PREFACE

Many historical events recorded in the Bible are misinterpreted due to someone not reading the text carefully and then jumping to conclusions. These distortions are then passed down from generation to generation. Among much else they apply to Shiloh, although about its location, at least, there is (unlike that of Sodom, or Rachel’s tomb, or the Red Sea Crossing) no dispute.

Not only the approximate site of Shiloh, but even the precise location of where the Tabernacle was set up, is now known. Archaeological researchers at Shiloh have recently found a marked site measuring precisely 100 x 50 cubits and aligned exactly east-west, which is too much of a coincidence to be anything other than the site of the Tabernacle. (I have been there and seen it, visitors are welcome.) This has aroused interest in ancient Shiloh, but the distortions of history are today again presented.

I have therefore given all the biblical references to Shiloh, which must be carefully read, along with certain other biblical references that are relevant. Non-biblical sources are not reliable, and with one exception which is not concerned with Shiloh but often confused with it, they are not quoted.

It is assumed that the reader is familiar with the background stories in which the quotations occur, as this is not the place to give all these in detail, though sometimes a reminder is added.

It is hoped that anyone writing about Shiloh will take into account all that is pointed out in this booklet.

My thanks to the One who has preserved me in old age with the strength to write this.

A.S., Eli (next to Shiloh), Mount Ephraim, Tammuz 5777
CONTENTS

1. Joshua 5
2. The Civil War 8
3. Eli and Samuel 13
4. Ahijah 16
5. Jeremiah 18
References (summary) 20
1. JOSHUA

The name, spelt variously as שילון, שילה, שילה, שילה, שילה, may have been originally Shilon with the final nun dropping off, since a person who came from there (we will meet one) was called שילוני a *Shiloni*,\(^1\) but this is uncertain, the nun may have been simply an addition.\(^2\)

Let us start at the beginning. Apart from a cryptic remark by Jacob on his death bed (Gen. 49:10)

\[\text{בראשית טז: לאריך}" \text{שוב מישנה הזקנים מבית רגב לייזר ברנאו שילה ריע תקננ}^1\]

whose meaning many have guessed at unconvincingly,

the first mention is in Joshua (18:1)

\[\text{ויהושע יא: יתקהל לכל יהודה במדבריאל שילה וישראל כן איש אולם מנהר הזנים}"\(^2\)

where we are told that the people congregated at Shiloh and the Tabernacle was placed there, after an initial stay at Joshua’s temporary headquarters at Gilgal. From later texts (quoted below) it emerges that Joshua set up his new headquarters at Shiloh. No reason is either given or (from our knowledge of the locality) apparent as to why he chose that spot. It was a fair distance from Shechem, the natural centre of the country,\(^3\) and, unlike Shechem

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1. A person who comes from Liverpool is called a Liverpudliam – where does the ‘d’ come from?
2. Compare Num.26, verse 20 (שהל) and verse 23 (פועה) but contrast verse 44 (ינמה).
3. Jerusalem was not the natural centre but was chosen much later by David for strategic, and more important political, reasons.
or even Bethel, it lies some little way off the main north-south highway.

It was from there that Joshua sent out a party of surveyors to ‘write’ (not actual maps as we know them) the rest of the land for allocation to the remaining seven tribes; and at Shiloh, on their return, he made the allocation.

The details of the allocation made before God, in front of the Tabernacle at Shiloh are concluded by

Allocating towns for the Levites was then dealt with at Shiloh

and finally it was from Shiloh that Joshua released the men of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh to return to their homes in land allocated to them by Moses across the Jordan.

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and finally it was from Shiloh that Joshua released the men of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh to return to their homes in land allocated to them by Moses across the Jordan.
Shortly afterwards there was a rumour of a planned attempt at secession by these tribes, and the rest of Israel assembled at Shiloh to go to war against them

but first they investigated and found that the rumour was false, based on a misunderstanding, and the idea was dropped.

The Book of Joshua contains no further references to Shiloh. When he assembled all the people for his final speech Joshua chose Shechem, which had two great advantages: it was central and with easy access from across the Jordan; and the special acoustics there between Mounts Gerizim and Ebal made it easier to address a large number of people when loud speakers had not yet been invented.
2. THE CIVIL WAR

With four exceptions (in the Book of Judges) – three in one story and a fourth in another – there is no further mention of Shiloh until the time when Elkanah and his wife Hannah used to go there every year to worship and sacrifice to God, with Eli the High Priest in charge and his two not-exactly-righteous sons helping him. Hannah prayed there for a son, and was answered with the birth of Samuel, who later served there as an assistant to Eli. All this has led to the mistaken idea that Shiloh was the permanent home of the Tabernacle continuously for several hundred years from the time of Samuel until the time of Samuel.

But – we mentioned the exceptions. In the intermediate period there was at one point a Civil War where Shiloh comes in at the end, but before that something else is directly relevant. At one point all the people went to Bethel where the Holy Ark was, the High Priest being Phinehas son of Eleazar son of Aaron.

Note that it was not at Shiloh. If this Phinehas was Aaron’s grandson, this took place soon after the time of Joshua (and other evidence points to this), though he may have been a great-great grandson which dates it later, but still before the time of Eli. The uncertainty of the exact date need not concern us here. The Ark was at Bethel and it would hardly have been taken out of the Tabernacle leaving the latter at Shiloh, so we may assume that the Tabernacle was there at Bethel. Why it should have been moved
we do not know, nor can we guess, but it was certainly restored to Shiloh before the time of Eli. Nonetheless it was not at Shiloh continuously from Joshua to Samuel.

Support for the Tabernacle being at Bethel comes from a remark in the same story, in the events at most a few weeks earlier that led up to the Civil War. The Levite on his way home from Bethlehem to Mount Ephraim met an old man, a fellow-countryman from Mount Ephraim, in Gibeah, and told him he was ‘on the way to the House of God’ (Judges 19:18). Assuming he was telling the truth, this makes more sense if the House of God was in Bethel, which he would have to pass through as Mount Ephraim started just beyond it. Shiloh was a lot further north, off the beaten track, and far less likely.

Now let us take a look at what happened immediately after they went to Bethel. The army moved from Bethel and set up a camp at Shiloh, to which place four hundred girls were brought from Jabesh Gilead to provide wives for the survivors of Benjamin.

Why did they set up camp at Shiloh, of all places? Who knows? Perhaps to take the Tabernacle back there away from Bethel which belonged to the tribe of Benjamin? But it does not say so.

These four hundred girls were not enough, they needed six hundred, so where could they find another two hundred? (It was essential to find wives for them, otherwise they might revert to the behaviour that led to the war in the first place.)

While at Shiloh they learned something that gave them an idea. An annual festival ‘to God’ was about to take place.
As part of the festivities the girls would come out from Shiloh and dance. The Benjamites were told to hide in the nearby vineyards, and when the girls came out to dance to come out of the vineyards, seize them, and take them home as wives.

[No, the girls did NOT dance in the vineyards as some imagine from carelessly reading the text.

A few thousand years later at an annual festival in Jerusalem (not Shiloh) on the fifteenth of Av the girls all came out and danced in the vineyards (Mishnah Ta'anit 4:8), hoping to find husbands. Confusion between the two has led to a belief that the Shiloh festival was on the fifteenth of Av, but there is no evidence to support any connection. No reason is given for either festival or for the date.]

The men could only hide in the vineyards in the summer when the vines are fully grown and in full leaf. After that the leaves are gradually shed and the trees are pruned right down ready to grow again next year.

One may make a guess at the festival. Shiloh was probably at the centre of a large vine-growing area (it is again today, though to a far lesser extent) and the festival would have been to celebrate the end of the grape picking towards the end of the summer (and the later one at Jerusalem likewise), just as Shavuot,
earlier, celebrates the end of the wheat harvest.

Incidentally, if Shiloh could provide not less than two hundred unmarried girls, it must have had a fair-sized population! So why was the Tabernacle moved to Bethel?

The real problem with verse 19 ([12] above) is not the purpose of the festival, but something else.

They were told that there was to be ‘an annual festival to God in Shiloh which is to the north of Bethel east of the highway from Bethel to Shechem and to the south of Lebonah’.

Arab villages usually retain the biblical names (slightly modified), so it is reasonably assumed that the site of Lebonah is approximately that of the modern Arab village of Luban.

Three questions arise:

1. Why go into all this detail to give the location of Shiloh? The Tabernacle had been there, it was Joshua’s headquarters for a long time, and it would have been well-known. As we will see, this was before it was destroyed. No other place mentioned in the book has its location so described, and the exact location is not relevant to the story.

2. If the location must be given, why not give it at the first mention, the place where they set up their camp (verse 12)?

3. In any case it is wrong – Shiloh is east of Lebonah, not south!

The answer 4 is that the location does not refer to that of Shiloh but to that of the festivities, a local one belonging to Shiloh, in which surrounding villages would join, but the site chosen was south of Lebonah, at some distance from Shiloh town.

4. For this idea I am indebted to Dr. Yoel Elizur of Ofra, who has even suggested the probable site, alongside modern Eli.
The fourth mention of Shiloh in the Book of Judges is casual. At some uncertain time between that of Joshua and that of Samuel, the tribe of Dan stole Micah’s idol and took with it Jonathan the Levite ‘priest’, setting up both in the town they named Dan. Micah’s idol was there ‘all the time God’s House was at Shiloh’.

בִּית-הָאָלֹהִים בֵּית-לוֹת

Later, Jeroboam put a golden calf there instead, but Jonathan’s descendants still served there as priests ‘until the exile’ (verse 30).
3. ELI AND SAMUEL

Once a year Elkanah with his two wives went to Shiloh to worship God and offer a sacrifice.

One wife, Hannah, who was childless, prayed there for a son and her prayer was answered. When this son, Samuel, was old enough she brought him to Shiloh and left him to assist Eli at the Tabernacle.

Elkanah and Hannah lived in the area known as Mount Ephraim, and Shiloh was roughly in the centre of that area, so it could not be very far away, yet she visited her son only once a year. Perhaps she was afraid that if she saw him often she might be tempted to take him home, against her vow. The boy grew up.

Meanwhile the Ark had returned from Bethel to Shiloh

Samuel certainly did not sleep inside the Tabernacle. There are two possible explanations of the verse:
(i) The lamp had not yet gone out (while Samuel lay down to sleep) in the Sanctuary.
(ii) The word היכל refers to a building, a temple (which we will consider later) which enclosed the Tabernacle and its surrounding
area, and Samuel slept inside the temple but not in the Tabernacle.

Samuel began to become a navi (‘prophet’), receiving direct messages from God.

The significance of Samuel opening the doors of the House of God will be considered later.

Eli’s sons used to seriously misbehave towards those who came to Shiloh to offer sacrifices, and Eli was cursed for this.

In a later war against the Philistines the Israelites found themselves on the losing side. In response to popular request, Eli’s two sons then took the Ark to the battle scene.

Eli was probably against the idea, as he was worried. Both of his sons were killed (in fulfilment of part of the curse) and the Ark was captured by the Philistines.

On hearing the news Eli collapsed and died.
The Philistines found the Ark to be a ‘hot potato’ and after only seven months they returned it. However it was not returned to Shiloh – the Israelites had a job to find a place for it. And Shiloh is not mentioned again anywhere in the Bible (apart from referring to the home of someone, which we will come to) until several hundred years later by Jeremiah (supported in one of the Psalms), who refers to its destruction. That means that something happened to Shiloh during that seven months that the Philistines held the Ark, and the Sanctuary was never restored there. It is generally assumed that the Philistines came and destroyed it, but that is not mentioned and there is evidence against that.
4. AHIJAH

After the time of Eli the next references to Shiloh are to a period a few generations later on, in the time of Solomon.  

A navi (so-called ‘prophet’) named Ahijah lived there and is referred to as Ahijah the Shilonite. This distinguishes him from another Ahijah, Eli’s grandson and successor as High Priest who is mentioned casually in the story of Saul’s battle against the Philistines.

(The ‘priest in Shiloh’ was of course Eli, not Ahijah who wore the Ephod. Shiloh of the Tabernacle was no longer.)

Ahijah told Jeroboam that God had decided he should be king of Israel, only not over all of it. This happened, but Jeroboam abused his position and turned the population to idolatry. He placed two golden calves, one at Dan in the far north, already a ‘holy city’ to the Danites who had placed Micah’s idol there; the other at Bethel in the far south of his territory, which (by its name) had a ‘holy’ history and where in addition the Ark had once been; but he did not attempt to revive Shiloh (where Ahijah lived) in the middle.

When his son was critically ill Jeroboam sent his wife to disguise herself and go to Shiloh to consult Ahijah

5. Apart from the refernce to Saul’s battle, given below.
Although blind from age (probably from a cataract), Ahijah, forewarned by God, recognised her footsteps. He told her that the child would die as she re-entered her home town, that Jeroboam would be punished, and so it was. However, nothing in this story tells us anything about Shiloh except that Ahijah lived there, and therefore the actual town itself, as against the Sanctuary, was either not destroyed (see later) or was rebuilt.

Solomon had meanwhile removed a descendant of Eli from being High Priest, in conformity with the curse.
5. JEREMIAH

Jeremiah refers to the destruction of Shiloh by God in revenge for Israel’s misbehaviour, and threatens a repeat with Jerusalem.

Yet the Tabernacle and Altar that Bezalel made appear again long after Eli (though before Jeremiah), in the time of Solomon. They had somehow made their way, without the Ark, to Gibeon (2Chron 1:3-5). How could it be that they were not destroyed? And what was destroyed?

The first of the verses quoted above says ‘Go to my place in Shiloh and see what I did to it.’ There was a terrible mess there that could still be seen some five hundred years later in the time of Jeremiah, and there had been no attempt to rebuild.

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6. A suggestion that they were once at Nob has no biblical support. The showbread there was a mere reminder, not the real thing, or David could not have eaten it.
We refer back to the statement that Samuel ‘opened the doors of God’s House’. The Tabernacle did not have doors, and anyway as he was not a priest Samuel would not be allowed to approach the actual Tabernacle. The conclusion is that the Tabernacle was enclosed in some sort of building of wood or more likely stone, which may have surrounded the entire area. This explains Jeremiah, since if it was destroyed there must have been something to destroy, yet the Tabernacle and Altar (and perhaps more) survived till the time of Solomon.

It is generally assumed, though nothing is mentioned in the Bible, that the destruction was by the Philistines. If it was the Philistines who came and destroyed Shiloh, how did they leave the Tabernacle intact and how were these rescued? And why was nothing rebuilt? Far more likely the Philistines did not reach Shiloh, but the destruction was by an earthquake or something similar. (I have experienced an earthquake, admittedly a very mild one, in my house in nearby modern Eli, which adjoins Shiloh.) This could have destroyed the outer structure while all inside it was rescued and removed from the area.

Although not mentioned in our records, the destruction made a great impression on the people, who still remembered it at the time of Jeremiah, or he would not have mentioned it.

A final reference to Shiloh in Jeremiah

[33] ירמיהו נפשו: 'יבא אנפשו ובשכם ומשלחו ומשמריו ומנינו וראים וצלאים

‘Eighty men arrived from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria .....’ confirms that the town still existed in Jeremiah’s time, even after the destruction of Jerusalem, and his earlier remarks were about the Sanctuary.
Why was Shiloh destroyed? Eli’s sons misbehaved towards the people who brought sacrifices and even insulted the sacrifices themselves, bringing about a curse on Eli and his descendants, but if the priests misbehaved why should the people be punished? For a partial reply, we read that Eli’s sons also slept with the women who gathered around the Tabernacle, the corollary being that the women consented (or worse), which indicates the hypocrisy of the population in their religious practice.

They are still excavating at Shiloh, let us see what they will come up with.
occurrences of shiloh in the bible

[1] shiloh לֶחֶם קְנֻיָּה וְשֵׁם מִזְמֹרָה וְסִפְרוֹת מָכָן בְּגֵלֶד לֹא כָּרָב אֲנִי
[2] וַיְרַא יְהוָה בֶּן-שָׂרָאֵל שֵׁם בֵּית אָבִית יְשֵׁר אָבָּת יְשֵׁר אָבָּתוֹ
[3] מַעֲרַת הַנַּחֲלָהּ וַנְּכֻשָּׁה לְפִיצֵיהּ
[4] וַיְרַא יְהוָה בֶּן-שָׂרָאֵל שֵׁם רֹאֶהֶם וְרַמָּה לְפִיצֵיהּ לֹא רָמָה לְפִיצֵיהּ
[5] וַיְרַא יְהוָה בֶּן-שָׂרָאֵל שֵׁם הָיָה יְשֵׁר בֵּית וּלְפִיצֵיהּ לֹא לְפִיצֵיהּ
[6] וַיְרַא יְהוָה בֶּן-שָׂרָאֵל שֵׁם מַעֲרַת הַנַּחֲלָהּ לְפִיצֵיהּ וּלְפִיצֵיהּ לֹא לְפִיצֵיהּ
[7] וַיְרַא יְהוָה בֶּן-שָׂרָאֵל שֵׁם הָיָה יְשֵׁר בֵּית וּלְפִיצֵיהּ לֹא לְפִיצֵיהּ
[8] וַיְרַא יְהוָה בֶּן-שָׂרָאֵל שֵׁם מַעֲרַת הַנַּחֲלָהּ לְפִיצֵיהּ וּלְפִיצֵיהּ לֹא לְפִיצֵיהּ
[9] וַיְרַא יְהוָה בֶּן-שָׂרָאֵל שֵׁם מַעֲרַת הַנַּחֲלָהּ לְפִיצֵיהּ וּלְפִיצֵיהּ לֹא לְפִיצֵיהּ

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Shiloh in the Bible

[10] ֽ֚שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ ָשֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ Shiloh in the Bible


[12] שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ Shiloh in the Bible

[13] שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ שֶׁ֣מֶשׁ Shiloh in the Bible

[14] Shiloh in the Bible

[15] Shiloh in the Bible

[16] Shiloh in the Bible

[17] Shiloh in the Bible

[18] Shiloh in the Bible
Shiloh in the Bible

[19] Shemariah said to Shemaiah, 'The word of God is in your mouth. Pharaoh will eat the words of God.'

[20] Shemariah said, 'Any king who considers defeating Shiloh will have a difficult journey. Shiloh will not be defeated.'

[21] Then the king gathered all the people of Ephraim and led them to Shiloh, to attack Gilgal.

[22] Shemariah said, 'The king has gathered all the people and led them to Shiloh. The king will not defeat them. Gilgal will continue to triumph.'

[23] They could not defeat Shiloh. They said to the king, 'They are too strong. We cannot defeat them. We will turn to the king again.'

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[24] Shemariah said, 'The king will not defeat them. Shiloh will remain strong.'

[25] He said, 'The king will not defeat them. Shiloh will remain strong.'

[26] He said, 'The king will not defeat them. Shiloh will remain strong.'

[27] He said, 'The king will not defeat them. Shiloh will remain strong.'

[28] He said, 'The king will not defeat them. Shiloh will remain strong.'
Shiloh in the Bible

[28]irimot: תִּרְדוּ גְּלְפֵן אֶל-כּוֹדֵם. ולאוּ יָדְרוּ בְּשִׁיָּלָה, אֵשֶׁר שֵׁבֵנְתָּ שְׁמֶה.

[29]יחד השישית בָּיִת, אַשְּרָה נַכְּרָה-שְׁמִי עַלְיָה אֱשֶׂר אַתָּם בֵּיתָם. וְלָפַלְפַלְוָם אַשְרָה-בֵיתָם לָכֶם (וְלָמַעְטָכֶם). בָּאָשֶׁר עַשֵּׂרוּ עַשֵּׂרֵי לְשׁוֹלֶשֶׁ.


[31]irimot: מְהַלְּכָּה יָבִית בְּשֵׁמָּה לָאָמְרָה בְּכֶשֶׁלֶת וּרְחָא תַּחְתָּ הָאֵתֵי הָיוֹת.

[32]מחלים תעָמָה, יָפָּשֶׁנָה מַשּׁוֹכֶנָה שְׁלָה בַּאָלֶל שֵׁכִּנָה בָּהּ.

[33]irimot: בְּכַעַר אֲנָשָׁשׁ מַשָּלָה מַשָּלָה וּמְשֻׁפָּרָה שְׁמַעְתָּן אֵלֶּה מַגְלָדָה. וְזָהוּ הַכַּעַר לַבִּינָה וְמְהַיְּדוּרֵי וְמְהַיְּדוּרֵי מְנַחֵת וּלְבִּנָה לְהַבְּיָה בִּינָה.