Prophecy, History
and Archaeology

The Sinai Peninsula

7. Mammals

David Green

HAVING CONSIDERED in the previous two articles some of the characteristic birds of Sinai, we now consider some of the mammals that frequent this area.

The rock hyrax

Hyraxes, also called rock badgers, are small, thickset, greyish-brown, rabbit-like mammals, with the largest being no more than eighteen inches long. These timid and inoffensive creatures live in colonies of up to sixty individuals and usually make their home in holes and crevices in the rocks. They are active mainly by day, when they feed on grass mostly, but also on herbs and shrubs. The Syrian rock hyrax has an extensive range, from Syria to Sinai and southern Arabia.

The AV and some other versions translate the Hebrew word shaphan, which means ‘the hider’, as ‘coney’, but it is clear that the rock hyrax is intended: “the conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks” (Prov. 30:26); “The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats; and the rocks for the conies” (Ps. 104:18). Having many enemies, they exhibit great wariness, and when alerted by their sentry’s danger cry they quickly scamper for the protection of their holes and rock crevices. Their feet have flattened nails resembling hooves and are designed for sure-footed movement as they scamper about the rocks and cliffs, where they are able to run and jump with great skill. The second digit on the hind feet has a claw that is used for grooming.

Under the Law of Moses the rock hyrax was counted as unclean because it did not divide the hoof, although it was said to chew the cud (Lev. 11:5; Deut. 14:7). In fact it is not a true ruminant, having no second stomach. However, it does continually work its teeth, giving an appearance of chewing the cud or re-chewing its food.

The wild ass

The frequent mention of wild asses in the Old Testament shows that they were well known in the vicinity of the Holy Land in Bible times. Wild asses live in desert or semi-desert areas, but there is no clear indication as to whether or

1. ‘Coney’ or ‘cony’ is an old English word for rabbit. Although rabbit-like in appearance, the hyrax is not considered to be related to rabbits.
not they were formerly found in the deserts of Sinai. Apparently African wild asses have been on the decline for centuries, one variety becoming extinct in Roman times and another surviving only in Ethiopia and Somalia. It is from the African wild ass that the domesticated ass, the donkey, is derived.

The variety that was originally found in the Holy Land, the Syrian wild ass, a subspecies of the Asian wild ass, became extinct in 1927 with the death of the last individual held in captivity. In 1968, however, twelve wild asses of the two closest available subspecies, six from zoos and six from the wild in Iran, were released into a twelve-square-kilometre enclosure in the Hai Bar nature reserve at Yotvata. Their descendants now roam free in the Negev desert.

The wild ass has different body proportions, ear length and coloration from the domesticated ass. It is an animal adapted for running, having long legs and strong hooves, and it runs with ease over the most difficult terrain. In fact it is so swift that the best horse and rider cannot keep up with it.

There is a considerable number of Scripture references to the wild ass. The Hebrew name pere has the meaning of ‘running free’. These passages speak of it being a wild and untameable creature, extremely shy, wary and very fleet of foot; for example: “Who hath sent out the wild ass free? or who hath loosed the bands of the wild ass? whose house I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwellings. He scorneth the multitude of the city, neither regardeth he the crying of the driver. The range of the mountains is his pasture, and he searcheth after every green thing” (Job 39:5-8). It was foretold of Ishmael by the angel that spoke to Hagar that he would grow up to be “a wild ass of a man” (Gen. 16:12, RSV).

The wild goat
The name ‘ibex’ is applied to most varieties of wild goats. The range of the species found in the Holy Land, the Nubian ibex, is indicated on the map in Purnell’s Illustrated Encyclopedia of Animal Life as covering Sinai and Palestine as well as other Middle Eastern areas. The most likely place for it to be seen in the Holy Land is on the west side of the Dead Sea, in the area of En-gedi, which means ‘the spring of the kid’. Apparently in former times it was quite common in Sinai.
Most varieties of ibex have quite long scimitar-shaped horns, are very wary and inhabit desolate hilly or mountainous areas, where they are adept at leaping up rocky mountain sides with sure-footed agility. This ability is the basis for its Hebrew name *ya’el*, meaning ‘the climber’.

In 1 Samuel there is mention of “the rocks of the wild goats” in the wilderness of En-gedi where David hid (24:1,2), and Psalm 104 speaks of the “high hills” that are “a refuge for the wild goats” (v. 18). God poses the question to Job, “Knowest thou the time when the wild goats of the rock bring forth? . . . Canst thou number the months that they fulfil?” (39:1,2). In fact, the Nubian ibex has a gestation period of 150-160 days, and the young are born from February to April, but this information would not have been known in Job’s day owing to the creature’s extreme wariness and wildness.

In Psalm 50 God says: “every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills” (v. 10). A careful consideration of the context leads us to the conclusion that the creatures referred to in verse 10 are wild, as opposed to the domesticated animals in verse 9. That being so, we have here a reference to the ibex, gazelles and other ‘clean’ beasts that lived wild in the hilly regions of Sinai and Palestine.

**The jackal**

In the past the golden or Indian jackal has been a very common creature throughout the Holy Land and the surrounding areas, such as Sinai. It is strange, therefore, that it finds no mention in the AV. However, a number of words in the Hebrew Scriptures may refer to this creature: *Iyim*. This word means ‘howlers’ and is translated ‘wild beasts’ in the AV, for example in Isaiah 13:22; 34:14 and Jeremiah 50:39, each time in the phrase “wild beasts of the islands”.

*Tannim*. This word is usually translated ‘dragons’ in the AV, and has the meaning ‘long extended things’. This name can be applied to jackals because of their long extended wailing howls. The context is used to decide the suitability of the translation, as is the case in the following passages, where they are said to

- live in the wilderness (Mal. 1:3)
- be associated with ostriches (Job 30:29)
- make a wailing (Mic. 1:8)
frequent the ruins of abandoned buildings (Jer. 10:22).

Shu'āl. This word means ‘burrower’ and is translated ‘fox’ in the AV but is used for both the fox and the jackal. Several of the modern names for the jackal in the Middle East and Asia resemble this Hebrew word, for example shacal in Syria.

The jackal belongs to the dog family and is about as large as a middle-sized dog, the head and body being twenty-two to twenty-nine inches long and the tail nine to fourteen inches. It resembles the fox in its hinder parts, especially the tail, and the wolf in its fore parts, especially the nose. Its colour ranges from dirty yellow to reddish brown with black and brown hairs and a black-tipped reddish-brown tail. It is said to have the savage fierceness of the wolf, to which is added the impudent familiarity of a dog.

In the past, when jackals were very common creatures in the Holy Land, their wailing cry or howling during the night, especially when in packs, greatly impressed travellers. Tristram describes the occasions when “their sudden howl would break the dead stillness of the night” and then be “caught up from pack to pack . . . till the air seemed filled as if with the wailing of a thousand infants”. One of the names used by Arabs for jackals has the meaning ‘sons of howling’, and, as mentioned above, the Hebrew name ‘iqîm can be translated ‘howlers’.

Several Scripture passages refer to this characteristic. Speaking of Babylon, Isaiah says: “Hyenas will howl in her strongholds, jackals in her luxurious palaces” (13:22, NIV); and again, the prophet Micah: “Therefore I will wail and howl . . . I will make a wailing like the jackals and a mourning like the ostriches” (1:8, NKJV).

Jackals sometimes work together in packs of up to fifty, but more often singly or in pairs, when they will defend a territory as much as two miles across. They are both scavengers and hunters, usually foraging for food at night. They feed on refuse, carrion and the remains of prey left by other carnivores, as well as insects, rats, hares and ground-nesting birds. They will even hunt gazelles, particularly the young, tiring them with a persistent chase before bringing them down.

Their carnivorous diet is alluded to in Psalm 63:9,10: “But those who seek my life, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth. They shall fall by the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals” (NKJV). In scavenging around human settlements they have been known to dig up graves and devour the corpses. The same fate would await those killed by the sword and left unburied, since vultures will always give way to jackals in the daytime, and jackals but not vultures will scavenge at night.

As well as feeding on animal flesh, they like to include roots and fruit in their diet. There may be a reference to this in the Song of Solomon: “Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes” (2:15, NKJV). Foxes as well as jackals have a weakness for grapes, so they are both probably intended in this passage. The time of year referred to in this song is springtime, when “the blossoming vines spread their fragrance” (v. 13, NIV). Consequently some versions, such as the NIV and RSV, also refer to grape blossom in verse 15 instead of “tender grapes”. Would the jackals and foxes be trapped at blossom time, fruit time or both?

The prophet Ezekiel likens the false prophets that seduced and destroyed God’s people by their lies to these cunning and destructive creatures: “Your prophets, O Israel, are like jackals among ruins [AV, deserts]” (Ezek. 13:4, NIV). Rather than aiding the safety of Israel by building up a spiritual wall of defence (v. 5), the false prophets bring down any remaining walls just as the jackals do by burrowing into the ruins when making their dens (see also Lamentations 5:18 and Nehemiah 4:3).

Because of Ezekiel’s comparison mentioned above, it has been suggested that from an allegorical point of view the little foxes or jackals spoken of in Song 2:15 are to be understood as referring to false teachers who cause members of the body of Christ to lose their spiritual fruitfulness. An alternative view is that they signify

2. This is in fact the origin of our word ‘jackal’.

4. It still does! I recall checking in for the night at a kibbutz hotel situated high on Mount Carmel, going for a walk as dusk was gathering and hearing the howls of jackals breaking out in the valley below. During the night we were disturbed by their howling close to where we were sleeping; evidently they were prowling round the kibbutz during the night. Jackals still seem to be quite common in the land; I have seen them several times in broad daylight.—T.B.

the little sins and failings in our lives that need to be eradicated if we are to glorify our heavenly Father by bearing much fruit (Jno. 15:8). A further interpretation is based on a figurative understanding of Lamentations 5:18, equating the foxes and jackals walking about on desolate Zion with the scavenging nations that took advantage of the Babylonian invasion to further their own interests (Lam. 2:16; Ps. 137:7; Obad. vv. 12-14; Ezek. 25:3,6,8,12,15). In this view the little foxes are those antagonistic nations who will be driven out of the land of Israel, God’s vineyard, in the springtime of the new age.

The common jackal is also most likely to have been the creature used by Samson in his stratagem for destroying the Philistines’ crops (Judg. 15:4,5). In the past the fox has been relatively rare in that area, but “jackals are concealed by hundreds in the gardens, and among ruins and tombs”.4 The brands would be attached some distance from the tails, and the jackals would not be fastened too tightly together, so that they could run together as accustomed and so constitute a very effective incendiary device.

4. Volney, quoted by Carpenter, p. 305, Scripture Natural History, 1836, SPRK.

The Holocaust

When the world passed by on the other side

Dennis M. Elliott

With the passing of time the veil has been lifted from what was previously classified as secret information in national archives, and it has been made accessible in the public domain. National and international leaders have as a consequence been put under the microscope, having their lives and actions analysed and exposed in the cold light of historical perspectives.

Roosevelt and the Jews

Franklin D. Roosevelt, four times President of the United States during the crucial years 1933-1945, has been scrutinised in this way and is adjudged to have been one of America’s great presidents. He is remembered principally for his effective social programmes and his New Deal policy, which put Americans back to work after the disastrous depression, moving the country forward towards economic recovery. He liked to use the expression, “The only thing to fear is fear itself”, as he endeavoured to rally the nation to a new sense of patriotism and belief in its destiny for greatness and prosperity.

But historians, in scrutinising the highs and lows of his political career, agree that he failed to support the cause of the Jews in Nazi-dominated Europe during their terrible ordeal in World War 2 when they lived in continual fear of their lives. At this time the prophetic Word of God, conveyed to the Israelites through His servant Moses and warning of the misfortunes that would overtake them if they were disobedient to His laws, came to pass with stark reality: “and thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life” (Deut. 28:66).

Roosevelt’s prevarication and indecision at this critical time was highly detrimental to attempts to extricate Jews from Nazi-occupied Europe, whereas Swedish diplomat and humanitarian Raoul Wallenberg and others were moved to action by the gravity of the situation, and succeeded in rescuing many Jewish people from German-controlled Budapest and other places. When war broke out, Zionist youth initiated rescue missions in German-occupied Europe, but in America the exercise lost its momentum. Jewish leaders in the US were not, as a group, inclined to radical reaction, and were under the impression that the administration of President Roosevelt was as disturbed as they were about the plight of European Jewry.

Fatal delay

The concern expressed above is shown in the autobiography of New York Jewish leader Rabbi Stephen Wise, and also in the diaries of the US Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau. On 28 August 1942 Wise received information...