project described in Chronicles if Judah had been completely wiped out. Thus, it seems that a remnant of Judah was left for such a quick rebuilding effort.

In the last section of his lecture Vaughn focused on the site of Ramat Rachel. He argues that the site was initially built by Hezekiah and then rebuilt just after the destruction in 701 BC. There are two Iron Age strata at the site; Level 5a (the later one, with parallels to Lachish II) destroyed in the early 6th century BC, and the earlier, Level 5b, 8th century BC stratum, with architectural features that include proto-Aeolic capitals and head-stretcher masonry, typical of the Phoenician-influenced palaces at Samaria. Vaughn believes that Hezekiah was the last king of Judah to know of the glorious palaces in Samaria. It is even possible that builders and artisans fled to Judah after the destruction of Samaria in 722 BC. After the destruction of Ramat Rachel, in 701 BC, either Hezekiah or his son, Manasseh, restored the site and built the Level 5a palace. Level 5b architectural elements were reused in this palace, and there is evidence of rebuilding, renovation and different use phases. The Level 5a palace was in use for around another 100 years.

Vaughn concludes that Hezekiah was not a complete failure. After 701 BC important parts of his kingdom remained and other parts were rebuilt. Understanding the results of Hezekiah’s reign in such a manner helps us better understand the accounts from 2 Kings and Chronicles, and also the prophecies of Isaiah and how the city of Jerusalem was restored in the 7th century BC and later.

( Owen Chesnut)
From May 11-25, 2008, a 28 member Old Testament tour group traversed the length of Egypt from St. Catherine’s to Abu Simbel. Two days were spent in the Sinai, three days in Cairo and vicinity with its great Pyramids and camel rides. An overnight train took the group to Karnak where it visited the temples of Karnak and Luxor, the Valley of the Kings and Hatshepsut’s Mortuary Temple. The group luxuriated on a cruise ship, spending four days drifting down the Nile with Roy Gane teaching exegesis classes from its deck. From Aswan, faluccas brought us to Elephantine and Philae, and a small plane took us to Abu Simbel. The students were terrific, as was Randall Youner’s leadership. It was an unforget-
Way of Horus Discoveries:

Archaeologists exploring the old military road in northeastern Sinai have unearthed the remains of a fortified city, a 19th Dynasty (1295-1185 BC) temple built on top of an 18th Dynasty (1576-1295 BC) fort, another mud-brick fort with towers dating to Ramses II (1279-1213 BC) and rows of warehouses used by the Egyptian army during the New Kingdom (1576-1069 BC).

Inscriptions about the Way of Horus on the walls of the Karnak Temple indicate that 11 fortresses protected Egypt's eastern border. Five of these forts have been discovered to date.

Roman Temple Found:

The ruins of a 2nd century AD Roman temple have been found at Zippori, the ancient Jewish capital of the Galilee, in Israel. This discovery indicates that the city housed a pagan population during the Roman period. A church from the Byzantine period sits on top of the ancient temple.

Gladiator Tomb Found:

Archaeologists have discovered the tomb of the person who inspired the character of the film “Gladiator.” The tomb is on the Tiber River near the via Flaminia, north of Rome. It was collapsed, but its columns, roof and decorations were intact. Marcus Nonius Macrinus, born in Brescia in northern Italy, was a general who led military campaigns for Emperor Marcus Aurelius from AD 161-180. He was one of the Emperor’s favorites, also serving as proconsul in Asia.

Solomon’s Mines Discovered?

Archaeologists have discovered a copper-production center in southern Jordan, dated by C14 analysis on organic materials to the 10th century BC, the time of King Solomon. The discovery was made at Khirbat en-Nahas, located south of the Dead Sea, in Edom.