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UGS303: Jerusalem

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Jerusalem's Status in the Tenth-Ninth Centuries B.C.E.

Around 1000 B.C.E., King David of the Israelites moved his capital from its previous location in Hebron to Jerusalem, which he attacked and captured from the Jebusites. This move to a geographically central and politically neutral location brought together David's kingdom and helped him successfully establish what is referred to in biblical history as the United Monarchy. Because of the small number of documents and artifacts dating to this time period in Jerusalem, the city's size, status, and significance during the tenth and ninth centuries B.C.E. is a subject of scholarly debate. Some scholars doubt that the United Monarchy even existed, while others believe that it was an enormously prosperous kingdom with an extensive capital at Jerusalem. In the article, "Iron Age Jerusalem: Temple-Palace, Capital City," Joe Uziel and Itzhaq Shai contest that in tenth century B.C.E., Jerusalem was a small capital that served solely as a royal and religious center to strengthen the power of the United Monarchy.¹ Nadav Na'aman writes his article, "The Contribution of the Amarna Letters to the Debate on Jerusalem's Political Position in the Tenth Century B.C.E." to refute the revisionist view of tenth century B.C.E. Jerusalem and analyze how scholars should be approaching this topic.² He believes that tenth century B.C.E. Jerusalem was the governmental center of David's legitimate kingdom. In both scholarly articles, the three authors present and evaluate archeological, biblical, and historical evidence. Though the authors are not wholly exclusive, Na'aman takes a largely historical approach in order to

¹ Joe Uziel and Itzhaq Shai, "Iron Age Jerusalem: Temple-Palace, Capital City," *JAOS* 127 (2007): 161–170.

² Nadav Na'aman, "The Contribution of the Amarna Letters to the Debate on Jerusalem's Political Position in the Tenth Century B.C.E.," *BASOR* 304 (1996): 17–26.

effectively refute revisionist views, and Uziel and Shai chiefly approach the ancient city's status from a biblical angle in order to reach their own unique conclusion.

Though neither article uses an extensive amount of archeological evidence dating back to the times of the United Monarchy, the authors briefly reference various material finds in order to further affirm the directional approaches they take on tenth century B.C.E. Jerusalem. In the beginning of their article, Uziel and Shai address the stepped stone structure, walls of a possible palace, and random pottery that date to the times of the United Monarchy. The space they allot for archeological evidence consumes no more than a short paragraph in which they mention that none of the existing evidence could possibly be conclusive in determining the size of Jerusalem during the tenth-ninth centuries B.C.E.³ Soon after, the authors make it clear that the Bible will be their main source saying, "Given the lack of archaeological evidence and extra-Biblical records, the Hebrew Bible serves as the major source for the reconstruction of the history of the United Monarchy..."⁴ Na'aman uses similar evidence to Uziel and Shai's but does more than simply mention it in passing. First, he addresses the stepped stone structure to point out excavation restriction issues. One of the reasons Na'aman is so adamant in advocating for historical perspective is because he realizes that the area under the Temple Mount, a place where much of Jerusalem's history may be found, cannot be excavated. Additionally, he points out that "...conquest, destruction, and desolation leave distinct marks that archaeologists can easily expose; uninterrupted continuity of settlement, on the other hand, leaves only a few remains of the earlier building activity."⁵ Since Jerusalem had been living in relative peace before David arrived, it is possible that not much archeological evidence pertaining to this time period exists.

³ Uziel and Shai, "Iron Age Jerusalem," 162.

⁴ Ibid. 163.

⁵ Na'aman, "The Contribution of the Amarna Letters," 18–19.

Na'aman also uses the Tel-Dan inscription, a stele dating back to the ninth century B.C.E. that mentions "House of David", as proof that the biblical story of David and Jerusalem is at least partially accurate. He uses this fact to his advantage when addressing other issues of the Bible. However, as mentioned before, Na'aman's use of the Bible and archeological evidence is much less prevalent than his attention to historical data.

While Na'aman uses the Bible in conjunction with other sources to reinforce his historically driven approach, Uziel and Shai use the Bible extensively to discuss the validity of their theory. Revisionists almost completely dismiss the Bible as a source of reliable information and depend solely on non-biblical documents and archeological finds to assess tenth-ninth century B.C.E. Jerusalem. Revisionists conclude, sometimes using negative evidence, that Jerusalem did not become a major city or center of society until the time of Hezekiah in the eighth century B.C.E. In order to contradict the revisionists and prove that Jerusalem was civilized during David's time, Na'aman uses the Bible to demonstrate the existence of courts and writing in tenth century Jerusalem. Na'aman cites the Egyptian Pharaoh Shishak's campaign in 1 Kings 14:25-28 and illustrates that the story in the Hebrew Bible must have been derived from another older writing because of its accuracy.⁶ This earlier writing, without which the story may have been misconstrued or forgotten, shows that Jerusalem probably had a court with writing before the tenth century B.C.E. Na'aman uses this to show that revisionists should not be completely dismissing the data the Bible presents and to show that negative conclusions are unreasonable. Na'aman consistently returns to the idea that historical long-range perspective is crucial when attempting to prove a theory. He also lists other passages in the Bible to further disprove revisionists as he focuses in on his historical approach. Uziel and Shai's use of the

⁶ Ibid. 22.

Bible is narrowly focused when compared with Na'aman's broad historical approach. They not only look to validate the reliability of the Bible but also use it in order to prove their proposition of tenth-ninth century B.C.E. Jerusalem's status. They clarify that they approach the Bible with a certain amount of caution due to its "religious agenda."⁷ However, like Na'aman, the authors assign credibility to the Bible by referencing Pharaoh Shishak's campaign and Gath's destruction by the King of Aram. These events in the Bible align with historical information and prove that the book is accurate more often than not. As I stated in my introduction, Uziel and Shai argue that "...in the days of the United Monarchy, Jerusalem served as the capital of the state. As a capital, its sole function was as a royal-cultic center, purposely separated from a large population of residents, with the specific intention of strengthening the status of the monarchy."⁸ The meat of the evidence for their argument is from the Bible as they address the story of the United Monarchy. This includes why David chose Jerusalem as his capital and how he added to his capital's significance through assigning it spiritual prominence and focusing on royal construction. According to 2 Samuel 6, David brought the Ark of the Covenant, the holiest of the Israelites' possessions and a host to the presence of God, to Jerusalem. This attributed to the city's holiness along with the city's high location and partition from the general population. Concerning construction, David built a palace for himself as it is written in 2 Samuel 5. 1 Kings 6-7 records that David's son, Solomon, built an enormous temple for God during his reign. If what Uziel and Shai claim is true, both kings did so in order to further bolster their successful monarchy in the eyes of the Israelite people, for "There is no mention of residential or related construction for a non-royal population."⁹ The city of Jerusalem was not opened to the general

⁷ Uziel and Shai, "Iron Age Jerusalem," 164.

⁸ Ibid. 162.

⁹ Ibid. 167.

population for residential and societal use until the monarchy was ready. The city's function likely changed some time in the eighth century B.C.E. In addition to the passages listed here, Uziel and Shai reference other passages in the Bible. The substantial amount of information the Bible provides about the kings of the United Monarchy, their practices, and Jerusalem is difficult to ignore.

In their article, Uziel and Shai intermittently derive assumptions from trends throughout history when they feel that a biblical claim needs further verification. Conversely, the strength of Na'aman's article is revealed when he hones in on historical reasoning concerning the Amarna letters and long-range perspective. In order to support their theory that Jerusalem was a small royal-cultic center, Uziel and Shai reference various historical instances in which leaders have chosen neutral territories for capitals and times when temples have brought about growth for a city. Concerning David's choice of Jerusalem for its neutrality, the authors reference the similar neutrality of Ancient Olympia and Washington D.C.¹⁰ When discussing Jerusalem's growth surrounding the temple, the authors refer to the Tell el-Hayyat, a Middle Bronze Age holy temple, and various ancient Egyptian temples that have acted as catalysts for the formation of cities.¹¹ According to their theory, David's choice and development of Jerusalem was strategic. Uziel and Shai do not forget about the important role historical trends play in deciphering ancient Jerusalem. However, they typically mention these as supporting facts after making biblically based claims like the ones above. This historical perspective is not their primary position like it is for Nadav Na'aman. As the title of his article alludes to, Na'aman focuses largely on the "lessons" learned from the Amarna letters. Na'aman uses the Amarna letters to display the discrepancies between archaeological data and historical documents in order to show that

¹⁰ Ibid. 165.

¹¹ Ibid. 169.

negative conclusions, particularly the ones reached by revisionists, are illogical. The Amarna tablets, letters written between the Egyptian pharaoh and client kings in the fourteenth century B.C.E., mention important information concerning the ancient cities of Shechem and Jerusalem. The Amarna letters show that Shechem in the Late Bronze Age II was a large and powerful city. The Amarna tablets also show that Jerusalem was significant enough to have a king who communicated with the Egyptian Pharaoh. If only archeological data were available, both Shechem and Jerusalem would have appeared to us as insignificant towns. Na'aman, through this illustration, proves that discrepancies between documents and archeological data are possible. Because of this, he says historians must be careful not to reach uninformed conclusions. Na'aman also illustrates how to use long range perspective, or historical comparison, by looking at the LBII and Iron Age IIA and "... comparing the political formations and socioeconomic conditions...and examining the long-term changes within an identical ecological setting...".¹² He uses what is known about the population growth in the region during these time periods to assign further validity to the fact that Jerusalem was existent before David's time and that the United Monarchy was possible.¹³ Na'aman's last guideline is this: "Scholars must always take into account the gap between our modern definitions of states and societies and the self-perception of ancient societies."¹⁴ When talking about ancient Jerusalem, or any city for that matter, he argues that it is crucial to concretely define any descriptive words, which some revisionists fail to do. Na'aman suggests that Jerusalem was a functioning, governing city ruled by David in the tenth century B.C.E., although he says the dimensions of the city are hard to assess. Even without an exhaustive and personal analysis of what Davidic Jerusalem actually looked like, Na'aman

¹² Na'aman, "The Contribution of the Amarna Letters," 19.

¹³ Ibid. 25.

¹⁴ Ibid.

successfully moves scholars closer to what the truth may be. He uses his perspective to make a point about what is logical when looking at ancient cities.

Uziel, Shai, and Na'aman approach their articles differently when it comes to evidence and conclusions reached from their assessments. Na'aman seeks to define what methods are acceptable, or unacceptable, when evaluating tenth-ninth century B.C.E. Jerusalem. For him, advocating for historical long-range perspective goes hand in hand with refuting the erroneous claims of revisionists. He works hard to validate his claims and refutes with various evidence, but he focuses on comparison between time periods. For Uziel and Shai, who set out to make a unique claim of their own, the Bible is their primary source because it provides them with more information than any other available sources. I believe that both sets of authors employed similar tactics and evidence when attacking this issue, but they placed emphasis on different points.

Uziel and Shai convincingly proved their claim that tenth-ninth century B.C.E. Jerusalem was a small capital that functioned as a religious and royal center. They were effective in their use of evidence to support their claim, and were not as focused on refuting the claims of various other scholars. Na'aman, on the other side of the spectrum, convincingly proved that long-range perspective and historical comparison are crucial when assessing ancient times. In my opinion, he effectively disproves the revisionist party. When it comes to his own theory, however, Na'aman is much less conclusive than his contemporaries and simply leaves the reader with an outline of facts. Both biblical and historical approaches to this debate are valid. When combined, the reader can assess what information is available and come closer to visualizing what tenth-ninth centuries B.C.E. Jerusalem may have actually looked like. Both articles are thought provoking, each in their own way. One article encourages the reader to analyze a view that has already been established, and the other article encourages the reader to open his or her eyes to

new possibilities. With completely different perspectives, similar categories of evidence, and almost unrelated conclusions, the authors successfully present ancient Jerusalem from independent, enlightened, and logical positions.

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