ANAYLSIS OF THE CURRENT IDENTIFICATION OF AI

AND OTHER POSSIBLE SITES
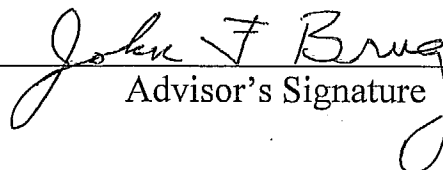
by

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<u>Introduction</u>

It has always bothered me when people say, "If only we could find Noah's ark then we could prove the Bible true and more people would be saved." That is not the case nor will it ever be. In spite of this, many have gone out trying to prove the Bible is true with the hope that they will convince others to believe. "They have Moses and the Prophets let them listen to them,"[1] was Abraham's response to the rich man's request to send someone from the dead and give his brother proof. God has given us all we need to know for salvation in his Word. But, that doesn't mean we have to completely disassociate God's Word from the world in which we live.

God's Word is deeply intertwined with geography and history. The events in the Bible actually happened in real places on the earth on which we live. God's Word is not just some pious fiction that many make it out to be. Understanding the lay of the land helps one to more fully appreciate the Bible as God has given it to us. The events recorded in the history of God's Word are worth looking into.

I've never had the opportunity to delve into the Holy Land. It has always been a dream of mine to go there and walk where God walked. To see, smell, hear, feel, even taste the land in which God's Word was written. All of this brings a different perspective, one which I haven't lived. All of this brings biblical events into a sharper focus, while at the same time allowing us to view the Bible as a whole, just as Greek and Hebrew allow us to dig deeper into the text.

This topic was selected because it is an area where I am lacking. Before taking a close look at the cities and their locations in relationship with one another all I knew was that Israel is on the eastern edge of the Mediterranean. I had never truly thought about the names and locations of cities in the Bible. They were just names that made no difference to me. I didn't associate anything with them, and they were skimmed over.

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[1] Luke 16:29

As I began looking into the city of Ai and its current identification, a number of problems came to the front. Challenges to God's Word surfaced. The biblical city of Ai has been called "an embarrassment to every view of The Conquest that takes the biblical and archaeological evidence seriously."[2] Most scholars have concluded that Khirbet et-Tell (hereafter et-Tell) is the biblical city of Ai. This is so widely accepted that if one wishes to look up Ai online or in an encyclopedia, you are redirected to et-Tell.

Of course not everybody agrees with the assumption that Ai is at et-Tell. The evidence doesn't fit. There are some serious problems, and rightly some scholars argue that the identification of et-Tell as Joshua's Ai is the result of a series of scholarly blunders that have been uncritically accepted to this day. The ruins at et-Tell do not fit with the biblical evidence. What scholars have done is take information from the Bible about a biblical city and then force it onto a site that clearly doesn't fit. It doesn't make any sense. If we are simply trying to place names on ruins why even bother to consult the Bible?

The identification of Ai at et-Tell is still a debated topic and worthy of study. It has opened up the world of the Old Testament. It has introduced me to what archaeology has and has not proven. It has given me an understanding of just what archaeology can and can't tell us. It has given me a basis on which to stand when others come forward with doubts about the accuracy of the Bible.

With this paper I hope to answer the questions, "How much or how clear is the evidence for or against et-Tell being the city of Ai?", "What makes archaeologists so certain they have found Ai?", and "What are other possibilities for the city of Ai?". I have answered these questions by approaching them with the viewpoint that God's Word is the inspired word of God. It is historically true and accurate. Using God's Word as my main source and authority I examined the evidence being unearthed. I examined the toponomical, topographical, patristic, and archaeological evidence.

I began with the problems associated with the current location of Ai. I then narrowed our scope by selecting a date in which one should expect to find Joshua's Ai. I looked at the evidence for and against the assumption that Ai is located at et-Tell. I will compared that evidence with the biblical requirements for Ai. I also looked into how other cities and their

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[2] Joseph Callaway, "New Evidence On the Conquest of Ai," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 87, no. 3 (September 1968): 312.

locations have affected the identification of Ai. Finally, I examined the solutions others have proposed for identifying Ai at et-Tell.

Archaeology can only prove so much. Not every city that has been found bears a "Welcome to_____" plaque at the gate. Quite a bit has simply been lost to time. What I have found is that no one knows the exact location of Joshua's city of Ai. The city has yet to be found. I'm not ruling out the possibility that it might be found someday but at this point nobody knows the exact location of Joshua's Ai.

The Problem

The account of Ai is one of the most detailed Conquest stories, and according to most scholars the most probable since it contains no miraculous events. Though Ai is expected to be the most plausible it also happens to be completely unsupported by archaeological evidence.

If et-Tell is Ai, then there is a serious problem for all those who consider the Bible to be God's inspired and inerrant Word. This identification calls into question the origin of ancient Israel. The traditional dating of the Exodus from Egypt places Joshua's Conquest around 1400 BC (hereafter as BCE). In the book of Joshua Israel is described as conquering the land of Canaan. This was no peaceful infiltration. This was God's judgment on the Canaanites. The Israelites were commanded to kill, burn, and destroy. At Jericho, they destroyed everyone living in it, men and women, young and old, sheep and donkeys.[3] At Ai, they left neither survivors nor fugitives.[4] If et-Tell is Ai, one would assume that there should be at least some destruction, but et-Tell was unoccupied in 1400 BCE. Et-Tell was unoccupied at the time of the Conquest. If et-Tell is Ai, then Joshua would have nobody to conquer.

This is a significant problem. There is no evidence of significant Late Bronze (LB) occupation in the region east of Bethel. There is no evidence of destruction at the time of Conquest. However excavations done in the 1930's and 1970's show there is evidence that Ai was a city with strong defensive walls that were destroyed in 2400 BCE.[5] During the Early Bronze (EB) period an un-walled village existed on the tell. Slowly this village grew until it developed into a major walled city of 27.5 acres in EB. Et-Tell was destroyed at the end of EB

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[3] Joshua 6:21
[4] Joshua 8:22
[5] Joseph Callaway, "Excavating Ai," *Biblical Archaeologist* (March, 1979): 29.

and then it remained unoccupied for more than 1,100 years.[6] There is no evidence whatsoever of a Middle Bronze (MB) age or LB age settlement at this site. There is an occupational gap from 2200 BCE until 1200 BCE. The times one would expect the city to be occupied, it's vacant. The times one would expect the city to be vacant, it's occupied.

Correct time period

In order to begin we must narrow our scope. We will focus on one time period. In any given city there may be any number of destruction levels found on the same site. Each one of these destruction levels occurred at a different time period. Without narrowing or limiting our focus we would be lost in destructions. We want to look for a destruction level at the same time period as the Exodus. Coming up with a date for the Exodus and Conquest of Canaan is another problem.

Just as the location is debated so is the date of the Conquest. William Albright suggests a later date for the Conquest, claiming it must have occurred in the latter part of the 13th century BCE, placing the Exodus around 1230-1220 BCE.[7] This is the commonly accepted date. However, a number of other problems become apparent when the date is shifted. Problems arise among cities, such as Ai, Jericho, Arad, Gibeon, Hebron, and Hormah/Zephath. Placing the Conquest earlier only adds to the problem. It doesn't clarify anything but it does call into question the veracity of the God's Word. Joseph Callaway claims, "We can no longer take for granted that the Conquest of Canaan by invading Israelites accounts for the Late Bronze destructions of Bethel, Lachish, Tel Beit Mirsim, or Hazor."[8] By changing the date the LB destruction levels that are found at other sites is thrown out. By changing the date we are left with un-walled cities in Canaan. At this later date even the walls of the MB were dismantled and domestic units reconstructed. This lack of fortified cities in Canaan speaks against the report given by the spies in Number 13:28. The cities of Heshbon, Dibon, and Aroer were not occupied during MBII and Lachish would still be in existence even after Joshua conquered it.

This later date contradicts 1 Kings 6:1, Judges 11:26, and Acts 13:20. Those who take the Bible seriously place the Exodus at 1446 BCE and the beginning of the Conquest at

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[6] Ziony Zevit, "The Problem of Ai," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 11, no. 2 (March/April, 1985): 58-69.

[7] William Albright, "The Kyle Memorial Excavation at Bethel," *Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research* 56 (December 1934): 10,11.

[8] Callaway, "New Evidence On the Conquest of ‹Ai," 320.

approximately 1406 BCE. This date is found by adding 480 years to the year Solomon laid the foundation of the temple (ca. 960 BCE, 1 Kings 6:1). Such a time frame gives about 1440 BCE for the date of the Exodus. Subtracting 40 years for wandering in the desert gives us a date of about 1400 BCE. This date is further confirmed by archaeological data gathered at Jericho and Hazor. We will be looking for Ai with a 1450-1400 BCE entry into the Promised Land.

PART I. PROBLEMS WITH AI

<u>What we know about Ai</u>

Everything we know about Ai is from the Bible, and we know a lot. Two chapters in Joshua are dedicated to the battle of Ai. That is about a third of all the stories dealing with the Conquest. The information given to us in these accounts is very specific and detailed. There are numerous direction and place markers about Ai. It's a city that excites archaeologists because to them this account is the most believable (without miracles) and therefore this city is most likely to be found.

Ai first appears in the book of Genesis. The Lord calls to Abraham saying "Go to the land I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). So Abraham left Haran and traveled to the land of Canaan where he arrived at the great tree of Moreh. There he built an altar to the Lord. "From there he went on towards the hills [הָהָרָה] east [מִקֶּדֶם] of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord" (Genesis 12:8). From this we know two things. **1.** Ai is East of Bethel and **2.** There is a mountain or a large hill between Bethel and Ai.

The next time we Ai is mentioned is in Joshua 7:2 about 700 years later. Is Abraham's Ai the same as the Ai of Joshua's time? 700 years have passed from Abraham to Joshua. Abraham may have been referring to the general vicinity and not a specific city. If they were the same why would Abraham pick a small village off the beaten path as a reference point? Joshua speaks of his Ai as being small. Bryant Wood raises the same question.

> Were all of these settlements named Ai, spread over a millennium and a half, located at the same place? It is commonly assumed that the Ai of Abraham and the Ai of Joshua were one and the same, because both were located east of Bethel (Genesis 12:8, Joshua 7:2). On closer examination, however, this does not appear to be the case. Abraham's Ai must have been a major landmark, because it was used to fix his position. Joshua's Ai,

on the other hand, was a small place because only a few men were stationed there (Joshua 7:3) and it was smaller than Gibeon (Joshua 10:2).[9]

Now 700 years after Abraham, Israel is once again on the move. We find them following on the heels of a victory at Jericho. There everything was to be destroyed. The articles of silver, gold, bronze, and iron were to be put into the treasury of the LORD's house but Achan took some of the things devoted to the LORD.

"Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-Aven to the east of Bethel…" (Joshua 7:2). **3.** Ai is near [עִם] Beth-Aven. **4.** Beth-Aven is also east of Ai. Spies are sent ahead. They return with the report, "Not all the people will have to go up against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary all the people, for only a few men are there" (Joshua 7:3). **5.** Ai must not be that large if only two to three thousand men are needed to take it. But Israel is routed by the men of Ai: "They chased the Israelites from the city gate as far as the stone quarries [הַשְּׁבָרִים] and struck them down on the slopes [בַּמּוֹרָד]" (Joshua 7:5). **6.** There is a gate. **7.** There is a location fitting of stone quarries or [הַשְּׁבָרִים]. **8.** A descent leads to Jericho. Also Joshua 8:1 when the LORD said to Joshua, "…take the whole army with you, and go up [עֲלֵה] and attack Ai." עָלָה **1.** of persons, *go up, ascend*, in local relations: **a.** from low place to high.[10]

So Joshua and the whole army moved out to attack Ai. He chose five thousand men and sent them out to set up an ambush behind the city (Joshua 8:12). "Don't go very far from it" (Joshua 8:4). "So they went to the place of ambush and lay in wait between Bethel and Ai, to the west of Ai" (Joshua 8:9). **9.** There must also be a large enough space between Bethel and Ai, to the west, not too far from the city which is able to hide five thousand men.

The rest of the force with Joshua approached the city and arrived in front of it. "They set up camp north of Ai, with the valley between them and the city" (Joshua 8:10). **10.** There is a valley on the north of Ai with a hill beyond. The next morning the men of the city went out to meet them. "All the people who were in the city were called to pursue them… not a man

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[9] Bryant Wood, *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 206.

[10] Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Complete and Unabridged, fully searchable, with Strong Numbers and interactive Index ed. (New York: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 748.1.

remained in Ai or Bethel who did not go after Israel" (Joshua 8:16,17). **11.** Bethel must have been close to Ai if men were to join in the fight. Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Hold out toward Ai the javelin that is in your hand… as soon as he did this, the men in ambush rose quickly" (Joshua 8:18,19). **12.** There must have been a hill somewhere north of Ai where the ambush west of the city was able to see him. The LORD delivered Ai into their hands and "Twelve thousand men and women fell that day – all the people of Ai" (Joshua 8:25). **13.** Ai's population was 12,000 men and women. "So Joshua burned Ai and made it a permanent heap of ruins, a desolate place to this day" (Joshua 8:28). **14.** Ai was burned and made a heap of ruins. They hung the king of Ai on a tree and then at sunset they threw his body down at the entrance of the city gate. They then raised a large pile of rocks over it, which remains to this day" (Joshua 8:28,29). **15.** There is a large pile of rocks at the entrance to the city gate with the king of Ai below them. **16.** It was destroyed, abandoned, and then left uninhabited after 1400 BCE.

Later on in Joshua 10:2 we learn that Gibeon was an important city. **17.** It was also larger than Ai. In Joshua 12:9 Ai and Bethel are listed together. **18.** Ai is beside [מִצַּד] Bethel. **19.** Ai and Bethel are twin cities or close together with one king. Much later in the Book of Ezra we hear about the men of Israel, the exiles who return, and the locations where they have taken up settlement. In Ezra 2:28 and Nehemiah 7:32 we see 223 men settled in Bethel and Ai. **20.** If there are people settled there then, Ai and Bethel must be occupied (ca. 538 BCE). Once again these cities are closely tied together.

Isaiah refers to Ai but without the definite article. Once again, after such a long time period, is this the same Ai that Joshua conquered? The alternative spelling is found in Isaiah 10:28 [עַיַּת] and Nehemiah 11:31[וְעַיָּ֖ה].

Here is a summary of the above topographical and archaeological evidence.

Topographical

1. Ai is East of Bethel (Genesis 12:8).

2. There is a mountain or a large hill between Bethel and Ai (Genesis 12:8).

3. Ai is near [עִם] Beth-Aven (Joshua 7:2).

4. Ai is west of Beth-Aven (Joshua 7:2).

5. Ai is beside [מִצַּד] Bethel (Joshua 12:9).

6. There is a location fitting of stone quarries [הַשְּׁבָרִים] nearby (Joshua 7:5).

7. Ai and Bethel are twin cities or close together with one king (Joshua 12:9).

8. A descent leads from Ai to Jericho (Joshua 7:5, Joshua 8:1).

9. There is a large enough space between Bethel and Ai, to the west, to hide 5,000 men (Joshua 8:4, Joshua 8:9, Joshua 8:12).

10. There is a valley to the north of Ai with a hill beyond where the ambush could see Joshua (Joshua 8:10,18,19).

11. Bethel must be close to Ai if they were to join in the fight (Joshua 8:10).

Archaeological

1. There is a gate facing north to northeast (Joshua 8:11). Ai was fortified at the time of the Conquest (Joshua 7:5-8:29).

2. Ai must not be very large if only two to three thousand men are needed to take it (Joshua 7:3).

3. Ai is smaller than Gibeon (Joshua 10:2).

4. The population of Ai was 12,000 men and women (Joshua 8:25).

5. Ai was burned and made a heap of ruins (Joshua 8:19, 28).

6. There was a large pile of rocks at the entrance to the city gate with the king of Ai below them (Joshua 8:28, 29).

7. Ai was abandoned after 1400 BCE (Joshua 8:28, 29).

8. Ai was resettled around 538 BCE (Ezra 2:28, Nehemiah 7:32).

Evidence supporting identification of Ai at et-Tell

If there are so many problems associated with et-Tell, what makes people so certain they've found Joshua's Ai? What is the evidence that supports their conclusion? We will look at four areas of evidence: toponomical, topographical, patristic, and archaeological. Here I will list their arguments for the assumption: "Ai is located at et-Tell."

Toponomical

Probably the strongest evidence for equation Ai = et-Tell is in its name. William Albright states, "The name *Ha-'Ai* means simply "the ruin" (par excellence) in Hebrew."[11] The Hebrew word

"עַי" means "the ruin". They assume the Arabic name is a translation of the Hebrew *ha-'Ai,*

which supposedly refers to "the ruin." They make the assumption that "עַי" is the same as "עִי".

According to the Theological Workbook of the Old Testament (TWOT) "עִי" is a ruin or heap of

ruins (**1577d** עִי (□ı□) *ruin, heap of ruins.).* [12] The modern Arabic name et-Tell also means

"ruin" or rather "ruin mound". "Et-Tell" is assumed to be an exact equivalent of Ai. Though

this site has had a number of names such as Tell el-Hajar (Mound of Stone), Tell er-Rijme

(Mound of Stones, Heap of Ruins) Et-Tell (the Mound) only the name et-Tell stands out as being

the oldest. The other names were inventions to provide explanations to the tourists who did not

understand what a "tell" was.[13] The main evidence for the identification of Ai at et-Tell is in the

name. The name et-Tell means ruin in Arabic and the Hebrew word "עִי" also means ruin.

Topographical

Ziony Zevit wrote an article on Ai's identification at et-Tell. He then carefully mapped out the

battle sequences and pinpointed them on a map. He visited the site a number of times and said

he was,

> … struck by the astounding extent to which the topographic details of the battle of Ai
> stated or implied in the biblical accounts can be identified on the ground at Khirbet et-
> Tell and the immediate vicinity…[14]

Earlier in the same article he states, "All geographical indications in the biblical text point to the

area of Khirbet et-Tell as the location of Ai."[15] Later in the same article he states.

> Assuming the presence of natural vegetation rising six to eight feet, movement at night, a
> completely unexposed position troops could have hidden themselves just outside of
> Ai…These striking topographical details reinforce the conclusion reached on general

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[11] Albright, "The Kyle Memorial Excavation at Bethel," 11.

[12] Laird Harris, ed., *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), s.v. "1577 עָנָה Bend, Twist, Distort."

[13] Jehoshua Grintz, "'Ai Which Is Beside Beth-Aven' a Re-Examination of the Identity of 'Ai," *Biblica* 42 (1961): 201-16.

[14] Ziony Zevit, "The Problem of Ai," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 11, no. 2 (March/April, 1985): 64.

[15] Zevit, "The Problem of Ai," 61.

geographic considerations that et-Tell is to be identified with Ai. In fact, they guarantee that the Ai story in the Bible was told about Khirbet et-Tell. [16]

As far as topographical evidence, the location et-Tell seems to meet many of the requirements.

Archaeological
There has been no definitive evidence proving the identification of Ai at et-Tell. Here I will summarize what has been done and what has been found.

1ˢᵗ excavation: The first excavation was done by John Garstang in September 1928. He quickly excavated eight soundings against the city walls, but never followed up with either a report of the soundings or more excavations. Later he reported that the site of et-Tell belonged entirely to the Bronze Age, and as evidence he left five labeled boxes containing a selection of pottery fragments marked as such. This collection contained several fossils, part of a tile, and a sample of mud and pottery collection. He left part of the collection at the American School. The rest of the collection of Byzantine, Iron Age I, and Early Bronze shards were stored at the Rockefeller Museum. However, the box left at the American schools has gone missing.[17]

2ⁿᵈ excavation: Judith Marquet-Krause did the first significant work, discovering the great 27.5 acre walled city of the Early Bronze Age underlying what they thought to be the almost insignificant Israelite village of only 2.75 acres.

During her excavation she made a number of discoveries. One of the most interesting was the ruin itself. A giant "mountain of stones" was found.[18] It stood about 20 feet tall, and covered a surface area of about 650 feet. Judith Marquet-Krause did not intend[19] to find the body of the king of Ai under this pile of stones but possibly a tower. This heap of stones was found at the city gate. She also discovered that et-Tell was a major Canaanite fortress between 3200 and 2400 BCE. These dates were discovered by examination of pottery. She died before completing the excavation.

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[16] Zevit, "The Problem of Ai," 65.

[17] Josheph Callaway, *The Early Bronze Age Sanctuary at Ai (et-Tell) No. I* (London: Bernard Quaritch LTD, 1972), 15,16.

[18] Teresa Rubiato Diaz, "La Mujer Que Convirtió A Josué En Leyenda a Judith Marquet-Krause (1906-1936) En El Centenario de Su Nacimiento" (diss., Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2006), 29-30, in Biblioteca Complutense, http://www.ucm.es/BUCM/revistas/ghi/02130181/articulos/GERI0707230023A.PDF (accessed February 14, 2012).

[19] "No pretendía Judith, desde luego, encontrar el cadáver del rey de Ha-'Ay bajo esa acumulación, sino tal vez una torre." Teresa Rubiato Diaz, "La Mujer Que Convirtió A Josué En Leyenda a Judith Marquet-Krause (1906-1936) En El Centenario de Su Nacimiento," 30.

3rd excavation: The third and final excavations at the site were done by Joseph Callaway starting in 1964 and going until 1970. The general purpose of his expedition was to continue the work terminated by the untimely death of Judith Marquet-Krause but he also wished to put an end to the debate surrounding the identification of Ai with et-Tell.

He went about looking for evidence showing how other sites east of Beitin could not be Ai. He did this by taking soundings at other areas which could be put in a category of "for consideration" such as (Khirbet Haiyan, Khirbet Khudriya, and Khirbet Haiy) and ruled them out one by one.[20] With this evidence supporting his assumption he claimed et-Tell is Ai by default since, "There is no Late Bronze evidence in the region east of Bethel that I can find."[21] He also claims that the location of et-Tell is in almost complete agreement with the Bible.

Even before Joseph Callaway's excavation William Albright wrote an article in 1924 which set the identification of et-Tell as Ai in stone. His basis for this paper was that et-Tell is the only Canaanite ruin in the vicinity meeting the topographic requirements of being east of Beitin and in the vicinity of Beitin. Once again there evidence is et-Tell is Ai by default.

As far as archaeological evidence supporting et-Tell as Ai, Joseph Callaway continues,

> The Iron Age village at Ai seems to have been larger than Late Bronze Gibeon, but smaller than Iron Age I Gibeon. A gate is mentioned in 7:5 and 8:29, although the LXX substitutes "pit" for "gate" in 8:29. There is actually no demand for fortifications in the Conquest accounts, and of course the Iron Age village was unfortified except for the ruined Early Bronze walls and steep north side of the site. Some evidence of burning, referred to in 8:19, is found in Area B XV, where a large Phase I building was destroyed by fire and left in ruins. In the ashy debris of the destruction were fragments of three footed chalices amid several sling-stones.[22]

Summary of evidence supporting claims et-Tell is Ai

1. The name Ai could mean "ruin" and so does the modern Arabic name et-Tell.
2. Some of the topographical details of et-Tell match those if Ai.
   a. Et-Tell is in the vicinity of Beitin (Joshua 8:17, 12:9).
   b. Et-Tell is east of Beitin (Joshua 7:2).
   c. Ai seems to be larger than LB Gibeon, but smaller than Iron Age I Gibeon.
   d. There is an ambush site between Beitin and et-Tell (Joshua 8:9, 12).
   e. There is a hill north of et-Tell (Joshua 8:11).
3. There was a pile of rocks at the gate.
4. There is no other city that fits all of the requirements east of Beitin.

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[20] Callaway, "New Evidence on the Conquest of 'Ai," 315.
[21] Callaway, "New Evidence on the Conquest of 'Ai," 315.
[22] Callaway, "New Evidence on the Conquest of 'Ai," 320.

5. There is evidence of fire.

Problems encountered with identification of Ai at et-Tell

Not everybody jumps on the et-Tell is Ai bandwagon. Not even Edward Robinson who visited et-Tell in 1838. He suggested that et-Tell could be Ai but rejected the idea because he could see no evidence of ancient occupation.[23] Et-Tell is located in the area near Beitin but that's about as close as et-Tell gets to being Ai. There are a number of problems associated with the "evidence" they have found.

Toponomical

The problems start with the name et-Tell. "עִי" means ruin and et-Tell is a ruin, therefore Ai must be at et-Tell is their assumption. But, what if Ai weren't pronounced "עִי" but "הָעַי"? Does Ai "הָעַי" really mean "ruin"? *Brown-Driver-Briggs* (BDB) chooses not to make the connection listing "עַי" as an old Canaanite city, always with the article, near Bethel to the South East (exact site unknown).[24] *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (*HALOT*)* gives no translation of "עַי". There is no mention of "עַי" having any connection to being a ruin. The simple fact is that "עַי" is not "עִי". Is it possible that the word "עִי" is causing confusion as to the actual meaning of "עַי"? Is it possible that they've been looking at the wrong name? Whatever the case, one can't make the argument that "עַי" means ruin by looking to the lexicons for proof.

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[23]Edward Robinson, *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai and Arabia Petraea* (London: A. Spottiswoode, 1841), 313, http://books.google.com/books?id=b-Ghd60n2eEC&pg=PA1&dq=%221841%22+Robinson++volume+ii&hl=en&sa=X&ei=SLtLT4-UOoGD0QGPndSwDg&ved=0CFAQ6AEwBQ#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed February 27, 2012).

[24] Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Complete and Unabridged, fully searchable, with Strong Numbers and interactive Index ed. (New York: Hendrickson Pub, 1996), 743.1.

Many like Martin Noth claim that et-Tell is a translation. He is not alone as there are others have decided that "הָעַי" means "the ruin" always with the definite article to designate the ruin known in that vicinity. They say et-Tell is an Arabic name of the Hebrew "הָעַי". "הָעַי" supposedly refers to "the ruin." The reasoning behind this is the use of the definite article "הָ", but not even the fact that "עַי" is always listed with the article changes its meaning.

Jehoshua Grintz along with Yehezkel Kaufmann disagree with the thought that Ai means "ruin".[25]/[26] Jehoshua Grintz points out that the use of the definite article may be peculiar to the tribal area of Benjamin because out of the 26 place names that are listed in Joshua 18:21-28, 11 of them appear with the definite article.[27] The claim that the use of the definite article to refer to "the ruin" is unsupported.

It unsupported by the LXX. Ai can't mean ruin given the way the LXX renders it. The LXX lists the city name in Genesis 12:8 and 13:3 and throughout Joshua as *Aggai*. In Jeremiah 49:3 (= LXX 30:19) *Gai* with a Greek *gamma* is used for the Hebrew letter *'ayin*. Ziony Zevit states it is a matter of pronunciation.

> In biblical Hebrew, however, this letter was polyphonous, indicating two distinct sounds. Its rendering in Greek by *gamma* indicates that it was pronounced as *ghayin, g,* as in the name of the Philistine city *'zh,* Greek *Gazza,* Arabic, *gazza,* and English "Gaza…The etymology of the word "Ai" negates any connection with the word meaning "ruin." Etymologically, Ai does not refer to a ruin. In antiquity the name would have been pronounce *ghay* (guttural gh) which would not have been associated by an Israelite with this Hebrew word for "ruin," *'iy.* The two words simple don't sound anything like each other.[28]

So based on the pronunciation, Ai can't mean ruin. But there is more to the name *Tell*. Ziony Zevit continues, "Any connection between the Hebrew name and the Arabic name for the site is to be rejected. The Arabic term *tell* refers to a hill or mound on which there is a ruin, as distinguished from *khirba* which refers to a deserted ruin, not necessarily on an elevated area.[29]

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[25] Grintz, ""Ai which is beside Beth-Aven' A re-examination of the identity of 'Ai," 211

[26] Y. Kaufmann, *The Biblical Account of the Conquest of Palestine* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1953), 77.

[27] Grintz, "'Ai which is beside Beth-Aven' A re-examination of the identity of 'Ai," 210

[28] Zevit, "The Problem of Ai," 62-63.

[29] Zevit, "The Problem of Ai," 62.

He clearly demonstrates there is a problem with saying, "The name *Ha-'Ai* means simply "the ruin" (par excellence) in Hebrew"[30] If there is no connection between the Arabic name of the site and the biblical site of Ai, what does Ai mean? Ziony Zevit maintains the, "Arabic cognates suggest that the name *gay* may have referred to some topographical feature of the city. The word *gay* may have referred to the height of the city."[31] Yehezkel Kaufmann believes it refers to a heap, a pile or piles of stones. [32] Jehoshua Grintz suggests something else such as a physical feature of the area. I myself am curious if the Ai may have referred to the *shebarim* [הַשְּׁבָרִים] of Joshua 7:5.

Another issue with Ai being called a ruin is the fact that it was inhabited. If a city were rebuilt would the inhabitants continue to call it a ruin? Yehezkel Kaufmann doesn't think so, saying, "The whole story in Josh 7-8 shows that Ai contained a Benjamite community since the time of the Conquest, in contradiction of what is related in 8:28. For clearly, … unless there had been a settlement there, so called on account of its being on the tell, the name could never have been preserved."[33]

Not even the Bible lists Ai as a ruin. It was and always had been an inhabited place until Joshua destroyed it. After the destruction it was then resettled. It would be proper to assume that if Ai had been in ruins from its first destruction until the coming of the Arabs and if the Israelites already called it by the name which later passed over to the Arabs – simply "the Mound" ("et-Tell"), then we could say it's a translation.[34] But that's not the case. Ai has always been a settled town. Biblical evidence is clear that Ai was not a ruin but an inhabited place from the period of the Kingdom until the end of the biblical period.

If Ai were not a ruin then it would follow that Ai is not et-Tell, since et-Tell is a ruin. If Ai were not a ruin then it would be in an inhabited city with the name Ai (no connection to a ruin).

Et-Tell is not a unique name either. Neither is it a translation of Ai. It is a designation quite common throughout the country. In a list of ruins and tells complied by the Antiquities

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[30] Albright, "The Kyle Memorial Excavation at Bethel," 11.
[31] Zevit, "The Problem of Ai," 63.
[32] Kaufmann, *The Biblical Account of the Conquest of Palestine*, 118-119.
[33] Kaufmann, *The Biblical Account of the Conquest of Palestine,* 118-119.
[34] Grintz, "'Ai which is beside Beth-Aven' A re-examination of the identity of 'Ai," 209.

Department of the Mandatory Government six tells bear the name et-Tell. Should we assume that all these places once bore the name Ai?[35]

The name Ai isn't unique either. There was a town called Ai in Ammon (Jeremiah 49:3 – "Howl O Heshbon, for Ai is spoiled").[36] On the border of Moab there was also a town with a similar name: [עִיִּים] (Numbers 33:45; this is [בְּעִיֵּי הָעֲבָרִים] Abarim of Numbers 21:11 and 33:44). In the hills of Judah there was also a town with the same name (Baalah, and [בַּעֲלָה וְעִיִּים]).[37] Should we assume that all of these sites are named et-Tell?

There are a number of things to consider with the name Ai. But we do know that using the place name correlation as evidence for the equation Ai = et-Tell is weak. Ai was not a ruin. The Ai of Abraham must have been an inhabited village or the name of a larger area. It follows that et-Tell could not have been the Ai of Abraham's time because it was in ruins when he passed by.

Topographical

Some would argue that et-Tell is not near Beitin. Others like Jehoshua Grintz say it is too close. In fact so close that it lacks an ambush site that wouldn't reveal their backside to Beitin.[38] It is about 2 kilometers (1.24 miles) east of Beitin.[39] All biblical references place Ai close to Bethel. They are mentioned together as twin cities. The text says [הָעַי אֲשֶׁר־מִצַּד בֵּית־אֵל] (Joshua 12:9). [מִצַּד] – literally means from the side, at the side of, and so on. But how close is "close"? Isaiah speaks of the glory of Zion saying, "Your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm" (Isaiah 60:4). Your daughters are carried [עַל־צַד] upon the side, most likely upon the hip. Are these cities like Minneapolis and St. Paul or Chicago and Milwaukee? The thought of carrying a daughter on the hips inclines me to believe they were very close.

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[35] Grintz, ""Ai which is beside Beth-Aven' A re-examination of the identity of 'Ai," 208.
[36] Grintz, ""Ai which is beside Beth-Aven' A re-examination of the identity of 'Ai," 211.
[37] Grintz, ""Ai which is beside Beth-Aven' A re-examination of the identity of 'Ai," 211.
[38] Grintz, ""Ai which is beside Beth-Aven' A re-examination of the identity of 'Ai," 203,211.
[39] Joseph Callaway, *The Early Bronze Age Sanctuary at Ai (et-Tell)* (London: Bernard Quaritch LTD, 1972), 9.

There is only one other reference in the Hebrew Bible where [מִצַּד] is used to describe

the relationship between two towns in Joshua 3:16 [בָאָדָם הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר מִצַּד צָרְתָן וְהַיֹּרְדִים עַל יָם

הָעֲרָבָה].

> Bryant Wood further explains,

> Adam is at Damiyeh and Zerenthan is generally thought to be at Tell es-Saidiyah, some
> 18.4 kilometers (11.4 miles) to the north. So [מִצַּד] doesn't necessarily mean immediate
> proximity. It appears that the meaning of the Hebrew roots *sad* in *missed* is related to the
> Arabic cognate, which means "vicinity," "in front of" or "in the vicinity of" (BDB,
> s.v.).[40]

So [מִצַּד] can either mean close or not so close. This doesn't help us. But, there is more to

consider. For example, when the men of Ai rushed out against the supposedly retreating Israel,

we read: "Not a man remained in Ai or Bethel who did not pursue Israel" (Joshua 8:17). Why?

Joshua 7:3 describes the men of Ai as being few. But, why did the men of Bethel rush out?

Were they close enough to come and help their sister city Ai?

Not only were Bethel and Ai closely connected but Ai was near Beth-Aven. The

Masoretic text (hereafter MT) says they were near [הָעַי אֲשֶׁר עִם־בֵּית אָוֶן]. The MT of Joshua

7:2 is rendered, "Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near [עִם] Beth-Aven, east

[מִקֶּדֶם] of Bethel." In this description it seems as though Ai is near Beth-Aven. But the LXX

leaves out the phrase, "which is near Beth-Aven."[41] So it reads, "Joshua sent men from Jericho

to Ai, which is near [עִם] Bethel. Has the MT been corrupted or is the LXX really a more

accurate text as Joseph Callaway claimed?[42] More will be said to this issue later.

Not only this reference, but all other references clearly indicate Ai is near to and

associated with Bethel, and Beth-Aven is not. Although Bethel and Ai are early mentioned as

twin cities twice,[43] there is no reference to Beth-Aven in the Pentateuch. The first mention of

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[40] Wood, "The Search for Joshua's Ai," in *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History*, 210.

[41] καὶ ἀπέστειλεν Ἰησοῦς ἄνδρας εἰς Γαι, ἥ ἐστιν κατὰ Βαιθηλ, λέγων Κατασκέψασθε τὴν Γαι, καὶ ἀνέβησαν οἱ ἄνδρες καὶ κατεσκέψαντο τὴν Γαι. (Joshua 7:2)

[42] Callaway, "New Evidence on the Conquest of 'Ai," 313.

[43] They are listed as close together in Genesis 12:8, 13:3.

Beth-Aven is in Joshua 7:2. The next time it appears is in Joshua 18:12, 13 where the "wilderness of Beth-Aven" is used as a reference point. But that does help us know. We do not help until we are able to locate Beth-Aven. In Joshua 16:1 and 18:21-28, Beth-Aven is not found in the list of cities belonging to Benjamin (nor in Ephraim, just north of Benjamin).

Joshua 12:7-24 lists all of the cities mentioned in the Conquest generally according to their order of appearance along with defeated kings. Bethel and Ai are among the towns listed. Beth-Aven is not listed. Was it conquered? The Bible does not say.

We are left with a number of questions. Is this is a trio of cities we are looking for? Should we be looking for a trio of cities in which Ai and Bethel are closely linked but Bethel is not near Beth-Aven? If Ai and Beth-Aven are near, does that mean Bethel is not near Beth-Aven? The point being made is that if et-Tell is the site of Ai, there is no suitable candidate for Beth-Aven.

> Beth-Aven has been variously identified as Khirbet Haiyah, Deir Dibwan, Burg Beitin, Burqa, Tell Maryam, or Khirbet Tell el-'askar… None of these sites, however, was occupied prior to the Hellenistic period, with the exception of Tell el-'Askar, which was occupied in Iron Age I. Thus, there is no candidate site for Beth-Aven in the vicinity of et-Tell that was occupied at the time of Conquest.[44]

So is the MT corrupted? Was this a scribal gloss or error? Joseph Callaway argues the MT is not accurate. He claims the LXX tradition of the Conquest of Ai varies from the MT at significant points in Josh 7:2-5 and 8:1-29.[45] He says,

> It [LXX] is a more concise account of the Conquest of 'Ai than is that of the MT. It omits redundancies (8:4), extensive involvement of the divine as in 8:5b-8a, technical names such as "Shebarim" in 7:5, or "Beth-aven" in 7:2, the association of the men of Bethel with the defense of 'Ai in 8:17, and the summarizing statement in 8:26. It is quite probable, in the light of texts from Qumran that agree with the LXX text of Joshua, Samuel, and Kings, that the LXX preserves a more accurate biblical tradition of the Conquest of 'Ai… .[46]

Even if this were a scribal gloss or an insertion into the text the scribe must have had a reason for placing it there. What he claims to be "redundancies" aren't redundant. The removal of the "extensive involvement of the divine," is a weak argument especially when we are talking about the Bible. The scribe would have been closer historically to Joshua's city of Ai and its location

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[44] Wood, "The Search for Joshua's Ai," in *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History*, 211.
[45] Callaway, "New Evidence on the Conquest of 'Ai," 313.
[46] Callaway, "New Evidence on the Conquest of 'Ai," 319.

may even have been known during his time. So even if it were a scribal gloss or insertion that wouldn't take away from the fact that Beth-Aven is near Ai.

Et-Tell is too big at 27.5 acres.[47] James Pritchard, excavator of Gibeon, states the size of Gibeon is a fifty-meter mound which is over 16 acres.[48] One of the requirements for the city of Ai was that it be smaller than Gibeon, yet et-Tell is almost double its size. Joseph Callaway argues against this saying that the un-walled Iron Age village situation on the acropolis of et-Tell was only 3 acres so it was smaller at that point during the Conquest.[49]

There is only a hill between Beitin and et-Tell. What is the meant by a "הַר"?

Unfortunately Hebrew does not distinguish between a mountain and a hill. Specifically a "הַר" is a mountain, high elevation, often in literature.[50] And of the 548 times "הַר" is used in the Bible, 486 of them are translated as mount or mountain, 62 times as hill, and once as hill country.[51]

Taking a quick look at translations give the following: NKJV – Mountain, KJV – mountain, NASB 95 – mountain, NIV- Hill, NLT – hill country, NRSV – hill country, RSV – mountain, and LXX - ὄρος, ους, τό. According to BDAG the Greek ὄρος is a

> **relatively high elevation of land that projects higher than a βοῦνος** ('a minor elevation, hill'), ***mountain, mount, hill*** (in Eng. diction what is considered a 'mountain' in one locality may be called a 'hill' by someone from an area with extremely high mountain ranges; similar flexibility prevails in the use of ὄρος, and the Eng. glosses merely suggest a comparative perspective; in comparison w. Mt. Everest [8848 meters] or Mount McKinley [6194 meters] any mountain in Palestine is a mere hill) w. βουνός.[52]

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[47] Callaway, *The Early Bronze Age Sanctuary at Ai (et-Tell)*, 9.

[48] James Pritchard, *Gibeon Expedition Records*, in the Penn Museum Archives. Libraries, http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/ead/ead.html?id=EAD_upenn_museum_PUMu1033 (accessed January 31, 2012).

[49] Callaway, "New Evidence On the Conquest of 'Ai," 320.

[50] Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Brown-driver-briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon.* (New York: Hendrickson Pub, 1996), 249.1.

[51] Robert Harris, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 224.

[52] Frederick Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 724.

So we are left with "הַר". A "הַר" can be either a hill or a mountain but the argument can be made that this is a large hill or mountain. In Genesis 12:8 Ai is mentioned when Abram is forced to leave Egypt because of a famine. In Genesis 13:3 Abram and Lot are headed back in the direction they came. They arrive at the same location where he built an altar, between Bethel and Ai. The Lord has blessed Abram and his nephew Lot tremendously while they were in Egypt. The land can no longer support both of their flocks. Abraham and Lot decide to split up. He says, "Is not the whole land before you? Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered." The very fact that Lot could see the whole plain indicates that they must have been standing at some elevation. This location must have had a certain vantage point of the entire land. There is a hill between et-Tell and Beitin that rises 3,000 feet above sea level which is enough to provide such a view of the land.

<u>Archaeological</u>

In Joshua 8:28 we clearly see that, "… Joshua burned Ai and made it a permanent heap of ruins, a desolate place to this day." The Bible clearly indicates that the city was burned when it was destroyed by Joshua. There is a burn level at et-Tell. Joseph Callaway says,

> "Layer 6 across the entire master balk is characterized by evidence of ashes and debris from a holocaust which terminated Building B, stones from walls Q are broken down into calcined masses… indicates the intense heat actually caused the trapped moisture to boil through the cement-like mass and create a lava-like deposit."[53]

There was a fire. There was a big fire but there was no evidence of Conquest. Instead et-Tell was abandoned. Ziony Zevit admits,

> Even at the Iron Age level, the excavations have produced no evidence of either a general destruction or a burning of the Iron Age village. As Callaway has correctly noted, the site was simply abandoned about the time of King Saul. The narrative, on the other hand, emphasizes the burning and ruination of Ai (Joshua 8:19,28).[54]

Et-Tell was not destroyed by fire nor was it conquered by Israel, it was simply abandoned. Joseph Callaway also argues that "there is actually no demand for fortifications in the Conquest accounts, and of course the Iron Age village was unfortified except for the ruined Early Bronze

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[53] Callaway, *The Early Bronze Age Sanctuary at Ai (et-Tell)*,34
[54] Zevit, "The Problem of Ai," 66.

walls and steep north side of the site."[55] But the mere fact that et-Tell was un-fortified disqualifies it.

Now there are no direct statements in the Bible saying, "Ai was fortified," but there are numerous statements in Joshua 7-8 indicating that it was. The mere mention of a gate indicates that there must have been a wall in which to set the gate. Otherwise a gate does not serve its purpose. We also have the report of the spies who were sent into Canaan. They said, "The people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very *large.* (Numbers 13:28) The Israelites completely defense less against the city to attack. More makes sense of this later. lites held a position face to face such as with the main wall or gate. Et-tell was not fortified during the time of Joshua's Conquest. The Early Bronze Age city at et-Tell was fortified but the only exposed gates are on the south side.[56] There is no northern gate.

Probably the strongest evidence that et-Tell is not Ai comes from the archaeologists themselves. They maintain that e-Tell was not occupied during the Conquest of Canaan. Ai was occupied. The Bible makes it very clear it was conquered by Joshua. 12,000 peopled died that day.

Instead of finding et-Tell to support the Bible there is complete disagreement with it. Ai is mentioned in the days of Abraham, the days of Joshua's Conquest, the Kingdom, and the return from the Babylonian Captivity at the period of Nehemiah. But, according to the archaeological evidence there was no occupation during these times, instead we see et-Tell was occupied only during the time when it shouldn't be. In fact there was only a short period of time when Ai was unoccupied. That would be the time between Joshua's destruction and its rebuilding, the early days of the Kingdom. However, this is the only time when et-Tell was inhabited and that when it should have been destroyed. Joseph Callaway goes on.

> … The site of Ai lay in ruins until ca. 1220 B.C. at the beginning of Iron Age I when a new village settlement was founded upon about 2.75 acres of the acropolis terraces. By that time the name of the great Early Bronze Age city had been lost, and it was known as "Ai" or "ruin," which undoubtedly was a popular designation as a regional landmark.[57]

Upon the destruction of Et-Tell, Ai was settled, and upon the destruction of Ai, Et-Tell was settled. Excavations at et-Tell have produced evidence that there was an Israelite village, built

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[55] Callaway, *New Evidence on the Conquest of 'Ai*," 320.

[56] Joseph Callaway, "Excavating Ai (et-Tell): 1964-1972)," *Biblical Archaeologist* (March 1976): 21.
[57] Callaway, "Excavating Ai (et-Tell): 1964-1972," 29.

on the mound in ca. 1200 BCE, but it was never inhabited after ca. 1050 BCE. However, Ai was inhabited during the time previous to the Babylonian Captivity. The fact is that the deportees who returned from the captivity (ca 538 BCE) included men from Ai (Ezra 2:28, Nehemiah 7:32). Ai was also inhabited in the days of Nehemiah. In these days et-Tell had been uninhabited for many centuries. These verses rule out the possibility that et-Tell could be the site of Ai.

PART II. PROBLEMS WITH BETHEL

<u>Everything is linked together: locating Bethel</u>

As you can see there are a number of problems with the current identification of et-Tell as Ai. What is even more troubling is when archaeologists claim there is no other location east of Beitin that fits as well as et-Tell. They assume that since there is no other location that fits, then et-Tell must be Ai by default. Their conclusion is logical but that assumption can only be made in the context of the identification of Bethel with Beitin. If that is the case, shouldn't we look at the current identification of Beitin as Bethel? Ai is almost always mentioned with Bethel. The location of Ai is closely linked with Bethel. These cities are closely intertwined, if you move one you move the other. If there is no suitable identification for Ai east of Bethel then what makes us so certain that Bethel is at Beitin?

American topographer Edward Robinson was one of the first to make the identification of Bethel at Beitin in May of 1838. Nobody has challenged it but Beitin like et-Tell has been uncritically accepted to this day.

<u>What we know about Bethel</u>

Bethel is mentioned many times but without any specific references to direction or distance of neighboring towns. We know there is a mountain between Bethel and Ai (Genesis 12:8), and it is a crossroads town. This village must have been on a main road, one through which travelers must pass since Jereboam's temple was built there to keep travelers from going down to Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:29). Bethel lay on the border between Benjamin and Ephraim (Joshua 16:1-3, 18:11-13). David Livingston points out that, "Bethel must have been a road juncture. It

was obviously on the main trade route north and south (from the Jordan Valley to Bethel and North II Kings 2:2ff and 2:8ff). It was also a junction for east and west traffic."[58]

Patristic

The *Onomasticon* of Eusebius mentions both Ai and Bethel. Joan Taylor and Rupert Chapman have also noted that Eusebius used Bethel as a central place for identification in the location of other places. Bethel was second in importance only to Jerusalem.[59] Bethel was a major city. Everyone would have known where Bethel was located. Eusebius uses Bethel as a point of reference that everyone would know and then measures out from there.

It's important to note that he does not say directly on the 12th mile marker but around it or in the general vicinity. That also means we shouldn't expect to find it a mile or two off but within the 12th mile. Keep in mind that Eusebius was not giving measurements but he was instead referring to mile markers or milestones.

Eusebius has given distances from four other locations. The first, Bethel is located at or near the twelfth milestone on the left side of the road north of Jerusalem. The second, Bethel is 4 milestones east of Gibeon. The third is the distance from from et-Taiyibeh, and finally the distance from the village of Aialon.[60]

Evidence supporting identification of Bethel at Beitin

What is the evidence that supports their conclusion? Again we will look at four types of evidence, toponomical, topographical, patristic, and archaeological.

Toponomical

Their proof is in the name Beitin. Anson Rainey states, "The shift of final Hebrew *lamed* to Arabic *nun* is a known phenomenon in Palestinian toponymics"[61] He is not alone. Ziony Zevit too, notes that "the linguistic equation Beitin is Bethel irrefutable because Hebrew "l" shifts to Arabic "n".

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[58] David Livingston, "Location of Biblical Bethel and Ai Reconsidered," *Westminster Theological Journal* 33 (1970): 29.

[59] Rupert Chapman and Joan Taylor, "Lecture Summaries: 17 March, 2004," Palestine Exploration Fund, http://www.pef.org.uk/oldsite/Pages/Previous%20Lectures/2004/Mar04.htm (accessed February 16, 2012).

[60] Chapman and Taylor, "Lecture Summaries: 17 March, 2004,"

[61] Rainey, "Bethel Is Still Beitin," 176.

Beitin is an ancient name and supposedly it doesn't mean anything in Arabic. And if, "an ancient name has *resisted* the tendency to assume some new form in colloquial Arabic and has survived in a form *without meaning* in local speech, then we have the very strongest testimony possible to its authenticity!"[62]

Topographical

Edward Robinson concluded that Beitin was Bethel based on Eusebius' *Onomasticon*. There he states that Bethel lay "at the 12th Roman milestone from Aelia on the east side of the road to Neapolis."   Edward Robinson verified his claim. He explains, "From Beitin to el-Bireh we found the distance to be forty-five minutes, and from Bireh to Jerusalem three hours, with horses".[63] Their general rate of travel being 3 English Miles[64] to the hour put them in the general vicinity of Beitin. From there it was a simple name change.

Archaeological

It seems the only thing they lack is a plaque welcoming visitors to Bethel. But there is no absolute archaeological evidence to support their claim. What William Albright does cite as evidence is the 1250 BCE burn level at Beitin which coincides with that of the altered date of Joshua's Conquest.[65]

Beitin is also one of the few sites in the area north of Jerusalem with Middle and Late Bronze Age stratification. Anson Rainey states.

> It is never *mandatory* that every period of occupation expected from the texts will be represented by material finds during excavation. It is, however, a *reasonable assumption* that something pertaining to the various periods will turn up… exact correlation between excavated strata and written sources is very difficult to achieve (unless written materials are found *in situ*) even under the best of circumstances… The fact that *Beitin* is one of the

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[62] Rainey, "Bethel Is Still Beitin," 176.

[63] Edward Robinson and Eli Smith, *Biblical Researches in Palestine and the Adjacent Regions: A Journal of Travels in the Years 1838*, 2nd ed. (London: Spottiswoode & Co., 1856), 448-49, http://books.google.com/books?id=MIUKXuBj5pkC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Edward+Robinson,+Biblical+researches+in+Palestine+and+the+adjacent+regions:+a+journal+of+travels+in+the+years+1838+and+1852&hl=en&sa=X&ei=BOEtT4jiF6iO0QHnhPTVCg&ved=0CEIQ6AEwAg#v=onepage (accessed February 4, 2012).

[64] Edward Robinson and Eli Smith, *Later Biblical Researches in Palestine, and in the Adjacent Regions. A Journal of Travels in the Year 1852*, 2nd ed. (London: Croker and Brewster, 1857), 635, http://books.google.com/books?id=IcgoAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=%22Biblical+researches+in+palestine&hl=en&sa=X&ei=i-8tT8rfK8n10gHLyt3gCg&ved=0CFwQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=%22Biblical%20researches%20in%20palestine&f=false (accessed February 4, 2012).

[65] Albright, "The Kyle Memorial Excavation at Bethel," 11.

few sites in the area north of Jerusalem with Middle and Late Bronze Age stratification is extremely important.[66]

Beitin is the one site with sufficient archaeological remains to satisfy the biblical and post-biblical sources. That is significant. But the archaeological history of Beitin discovered from the excavations only fit in the biblical history of Beitin if the Conquest was late.

Problems encountered with identification of Bethel at Beitin

Toponomical:

Once again there are problems. It's never that simple. The change of *l* to *n* isn't that simple either. It does happen and has happened but, it may not have happened here. In order to identify Beitin with Bethel you have to make that change. The first use of the name Beitin was in the 1800's. Carl Ritter states,

> At the time of Jerome and Eusebius it was an unimportant place, whose situation fell into entire oblivion at the time of the Crusades… In the centuries after the holy wars, the site of ancient Bethel was sought elsewhere, in the neighbourhood of Shechem; and even in Robinson's time the monks of Jerusalem did not suspect that Beitin occupied its site.[67]

The site was abandoned when Edward Robinson made his identification of Bethel. David Livingston states, "Long historical gaps exist in our knowledge of Bethel's location (as much as fourteen hundred years in this era)."[68] He then concludes that Bethel could very well be one of these sites that are sometimes, as William Albright said, "Displaced over a considerable local area."[69]

So even if there is a connection in the name Beitin to Bethel, names have a way of migrating. Even if Beitin is Bethel there is no assurance that the site Beitin is the biblical location of Bethel.

Others have argued that there is no connection between Beitin and Bethel. David Livingston wrote in a foot note how he went on a trip to Israel and asked an Arab what "Beitin"

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[66] Rainey, "Bethel is still Beitin," 178.

[67] Carl Ritter, *The Comparative Geography of Palestine and the Sinatic Peninsula Vol. Iv* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1866), 226., http://books.google.com/books?id=hiAEAQAAIAAJ&pg=PA287&dq=Karl+Ritter+geography+IV&hl=en&sa=X&ei=yAdAT-OfCKLG0QGmnfzrBw&ved=0CDAQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed February 18, 2012).

[68] David Livingston, "Location of Biblical Bethel and Ai Reconsidered," *Westminster Theological Journal* 33 (1970): 32.

[69] William Albright, "The Kyle Memorial Excavation at Bethel," *Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research* 56 (December 1934): 1.

(written in Arabic) meant. His answer was, "Two houses" (dual form).[70] What then does Beitin refer to? Could Beitin have referred to the two large buildings that remained in the area when Robinson came upon them?

Rupert Chapman too has another suggestion he notes that while Edward Robinson had suggested that Bethel had become Beitin by the change of the final 'l' to 'n', there is a simpler change. He states a vowel change took place from Beth-aun (sometimes transliterated as Beth-Aven) to Beitin.[71] No matter how you look at it, the case for Beitin = Bethel is not a strong argument.

Topographical

The Bible says there is a mountain between Bethel and Ai (Genesis 12:8, 13:9) but even Edward Robinson admits that in the vicinity of Beitin, "There is no major summit or hill."[72]

Bethel should be on a main trade route north and south, east and west but Beitin is not. The lay of the land would help define where these routes were. Bethel was an important city on a main trade route. It would not be likely that this city would just die off and be completely forgotten about for centuries as Beitin was. If Beitin is Bethel, the border requires an abnormal bulge northward at this point.[73]

Partristic

We know that Bethel is near the 12th mile marker north of Jerusalem.[74] This is important since we are dealing with mile markers and not literal miles. Edward Robinson measured the distance via horse at a rate of 3 English miles per hour and with that calculated the distance. Using a car with odometer the current identification of Bethel at Beitin is around 14 miles north of

[70] Livingston, "Location of Biblical Bethel and Ai Reconsidered," 32.

[71] Rupert Chapman and Joan Taylor, "Lecture Summaries: 17 March, 2004," Palestine Exploration Fund, http://www.pef.org.uk/oldsite/Pages/Previous%20Lectures/2004/Mar04.htm (accessed February 16, 2012).

[72] Edward Robinson, *Physical Geography of the Holy Land* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1865), 41, http://books.google.com/books?id=K5tCAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed February 16, 2012).

[73] John Bimson and David Livingston, "Redating the Exodus," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 13, no. 5 (Sep/Oct 1987): 40-48

[74] F Larsow, *Eusebii Pamphili Episcopi Caesariensis Onomasticon* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1862), 10-11, http://books.google.com/ebooks/reader?id=ilZtYA92-gwC&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&pg=GBS.PR3 (accessed December 21, 2011).

Jerusalem.[75] Beitin does not lie at or around the 12th Roman milestone as Eusebius and Jerome indicated but on the 14th.[76]

Eusebius mentions also mentions that "Gibeon was four miles west of Bethel." It doesn't work. Beitin, is 15 miles from Jerusalem and at least 5.5 Roman miles from Gibeon.[77]

Archaeological

We know that both Eusebius and Jerome described Bethel as a living village in their own time. Rupert Chapman states that the…

> small amounts of Roman-Byzantine pottery found at Beitin, from unstratified contexts, suggested an occupation ending before this period. In addition, there was a ruined Crusader church, with a dedication to St. Joseph, at Beitin, although Bethel was not mentioned, at least by that name, in any Crusader sources.[78]

Beitin was unoccupied during the time that Eusebius and Jerome wrote about it. Moreover there is an outstanding lack of evidence found at Beitin linking it to Bethel. Jereboam's temple has not been found.

William Albright also stated there was evidence in a burn level found at Beitin. Excavations there show the most…

> terrific conflagration yet seen in Palestine. Burned brick, ash-filled earth, and charred debris were the sole remains of a well-built Canaanite city, whose house walls and floors were of the best Late Bronze Age domestic construction uncovered in the Holy Land.[79]

The only problem with this is that the Bible never records Bethel as being burned or destroyed. There is textual evidence for the burning of only three cities by Joshua: Jericho (Joshua 6:24), Ai (Joshua 8:28), and Hazor (Joshua 11:13). The only thing this fire and destruction prove is that a LB Age city was destroyed there. This burn level is also dated to 1250 BCE much later than the biblical Conquest.

There is no archaeological evidence. "No trace of the sanctuary built by Jeroboam I and still used in the following two centuries was found, and the constructions of Iron II proved to be extremely inferior in general."[80]

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[75] Livingston. "Location of Biblical Bethel and Ai Reconsidered," 36.
[76] David Livingston, "Location of Biblical Bethel and Ai Reconsidered," 37.
[77] Rupert Chapman and Taylor Joan, "Distances Used by Eusebius and the Identification of Sites," in *The Onomasticon by Eusebius of Caesarea* (Jerusalem: Greville S.P. Freeman-Grenville, 2003), 177.
[78] Rupert Chapman and Joan Taylor, "Lecture Summaries: 17 March, 2004," Palestine Exploration Fund, http://www.pef.org.uk/oldsite/Pages/Previous%20Lectures/2004/Mar04.htm (accessed February 16, 2012).
[79] Albright, "The Kyle Memorial Excavation at Bethel," 11.

Probably the strongest evidence that Beitin cannot be Bethel is the fact that Ai has not been found east of it. They were twin cities closely connected, and Ai is not there. If they are looking for archaeological proof that Beitin is Bethel then they should find Ai or Jeroboam's temple or some other solid evidence. If not, they can quit claiming to have found archaeological evidence.

PART III. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Suggested solutions to these problems

Archaeologist and others have come up with any number of explanations in order to prove that et-Tell still is Ai. Even when these explanations contradict the Bible, they are still given more credence.

William Albright suggests that the, "Ai story in the Bible was originally told about the Israelite destruction of the Late Bronze Age city at Bethel; sometime during the Iron Age."[81] Which is unlikely since Joshua carefully distinguishes between the two cities and there is no destruction of Bethel at the time when et-Tell was destroyed. There could have been no confusion between these two sites.

Joseph Callaway moved the time period of the Conquest saying it took place during the Iron Age, not the Late Bronze Age. But this opens up another large set of problems. He completely disassociates the Conquest of Ai from the Late Bronze cities of Bethel, Lachish and Hazor by more than a century.[82]

However the most radical of all solutions comes from Martin Noth and Judith Marquet-Krause, who say the story of Ai is an aetiological legend.

> The well-known stories of the Conquest of the cities of Jericho (Jos. vi) and Ai (Jos. viii) have not been taken into consideration. They are in fact aetiological legends based on the fact that these cities were destroyed. But the destruction of these cities—as is certain in the case of Ai (the modern et-Tell near Der Dubwan), and probable in that of Jericho… had taken place before the Israelites' occupation, so that the latter were able simply to take possession of the ruins and their territories.[83]

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[80] Albright, "The Kyle Memorial Excavation at Bethel," 14.
[81] Zevit, "The Problem of Ai," 63.
[82] Zevit, "The Problem of Ai," 63.
[83] Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (Great Britian: R.&R. Clark LTD Edinburgh, 1959), 149.

Ziony Zevit concludes, "That although the Ai story was indeed told about an Iron Age village, it is historically not true, in the sense that we moderns understand historical truth."[84]

The only thing all of these archaeologists could agree upon was that the biblical narrative cannot be taken literally. This "aetiological legend" is realistic, with nothing of "legend" about it. Why is a story written with so much detail if we are supposed to assume it's just a fictional story? It is either legendary or it actually describes a campaign. Why did the Bible tell such a long story about the Conquest of a city which could not have possibly existed at the time? The book of Joshua describes a concentrated sequence of military campaigns by a unified Israelite army defeating one city after the next with the help of God.

The Book of Joshua chapter 8 is not meant to tell the story of twelve stones nor is it put there to describe a heap of stones found at Ai. These were real events that took place in history. The main point behind the Conquest is that this is all God's doing. Israel could not have done any of this on their own. Numbers 13:28 says the Canaanites were mighty men with fortified cities, who had horses and chariots. The Israelites couldn't do it by themselves. God was and still is the one in control of it all.

Other possibilities for Ai

Even before et-Tell was mistakenly identified as Ai there were a number of suggestions floating around as to where it could possibly be. So far a possible identification for Ai is Khirbet Maqatir which is currently being excavated by Bryant Wood.

Khirbet Maqatir

If Khirbet Maqatir were to be identified as Ai, its location fits the biblical record. The deep Wadi Sheban to the west provides a perfect location for the ambush forces of the Israelites to hide. Joshua's command post was on the hill just east (left) of the modern road and he fled east away from the wadi allowing the ambush force to attack from behind.

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[84] Zevit, "The Problem of Ai," 67.

Archaeological:

Evidence has been found indicating that Khirbet Maqatir could be the Ai of Joshua's day, including the city fortifications, gate, evidence of battle and destruction by fire. They've found a fortress which was captured, destroyed and burned by Joshua.

> "Unfortunately, while we found pottery from the time of Joshua (15th century BC) in almost every square – even in one beneath the foundation of the monastery – this season we did not reach architecture from the fortress in any of the squares we excavated. As in previous seasons some of the 15th century BC pottery was "refired." That means, subsequent to its manufacture, it had been subjected to a second very intense heating which baked it to a metallic hardness. This is powerful evidence for the burning of Ai as described in Joshua 8:28."

They have not reached architecture from the fortress in any of the squares excavated.[85]

Patristic

Local tradition places Ai here. The same day Edward Robinson visited Beitin he also visited Maqatir. This was the site that the Greek priests and locals of the area had chosen to give the name of Ai. Of this site he said, "There is not the slightest ground for any such hypothesis. There never was anything here but a church; and Ai must have been further off from Bethel, and certainly not in sight of it."[86] According to Bryant Wood if Edward Robinson would have walked 200 meters down the southeast slope of the site he might have changed the course of Palestinian archaeology. There is abundant evidence for early occupation, including ancient walls on the surface.[87]

Other Possibilities

Of course Khirbet Maqatir isn't without competition. There is also Khirbet Nisya, Khirbet Khudriya, Khirbet Hai, Khirbet Khudriya, Khirbet Khaiyan.

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[85] Gary Byers, "The Search For Joshua's Ai at Khirbet El-Maqatir 2011," Associates for Biblical Research, http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2011/07/18/The-Search-for-Joshuas-Ai-at-Khirbet-el-Maqatir-2011.aspx (accessed October 19, 2011).

[86] Edward Robinson and Eli Smith, *Biblical Researches in Palestine and the Adjacent Regions: A Journal of Travels in the Years 1838*, 2nd ed. (London: Spottiswoode & Co., 1856), 448-49, http://books.google.com/books?id=MIUKXuBj5pkC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Edward+Robinson,+Biblical+researches+in+Palestine+and+the+adjacent+regions:+a+journal+of+travels+in+the+years+1838+and+1852&hl=en&sa=X&ei=BOEtT4jiF6iO0QHnhPTVCg&ved=0CEIQ6AEwAg#v=onepage (accessed February 4, 2012).

[87] Wood, "The Search for Joshua's Ai," in *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History*, 229-230.

Khirbet Nisya is the favorite of David Livingston. This site too claims to match topography of every detail given in the account given in Joshua 7-8. However it also lacks fortifications; there are no building remains, nor a destruction level.

Khirbet Khaiyan was the favorite of Jehoshua Grintz. This site preserves the name of Ai. But a sounding of the area has found nothing earlier than 1st Century Roman Coins. The earliest datable evidence found has been coins of 68 CE on bedrock.[88]

Problems with Archaeology

We know so little. Only so much as been recovered and there is a lot left to excavate. But it's not as simple as looking at a map and finding Ai and then digging on the "X". In fact even if we were to find the name Ai or something similar it might not even be in the same location that it was more than 2000 years ago.

There are a number of problems that history throws in the works of archaeology. One of them is the fact that people reused buildings and stones. They would often build on bedrock. This means they scraped the site clean and started on fresh ground. They removed all previous debris. Remodeling also throws archaeologists for a loop. People don't always build new structures for every new time period that they live in. Often they will expand or rework existing structures.

History is also affected by nature. Erosion changes the landscape so much so that sometimes what once was there can't even be recognized if you had a photo of before and after. They are completely different.

Next we need to remember what kind of people we are looking into. Israel was a nation who had been in slavery for some time. They had spent 400 years in Egypt. They undoubtedly reflected many Egyptian customs, practices, and artwork. This means that while they had distinct flavors about them they probably carried with them many Egyptian styles. They were also goat herders and farmers. They were nomadic people who didn't exactly leave behind a lot of stuff. So even the basic assumption of "no remains, no occupation" cannot stand.

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[88] Joseph Callaway, *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land Vol. 1* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), s.v. "Ai."

Conclusion

I went through from one paper to the next trying to find someone, really anyone, who would summarize the findings or the proof that et-Tell was indeed Ai, there were none. What was even more frustrating was the notion that Ai was and still is considered to be an open and shut case.

Rather than cite evidence archaeologists would point to how hard-headed those who believe the Bible are. Then go on to speak about the pottery recovered and the type of life these people would have lived in et-Tell. Instead of telling me about what they've found supporting their identification they go on to tell me about the people that lived there.

It appears that instead of relying on actual archaeological evidence from et-Tell to support the view that Ai played a historical role at the time of the Conquest, they are accusing the biblical writer of being wrong. Instead of saying, "Hold on, I think we've got the wrong place," they continue while ignoring the only bit of information that we have. The identification made by the biblical writer is "proved" wrong, instead of their identification with et-Tell. The case still is: Nobody knows the exact location of Joshua's Ai.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

PART I. PROBLEMS WITH AI

PART II. PROBLEMS WITH BETHEL

PART III. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

ANAYLSIS OF THE CURRENT IDENTIFICATION OF AI

AND OTHER POSSIBLE SITES

BY

JOSHUA J. HANSON

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

PROF. JOHN BRUG, ADVISOR

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Abstract:

The current location of Ai at et-Tell has caused a number of problems for those who take the Bible seriously. The main problem is that there was no occupation of et-Tell during the time of conquest. Because of this many have stated that the conquest didn't happen or that it happened as a peaceful infiltration. Others have taken another look at the current location and then suggested other sites where the biblical requirements match that of archaeology. The purpose of this paper is to take a close look at the evidence supporting and contrasting et-Tell with the biblical city of Ai.

I will approach this from the viewpoint that God's Word is the inspired word of God. It is historically true and accurate. Using God's Word as my source and authority in matters that actually happened I will examine the evidence being unearthed, extra-biblical sources, topographical maps, and local tradition.