What does the Bible tell us about Megaliths?

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There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,

Kohelet (3:1-5)

Abstract

Megalithic remnants have been the subject of numerous studies and constitute one of the most controversial subjects in archaeology. The problem of their function is still a point of disagreement among scholars. Archaeologists are usually very careful or critical about any interpretations concerning their religious, social or ritual meanings. The same scientific caution has generally led to ignoring of practices and beliefs found in modern folklore, let alone the biblical text. This is unfortunate, because the Bible is one of the very rare written sources informing us directly about prehistoric or proto-historical periods. Biblical references to the constructions and functions of megalithic monuments are numerous, and if authors have sometimes mentioned them, this has been merely as a simple list of verses without further comment or analysis. But in many places the Bible mentions the construction of megalithic monuments and gives precious information regarding their functions. Why not take them into consideration? The semantic contexts may also lead to further interpretations. I do not need to confess that the presentation only proposes a first approach to the problem, and quotations of the text will most unfortunately have to be reduced drastically.

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Słowa kluczowe: Biblia, megality, Gilgal, Pascha, Chanuka
1. Single raised stones or menhirs

1.1. The betyle of Jacob

Certainly the most famous raised stone in the Bible is the betyle of Jacob:

When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, and He said: “I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you”. When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, „Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven”. Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz (Genesis 28:11–19).

The stone is isolated and marks a place of incubation, of a prophetic vision, inhabited by the spirit of God. Bet El means the house of God¹, it is a spot of contact between earth and heaven, a direct opening to the sky. It is a rough stone, natural, left as it was found laying in nature. The only human intervention consists of erecting it vertically. As a step or passage between earth and heaven, the stone also recalls the ladders of seven or nine steps known to represent the link with the upper world in various primitive religions. In European religious folklore as well as in several other traditions numerous are the megaliths said to have kept the mark of the foot of a god, saint or prophet, his last print on earth before leaving for the other world². The first ritual of sanctification is an unction of oil, which is probably related to the previous name of the place, “Luz”. Luz means almond or almond tree, both words related to light, because the almond oil was considered the best for oil lamps and the menorah is believed to represent an almond tree. This association leads to another one, because the menorah has seven branches as the seven days of the week, or nine branches as the eight days of Hanukah plus the central guardian light. In the Bible the stars are called lamps or luminaries, and so the seven and nine lamps of the candelabrum are representative of the seven planets or seven planets plus the two pseudo-planetary nodes of the moon’s orbit³. We see that this Luz – almond tree – candelabrum is directly connected to the problem of calendars, counting time and the starry heavens.

If we look for other meanings of the word “Luz” or related words, we find:

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¹ A reference to Betlehem, in Galilee.