

# SHILOH

## Introduction

- The name Shiloh possibly refers to the Messiah, “the peaceful one.” Its location is noted in Judges 21:19, *19 So they said, “Behold, there is the yearly feast of the LORD at Shiloh, which is north of Bethel, on the east of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah.”* It is in the hill country of Ephraim, 10 miles northeast of Bethel, 12 miles southeast of Shechem, and 3 miles east of the road between Shechem and Jerusalem. The ark of the covenant and the tabernacle were there from the time of Joshua through that of Samuel, for 369 years.
- Philip Schaff, *From its central, and at the same time secluded, position, Shiloh was well adapted to be the resting-place of the ark and the principal sanctuary of the Jewish nation.*
- H. G. Andersen, *There were traces of occupation in the Middle Bronze period (c. 2100 to 1600 B.C.), but no evidence of Canaanite occupation was found for the Late Bronze period (c. 1600 to 1200). Evidence was found, however, for the occupation of the site again beginning about 1200 and continuing to about 1050, when Shiloh or parts of it were destroyed, probably by the Philistines ... the visit of Jeroboam’s wife to the home of Ahijah the prophet in Shiloh probably implies the existence of some kind of shrine there at least as late as 922 (1 Ki. 14:2, 4). It was generally recognized that God had “abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh (Psalm 78:60-61, He forsook his dwelling at Shiloh, the tent where he dwelt among mankind, and delivered his power to captivity, his glory to the hand of the foe).*



Map of Shiloh in Ephraim (Logos Software)

## Excavation of the Site



Dr. Scott Stripling

- The site was identified by E. Robinson in 1838. Excavation of the site began with digs in 1926, 1929, 1932 and 1963. Excavations resumed from 1981-1984 and were resumed again in 2017. The current excavation leader is Dr. Scott Stripling of Associated for Biblical Research (digshiloh.org). During 2023, there were 220 workers from 13 countries helping with the excavation. They have excavated pottery shards at a specific level above the probable tabernacle site. Following religious custom, people worshiping at the tabernacle would eat, smash their dishes on the ground and return home. Excavations have uncovered bone deposits from sacrificial offerings. Sixty percent were from the right side of clean animals (the portion for the priests). Dr. Stripling uses wet sifting technology which more accurately locates valuable items. The workers have uncovered 2,000 pieces of pottery per day. They have excavated grape seeds from the digs and have been able to produce wine for sale. Also, dates palms are being grown from excavated seeds.
- Philip Schaff, *Excavations show that Shiloh flourished as a fortified town in the early 2nd millennium (Middle Bronze II). The site was abandoned and resettled in the early Israelite period. The Bible provides no information as to how the site passed into Israelite hands . . . There is an excellent spring in the valley to the east. There are also numerous rock-hewn tombs. The terraced slopes tell of vineyards, long since disappeared.*

- Informational signs at Tel Shiloh

*The Canaanite wall surrounded the upper part of the tel and left the northern extension outside the city. That section was settled afterward, during the Israelite period. On both sides of the path one can see the remains of the city wall made of enormous field stones and the gently sloping bank of earth that surround it ... Storerooms were found along the inside of the walls. Large storage jars from the Canaanite period were unearthed. Stones may be seen that were used as the bases for wooden pillars that held up the roof. Dozens of complete vessels were found in a layer of ash. Charred raisins found beside the jars were used to date the buildings to the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> c. B.C. This date corresponds to the Jewish tradition concerning the destruction of Shiloh following the defeat of the Israelite army in the battle of Eben-eze and the death of Eli the High Priest.*



Section of Canaanite Wall



**Temple excavation**

*Some researchers believe the Tabernacle stood on the platform flanked by two rock walls at the northern extension of the tel. The width of the platform matches the width of the courtyard of the tabernacle mentioned in the Torah - 50 cubits, and its east-west orientation matches the description of the tabernacle, whose opening faced east, with the Holy of Holies to the west. Other sites proposed for the location of the Tabernacle are the summit of the tel or an area south of the tel. The proposal that the northern platform was the site of the Tabernacle in ancient times encouraged researchers to conduct archaeological excavation there. These excavations uncovered many artifacts from the Canaanite, Israelite, Persian, Hellenistic and Roman periods. The earliest find discovered on this platform, which is evidence of the religious activity here, is a favissa (repository pit for holy objects), dated to the beginning of the Israelite kingdom.*



**Storerooms**



**Shiloh dwellings**



**Sifting for artifacts**



**Finding bone deposits**

## Biblical references and significance of Shiloh

### The first permanent spiritual center of Israel

- Joshua established the tabernacle at Shiloh, Joshua 18:1, *Then the whole congregation of the people of Israel assembled at Shiloh and set up the tent of meeting there. The land lay subdued before them.*
- The Promised Land was apportioned to seven of the tribes, Joshua 18:8-10, *So the men arose and went, and Joshua charged those who went to write the description of the land, saying, "Go up and down in the land and write a description and return to me. And I will cast lots for you here before the LORD in Shiloh." So the men went and passed up and down in the land and wrote in a book a description of it by towns in seven divisions. Then they came to Joshua to the camp at Shiloh, and Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the LORD. And there Joshua apportioned the land to the people of Israel, to each his portion.*
- Levitical cities were designated, Joshua 21:1-42.
- W. Ewing, *During the period of the Judges, it was the central sanctuary (Jg 18:31), the scene of great religious festivals and pilgrimages (21:19, 1 S 1:2) ... we gather that the 'tent' had given place to a permanent structure, a 'temple' (hekal), under the care of the high priest Eli and his family.*



The 12 Tribes

### The Altar of Witness

- Joshua 22:10-12, *And when they came to the region of the Jordan that is in the land of Canaan, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by the Jordan, an altar of imposing size. And the people of Israel heard it said, "Behold, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built the altar at the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region about the Jordan, on the side that belongs to the people of Israel." And when the people of Israel heard of it, the whole assembly of the people of Israel gathered at Shiloh to make war against them.*
- Daniel Diffey, *The city also served as a staging point for a near conflict between those tribes on the east side of the Jordan and those on the west. When Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh built an altar near the Jordan (Josh 22), the tribes on the west took it as idolatry against Yahweh and gathered at Shiloh to go to war (Josh 22:12-16). However, war was averted when the tribes on the east assured those on the west that they had built the altar as a witness of solidarity between the two groups (Josh 22:34).*

### Wives for the tribe of Benjamin

- Judges 21:19-21, *So they said, "Behold, there is the yearly feast of the LORD at Shiloh, which is north of Bethel, on the east of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah." And they commanded the people of Benjamin, saying, "Go and lie in ambush in the vineyards and watch. If the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in the dances, then come out of the vineyards and snatch each man his wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin.*
- Daniel Diffey, *Shiloh also served as a location of sanctioned kidnaping after the civil war between the other tribes and Benjamin, when the tribes swore they would not let any Benjamite man marry their daughters (Judg 21). This took place during a "yearly feast of Yahweh" located in Shiloh (Judg 21:19).*
- Philip Schaff, *In a little valley about half a mile from the ruins are the spring and well of Shiloh, and this must have been the spot where the "daughters of Shiloh" were seized. In the neighborhood of this spring are many rock-hewn tombs, in which, according to Jewish tradition, were laid the bodies of Eli and his sons.*

### Hannah and Samuel

- 1 Samuel 1:3-2:11, *Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD ....*
- 1 Samuel 3:21, *21 And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.*
- Elkanah and Hannah often traveled to the tabernacle at Shiloh, where Hannah vowed to give her child to the service of the Lord (1 Sm 1:3, 9, 24).
- Avraham Negev, *The house of God (Judg. 18:31) in which Eli and his sons officiated was at Shiloh, and God appeared there before Samuel (1 Sam. 1:19; 3:1 ff.).*
- Samuel was the son for whom Hannah prayed. He was the last of the judges (1 Samuel 7:6, 15-17) and the first of the prophets (1 Samuel 3:20; Acts 3:24; 13:20). He also anointed Saul (1 Samuel 10:1, 17-25; 11:12-15), and David (1 Samuel 16:12, 13) as king.

### *The capture of the Ark*

- 1 Samuel 4:1-11, 3-4, *And when the people came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies." So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.*
- Walter Elwell, *The ark was never returned to Shiloh; the psalmist records that God had "abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent he had set up among men" (Ps 78:60 NIV) ... Some scholars associate the fact that the ark was not returned to Shiloh but to Kiriathjearim with an assumed destruction under the Philistines around 1050 BC.*
- Avraham Negev, *When the Israelites were hard-pressed by the Philistines at Eben-Ezer the tabernacle was transported from Shiloh to the battlefield, but fell into the hands of the enemy (1 Sam. 4:1-5, 5:1). It seems that after this battle the city was set on fire and was only later rebuilt (Jer. 4:5; 7:12; 26:6, 9).*

### *The death of Eli*

- 1 Samuel 4:12-22, 16-18, *And the man said to Eli, "I am he who has come from the battle; I fled from the battle today." And he said, "How did it go, my son?" He who brought the news answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has also been a great defeat among the people. Your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured." As soon as he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. He had judged Israel forty years.*
- Walter Elwell, *When the ark was taken from Shiloh to battle, news of its loss to the Philistines reached Eli and brought about his death (4:1-18).*

### *Prophecy against Jeroboam*

- 1 Kings 14:1-31, 1-2, *At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam fell sick. And Jeroboam said to his wife, "Arise, and disguise yourself, that it not be known that you are the wife of Jeroboam, and go to Shiloh. Behold, Ahijah the prophet is there, who said of me that I should be king over this people.*
- The prophet Ahijah was a native of Shiloh (1 Kings 11:29, 14:2, 4).
- Walter Elwell, *The wife of Jeroboam (930-909 BC) went to Shiloh to inquire about the outcome of her husband's illness (1 Kgs 14:2, 4).*

### *God's rejection of Shiloh (Ephraim)*

- Psalm 78:60, *He forsook his dwelling at Shiloh, the tent where he dwelt among mankind.*
- Jeremiah 7:12-14, *Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel. And now, because you have done all these things, declares the LORD, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh.*
- W. Ewing, *The destruction of its temple, possibly by the Philistines, is alluded to in Jer 7:12, 14, 26:6, 9 (cf. Ps 78:60).*
- Walter Elwell, *Over 400 years later Jeremiah does use the destruction of Shiloh as a model for what he prophesied would happen to Jerusalem (Jer 7:12-14; 26:6-9).*
- Daniel Diffey, *Yahweh purposely rejected Shiloh as the place where He would make His name dwell, choosing Jerusalem instead (Psa 78:60; Jer 7:12, 14; 26:6, 9).*
- Larry McGraw, *Centuries later, Jeremiah used Shiloh and the tabernacle as illustrations to warn Jerusalem that it was not safe merely because it housed the temple (7:12-14). Hearing the same message again, the people sought to kill Jeremiah (26:6-9). Jeremiah mentioned some men from Shiloh as late as 585 B.C. (41:5), indicating some occupation at that time.*



**Road of the Prophets below Shiloh**