Old Testament Introduction  
The Bible’s Buried Secrets  
Chapter 18, Ai

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/ancient/bibles-buried-secrets.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qalTJzk4kO0>

***About the Video***

What is for the most part an exact copy of the video script follows. There are a few places where individual speakers could neither be heard nor understood: for this we apologize. Every effort was made to be precise: there were just spots that defeated us. Since this is a quote in its entirety it seemed unnecessary to mark it with quotation marks. The notation for each speaker is tedious enough: Narrator, Reader, etc. If you discover bothersome errors, please reply to this website and point them out. You may verify the script more easily by starting to replay it where the “time” stamps indicate discussion begins. The second of the above links is free from advertising and thus easier to use.

***Overview***

There is no remaining evidence that Et-Tell ever was the biblical Ai. Neither Garstang’s date, nor Albright’s opinion can be sustained. The site is simply not in existence in 1364 BC. Since neither Jericho nor Hazor provided 14C evidence for or against a 1364 BC Exodus, a new location could be sought for Ai. The other commentary included in this segment consists mostly of irrelevancies: the topic of discussion was Ai, and *The Bible’s Buried Secrets* (BBS) should have stuck with Ai. Asserting manufactured dates for Jericho and Hazor does not help BBS claims. The introduction of other city-states is premature and belongs with Ben-Tor’s introduction of the Israelite house, in the middle of Finkelstein’s Hypothesis. The analysis of Hazor’s upper and lower cities belonged with Hazor. The net result of this irrelevant jumping around with subject matter leads to an erroneous conclusion. There is nothing here that suggests that the Israelites were ever lost; or that their history was every anything but precise.

***Script***

Ai (time 29:20)

Quote:

N: And there’s another Canaanite city-state that Joshua and his army of Israelites are credited with laying waste. It’s called Ai, and has been discovered[[1]](#endnote-1) in what is now the Palestinian territory of the west bank. Here archaeologist Hani Nur El-Din[[2]](#endnote-2) and his team are finding evidence of a rich Canaanite culture.

El-Din: The village at first appears, and develops the city, and then there was a kind of fortification surrounding this settlement.

N: These pieces of stones were once the magnificent palace and temples that were eventually destroyed; but when the archaeologists date the destruction they discover it occurred about 2200 BC.[[3]](#endnote-3) They date the destruction of Jericho to 1500 BC, and Hazor’s to about 1250 BC.[[4]](#endnote-4) Clearly these city-states were not destroyed at the same time. They range over nearly a thousand years. In fact, of the thirty-one sites the Bible says that Joshua conquered, few showed any signs of war.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Dever: There was no evidence of armed conflict in most of these sites. At the same time it was discovered that most of the large Canaanite towns that were supposed to have been destroyed by these Israelites, were either not destroyed at all, or were destroyed by another.[[6]](#endnote-6)

N: A single sweeping military invasion led by Joshua cannot account for how the Israelites arrived in Canaan.[[7]](#endnote-7) But the destruction of Hazor does coincide with the time that the Merneptah Stele locates the Israelites in Canaan.[[8]](#endnote-8) So who destroyed Hazor? Amnon Ben-Tor still believes it was the Israelites who destroyed the city. But his co-director Sharon Zuckerman has a different idea.

Zuckerman: The final destruction itself consisted of the mutilation of statues of kings and gods. It did not consist of signs of war or any kind of fighting, we don’t see weapons in the streets like we see in other sites….[[9]](#endnote-9)

N: So if there was no invasion, what happened?[[10]](#endnote-10) Excavations reveal that Hazor had a lower city of commoners, serfs, and slaves, and an upper city with a king and wealthy elites. Zuckerman finds within the grand palaces of elite Hazor areas of disrepair, and abandonment. To archaeologists, signs of a culture in decline, and rebellion from within.[[11]](#endnote-11)

Zuckerman: I would not rule out the possibility of an internal revolt of Canaanites living at Hazor and a revolting against the….[[12]](#endnote-12)

N: In fact, the entire Canaanite city-state system, including Hazor and Jericho breaks down.[[13]](#endnote-13) Archaeology and ancient texts[[14]](#endnote-14) clearly show that it is the result of a long period of decline and upheaval that sweep through Mesopotamia, the Aegean region, and the Egyptian Empire around 1200 BC.[[15]](#endnote-15)

Machinist: And when the dust, as it were, settled, when we can begin to see what takes the place of this great state system, we find a number of new people, suddenly coming into focus, in a kind of void that is created with the dissolution of the great state system.[[16]](#endnote-16)

N: Can archaeologists find the Israelites among these new people?[[17]](#endnote-17)

Unquote.

***Commentary***

Ai[[18]](#endnote-18) is indeed located on the western bank according to the biblical record. We cannot be certain that Ai actually corresponds to Et-Tell[[19]](#endnote-19) at all. Dr. Bryant G. Wood[[20]](#endnote-20) has proposed that Khirbet el-Maqatir be considered as an alternative location.[[21]](#endnote-21) No one can easily claim that the location of Ai is not contested.

“The site of et-Tell (Arabic for "the ruin-heap") is about 3 km east of the modern village of Beitin (Bethel),[[22]](#endnote-22) atop a watershed plateau overlooking the Jordan Valley and the city of Jericho 14 km east.”[[23]](#endnote-23)

A distance of 3 km is a little less than 2 miles; 14 km is a little more than 8.5 miles. The key phrase that should catch our attention is “atop a watershed plateau.” The Jordan River falls from an elevation of 686 feet below sea level at Galilee to 1,407 feet below sea level at the Dead Sea, a drop of 721 feet in a distance of [[24]](#endnote-24) seventy-five miles, with a nine mile width. It is difficult to believe that this valley does not become a raging torrent from time to time.[[25]](#endnote-25)

We believe that this valley is prone to sudden flooding, as well as mud and rock slides.[[26]](#endnote-26) Although we were unable to find sufficient support for this idea. The terrain seems right for flooding and slides, but the rainfall appears to be too slight to produce them frequently.[[27]](#endnote-27)

***Et-Tell***

The identification of Et-Tell as the biblical Ai rests on the opinions of Edward Robinson (1838)[[28]](#endnote-28), Charles Wilson (1866)[[29]](#endnote-29), and William Foxwell Albright (1924)[[30]](#endnote-30). These opinions may amount to nothing more than proposals for a working hypothesis that needs to be tested against fact: words like “suggested” are easily overlooked in such a context. Ostensibly, Et-Tell is unoccupied in the late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age for a period of over 1000 years. When we search for additional, more specific information on dating, there is no reference to pottery; and more especially, any reference to 14C: there is no reference to any specific dating information or method. In fact, it doesn’t even appear that Ai (Et-Tell) was in existence at all during the late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. It was, as the name suggests, a trash dump. This means that it cannot possibly be the site of Joshua’s battle in or shortly after 1364 BC.[[31]](#endnote-31)

Evidently John Garstang[[32]](#endnote-32) began the excavation of Et-Tell in 1928. This makes the identification of Et-Tell by Robinson and Wilson, nothing more than subjective suggestions and wishes: for both were offered long before Garstang began. Garstang employed trench archaeology, rather than more careful square and area methods. Garstang dates the city to 1400 BC based on pottery that cannot be proved to ever be in existence.[[33]](#endnote-33)

Judith Marquet-Krause also excavated only the “upper region of the mound and exposed regions of the acropolis and a village” at Et-Tell (1933-1936) and identified an Iron Age village: much too late to be useful, and not specifically dated, with no methodology specified. So now we are confronted with two excavations and no real results.[[34]](#endnote-34)

A third, more thorough excavation was conducted by the American Schools of Oriental Research (1964-1970) with these results dated by pottery:

* EBI, Pre-Urban phase (circa 3200-3100 BC).
* EBI, Urban A phase (circa 3100, burned in 2950/2860 BC).
* EBII, Urban B phase (circa 2950/2860 BC, burned in 2720 BC: 14C).[[35]](#endnote-35)
* EBIII, Urban C phase (circa 2700/2680 BC, destroyed in 2400 BC).
* Abandonment phase (circa 2400-1200 BC)[[36]](#endnote-36)

Neither the BBS discussion nor the El-Din excavation adds anything to this discussion. The dating again hangs on some uncertain pottery dating and the only 14C level comparable with Jericho and Hazor is Urban B, which must also have some sort of “wiggle” analysis applied, so at a minimum error 2930 ± 17 BC calibrated, we calculate 2964-2896 BC. The description indicates the complete absence of any evidence for any occupied site from 2400 to 1200. Only one conclusion is possible. The Et-Tell dating is not compatible with either Jericho or Hazor or a 1364 BC conquest. Et-Tell may or may not be the site of biblical Ai: any evidence is gone. The facts show that Albright erred in his opinion based on location. The site may have been washed away by flooding, but no evidence for this is reported; one possible conclusion remains; this is probably the wrong site!

***Khirbet el-Maqatir***

Clearly an alternate site must be located. Et-Tell may remain an excavation of interest, but not as the biblical Ai, unless it can be established that the city evidence from 2400 to 1200 was washed away by flood. This necessitates the quest for and an alternate site. At this time only Khirbet el-Maqatir[[37]](#endnote-37) has been proposed by Wood. We have insufficient information to explore this alternative more thoroughly.

***Conclusion***

There is no remaining evidence that Et-Tell ever was the biblical Ai. Neither Garstang’s date, nor Albright’s opinion can be sustained. The site is simply not in existence in 1364 BC. Since neither Jericho nor Hazor provided 14C evidence for or against a 1364 BC Exodus, a new location could be sought for Ai. The other commentary included in this segment consists mostly of irrelevancies: the topic of discussion was Ai, and BBS should have stuck with Ai. Asserting manufactured dates for Jericho and Hazor does not help BBS claims. The introduction of other city-states is premature and belongs with Ben-Tor’s introduction of the Israelite house, in the middle of Finkelstein’s Hypothesis. The analysis of Hazor’s upper and lower cities belonged with Hazor. The net result of this irrelevant jumping around with subject matter leads to an erroneous conclusion. There is nothing here that suggests that the Israelites were ever lost; or that their history was every anything but precise.

[[38]](#endnote-38)

1. Note that the false claim for the certainty of the discovery of Ai rests on blind fiat alone. That which is most certainly nothing more than subjective opinion alone, is served up for us as fact, without so much as even honoring us with the names of scholars who may have once held such opinions. It must be true because BBS claims that it is true. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Hani Nur El-Din, Al Quds University, no other bibliography. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. No declaration of the dating method is given. The date offered is 846 to 836 years too premature for Joshua, possibly because the 1364-1354 BC layer had washed away, or they dug through it without recognizing it, or this is not the site of Ai at all. In a site as exposed to water erosion as Ai, where at least one instance of floods carrying landslides into and damning the Jordan has thought to have occurred (this is one humanistic and naturalistic pseudo-explanation of the dry-river Jordan crossing under Joshua), we must always consider the possibility that flood erosion has washed the evidence away. Is Joshua (the book) false? There is no proof for that conclusion. This Ai better fits the Battle of Four Kings Against Five (circa 1876 BC, Genesis 14:9): however, such an admission would bring historical credibility to the life of Abraham and the record of Genesis.

   <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ai_(Bible)>

   Et-Tell:

   <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Et-Tell>

   Kirbet el-Maqatir:

   <http://www.bibleplaces.com/maqatir.htm>

   <http://www.bibleplaces.com/ai2000.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Clearly this is a false statement. Kenyon dates Jericho to 1550 BC. Based on only eighteen samples, we recalculated the original data for Jericho to an overall average of 3363 ± 17 BP. At a 95% confidence, this yields an interval of 3397-3329 BP. Converting with the standard 1950 base, we arrive at 1413 BC. A 210 year “wiggle” calibration was applied to reach a possible 1623 BC calibrated average, with a possible 1697-1549 BC range. However, there were severe problems found with the specimens amounting to inaccuracies of over 200 years; complications with calibration were, if anything, worse. So, none of these gyrations has any validity, other than the original BP measurements and calculations. Moreover, strata above the specimen find would still be later, and no final conclusion may be reached concerning Jericho.

   Although the data from Hazor were not disclosed a mean date of 1450 BC, was reached, suggesting a possible 1660 BC calibrated gyration. In this case, we are in even worse shape than at Jericho: for absolutely no data have been reported. Any statistical conclusions drawn would be premature. Both Jericho and Hazor may very well be the exact sites engaged by Joshua. Clearly these city-states may well have been destroyed at the same time, within ten years of each other. The clearly errant 1250 BC date for Hazor is a relic left over from the delusion of clinging to a Ramesside Exodus theory.

   The tragic tale to be repeated here is that, while AMS has made great technological strides and leaps of advancement; archaeology, has failed to produce coherent and consistent sampling, and does not know what to do with any results obtained. The outcome is a travesty; worse than travesty, a laughingstock, the derision of drunkards. So all the excellent AMS measurements are doing is exposing one blunder after another. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Nor should we expect to find signs of war. Major battles were all fought outside of and away from cities. Siege tactics were rarely employed in this period. By the way, since the claim has been made, where is the archaeological evidence for such a claim? Since archaeological evidence has not been provided it is reasonable to conclude that it does not exist. The primary evidence for the absence of internal city war is the biblical record. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Dever leads with another false assumption, a sweeping generalization. According to the clear record, the majority of all battles were fought outside of cities. Ai was engaged in the external fields, only to be burned later. Both the Amorite and the Canaanite Coalitions, engaged the Israelites at battle fields of their choosing. Cities were entered only after the armies were defeated: the only combat defenses would have been mounted by minority or reserve units and civilians. The invading victors had every reason to keep these cities intact as the spoils of war: for someday, they might wish to live in these cities. This is the same logic behind the development of the neutron bomb: collateral damage is a byproduct of war, never a desirable outcome. The reason that, “There was no evidence of armed conflict in most of these sites,” was clearly because no armed conflict actually took place within these sites. These were not examples of siege warfare. The destruction of cities was a relatively rare occurrence under Joshua. Buildings were not blamed for the evil actions and intentions of people. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. “A single sweeping military invasion led by Joshua cannot account for how the Israelites arrived in Canaan,” because there was no single sweeping military invasion. Rather a stepped sequence of events played out: a Central Campaign concluding with the establishment of a permanent worship center at Ebal, and a peace treaty with Gibeon came first. Gibeon established the timing for the treaty. Then the Amorite Coalition set the time and place for the Southern Campaign. Finally the Canaanite Coalition set the time and place for the Northern Campaign, afterward. The Gibeonites sued for peace. The Amorites and Canaanites chose war. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. These dates are not close to being coincident. Hazor dates to 1450 BC according to the wheat grains. Merneptah dates to 1208 BC. To what sort of coincidence does a difference of 242 years amount. How does this discredit the biblical account where the divergence of data is at most 52 years? [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. We don’t see “signs of war” because the war was conducted on a large flat plain suitable for deploying chariots (Joshua 11:4-5). The place of battle is explicitly stated to be “the waters of Merom” not Hazor. We refuted the Zuckerman hypothesis in the Hazor blog. It is becoming tedious to be forced to refute this oft repeated lie. The frequent repetition of a lie can never make it true.

   <http://swantec-oti.blogspot.com/2015/06/bbs-hazor.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. The logical fallacy of assuming the conclusion without demonstration is called “begging the question.” [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. This discussion belongs with the earlier discussion concerning Hazor. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. This is exactly what we must rule out. It makes no sense whatsoever that the residents of Hazor set their own city on fire. They may not have loved their rulers dwelling in relative luxury in the upper city, but their safety, security, and livelihood depended on them. Without the power of the upper city, the lower city is exposed to every wandering horde of random invaders. It is the upper city that maintains peace. Everyone knew that setting fire to the upper city, could easily spread to the lower city. At this era of world civilizations, no one has the means to contain fire, or to put it out. A conflagration risks death to everybody concerned. The claim, especially without specific proof, does not hold water. The claim is deliberately set against such strong evidence from provenance that we already possess. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. All of such claims are made without evidence. They are to be believed simply because BBS says so. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. The only such texts that we are able to identify are the books of Judges and 1 Samuel. BBS has steadfastly refused to include the Amarna and other evidence. Although, the following paper discusses IA dating, the problems revealed apply equally to MBA, and LBA.

    <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.467.202&rep=rep1&type=pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Which is a nearly perfect summary of the record of Judges from 1354 to 1010 BC. We suppose that the so-called Bronze Age Collapse was intended. As far as the first battle of Hazor is concerned, 1200 BC is at least two-hundred years too late to fit the Hazor data. As far as the second battle of Hazor is concerned, the fit may be nearly perfect with a 1200 BC date: for which there is no supporting archaeological evidence yet identified at Hazor. The second battle of Hazor was also conducted in the field. As soon as a pseudo-date is manufactured for real conflation, false conclusions surface, conclusions that are impossible to reconcile with reality.

    The claim of, “a long period of decline and upheaval that sweep through Mesopotamia, the Aegean region, and the Egyptian Empire around 1200 BC,” is stated without supporting evidence. It would be nice to have some supporting evidence, if such a claim is close to being a realistic picture. LBA collapse is tenuous at best.

    <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Late_Bronze_Age_collapse> [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. The case is being developed for the claim that the Israelites are a rebelling indigenous Canaanite people, and not an invading horde. However, as we have seen, the case is being developed without evidence. The evidence that does exist, clearly refutes this claim.

    There is no void. The Canaanites hold a balanced tension of power throughout the period (1396-1010) until the Philistines begin to dominate the region (possibly 1106-1010). The period is one described as “up and down” for both Canaanites and Israelites as the balance of power sways back and forth. The Israelites made themselves look like Canaanites by trying to mix Yahweh with foreign idols during this period. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Again the conclusion is assumed. The Israelites never were lost. This is the desperate effort of someone attempting to establish a theory for which there is no evidence. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. The summary of the biblical account given in this article is a bit fanciful. There is no record of impaling the king of Ai, only hanging. The article assumes a 2400 BC date for destruction by Egyptians; yet, no dating evidence is provided, nor is a record for Egyptian involvement in the region brought forth.

    <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ai_(Bible)> [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Et-Tell> [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bryant_G._Wood> [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. <http://www.bibleplaces.com/maqatir.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Possibly Luz or al-Burj:

    <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beitin> [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Et-Tell> [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jordan_Valley_(Middle_East)>

    <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jordan_Rift_Valley>

    <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea_of_Galilee>

    <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dead_Sea>

    <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galilee> [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quDZ298uF4E>

    <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfYULF9yo0A>

    <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Zh1oQavaNs> [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. “The outcropping formations around the basins represent alternating deposition and erosion phases.”

    <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jordan_Rift_Valley>

    <http://www.tau.ac.il/~archpubs/projects/horjordanriftvalley.html>

    <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Israel> [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. <http://countrystudies.us/jordan/27.htm>

    <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Jordan#Climate> [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Edward Robinson (1794-1863)

    <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Robinson_(scholar)> [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. This must refer to Charles William Wilson (1836-1905) and not to Charles Henry Wilson (1914-1991), whose dates cannot possibly be made to fit.

    <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_William_Wilson>

    <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Wilson_(historian)> [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. William Foxwell Albright (1891-1971)

    <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_F._Albright> [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ai_(Bible)> [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. John Garstang (1876-1956)

    <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Garstang> [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Et-Tell> [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. ibid [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. No substantiating evidence has been found: no specimens, no lab reports, no scientific analysis; just an unsubstantiated claim. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. ibid [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. <http://www.bibleplaces.com/maqatir.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
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