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SERIES: Israel

TITLE: Program 1 – Dr. Bahat Interview, Part 1

MONDAY

OPEN

One of the most wonderful words in the Word of God is the word “redeemer.” And you go all the way back to the book of Leviticus, to the book of Numbers, to the book of Deuteronomy and what do you find? You find the picture of a redeemer that says, [“This land is My land and it shall not be sold permanently.”] (PARAPHRASE Deuteronomy 1:8) Today, we’re going to talk to a man who has excavated God’s land, an archaeologist of renown. And you and I are going to learn a lot about God’s land, the land that God has given to Israel, the land that God will redeem.

PART ONE

Kay: You know one of the things that you discover when you study kinsman redeemer is you discover that that kinsman was the closest of relatives. And God sets Himself up as the Redeemer of Israel. He understands our hearts. He understands where we are. And you know, one of the great delights is that He gives us such unexpected privileges. And today we have an unexpected privilege. I have a friend of mine, Dan Bahat, who has come to

Chattanooga, Tennessee just to visit us. Now let me just tell you this. That Dan has his Ph.D. in Medieval History. The emphasis, the period of time that you're involved in the most in your archaeological digs is what period of time?

Dan: Oh, it's very difficult to say, because the sight I'm digging has got everything. But I was very much interested. That's why I wrote my Ph.D. in Medieval History, although I'm an archaeologist of a different period, because of the interest of Jerusalem. The city which you see today is actually a city which is planned as the Romans built it by Emperor Hadrian in the second century A.D. But the actual city, the functions, the divisions of the quarters and things of the like is essentially the Crusaders city. So I decided to study the Crusader period, and so I got into medieval. It came because I discovered a workshop of a furniture producer. I went into that shop and to my greatest surprise I found out that it was a Crusader church in tact. It had all the decorations. And no one knew about it before. It was not mentioned. And I understand why. Because it was in the heart of the Moslem quarter and no one until 1967, no stranger or not Moslem dared to go to that quarter, not even under the British. And therefore I realized a great part of Jerusalem was never explored. And hence, the reason for me to study that period and to dig, was Jerusalem, as it was at that time.

Kay: All right, now presently you're doing an archaeological dig in the western tunnel. Right?

Dan: Yes.

Kay: And tell me what you've discovered in this dig.

Dan: A lot. First of all I want to say that the whole purpose of the tunnel, which we do along the Western Wall, which is external retaining wall of the Temple Mount.

Kay: Let me just stop now and say, the Western Wall is the wall that you see on television where you see the men on one side and the women on the other side. And you look up that wall, if you're high enough, you'll get a glimpse of that golden dome that marks the Temple Mount area.

Dan: Yes, the section which you are talking about, the plaza where people are praying, occupies one ninth of the entire length of the Western Wall, which is over 1500 feet. So first of all, one of the reasons why we started to dig there is to understand why did the Western Wall become the most sanctified part of the Jewish people of today. Because actually the Temple Mount has got four walls: the south and eastern, northern and why the Western Wall? And when we excavated that, first we discovered all of this some years ago. The gate which led into the Temple itself, which is the closest point from the outside to which a Jewish person can approach the holiness, the Golden Dome which you have mentioned, is precisely the sight of the Holy of Holies of the Temple. So for the Jewish people to stand as close as possible to it, since they are denied access into the Temple Mount itself, is the dearest thing they could think of. After the Crusader period, when Jews came back to Jerusalem, because during the Crusader period there were no Jewish people living in Jerusalem, they wanted to go back to that place, but the Crusaders blocked the passage. They turned it into a cistern as it is to this very day. So the Jews looked for the closest possible place to be as close as possible to the Holy of Holies. And the Western Wall section today is actually the closest one where the wall is exposed and they are able to pray. The present shape of the Western Wall, as you see today, is from the 16th century, following an earthquake which destroyed many buildings which were abutting that section. And this is also a new discovery, because no one really knew when does the Western Wall praying plaza get its present shape. It is only after 1546 when this earthquake destroyed those buildings which I have just mentioned.

Kay: So let me just ask you a question.

Dan: Yes.

Kay: The earthquake, in a sense, was a blessing?

Dan: For the Jewish people, definitely.

Kay: For the Jewish people.

Dan: Definitely yes.

Kay: And see so many times, I think when we hit a tragedy we look at that tragedy and we see it as a tragedy but we don't see the ramifications, the after shock of what it's going to bring. So it really was a blessing to Israel.

Dan: I will tell you more than that. I think that one of the most exciting things are, to learn the history of the Jewish people, how they were attached to Jerusalem through the centuries and what sacrifices they made in order to be attached to it. Because there were periods when they were denied entrance to the city. The best example is actually St. Jerome. He learned Hebrew from a Jewish person who used to come to him. But since there was prohibition of the Jews to come to Jerusalem, it was also prohibition to come to any place from which Jerusalem was visible. Since, from Bethlehem, you can see Jerusalem, he was not allowed to come there. So imagine this Jewish person used to come every evening after sunset and run away from Bethlehem before sunrise. And one of the reasons he did it, not only so much to teach St. Jerome to become later one of the most important fathers of the church, but also he did it because he was the first one to translate the Bible into Latin. This is the Vulgatae, which to this very day is the most authorized translation of the Bible into Latin. And when you read the Bible in English which you read today, when King James translated it in 1611, it was very much based still on St. Jerome's description.

Kay: And St. Jerome goes back to what year?

Dan: He was about the end of the fourth, beginning of the fifth century, which is really the inception of Christianity as a recognized religion in the Roman world.

Kay: Now when I go to Bethlehem, which I don't do anymore, but when I go to Bethlehem, and I go to where the Church of the Nativity is then you can go over to the other side and go down these stairs and they say that those are the caves where St. Jerome translated the Word of God.

Dan: Precisely, that's the story. Yes, that's the story. I will tell you, not so much story, as probably a fact. Because the tradition about it is very very old. I want to mention one very important thing and I'll go further. This is

the very same cave which is believed to be the cave where the innocents, you know, the children were slaughtered.

Kay: Yes, when Jesus was born.

Dan: Now why... when Jesus was born, this is the whole thing. And the point is that Bethlehem's church is the oldest church still standing as it was. And the reason is very simple. In the 7th century, the Persians conquered the country. It's a famous conquest in 614. All the churches of the country were destroyed including the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, as you call it. And this one was stripped off of all its decoration. When the Persians got to the church of Bethlehem, Emperor Justinian made a beautiful mosaic on the gable of the church which showed the child, Jesus, sitting on His mother, and the three kings of the east approaching them. The Persians said, "Oh these are our kings." So they did not touch the church.

Kay: Isn't that exciting.

Dan: And hence the church is the only one which is authenticised because it is really the one which stands from the beginning of Christianity. Therefore, the traditions which are connected to the covens, the caves under the church, must be connected also to the historic construction of the church. And the first one was built in the 4th century and it was later adjusted, let's say, to modern in those terms, by Emperor Justinian in the 6th century. But all together the sight is already known from the very beginning of Christianity.

Kay: Isn't that incredible. Can you imagine my friend going to these places? You know when you go into the church in Bethlehem, you have to bow very very low to get in. And that was to keep the Crusaders, right... Or is that a tradition?

Dan: No, no, no. It was made on purpose so that Muslim invaders will not be able to go

with force into the church.

Kay: Right. They couldn't ride on their horses into the church like that. So they made the opening very small. But when you go through that, and you bow your head, you cannot help but think about Matthew, chapter 7, where

Jesus said, [“That narrow is the way and small is the gate and few are those who enter in into eternal life.”] (PARAPHRASE Matthew 7:14) So as you go and you bow and you bring yourself low and you’re going to the place where they really believe that Jesus was born... We know it was in Bethlehem. The exact sight really isn’t important except that when you begin to study history and you go back to the time... It was Queen Helena, Constantines’ mother that marked some of these spots from tradition. Right.

Dan: That’s true. Because you can ask today, how did Constantine know where to build the churches which he did? He was the first one to build the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the first Church of the Ascension, the first Church of Mt. of Olives, the first Church of the Nativity and many others. People are wondering, how did he know. It was his mother who already indicated the sights. And one of the things which is so interesting, first of all, that is Christianity, the mother of emperor already played such an important role. And the second thing which I want to say, and this is very exciting. As you have said, it is not important precisely where it is, because many of the sights, archaeologically speaking, we may doubt today. Many sights, like the Via Dolorosa and others. And the thing is, the important thing is that it is in our heart and we understand actually what we are doing. Nevertheless, the only one to authenticise, to give authenticity of the holy places is archaeology. And people ask me, “What is archaeology doing to religion?” I say, “Archeology is illustrating.” When you want to know, for example. When you hear the story of David slaying Goliath, you’ve got a few questions to ask yourself. Where was it? And by the fact that you know from the Bible that it was between the two cities of Socoh and Azekah. Archaeologists proved where is Socoh and Azekah. So archeology played a role where you can know exactly where you are. And it is not by mere chance that exactly on the same site there is a little inlet which has got a lot of pebbles there. And if you remember, David killed Goliath by a pebble. And the other thing which archaeology can tell you, which is very interesting, there is a full description of the weapons which Goliath held. When you study it it is very typical when you read about units, let’s say in contemporary Egyptian army, you know that this was the equipment which

was, this was the gear which every soldier wore. Because of archaeology, which has found things, I can tell you what was the shape of the sword, what was the shape of the lance and all those kind of things. I know only from archaeology. So if you take a book, let's say, illustration to children, and you show David and Goliath, you are able to make the drawings of all the arms or the slingshot of King David, because they know what the pebbles are really like. So I don't have anything to imagination.

Kay: It's incredible and I want you to know that once you go to Israel, you will never open this Book the same way. We're going to continue our wonderful conversation in just a minute.

PART TWO

Kay: You know we're living in a post modern era. And what that means is that when you open a book now days in school, you don't look at the author, you don't look at the author's purpose, you say, "How do you feel about this book? What does this book mean to you?" And you know what, that's the wrong way to approach it? Because the author has a purpose when he writes the book. And when you and I get into the Word of God, we discover that these were real people in real times, in real places. And once you go back to the land of the Book, and I've gone many other places and traveled many other places, but I tell you honestly, there's no place like Israel. I'd rather go to Israel than any other place in the world. You say, "Aren't you afraid?" I want to tell you something. Every time we go over there and we take a tour, which we do every year, the people say to me, "This isn't what I expected. This isn't what's on the news." And I said, "No, it's not. You're not getting a true picture." And I want you know this, that once you go, you get even a truer picture of the Word of God. And Dan, of all the excavations that you have ever done, what's been your most exciting or most rewarding excavation?

Dan: It's very difficult to say because my love is Jerusalem. But of course, Jerusalem has more preference than anything else. But there was another excavation which I think was very important for me and that was Masada.

I've been the field director of Masada and those of our audience who have been to Masada may recall the northern palace, the store rooms and the bath house. This was the part I was in charge of.

Kay: Wow!

Dan: And there I had really the discovery of my life, I think. When we discovered one day that in one little room there were inscribed pottery pieces. Amongst other things it was probably the gate into the storeroom. Because during the siege on Masada, which everyone knows the history of it. Probably they had the ration on food, so everyone who went in had to pay with a certain token in order to get a certain amount of food or certain type of food or whatever. But in the corner in that very room I discovered eleven pottery shards which were inscribed by private names or I'll say, names which are popular like, first of all was Ben Ya'ir the commander of Masada. Then were, one was name was Jaove. Another one was the man from the valley. Another one was a fat man. Another one was the son of the baker. And if you remember, Josephus Flavius tells us that when the Jews decided to commit suicide and not to fall into slavery in the hands of the Romans, what did they do? Every man killed his own family and then they made a kind of a lottery where ten men were chosen to kill the rest and then one of them probably the commander of Masada, Ben Ya'ir to kill the other ten and commit suicide himself. So we believe that the eleven pottery shells which included also the name of Ben Ya'ir the commander, that this was the lethal lottery which we are talking about. In any case, if this is really true, it is so exciting to see how things which you read about become reality and tangible when you touch it. You can touch it.

Kay: Yes, yes, that's right. When I think about, what would it have been like to have to put your own family to death. Because, you know, of all the people on the face of this earth, I have never met a people, a nation, that respects life more than Israel. I think of how it pains you to see somebody die and I think, you know, Israel would never strap bombs on their people and send them in to do what is happening over there. And when I think about those men having to kill their own families and then I think about the soldiers that go up on top of Masada and tell them what they swear.

Dan: Well they swear that there will never be again another Masada. But I want to say, the point is in order to continue your way of thinking, Josephus Flavius gives us excuse why did they do it. Because they swore never to be a slave to anybody but to God Himself. And when suddenly they had to change their masters, they say it's preferable to be dead rather than change the master which is the Lord. And not to be into the Roman hands. The story's very interesting again because people think that our connection to the country was always a very distant one. That it was kind of a dream of prayers and things of the like, but never something real. People don't understand the contract between us and the land. I tell you more than that. The interesting thing is to tell what the Jews did, as I said before, for Jerusalem, to have a presence in Jerusalem, is amazing. In order to understand those kinds of things you have got to come here. And St. Jerome said that coming to the Holy Land makes the fifth gospel. Because then you can really understand. When you read the Bible and you read about somebody being thirsty, when read probably the Bible, like let's say in Psalm 42, which is in my opinion is the most beautiful of all the Psalms, when he says, that the person is [refreshing his soul like the river of Jordan, the sources of the Jordan coming out,] (PARAPHRASE Psalm 42:6-7) you know, very cold from the snows of Lebanon, on a hot summer day. What can be the more to understand the vitality of the country or the ones inside? The other way, what is so characteristic to the country? And I always try to compare it, people probably don't know that the Crusaders, for example, were defeated by the Moslems because the last decisive battle, the famous battle of Hattin, in the fourth of July was because it was a hotscene day. Hotscene, if people don't know, this is the hot wind of summer. And you have to realize the Crusaders are with all the metal shields and everything, they burned the fields which were already thorns, because in July already, the grain becomes yellow. And down below you could see a little spot of blue. This was the Lake of Galilee. And what the Crusaders wanted really to go to drink the water and they didn't manage. And this was the defeat. Who can describe it more than to go and to stand there? And then you read a book and you understand the whole history. We've got a sequence of such information about the land itself. I think of Jonah sitting by a tree. A minute

the tree is fresh, the minute after it will be dead. It happens when the spring is over. The hot winds of the summer is already coming, so it will dry in one day. You have to live it in order to understand that when the Bible speaks about things. It knows what it says. And the prophets were definitely people who lived in this country really knew all the phenomena I am talking about.

Kay: You know I am so thrilled that I've been to Israel because I know the topography of the land and you've written a book and we only have just a minute, but just tell me the name of that book so that people can look for it.

Dan: I've done some, for example, the most popular book of mine is the Atlas of Jerusalem, which describes Jerusalem through the periods. But for the two thousand second millennium of Jesus I wrote a popular book, very much lavish with pictures and drawings showing the country. It is called "Two Thousand Years of History". Some years before when Jerusalem celebrated 3000 years of being the capital of Israel, since King David, I wrote a book of Jerusalem's "3000 Years of History". I do it because in order I want people to make them love Israel, to understand the connection between the land and the people. And to understand it's a spiritual country. When you come to Israel you are not a tourist, you are a pilgrim.

Kay: That's right.

Dan: And that's what makes the difference.

Kay: And listen to me very carefully. You cannot separate the land from the people. Because this is the land that God promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as an everlasting possession. God says, "The earth is [Mine,] and the fullness thereof..." (Psalm 24:1 KJV) and He gives it to whomever He pleases. This is the land that He's given to Israel. This is the land of King David. This the land of all the patriarchs. This is the land that you need to visit. This is the land... You need to get Dan's book and you need to read it, so that you're connected to the land. Because when you're connected to the land, you're connected to God and His people.