

The search for Biblical Ziklag

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1 SAMUEL 27 records that, after being pursued by Saul for some considerable time, David took refuge with Achish, king of Gath, in the land of the Philistines, the bitter enemies of Israel, who, no doubt, saw him as a potentially useful ally in their war against Saul. The chapter goes on to record: "And David said unto Achish, If I have now found grace in thine eyes, let them give me a place in some town in the country, that I may dwell there: for why should thy servant dwell in the royal city with thee? Then Achish gave him Ziklag that day: wherefore Ziklag pertaineth unto the kings of Judah unto this day" (vv. 5,6).

Ziklag must have been a town in southern Judah because of its allocation to the tribe of Simeon, which was located in that area (Josh. 19:5). In Nehemiah 11:28 Ziklag is mentioned after the city of Beersheba, which gives some indication as to where the city was situated. The exact location of Ziklag has, however, been a matter of considerable debate.

During the period 1976-1980 Paul Jacobs did excavations at one possible site, **Tell Halif**, about fifteen kilometres northwest of Beersheba. Some ashlar (cut stone) masonry, considered to be the 'royal stone' of the Iron Age, was found at nearby **Tell Sera**, which gave rise to the idea that this site should be identified as Ziklag. However, Israeli archaeologist Yohanan Aharoni was of the view that **Tell es-Sheriya** further to the south was ancient Ziklag.

Another archaeologist, Volkmar Fritz, a professor at the University of Giessen, in Germany, was of the opinion that Tell es-Sheriya was not Ziklag because it was uninhabited in the twelfth and eleventh centuries B.C., destroyed in the ninth and abandoned at the end of the seventh. He stated that **Tell Masos**, thought to be another possible site for Ziklag, was abandoned from the early Iron Age II until the seventh century B.C., and claimed that Tell Halif had practically no occupation during Iron Age I. Under conventional dating, this would mean that these sites were not occupied at the time of David and Saul (see below). That, in Fritz's reasoning, left yet another site, **Tell es-Seba**, as the likely Ziklag.

In an article in the May 1993 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Fritz pointed out that the

settlement of Tell es-Seba was founded in Iron Age I in the twelfth century B.C. in the Philistine era, rebuilt three times during the period that followed, established as a fortified administrative centre in the tenth century B.C. (which is king David's time), and destroyed in the eighth century B.C. The site, he claims, then remained mostly uninhabited until the Greek period.

David Down, in his magazine *Archaeological Diggings*, says that Fritz either overlooked or discounted the fact that Ziklag was occupied during the time of Nehemiah (Neh. 11:28), and could not therefore have been Tell es-Seba, which was not occupied then. Down explains that confusion has arisen because of the widely held view that the Israelites entered the land of Palestine at the commencement of the Iron Age, about 1200 B.C. From that time to 1000 B.C. is considered to be Iron Age I. Then follows Iron Age II, which is regarded as the period of the monarchy. But the conventional history of most of the suggested sites for Ziklag does not correlate with this pattern.

There is, however, a revised chronology that dates the entry of the Israelites into Canaan at about 1400 B.C., which is in accordance with the Biblical data. Support for this has come from John Garstang, excavator of Biblical Jericho, Rudolph Cohen, former Director of the Israel Department of Antiquities, Dr Bryant G. Wood, a leading authority in pottery dating, and Merrill Unger of Bible Dictionary fame, and others.

Of the five candidates identified above, Down avers that there is evidence pointing to Tell Halif as being the Biblical Ziklag. He was involved in excavations there in 1985, with Israeli archaeologist Paul Jacobs being in charge of the work. Down was shown the exposed strata, which revealed two very distinct layers of burnt ash. The earlier of the two was dated as being at the end of the Early Bronze Age. For Jacobs this held no particular significance, because he, with conventional archaeologists, estimated this period to have been long before the Israelites entered Palestine. But to Down the end of the Early Bronze Age was the time of the Israelite invasion, and he asserts that there is evidence of nomads occupying the site after this destruction, which would

therefore have been carried out by the invading Israelites.

The second layer of black ash would then almost certainly be the burnt remains resulting from the destruction and firing of the city by the Amalekites. After having seen what he considered to be this compelling evidence, Down came

to the conclusion that they had found Biblical Ziklag.

As has happened so many times in past years, the Bible record has yet again been found to be accurate and authentic beyond any reasonable doubt as a result of painstaking, scientific excavations.