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It looks like the Covid-19 virus is going to be with us for some time yet. I therefore will revert to publishing MaozNews on a quarterly basis, so long as no great events justify a more frequent program. Our next issue is, therefore, due in August. More frequent updates – often daily – are available via my accounts with [FaceBook](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#)

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Bible-era Temple Found Near Jerusalem May Be Linked to the Ark of the Covenant

Based on an Article by Ariel David, Ha'Arets, December 17, 2019

Archaeologists excavating a 3,100-year-old temple in the ancient settlement of Beth Shemesh, near Jerusalem, have uncovered an unusual stone table that eerily recalls a stone table described in the Bible as playing a role in the story of the Ark of the Covenant. The find can be interpreted many ways, but one possibility is that the site is linked to the biblical narrative of the ark which contained the tablets of the Ten Commandments received by Moses on Mount Sinai. “This would be a rare case in which we can merge the biblical narrative with an archaeological find,” says Dr. Zvi Lederman, a Tel Aviv University archaeologist who leads the Beth Shemesh dig with his colleague, Prof. Shlomo Bunimovitz.

If their hypothesis is correct, the find would be evidence of historical truths from earlier periods than most experts previously thought.

Sacrifices and Mini-Olive Presses

First things first: how do we know that the building that contained the mysterious find was, in fact, a temple? The structure, which has been dated to the 12th century BC, is located on a tel (the stratified remains of multiple ancient settlements) on the border of the modern Israeli city of Beth Shemesh, some 14 miles kilometers west of Jerusalem. The building was separate from the residential areas and had sturdier walls, Bunimovitz explains. Also, it was a perfect square, each side 8.5 meters long, whose corners aligned with the cardinal points. Facing east, where the sun rises, the structure opened onto a *bamah* – a high place in biblical parlance – a raised platform that served for religious ceremonies.

Inside the putative temple archaeologists found two large round, concave, stones into which gutters had been carved. These may have been used for libations of wine, or they could have been miniature olive presses for the production of sacred oil, Lederman theorizes.

The researchers also found a treasure-trove of decorated pottery jugs and cups, and a pile of animal bones, all signs of ritual activity, Bunimovitz says. “There is a good deal of evidence that this was indeed a temple. When you look at the structure and its content, it become obvious that was not a standard domestic space, but a special structure”. By “special” he means, “dedicated to some form of worship”.



Aerial view of the early Iron Age temple in Beth Shemesh Dr. Zvi Lederman

Desecration by Dung

There is also evidence that someone had a serious beef with the place. At some point in the mid-12th century B.C.E. the building was destroyed, and the above-mentioned pottery vessels were smashed to bits. To uncover the temple, the archaeologists had to dig through multiple layers of a thick black material, which they initially thought was ash that formed when the building was torched. Analyzation of the material indicated that the building had been covered with heaps of animal dung. “Very shortly after it was destroyed, the entire place was turned into an animal pen,” Lederman tells Haaretz. “This is an act of hostility, an intentional desecration of a holy place.”

As for who might have been responsible for such a sacrilege, the archaeologist points a tentative finger at the Philistines – whose closest settlement, Tel Batash, was a mere seven kilometers from Beth Shemesh. Based on the biblical chronology, the 12th-11th centuries B.C.E. correspond to the era of pre-monarchic Israel, when judges like Samson and Deborah ruled over the loosely united tribes. Beth Shemesh is described as a border town between the Israelites and the Philistines, where the two peoples often clashed.

The archaeology of Beth Shemesh indicates that the settlement was indeed a flashpoint border location, Lederman says. Archaeologists have identified four distinct villages built, one atop another. In other words, the village was conquered, abandoned or destroyed, and rebuilt multiple times in the space of 200 years, he says. It was during one of the periods in which Beth Shemesh changed hands that the temple was destroyed. It is likely that those responsible for the desecration were conquering Philistines.

The Site’s Possible History

But why would this sanctuary have been so significant to the local inhabitants, and so reviled by their enemies? While the temple has been under excavation since 2012, it was only last summer that archaeologists unearthed a possible clue to its importance: a massive stone slab resting horizontally on two smaller rocks.



The stone table in Beth Shemesh.
The dark lines
are layers of dung (Ariel David)

“At the beginning we thought it was a matsebah (a sacred stone, see, for example Genesis 28:22, compare Deuteronomy 16:22) that had fallen over,” Lederman says, referring to the standing stones commonly associated with cultic activity in the ancient Levant. “But soon we realized that it was meant to be a table,” That is to say a raised platform on which valuable items would be placed.

The enigmatic table fits the timeframe and profile of the “large stone” on which, according to the First Book of Samuel, the Ark of the Covenant rested when it was brought to Beth Shemesh after being recovered from the Philistines (1 Samuel 1:1-15), he notes.

According to the Bible, after the Israelites settled in the Promised Land, the ark was placed in Shiloh, just north of Jerusalem, but was captured by the Philistines in battle. God then punished the Philistines for their arrogance, afflicting them with illness and plagues until their leaders placed the holy artifact on a cart and led it back to the Israelites along with gifts of gold to appease the rival deity. That is where Beth Shemesh enters the story of the ark:

Now the people of Beth Shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley; and they lifted their eyes and saw the ark and rejoiced to see it. Then the cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh, and stood there; a large stone was there. So they split the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord. The Levites took down the ark of the Lord and the chest that was with it, in which were the articles of gold, and put them on the large stone (1 Samuel 6:13-15).

It is possible that, having had the ark laid on the “table”, the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh considered it sacred and moved into their small local temple.

The town’s name, Beth Shemesh, means “house of the sun”, which suggests that the earliest settlers there were devoted to the Canaanite solar deity. On the other hand, the animal bones found in the temple – and across the ancient Iron Age settlement itself – do not include pig, echoing the biblical rejection of pork as a valid sacrifice or as part of one’s diet.

The near absence of pig bones in settlements across the Levant has long been identified as one of the early distinguishing traits of Israelite settlements. It also serves to distinguish the local inhabitants from their Philistine arch-nemeses, who definitely enjoyed eating pork. So, apparently, the site was considered sacred before the Israelites settled there.

A Comment on Recent Events in the US

No country is perfect, nor is any Government but God’s free of fault, error or sin. But, under God and since the First World War and in spite of its many failings, the US has had a largely positive, multifaceted impact on the world.

We are now witnessing what may well become the demise of America’s power and of its positive role in world history. Some of the factors that threaten to drive the US in that direction are a short-sighted hedonism, a materialist, mechanical view of the world that can encourage technological advances but can never fuel significant scientific insights, an

individualism that spills over into personal and sectional selfishness, the erosion of social and personal morality and the marked weakening of social bonds.

Increasingly since the election of George W. Bush, American's have been at each other's throats. Civil discourse has been replaced by mockery. Shared interests have been obscured by political discord. National institutions have been harnessed to political interests. Information became infotainment and an objective Press became an enlisted Press, deaf to all views but those for which it has chosen enlist.

American society is increasingly polarized between blacks and whites (all the more so, surprisingly, as of Barak Obama's presidency), Democrats and Republicans, the Left and the Right (both of whom are often wrong), illiberal Liberals and reactionary Conservatives. Justified protests have become riots, orgies of looting. Confidence in Government is at a dangerously low ebb. The ridiculous idea that the police need not be educated but defunded is being bandied about by those who are most likely to threaten the peace, academics are being forced out of Universities because they dare challenge the present consensus and gender is presented in terms of a choice man can make, not one that God determines.

Meanwhile, China is flexing its muscles in Hong Kong and the Pacific, Russia is replacing the US in the Middle East, Iran continues its march toward a nuclear bomb while supporting terrorism throughout the Middle East, America's national debt is far beyond imagining and America's economy is suffering under the impact of the Corona-Virus pandemic.

And what is the church doing? Nothing much of significance. It is neither hot nor cold. Christians are busy taking sides over the political divide, but few speak up boldly for the kingdom of God. Fewer still are heard.

This is the time to call for national repentance, to challenge what has become the American Way of Life; to replace the selfish, impossible pursuit of happiness with a pursuit of godliness; to courageously deny man's arrogant presumption of autonomy and to call upon our nation to accept the sweet and pleasant yoke of the commandments of God. This is the time for the church to dare be the church, God's voice to the nation, the nation's conscience and therefore the nation's legitimate future. This is the time to be faithful.

I do not believe the church should subscribe to political platforms; it should be the voice of God with regard to whatever political platform we Christians deem to be more correct, recognizing that all political platforms are inherently infected by sin. Our ultimate platform should be holiness in the fear of God, integrity and mutual respect as commanded by God, care for the poor and protection for the downtrodden, the inviolability of the family, the unchangeability of the genders, and so on. By way of an example closer to my own heart: pro- and anti-Zionism are valid political positions, but when embraced and promoted in the name of God, they are both wrong. Jesus spoke in the name of God without embracing a political platform, as did Paul, his most prominent follower.

It is time for Evangelicals to band together in spite of our differences, examine, repent and reform our own practice, and raise a clear voice to the nation. It is time for a truly God-focused, God-oriented, God-fearing voice to be clearly heard – and who can raise it but those who believe the Gospel? It is time for us to awake from our slumber and engage the world's evils and our own, change course and think, not merely in terms of so-called evangelism, but of raising a prophetic voice, sounding a truly prophetic message in the ears

of our angry, confused and desperately lost generation. Enough of feckless, spineless seeker-friendliness! It is time for holiness and truth.

Israel has A Government

Israel now has a Government, to led by Benjamin (Bibi) Netanyahu for the coming 18 months, with Benjamin (Benny) Gantz as Alternative Prime Minister – a post created for the occasion. In the Following 18 months; the two Benjamins are slated to exchange positions - that is, unless an early election is called. Few believe that Mr. Netanyahu will allow Mr. Gantz to ever assume the Prime Ministership.

Meanwhile, Netanyahu's Likud and Gantz' Blue and White are at repeatedly each other's parliamentary throats and Mr. Gantz is expending every effort to woo members of the opposition to change sides and join his party. He can offer significant enticements in terms of Knesset Committee memberships and, in some cases, even headship, and other such perks.

Mr. Netanyahu has vowed to annex large portions of the West Bank in July of this year, and is now faced with opposition from both sides of the political divide. Many on the Right oppose the plan to annex because it implies the establishment of a Palestinian State. All on the right oppose it because, they insist, unilateral action will cause renewed conflagration in an already volatile Middle East. So far, no visible practical steps have been taken by Mr. Netanyahu to implement his professed intentions and many believe his is setting up his opponents on the right and on the left, so that they would take the blame for any failure to annex.

Ministry News

1. I am now nearing the end of reviewing editorial comments on I Corinthians in the **New Testament project**.
2. In the **Bible study notes project**, I've completed translating, with but minor changes, the **General Introduction to the Prophets** and the **Introductions to Isaiah - Jonah**. I'm well advanced in this project and hope to complete my assignments sooner than scheduled. In all, I am to work on the Old Testament prophets, the Psalms and the New Testament.
3. **How to Understand the Bible**, I've completed the first draft of the four initial chapters of this book. After a chapter or two more, I will begin looking for a publisher while continuing to write the book. To do that I will need to prepare an outline of the remainder of the book and a precis' of its argument.
4. My last commentary on the Minor Prophets (**Zachariah**) is still on the back-burner. Our belongings have arrived, but my books are still in storage and I cannot make much progress without them.

Family News

On the family front, in the goodness of God, we are all well. **Eran Marcus and I** each work at home while we remain in a somewhat relaxed **quarantine**. **Keith, Shlomit and the children** will soon move into their rental, just about a mile away from Avital and 3-4 miles for the rest of us. They will be in strict quarantine for the first 14 days, after which they will both earnestly be seeking employment. **Tamar** intends to home-school **Yotam** and **Avishai**, and send **Eliya** to a public school.

We are excited over the prospect of all the family living nearby – a reality we have not experienced ever since the first of the girls left for University some 30 years ago. Since then the family has been augmented with husbands and children.

Thank you for your prayers and for your material support. Both are truly needed.

in Christ by grace,

Baruch and Bracha Maoz

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[Come Let Us Reason Together](#) (On the Unity of Jews and Gentiles in the Church). Christ as the fullness of divine revelation and his work as sufficient for our whole salvation, Presbyterian and Reformed.

[Jonah: A Prophet on the Run](#) a devotional commentary on the book of Jonah, Shepherd Press.

[Malachi: A Prophet in Times of Distress](#) a devotional commentary on the book of Malachi. Founders Press.

[Colossians: The All-Sufficient Savior](#) a devotional commentary on the book of Colossians. Founders Press.

Soon to be available: *[Galatians: He Did it All](#)* a devotional commentary on the book of Galatians. Founders Press.

The commentaries are suited for personal devotions and group studies

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