

CHAPTER VI

THE CITIES OF PALESTINE

THEIR SITES. THE WALLS. THE STONE WORK. HOUSES. PALACES: At Tanaach. At Samaria. At Megiddo. FOUNDATION SACRIFICES. CITY GATES. WATER SUPPLY: Springs. Underground tunnels. Reservoirs.

1. Their Sites.—The cities of Palestine were usually built on hills. These elevations, surmounted as they were by walls, created a natural means of defense from attack (see Fig 33). Even more important than an elevated situation was a water supply, hence all Palestinian cities of importance are near springs. The necessity of being near a spring led, in some cases, to the erection of a city on a level plain. This was the case with Jericho; the only mound at its site is that created by the city itself.

The hills on which the cities were erected varied in height. That at Megiddo rose to a height of but 45 to 90 feet above the surrounding land, but even this elevation was a great protection from the simple methods of attack known to ancient warfare. The hill Ophel, the site of Jebusite Jerusalem, rises today from 60 to 150 feet above the valley of the Kidron, and in ancient times that valley was from 20 to 50 feet deeper than it is now. The same hill was separated from the land on the west by a valley the bed of which in ancient times was from 50 to 100 feet below the top of the hill. The hill on which Samaria was situated rose some 300 feet above the surrounding valley on all sides except the east, and when fortified presented an impregnable front that it took even an Assyrian army three years to capture it. (2 Kings 17:5) In the Seleucid and Roman periods, when some cities expanded in size, the hill-tops were sometimes abandoned and they spread out over the plain. This was the case with Gerasa and Philadelphia (Rabbah Ammon). But “a city set on a hill” (Matt. 5:14) was a common feature of the Palestinian landscape.

2. The Walls.—The walls by which the cities were surrounded varied according to the advancement of the different periods, and according to the importance of the place. As has

already been pointed out in Chapter V, the first wall at Gezer was but 6 feet high and 2 feet thick, and had a sloping bank of earth packed against it on the outside. This bank was 6 feet 6 inches thick at the base and was covered with a facing of stone. In the Amorite period a wall 13 feet thick was erected at Gezer, in which towers were constructed about every 90 feet. These towers were 24 X 41 feet. Their height is, of course, unknown. This wall was probably built about 2500 B.C. and formed the defense of the city for a thousand years. By that time the tops of the houses probably protruded above the wall, and the population had increased so that more space was needed. This wall was, accordingly, replaced by another built outside of it. Much of the material of which the old wall was constructed went into the new wall, which was approximately 14 feet thick and contained occasional towers. At some time a part of this wall had been destroyed, and then rebuilt. Probably at the time of this rebuilding, additional towers had been inserted at different points. The stones of these towers touched those of the wall without being articulated with them. It has been conjectured that these towers were apart of the repairs made by King Solomon after the town had been captured by his Egyptian father-in-law and presented to Solomon. (See 1 Kings 9:16, 17.) Still later an attempt was made to strengthen the weakness caused by the unclosed seam between the towers and the wall by constructing around the towers rude bastions. (See Figs. 40, 46.) Professor Macalister conjectures that this was done by the

Syrian General Bacchides when he hastily fortified Gezer and occupied it 160 B.C. (1 Macc. 9:52.)

At Tell el-Hesy, Petrie found massive city walls, though he did not describe them in detail. At Taanach, Sellin found a strong city wall, but did not attempt to trace it about the tell. Schumacher devoted considerable attention to the city walls of Megiddo, a part of which were built of bricks. At Tell es-Safi (Gath?) the outlines of the city walls were traced, as they were at Tel el-Judeideh. At Samaria a part of the Roman wall of the time of Herod was found; lower down in the mound remains of a Babylonian wall (See 2 Kings 17:24), beneath which the excavators recognized the Hebrew wall.

Macalister, *The Excavation of Gezer*, I
Petrie, *Tell el-Hesy*
Harvard Theological Review, III

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City walls were found, too, at Beth-Shemesh, but of especial interest to the student of the Bible are the walls of Jericho. Here, as at Megiddo, the walls were constructed in part of brick. They had an average thickness of 13 feet. The Canaanitish wall was traced around three sides of the mound. It was strengthened by occasionally towers. On the east, next to spring, they had entirely disappeared. At the northwest corner of the Canaanitish wall was a tower enclosed by two brick walls; the outer wall was a little more than 4 feet thick; the inner, about 10 feet. The walls of Jerusalem will be treated in Chapter XIII.

3. The Stone Work.---The kind of stones used in city walls varied with the circumstances and the degree of civilization. The walls of Stone Age were naturally made of small undressed stones. The Amorites began the use of cut stone. Their blocks are often fairly smooth and regular. The Amorite wall of Gezer was made of more regular stones than the wall of the Egyptian period. In the Israelitish and Jewish periods a stone with an embossed edge was often used. It is found in the wall of Nehemiah, excavated by Bliss, ---a wall made of stones that some pre-exilic king had used before,---and appears also in the structures of Herod the Great. In the structures of Constantine and later Byzantine builders, this type of stone is replaced by a stone with a perfectly smooth surface --much more smooth than anything found in the early walls. This type of stone work continued through the Crusading period (see Figs. 253, 254.) While these types can be traced, their use was not altogether regular.

The areas of Palestinian cities in the early time were very small. All of Canaanite Jericho could be put in the Coliseum at Rome! Megiddo, one of the largest of these early cities, was built on a mound that contained only about eleven acres, and Jebusite Jerusalem was built on a ridge that in ancient times contained not less than nine or more than thirteen acres.

4. Houses.---Within these areas the ordinary houses were crowded, as in the modern native villages of Palestine, separated only by narrow, corroded lanes. One may see in Hebron or in some parts of Jerusalem similar conditions to this day. There was no drainage; refuse was thrown into the streets. The cities were

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ill-smelling places. The wonder is that the mortality was not greater. The houses in the central, elevated portion of Palestine were usually of stone, though at Gezer, Jericho, and places in the lower-lying portions of the country they were sometimes of brick. The walls of the stone houses

were constructed of rough stones of a great variety of sizes, from small pebbles to large boulders. Mortar and cement were never used. The stones were set in mud. They were not dressed except with a hammer in the roughest way. The joints between them were wide and irregular. Into the crevices serpents and scorpions might crawl. It was of such a house that Amos says, "a man...leaned his hand on wall and a serpent bit him" (5:19). The bricks were rarely burned; they were simply sun-dried, and had no more cohesion than the earth in which they were embedded. The houses generally had no floor except the earth, which was smoothed off and packed hard. Sometimes this was varied by mixing lime with the mud and letting it harden, and sometimes floors of cobblestones or stone chippings mixed with lime were found. In the Roman period mosaic floors, made by embedding small smoothly cut squares of stone in the earth, were introduced. By employing stones of different colors the mosaics were often worked into beautiful patterns; (see Figs 35, 42, 43, 44, 47, and 48). Sometimes pictures of birds and animals were formed in the floors.

The doorways were usually simply an opening made by the vertical sides left in the masonry. In the later time they were sometimes lined with standing stones. The doors themselves have long since disappeared, but there is evidence that, like many houses still to be seen in Palestine, they were made fast to a post, the lower end of which was set in a hollow or perforated stone. When the door swung the whole post turned in this stone. Some of these stones were found. In a few houses at Gezer enclosures of stones on end were sometimes found in the middle or the corners of dwelling houses. Perhaps these were hearths. Some houses built after the time of Alexander the Great had a kind of piazza running along the side. The remains of the pillars which supported the roofs of these were discovered. Beginning with the Hellenistic period, some of the better houses had baths. (On doors, see Figs. 49, 50.)

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5. Palaces.---In the excavation of different sites the outlines of several larger buildings or palaces were uncovered. A few of these are of interest to the student of the Bible.

(1) *At Tanaach.*---In the northeast of the mound at Tanaach the remains of a building about 75 X 77 feet were found. It was in existence in the fourteenth century before Christ. This building contained several rooms, as the plan will make clear; (see Fig 45). The remains of the wall still showed one layer of hewn stones, some of which were very large. In a vault underneath the building four cuneiform tablets were found. They had been placed there for safety in time of siege, and these four tablets had been overlooked when the rest of the archive was rifled. These tablets proved to be letters written at the same time as the house found at El-Amarna. The building was the palace of a Canaanite king.

(2) *At Samaria.*---Of special interest to the student of the Bible are the palaces of the Hebrew period. At Samaria Reisner discovered massive walls, which were probably the remains of the places of Omri and Ahab. That of Omri was built of large stones and rested on native rock. As Omri was the founder of the city (1 Kings 16:24), there can be little doubt that this was his palace. An enlargement of this consisted of walls the construction of which was finer. They were favored with white marble. In this palace an alabaster vase was found, inscribed with the name of Osorkon II, King of Egypt, who was a contemporary of King Ahab. This is therefore, believed to be the palace of Ahab---perhaps the "house of ivory" which Ahab built (1 Kings 22:39; see Fig. 52).

(3) *At Megiddo.*---Another residence of an Israelitish governor was found at Megiddo. This was a large, irregular building, constructed around a courtyard. Some of the work was of dressed stones of considerable size, in every way superior to the stone-work of the earlier buildings of that city. In this palace a seal of a man named Shema was found, which bore the inscription, "Belonging to Shema, the servant of Jeroboam." We do not know whether this man served under

Jeroboam I or Jeroboam II. The fine character of the stone-work leads one to think the reign of Jeroboam II the more probable date; (see Figs 53 and 27).

Among the palaces explored one other should be noticed, that of Simon the Maccabee (142-135 B.C.) at Gezer. This palace is

Sellin, *Tel Tanaach*

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clearly of the Hellenistic type, and was identified as the dwelling place that Simon built for himself (Macc. 13:48), by the discovery of an ancient curse against Simon's palace scrawled in Greek on a block of stone. This building was constructed of rather finely cut stone, was of irregular shape (see Figs 54, 55), had an imposing gate, which admitted into a courtyard, and was supplied with a good system of drainage. For further information see Chapter XI.

6. Foundation Sacrifices.---When a house was built it was customary to consecrate it by a sacrifice. In Gezer the skeleton of a woman was found built into the walls of a house. Numerous skeletons of children were also found under the corners of houses. Such sacrificial offerings were more often made under the corners of buildings, since the corners were considered sacred. In Babylonia and Egypt the sacrifice was accompanied with the burial under the corner-stone of inscriptions and other deposits, though in Egypt, as in Palestine, the deposit was not always under the corners. Similar sacrifices were found at Tanaach and Megiddo. These sacrifices illustrate, some think 1 Kings 16:34, where Hiel laid the foundation of Jericho with the loss of his first-born, and set up its gates with the loss of his youngest son.

7. City Gates.---The city gates was in Palestine an important part of the town. Gateways were constructed in different ways at different times. At Gezer the northern gate consisted of a protruding tower, into which one entered at the side, then turned a right angle to gain entrance to the city; (see Fig. 58). Gates of this type are still common in the East. The passageway in this gate at Gezer was 40 feet wide. The southern gate of Gezer consisted simply of a straight passageway, 42 feet long and 9 feet wide, between two brick towers; (see Fig 61). Often, as in the case of the gate found at Beth-Shemesh (Fig. 59), there were rooms on each side of the passageway through the tower. One with still more space within its tower was uncovered at Megiddo; (Fig. 57).

The city gates usually remained at the same points in the wall through the successive reconstructions of the city. Thus at Samaria the remains of round Herodian towers which flanked the

Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol IV.
Schumacher, *Tell el-Mutusalim*
Macalister, *The Excavation of Gezer*, I

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gateway were found resting on larger square bases of the Seleucid period, beneath which the outline of the earlier Israelitish towers were still visible; (see Figs. 65, 66)

The form of these gates illuminates many Biblical passages. Lot sat in the gate of Sodom (Gen. 19:1). Joab took Abner aside in the gate to speak to him (2 Sam 3:27). The gate was the place of conference for the elders of a city (Gen. 34:20). To be praised in the "gate," where the city's affairs were settled (Prov. 31:31), was to have desired fame.

8. Water Supply:

(1) *Springs*---The water supply of Palestinian cities came in part from the never-failing springs near which they were built. This supply was, however, seldom sufficient, so that from the early days cisterns were built to catch the water of the rainy season and conserve it for use during summer months. These cisterns were often excavated in the solid rock, but sometimes were simple pits in the earth, over the bottom of which a coating of lime or cement had been spread.

(2) *Underground Tunnels*.---In the time of war, when a city might be shut up for years, cities were often compelled to yield for want of water. This was especially the case if the spring lay outside the city walls. In several Palestinian cities means were taken to secure access to a spring without exposing oneself to the enemy outside the wall. One of the greatest of these undertakings was discovered at Gezer. This was a tunnel cut into the solid rock, which was entered by a long flight of rock-cut steps. At the entrance the rock formed an imposing archway 23 feet high and 13 feet 10 inches broad. These dimensions were maintained throughout about two-thirds of the length of the tunnel. The whole passage was about 130 feet long. The last third of it had to be cut through a much harder rock, where the work was much more difficult, and its workmanship was here not so good as above. The tunnel also became appreciably smaller. The passage terminated in a very large cave, in the bottom of which was a spring, and was evidently constructed to enable the inhabitants to reach a water supply in time of siege. The floor of the cave is 94 feet 6 inches below the level of the rock surface of the ancient city. The whole tunnel is a remarkable piece of engineering for an early people; (see Figs 60 and 62).

The earth with which the mouth of the tunnel was closed contained objects, which belonged to the time 1450-1250 B.C. The

steps in the passageway had been before this deeply worn by many feet---so deeply worn that Professor Macalister estimated that they must have been in used for 500 years. For these reasons he supposes that this water-passage was excavated about 2000 B.C. or soon after that date. It had ceased to be used before the Israelites conquered the place.

A similar underground tunnel leading to a spring has been found at El-Gib, Gibeon, (Fig. 63), at Megiddo, and one made in Jebusite times also existed at Jerusalem. It is mentioned in 2 Samuel 5:8, and will be described in connection with Jerusalem (p.231). At Rabbath-Ammon an underground passage connected the old city situated on the hill with a large cistern, which was roofed over so as to be concealed. To this cistern in time of siege the inhabitants could go through passage and obtain water. It was this cistern, which Joab had captured (2 Sam. 12:27) when he sent to David to come and take the city. Antiochus III of Syria in the same way compelled the city to surrender in the year 218 B.C., and Herod the Great did the same thing before 30 B.C.

(3) *Reservoir*.---Among the sources of water supply for the cities of Palestine the so-called Pools of Solomon to the south of Bethlehem are unique. They consist of three reservoirs, partly rock-cut and in part constructed of walls of masonry, in the Wady Artas, about a mile and a half to the southwest of Bethlehem. The highest of these pools is 127 yards long and 76 yards wide, and 25 feet deep at its lower end. The central pool is 141 yards long, from 53 to 83 yards wide and 38 feet deep. The lowest and finest of the three is 194 yards long, 49 to 69 yards wide, and 48 feet at its deepest part. In these reservoirs water from neighboring springs was collected and stored. Two aqueducts at different times conveyed it to Jerusalem as it was needed. These aqueducts are now known respectively as the Low Level Aqueduct and the High Level Aqueduct. The High Level Aqueduct appears to be the older. In recent years the Low Level Aqueduct has been repaired, so that these "pools" still contribute to the water supply of Jerusalem.

There is no evidence that Solomon built these. His name has been attached to them solely on account of Ecclesiastes 2:6: "I

Journal of Bible Literature, XXVII
Polybius V
Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, I xix, 5 ff.

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made me pools of water." The whole structure of these and their aqueducts seems rather to be Greek or Roman work; (see Fig. 64).

Evidence for the dates is not conclusive, but there is some probability that the pools were constructed by John Hyrcanus I, 135-105 B.C. who made the High Level Aqueduct, and that the Low Level aqueduct, as it make a detour toward Gebel Fureidis, where Herod constructed a palace, to which he conveyed water. This Low Level Aqueduct is probably the one afterward repaired by Pontius Pilate.

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