

Bible and the Headlines: Lost City

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Nov 5, 2024

Last year's release of "Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny" was supposed to be the final installment of the Indiana Jones franchise. No longer would the intrepid archeologist discover objects lost to history. Headlines this week suggest Indiana Jones' retirement may be premature.

On October 29th, the journal *Antiquity* (published online by Cambridge University Press) featured, "Running Out of Empty Space: Environmental Lidar and the Crowded Ancient Landscape Of Campeche, Mexico." This research paper revealed the existence of a previously unknown metropolis of the pre-Columbian Maya empire. The archeologists made their discovery using LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging- a vegetation penetrating radar) maps of Mexico's geography which had been discarded by their creator, a Mexican environmental research organization. Talk about recycling.

Thankfully, *Archeology Magazine* on October 30th, synthesized the pertinent parts of the Cambridge Press paper and gave it a more attractive name, "Ruins of Densely Populated Maya City Discovered in Mexico." The article reveals, "The ruins of a Maya city have been discovered under jungle canopy in southeastern Mexico, just a 15-minute hike from a major road." Suggesting the cause of the urban center's demise a millennia ago, an author of the research paper said, "The landscape was just completely full of people at the onset of drought conditions and it didn't have a lot of flexibility left." The drought hypothesis for the city's depopulation is in contrast to lagoons, underground reservoirs, and wells included in the survey.

And from the city that gave us Indiana Jones' original lost ark, the *Jerusalem Post* on October 30th featured, "Archaeologists Discover Hidden Maya City 'Valeriana' with Grand Pyramids in Mexico." Describing the metropolis in its heyday, the article says it contained, ". . . more than 6,600 previously unknown structures linked to the Maya civilization in southeast Mexico, including a hidden city named "Valeriana" with impressive pyramids." These occluded edifices lay undiscovered next to the only highway through Campeche. One of the research paper's authors noted, "[Local] people have been actively farming among the ruins for years."

This Mayan story is reminiscent of the 1812 rediscovery of Petra in Jordan. Petra was among the crowning glories of the Edomites, a people who were cousins to the Israelites, being the descendants of two brothers, Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:23). However, these nephews were fighting cousins, not kissing cousins. For their enmity to Israel, the Edomites were cursed by God who said, "Esau, you did harmful things to your brothers, the people of Jacob. So, you will be covered with shame. You will be destroyed forever" (Oba 1:10). The disappearance of Edom's cities was prophesized by Isaiah who said, "Edom's nobles won't have anything left in their land that can be called a kingdom. . . Thorns will cover its forts. Bushes and weeds will cover its safest places. It will become a home for wild dogs. It will become a place where owls live" (Isa 34:12-13). The disappearance of the Edomites was so complete that two thousand years later, it took a Swiss tourist looking for a different Biblical feature to find a little vestige of the Edomites' lost glory.

The Mayans had no part in the feud with Israel, so perhaps the seeds of their destruction was the wealth and power of their empire. The New Testament contains a prophecy about a future metropolis (Babylon) that will be so wealthy and powerful it will disappear (Rev 18:21). Echoing the fate of the original Babylon prophesized by

Isaiah, the Babylon God showed to John will become, “A place where demons live. She has become a den for every evil spirit. She has become a nest for every 'unclean' and hated bird” (Isa 13:20-22; Rev 18:2). For 2,000 years the location of this ‘Babylon’ has been the subject of conjecture by Christians around the world. And for good reasons since God commands us, “Come out of her, my people. Then you will not take part in her sins. You will not suffer from any of her plagues” (Rev 18:4 and 8). When God visits judgment on this Babylon, I don’t think any kind of radar, or even Indiana Jones, will find it.