

ARAD

Tel Arad is located about ten miles west of the Dead Sea and about thirty miles east of Beersheba. The ancient city was on a trade route in the Negev. Ostraca have been found with the name “Arad,” positively identifying the site (*BAR* [Mar/Apr 1987]: 22).

Actually, two ancient sites have been discovered in this area: a city stretching out over 25 acres which has been dated from 3200 to 2050 B.C. and the fortress on the nearby hill which has been dated from 1200 to 586 B.C. (*BAR* [Mar/Apr 1987]: 21). Arguing from the absence of information, many archaeologists contend that no settlement existed at Arad during the period of the conquest under Joshua (c. 1400 B.C.). Nevertheless, the Bible indicates that a city called Arad existed in the Negev at that time. The Israelites came into conflict with “the Canaanite king of Arad” near the end of their wandering in the wilderness (Num. 21:1; 33:40). Later, in the conquest, Joshua defeated the king of Arad (Josh. 12:14). After the conquest of Canaan, the Kenites (who were descendants of Moses’ father-in-law) settled near Arad in Judah’s tribal allotment (Judg. 1:16). In cases like this, believers must accept the infallible word of God as truth and hold the imperfect dating and conclusions of archaeologists in question.

A major Israelite fortress was built on Arad’s summit as an important southern defense. The chief enemies of Israel to the south were Edom and Egypt. The fortress was probably built at Arad by King Solomon in the tenth century B.C. It may have been destroyed by Pharaoh Shishak and later rebuilt.

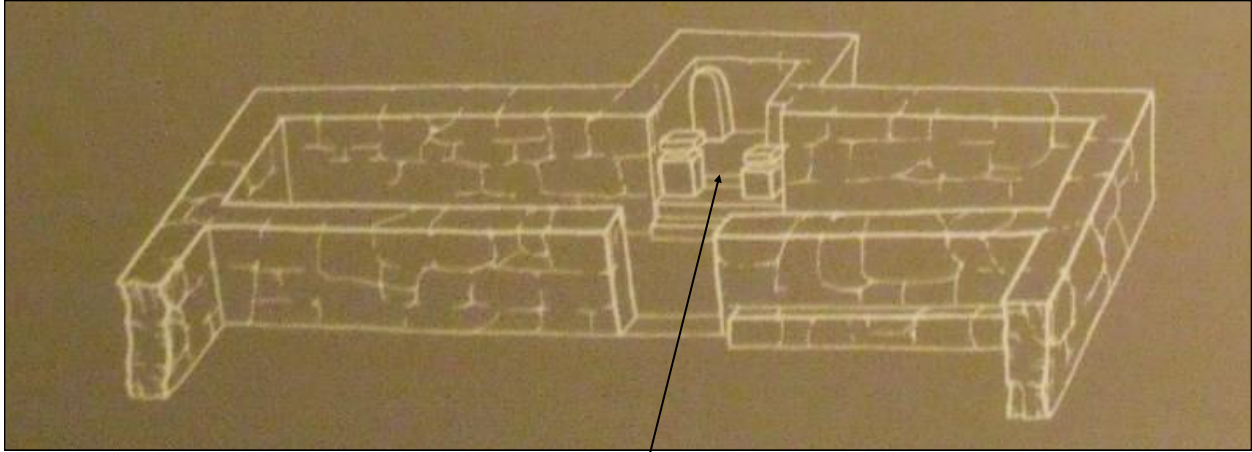
Although Jerusalem was the place where God had chosen to put his name and where Solomon had built the temple, the people still worshiped at unauthorized sanctuaries (Deut. 12:8-14; 2 Kings 23:8; 2 Chron. 30:6-8; 32:11-12; Is. 36:7). Archaeologists have discovered an Israelite temple at Arad that was used during the period of the Divided Kingdom. It had a holy place (whose width was greater than its length) and a small holy of holies, with a standing stone (*massebah*) and two incense altars. The main altar at the temple was square, measuring 5 cubits by 5 cubits (7.5 by 7.5 feet), which corresponds to the instructions for the altar of burnt offering in Exodus 27:1. The stone had not been worked with a tool, conforming to the legislation in Exodus 20:25. Two shallow bowls were found at the base of the altar, which were inscribed with the Hebrew letters *qoph* and *kaph*. These letters probably were an abbreviation for *qodesh kohanim*, which means “sacred to the priests.” They may have been used by the priests to receive their portion of the offering (*BAR* [Mar/Apr 1987]: 32-33).

Modern Arad is another five miles west of the ancient city. In 2019, it had a population of nearly 27,000, which included both Jews and Bedouins.



House Model from Arad
3000-2650 B.C.
(Israel Museum, Jerusalem)

“Arad’s houses were boxy, windowless, single-story structures with flat roofs and gutters for the collection of rainwater. They consisted of a main room used for sleeping, storage, and some food preparation, and a side room used for cooking. Livestock was kept in the courtyard. Other daily activities, such as spinning, weaving, and flint tool-making, were carried out there as well.” (Museum Description)



Holy of Holies in the Arad Sanctuary



Standing Stone (*Massebah*) and Incense Altars from the Holy of Holies
8th Century B.C.
(Israel Museum)



Jug from Arad with the Inscription
“[Belonging] to Zadoq”
7th-6th Century B.C.
(Israel Museum)

Arad Letter
6th Century B.C.
(Israel Museum)

This letter, which is ink on pottery, was written from Jerusalem to the fortress at Arad. It says: “To my lord, Eliashib, may the Lord seek your welfare, and now: Give to Shemaryahu a *lethekh*(?), and the Kerosi give a *homer*(?), and as to the matter which you commanded me—it is well; he is in the house of God.” “The house of God” is a reference to Solomon’s temple. The letter was written while the temple was still standing, prior to the Babylonian destruction in 586 B.C.

