

The Dig at Dan

The Fourteenth Season
1980

by
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The summer of 1980 was the fourteenth season of the archeological dig at Dan, Tel-Dan in Northern Galilee. The biblical city of Dan is located at the foot of Mount Hermon in northeastern Israel. The fertility of the area around Dan is mentioned in the Bible, : "For we have seen the Land, and behold, it is very good." (Judges 18:9) Dr. Avram Biran, the director of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology at Hebrew Union College the Jewish School of Religion in Jerusalem picked out this site for excavation first in hopes of finding the ceremonial mound and perhaps the Golden Calf which was placed there by Jeroboam I after the division of Solomon's kingdom into two, Northern and Southern kingdoms. What he was to find there was beyond his imagination. Dr. Biran has his PhD from Johns Hopkins University and was the President of the Israel Exploration Society.

Hebrew Union College is not to be confused with Hebrew Union University which is also in Jerusalem. ##

Discoveries in digs such as the one at Dan is of special importance for understanding the biblical narrative which repeatedly mentions the city of Dan.

To be a part of a real Archaeology experience became a reality for me in 1980. I was a student at Lexington Theological Seminary and for a credit in New Testament Studies took a J term class with Dr. Allan Culpepper We journeyed to Egypt, Jordan and Israel. in January of 1980 . Dr Culpepper suggested that I should apply to go on a dig, and suggested the one at Dan. I applied through the New York branch of Hebrew Union College and was accepted. The season lasted for seven weeks in which we were housed three miles south of Tel-Dan at the Tel High Youth Hostel. About 20 men and women from various Universities and Colleges made up the group for this season. There were three from the North America College, Pontifical School in Rome, others from Brown University, Notre Dame, Rice, LTS, Averett College, among others.

Mount Lebanon is visible from the Tell, and many days we witnessed Israeli aircraft firing rockets near the Lebanese border. Mt. Hermon was to the east of this picture which

was more prominent as it could be seen from the area of the Sea of Galilee some 30 miles south of us. It was from Hermon that we had our water supply... A wonderful spring on our dig was fed by the melting snows on Mt. Hermon. This spring is one of the three water sources for the Jordan River which flows into the Sea of Galilee about where Bethsaida stood and flows out on the south on its way to the Dead Sea. Having a spring on site was a luxury that most digs do not have. We always had fresh cool water which was needed as we were out in the hot sun most of the day. I used Aura Glow to cover my skin to keep from burning. Aura Glow is olive oil, peanut oil and lanolin. ##

This is the Israelite entrance to Dan as it was in the first temple period. One would pass through the outer gate into a plaza area. There is a small platform of hewn limestone that at one time had a canopy overhead for shade. Here the ruler or king would sit while at the village and on both sides of the throne are stone benches upon which the elders of the city would sit. In those days if one had a dispute or legal question, they would take it to the elders at the city gate. Boaz in the book of Ruth did this not to confuse one to think that Boaz was present at Dan but a similar setting as this existed at most cities of this time in sites in Israel. There were walls around this area that have been destroyed by other conquering peoples. ##

In 1976 a ten inch limestone tablet was uncovered. The bilingual inscription of the top three lines in Greek and the bottom line in Aramaic refer to a person named Zoilos who made a vow to the God who is in Dan or another translation to the God of the Danites. The inscription dates to the late third or early second century BC based on the style of the scripts. Thus we have evidence that we are in the right place DAN! ##

. After the death of Solomon about 921 B.C. the Kingdom split in half. Jeroboam became the king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He set up two religious shrines, to deter the people going to the Temple in Jerusalem. These shrines or High Places were at Dan and in the North and Bethel in the Southern part of the Northern Kingdom. (I Kings 12:29)

Beth-bamah has been translated in the various Bibles as Hilltop shrine, or high Place, or a cult place. High places were used for general worship, the most commonly mentioned were sacrifices or burning incense (I Kings 3:3, 12:32-33, Jeremiah 19:3-5, and Ezekiel 6:6 and 20:38) This sacred area covers about half acre in size. There were three levels of

occupation and construction found, one dating from the 10th Century BC another 9th Century and the later 8th century BC. The earlier construction was 22 by 60 meters and the 9th Century BC construction was a high place 60 x 62 meters. Inense burners and spades or shovel like tools have been found which tell of animal sacrifices in this area.

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This slide shows the Tel rising about 50 feet from the fields below. The earlier habitation being some 4000 years ago from the ancient city of Laish, a Canaanite settlement. The tel is built up by remains of 3000 years of habitation. One occupation on top of the other thus making an archeological dig complicated for one has to know the general age of each occupation as artifacts are uncovered. The classic tell is at Megiddo and written in a book by James Michener, "The Source". This book is basic reading to understand the occupations of sites in Israel.

The land that the tribe of Dan was given, was originally near the present Gaza strip, a land bordering the Philistines. There was no peace being neighbors to the Philistines, so the Danites sent out scouts to find another location. They went North and ran over the occupants of the city of Laish, a Canaanite city. They named the city Dan after the name of Dan their father. (Judges 18:29) Today we refer to this area as Tel-Dan. This occurred in the eleventh Century B.C. ##

Dr Biran lectured to us telling us about the area and previous years studies. Mostly these lectures were in the class room of Tell High University adjacent to the Youth Hostel where we were housed. We were awoken around five in the morning by the call of the doves, as they sang out good morning in Hebrew, bacara, b'backra. We got ready and went for a snack in the mess hall loaded on a bus and out on the dig about 6:30AM ## It was about a four mile ride out to the dig. We would be assigned a square or place to dig and with pick and shovel we started to see what would turn up. We uncovered walls and followed their direction. The most plentiful artifacts were shards from clay utensils or pieces of pottery. There is always the anticipation of finding a coin or a piece of jewelry, but we did not find those things this year. An Egyptian bead was found near the last day

of the season. When we closed a days dig an interpretation would be made of what we found which was often revised as the result of findings the next day when another wall would be found. Going maybe in a different direction. We would shovel the dirt or over burden into rubber buckets and some would be designated to sifting and others would be loaded in wheel barrows and discarded over the side of the tel. ##

About nine o'clock we would break for Breakfast. The first day they put before us a tomato, a cucumber, a hard boiled egg and a cup of eschel or yogurt. I choked down the egg and ate the tomato and left the cucumber...ate the eschel...I soon learned how to handle this...cut up all of the items and make a salad with the eschel or yogurt . This was good and even palatable. The trees in the background are eucalyptus which were plentiful in groves as they were introduced.as they are not native to the area. One tree that intrigued me was the carob tree with the long beans hanging down. I immediately knew that this was the locust that John the Baptist ate along with honey as is recorded in the Biblical Text in the book of John.. The Carob tree must be a legume as I has these long bean like pods hanging down like a locust tree does. The carob bean is like chocolate and is used as a substitute in some candies. Among other trees that abound was a specie of oak and the juniper that is tall and bent as the wind blows constantly.

When Dr. Biran staked out the dig he intended to begin iover in the area of the Bamah but the army was set up there with their guns pointing toward Syria . So as to not be in their way they said he could dig further to the South on the Tell. He picked a spot where two stones or columns protruded above the surface. This was in 1967 and as the result ## of this in ensuing years an amazing thing came to light this arch. It was originally covered with plaster as you can see in the cracks. It was not recognized at first as such but as the artist recorded the findings upon drawing it she saw that it was not just a wall but a mud brick arch. This was the Laish entrance to the city. This dates to about 1800 B.C. The arch spans eight feet across and had two flanking towers The reason this has been preserved as it is thought after 30 or 40 years of use it was covered up and ramps were constructed against the city wall to conceal this structure. It was better protection to have ramps than have the open gateway. As the arch was uncovered it was seen that

there were not one but three arches through the gate way thus a triple arch was found going through the wall. . There was fear by Dr Biran that if they cleared the gateway that the arch would collapse. Therefore they only exposed half of the gateway. Another reason that Dr. Biran gave us for clearing half of the gateway was that he was leaving the excavation of the other half for another archeologist at another time for a future expedition may have more expertise. Whenever you dig you destroy. All excavation is destruction. ##

After each days session, Dr Biran would take photographs of the days findings, one in color and one in black and white. If there was a shadow on the exposed diggings then he would get assistance to hold up a canvas to block the sun from casting a shadow. This cloth he called a Joshua Cloth, then he would say, "Joshua caused the sun to be still for a day, didn't he? (Joshua 10-14) ## A better view of the Joshua cloth is in a later slide.

Gila Cook, an architect is shown here illustrating the findings as the days work goes on. It was she who first realized that this was an arch. It was a revelation that the Canaanites knew how to build an arch, for it was thought that the arch came into being from the Romans. ##

When this bowl shaped pit was uncovered, I was assigned to it for I had borrowed some dental tools from a friend and we used them in cleaning out the crevices thus .. revealed a plastered bowl shape. We speculated that this could be a Canaanite wine press operation or that it could be an olive press. Olive oil was used for lighting lamps as well for ceremonial purposes such as anointing. We did not know for sure what the purpose was. We did find a grave alongside this site but we could not date the burial. We were disappointed that nothing of any artifact nature was buried with this artesian. ##

Here you can see the Joshua cloth rolled up ready to be used when needed.

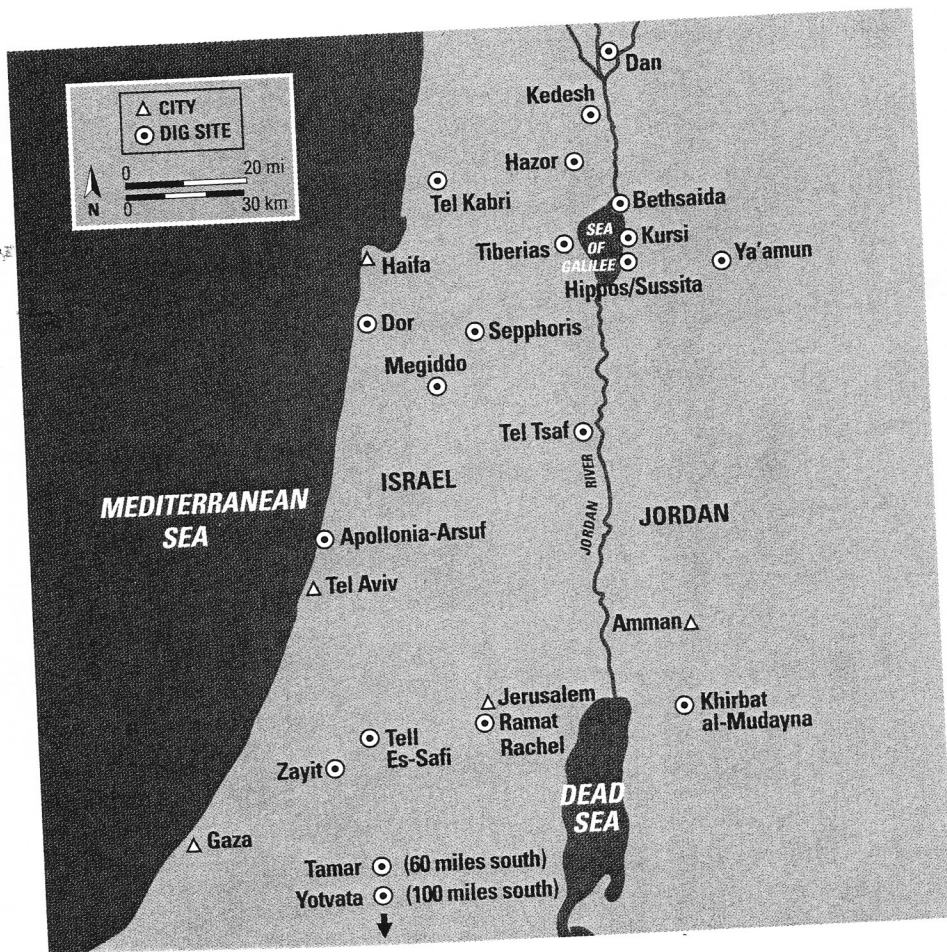
At the end of the season we cut eucalyptus saplings to support boards to try to preserve the arch to keep it from collapsing before the 1981 season. I received a letter from Dr Biran in 1982 in which he said that they had to abandon the dig for that season because of

the shelling... and went to Southern part of Israel to Aroer to open a site there to finish the season.

Thus with this year's dig at Tell Dan, will run from June 25th to June 27th. Dr Biran has been replaced as he is now 97 years old. This year's dig will be conducted by Hebrew Union College under the direction of David Ilan and Nili Fox. They will concentrate on the Iron Age destruction level and the exposure of a neighborhood that was destroyed during the Babylonian invasion under Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C. This is the oldest continuing dig site in all of Israel. This year 2006 will be the 40th season at Tel-Dan. Applications are being received to fill this years group. I do not remember how much I paid but it was about than 1500 dollars , I found a brochure for the 1982 season and see the cost for the six weeks time on the dig would \$1,875, that includes airfare from and to Kennedy in New York, and for food and lodging for the season. With out airfare the cost would be \$750. Participants are expected to cover their own expenses on weekends and for an optional three day tour of Greece.

This was an experience of a life time. Not only the experience of the dig but of touring in Israel was wonderful. On Thursday afternoon after closing the dig for the week we were off to go wherever we would in the country. This is another story of our adventures on our own, not with a tour group... living in Youth Hostels from two to four dollars a night including breakfast. The bus transportation is good even tho the Arab Buses do not run on Friday as that is their Holy Day. For the Jews Shabbat begins at sundown on Friday til Sundown on Saturday. We had to be back ready to dig on Sunday morning. One evening we were coming back to Tel-High from Jerusalem. We were hungry and decided to stop at a Kiosk to get something to eat. The operator would not serve us until he could come out and count three stars meaning that Shabbat was over.

Of all of the places I traveled in Israel I just loved to go by and around the Sea of Galilee for it so beautiful and the other place I loved was the Wailing Wall. These are two of the places that gave me a warm feeling and a sense of fulfillment, for I felt I had come home.



Timeline

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| Prehistory | 1,000,000–3300 B.C. |
| Neolithic | 8300–4500 B.C. |
| Chalcolithic | 4500–3200 B.C. |
| Early Bronze Age | 3200–2200 B.C. |
| Middle Bronze Age | 2200–1550 B.C. |
| Late Bronze Age | 1550–1200 B.C. |
| Iron Age I | 1200–1000 B.C. |
| Iron Age II | 1000–586 B.C. |
| Babylonian Period | 586–539 B.C. |
| Persian Period | 539–332 B.C. |
| Hellenistic Period | 332–141 B.C. |
| Hasmonean Period | 141–37 B.C. |
| Roman Period | 37 B.C.–324 A.D. |
| Byzantine Period | 324–638 A.D. |
| Arab Period | 638–1516 A.D. |
| Crusader Period | 1099–1291 A.D. |
| Ottoman Period | 1517–1917 A.D. |