

# LET THE

The magazine of the  
ARMSTRONG INSTITUTE OF BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

# STONES SPEAK



JULY-AUGUST 2022



# Excavating The Ophel



# LET THE STONES SPEAK

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**The front door of the Armstrong  
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PHOTO: GEORGE HADDAD/ARMSTRONG INSTITUTE OF BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

**COVER The 2022 Ophel excavation  
team; Prof. Uzi Leibner center**

PHOTO: EYREN MACDONALD/ARMSTRONG INSTITUTE OF BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY





FROM THE EDITOR | GERALD FLURRY

# A Home in Jerusalem

The founding of the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology is complete.

**I**N JANUARY, I SHARED WITH YOU THE NEWS about the establishment of the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology (AIBA) in Jerusalem.

AIBA is a nonprofit academic and educational institute. Our primary goal is to promote and share Israel's biblical archaeology and history. In addition to publishing *Let the Stones Speak*, AIBA hosts [ArmstrongInstitute.org](http://ArmstrongInstitute.org), an engaging website that features articles, videos, visuals and podcasts showcasing Israel's biblical archaeology. We also sponsor public seminars, create archaeological exhibits, and conduct private tours of ancient Jerusalem, primarily the Ophel and the City of David.

We don't just talk and write about Israel's archaeology; we practice it too. For more than 15 years, we have participated in various archaeological excavations in the City of David and on the Ophel. In fact, our legacy of excavating and researching ancient Jerusalem extends all the way back to 1968.

This is when our founder, the late educator and humanitarian Herbert W. Armstrong, forged an "iron-bridge" partnership working with Prof. Benjamin Mazar and Hebrew University on the "big dig" on the Ophel.

I am delighted to share some more exciting news: The Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology now has a permanent home in Jerusalem!

In July, we signed a long-term lease on a beautiful new building: a three-story Arab-style villa originally constructed in 1926. The institute's new home is in Talbiyeh, one of Jerusalem's preeminent neighborhoods, a short stroll from the residences of both Israel's prime minister and president.

Following seven weeks of renovations, the Armstrong Institute staff moved into the new building at the end of August. The building provides both residential and office space, an area for small archaeological exhibits, and room for the combined libraries of archaeologists Dr. Eilat Mazar and her grandfather

Prof. Benjamin Mazar. We acquired these libraries following Eilat's death in May 2021. The collection of approximately 4,000 books (plus another 4,000 archaeology- and history-related books we acquired from Hebrew University) represents a wealth of crucial historical and scientific knowledge revolving around the most historic and important city on Earth. (The library will be open to the public upon request.)

We plan to officially open the new institute building and library with a special event on September 4. I will be in Jerusalem for the opening and plan to address our guests. At the event, we will share some of our long history in Jerusalem, and we also hope to share some of the remarkable discoveries uncovered during our archaeological excavation on the Ophel this summer.

Although seating for the event is limited, we would be delighted to have some of our *Let the Stones Speak* subscribers, especially those living in Israel, with us. If you would like to attend this event, please let us know; you can e-mail [letters@ArmstrongInstitute.org](mailto:letters@ArmstrongInstitute.org).

If you would like to visit us at the new building at another time, or utilize the library, you can send us a note at the same e-mail address.

July was a big (and busy) month for AIBA. The same week that we received the keys to the new building, we renewed excavations on the Ophel. Between July 12 and August 11, ten AIBA staff and Herbert W. Armstrong College students partially uncovered what appears to be a monumental Second Temple-period structure on the far east side of the Ophel.

The lead archaeologist on this excavation was Prof. Uzi Leibner, head of the Institute of Archaeology at Hebrew University. This was our first excavation with Professor Leibner, who is a distinguished archaeologist specializing in the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods. We thoroughly enjoyed working with him. He is a visionary, pragmatic archaeologist who cares as much about the people he works with as he does the science he is practicing.

On this dig, we continued from where we concluded our last excavation with Dr. Eilat Mazar in 2018. In our final hours working with Dr. Mazar, we uncovered evidence—a handful of beautiful handcrafted steps—of what appeared to be a significant Herodian building.

Earlier this year, we discussed the 2018 excavation and these steps with Hebrew University scholars and expressed our desire to continue excavating. Professor Leibner was keen to renew excavations and got to work securing the license and approvals. Within days of commencing digging, Uzi and his team had made some exciting finds.

“The results of the excavation season exceeded all

expectations, mainly thanks to the enthusiastic work of the students of the Armstrong College,” Professor Leibner told us. “We uncovered impressive remains of what seems to be a public building from the Herodian period, located some 60 meters from a main entrance to the Temple Mount. The evidence of a violent destruction together with the rich assemblage of finds provide a rare perspective of the horrific events of the destruction of Jerusalem in the summer of c.e. 70. Not least interesting was the exposure of a complicated system of underground tunnels and chambers beneath the structure. Continuation of the dig will hopefully enable us to understand the purpose of this building situated in such a prime location.”

About two weeks into the excavation, Professor Leibner told our students that “many archaeologists excavate all their lives and might not find what you have found in your two weeks of excavation.”

Within two weeks, we had uncovered evidence confirming that this was indeed a monumental Second Temple-period public building. On the lowest steps we found large ashlar stones and further evidence of the c.e. 70 destruction of Jerusalem wrought at the hands of the Romans. The discovery of this destruction layer was made more impactful because it was unearthed in the days leading up to Tisha B'Av (the 9th of Av), the day the first and second temples were destroyed—a day that continues to be observed in Israel with fasting and lamentation.

The destruction layer also yielded more than 100 coins, including coins minted by the Jews in Jerusalem during the Great Revolt that took place c.e. 66–70. The most common of these coins are the Year Two coins. Among the rarest are the Year Four coins, which were minted when most of Judea outside of Jerusalem had been reconquered by Rome. These coins were found within the Roman-period destruction, thus from the final stage of the Great Revolt.

You can read more about the recent Ophel excavation in Brad Macdonald's article “Excavating the Ophel” (page 10). And Brent Nagtegaal writes about the revolt coins in his article (page 8). We plan to cover the excavation and the many artifacts we found in more detail in a future issue, after the site and artifacts have been fully studied and documented.

It was a rare honor for our students to excavate the remains of this Second Temple-period structure and to uncover remains from one of Jerusalem's most sobering and consequential events: the c.e. 70 destruction of Jerusalem. We keenly anticipate more excavations to further reveal this remarkable building situated at the political and religious heart of ancient Jerusalem. ■



# King Hezekiah's Ingenious Sluice Gate?

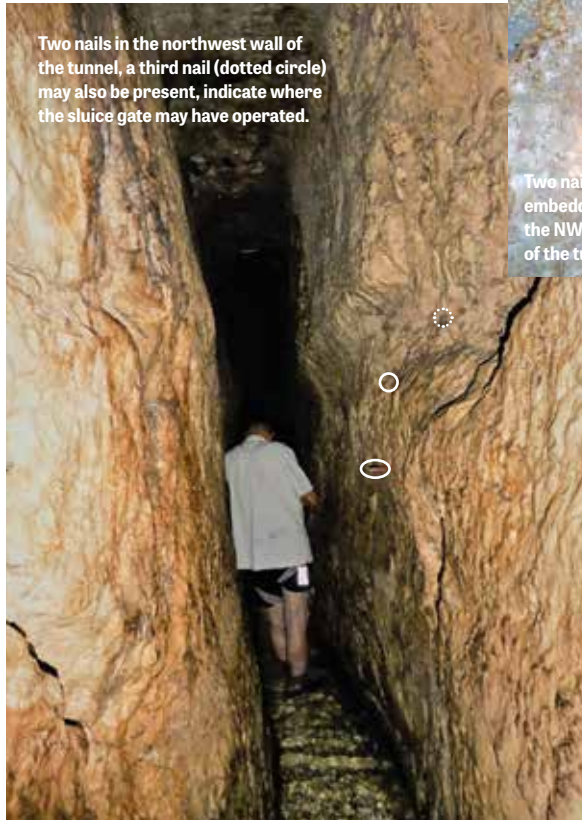
A fascinating new study furthers our understanding of one of ancient Jerusalem's most iconic features.

BY CHRISTOPHER EAMES

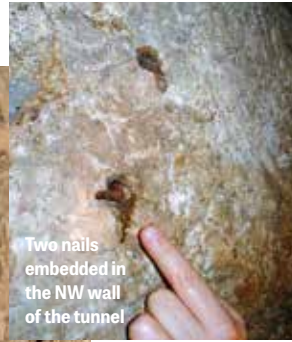
**I**F YOU'VE EVER WALKED THROUGH HEZEKIAH'S tunnel, perhaps you've wondered if there's a purpose for the noticeably higher ceiling at the southern end of the tunnel? Maybe you wondered why, when the water is less than knee-deep, there is occasionally a visible "waterline" much higher up on the walls?

What about the implications of Hezekiah channeling water away from the Gihon Spring reservoir complex? Wouldn't water gushing down to the lower pool deplete the upper pool, depriving the people and buildings in the upper city easy access to water?





Two nails in the northwest wall of the tunnel, a third nail (dotted circle) may also be present, indicate where the sluice gate may have operated.



Two nails embedded in the NW wall of the tunnel



Two nails extricated from the tunnel walls

These questions have been answered, at least in part, through a fascinating new research project published in April in the academic journal *Archaeological Discovery*. The article is titled “A Sluice Gate in Hezekiah’s (Iron Age II) Aqueduct in Jerusalem: Archaeology, Architecture and the Petrochemical Setting of Its Micro and Macro Structures.” It was authored by Aryeh E. Shimron, Vitaly Gutkin and Vladimir Uvarov, researchers from the Geological Survey of Israel and Hebrew University’s Center for Nanoscience and Nanotechnology. The article reveals new evidence showing that Hezekiah’s tunnel contained an ingenious *sluice gate* that allowed the water level to be controlled.

What is a sluice gate? Essentially, it’s a type of gate that can be raised or lowered vertically to control the water level. Think about England’s numerous canals: The water levels in many are controlled by a sluice gate.

The biblical overview of Hezekiah’s tunnel, including the reason for its construction, is fairly well established. Constructed at the end of the eighth century B.C.E., it was built around the time of the Assyrian king Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah. The tunnel was designed to divert Gihon Spring water from the more vulnerable eastern side of the City of David down to the Siloam pool catchment area in the lower southern part of the city.

The tunnel’s construction is recorded in 2 Chronicles 32. “And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib was come, and that he was purposed to fight against Jerusalem, he took counsel with his princes and his mighty men to stop the waters of the fountains which were without the city; and they helped him. So there was gathered much people together, and they stopped all the fountains, and the brook that flowed through the midst of the land, saying: ‘Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water?’” (verses 2-4).

Verse 30 reads: “This same Hezekiah also stopped the upper watercourse of Gihon, and brought it straight down to the west side of the city of David. And Hezekiah prospered in all his works” (King James Version).

The tunnel is a marvel of human engineering. Hezekiah’s laborers not only carved the 533-meter-long Siloam Tunnel (as it is sometimes called) through solid rock, they worked simultaneously from both ends of the tunnel. It doesn’t take much imagination to appreciate the stunning level of engineering and surveying required to do this. How did Hezekiah’s engineers develop a plan that allowed workers to work from both sides but meet at exactly the same point? And how did they not only determine, but then accomplish, the perfect gradient? (The gradient of the tunnel is 0.06 degrees. The exit elevation is just 30 centimeters lower than the starting elevation.)

For Hezekiah’s engineers, figuring out the path and gradient of the tunnel wasn’t the only challenge they faced. One of the big challenges noted by the authors of the above-mentioned academic paper is that the diversion of the Gihon Spring water through the tunnel would have lowered the water level so significantly that the spring would no longer have been able to fill the existing upper Gihon catchment area. This area is fed by a cavern conduit located 2.4 meters above the mouth of the spring.

The redirection of water would make the water level so low in the upper part of the city as to render it virtually inaccessible. “In the absence of the frequently erratic ebb and flow (pulsating) nature of the spring, this elevation would not suffice for the water to enter

Channels II, the Rock-cut Pool and fill the WS [Warren's Shaft] cave to a minimum level for drawing water," they wrote. So rather than Hezekiah's tunnel fully solving a problem, it would have created a new one. It would have essentially restricted or eliminated the flow of water through Warren's Shaft to the upper side of the city where critical infrastructure, including the royal palace and the temple, were situated.

Scientists have puzzled over this question. How exactly did Hezekiah's engineers build a tunnel that did not drain the upper reservoir area entirely? The authors cited one solution presented by geologist Dr. Dan Gill in 1994. Gill posited that in order for water to still be readily accessible from the infrastructure around the mouth of the Gihon Spring, "a dam must have been constructed somewhere along Hezekiah's

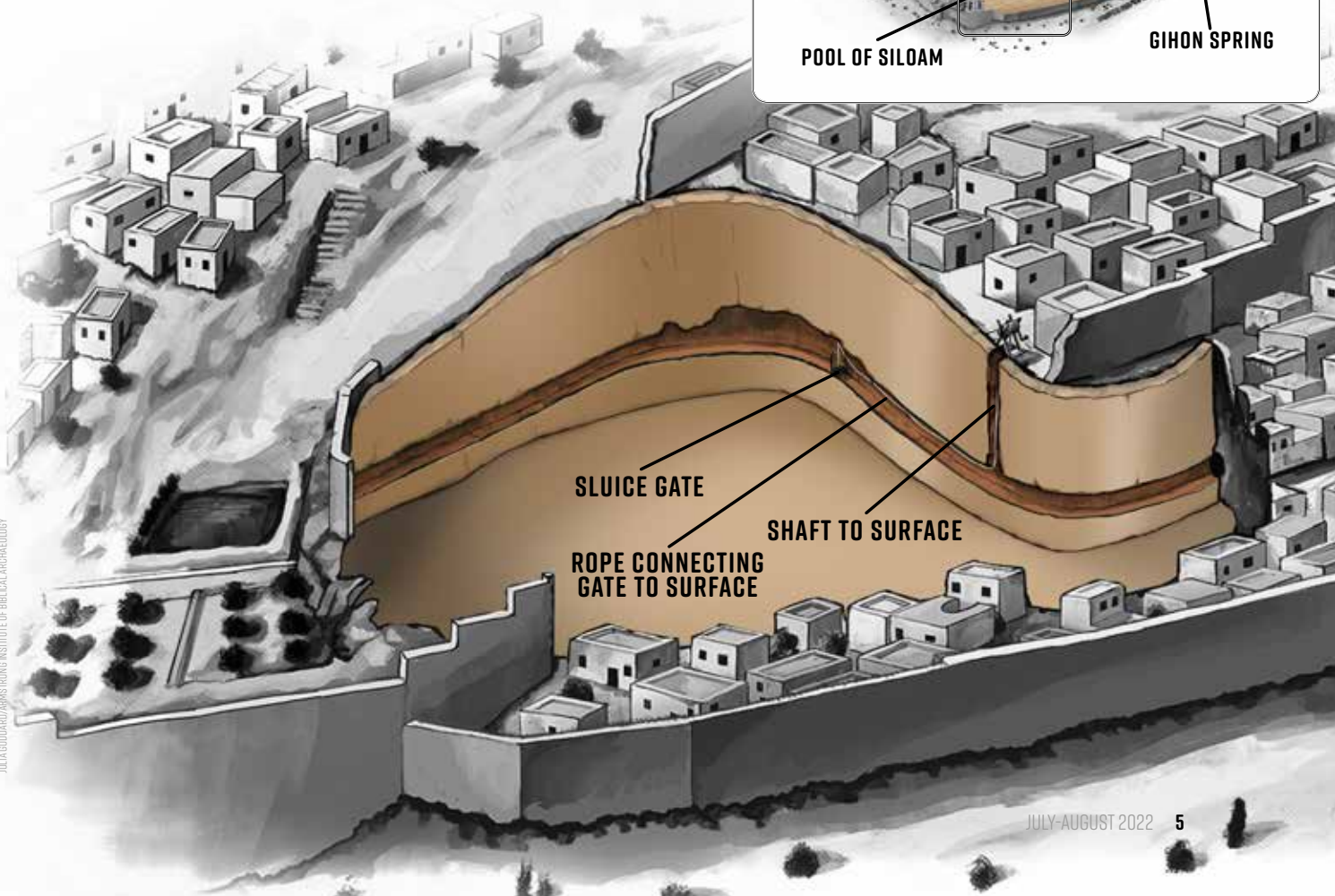
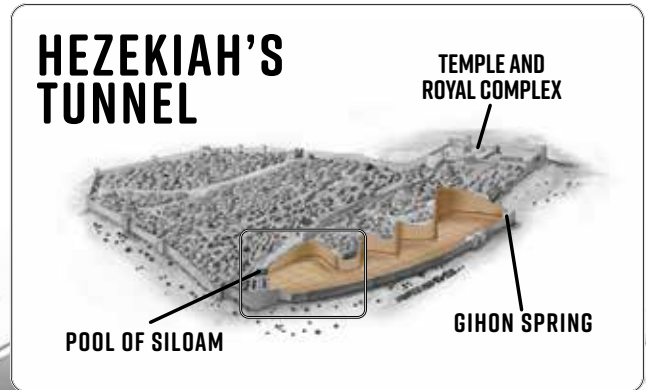
tunnel," allowing the water level to rise sufficiently to fill the original raised catchment complex above the spring.

Obviously, the notion of going to all the effort to excavate Hezekiah's tunnel (and at such a precise gradient) only to dam it up seems counterintuitive. This, therefore, could not have been any ordinary dam.

### Hezekiah's Invention

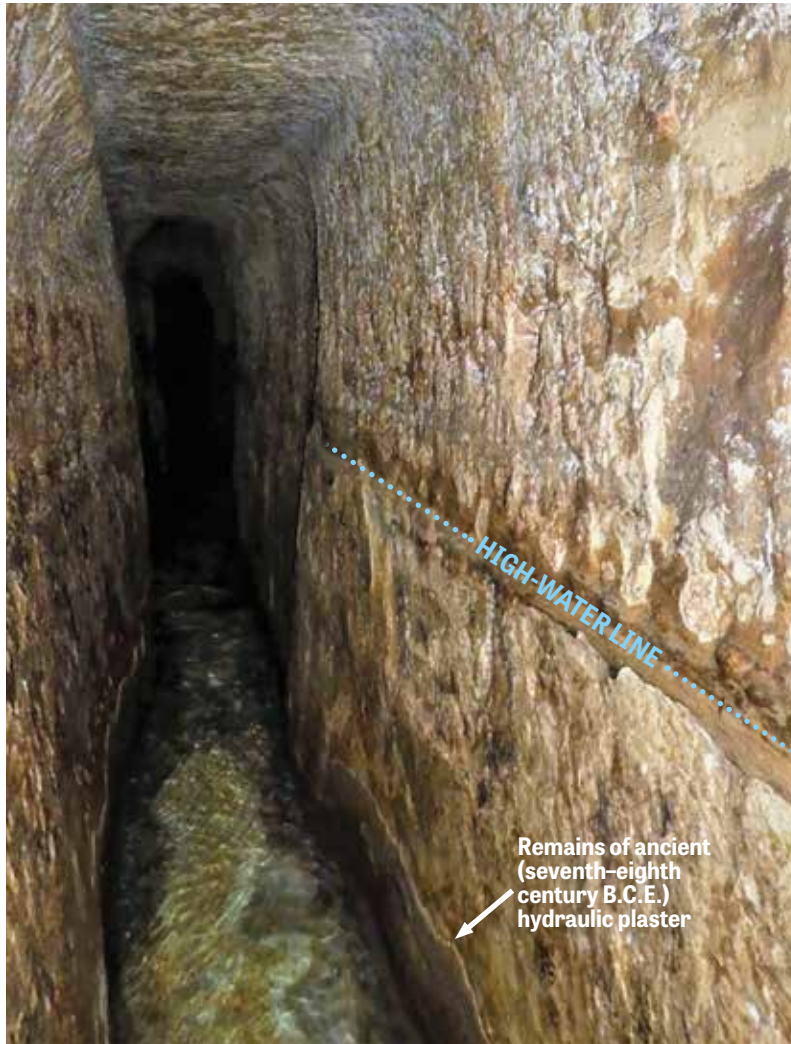
The new research paper takes this theory much further. Shimron, Gutkin and Uvarov wrote: "We have searched for such a dam at what would be the ideal, perhaps only location for such a structure to be able to function effectively, AND HAVE FOUND PHYSICAL EVIDENCE FOR WHAT MAY HAVE BEEN A MOVABLE BLOCKING WALL (SLUICE) AT PRECISELY SUCH A PLACE. [This] 'device' to control water level in the new aqueduct and thereby

Obviously, the notion of going to all the effort to excavate Hezekiah's tunnel (and at such a precise gradient) only to dam it up seems counterintuitive. This, therefore, could not have been any ordinary dam.



JULIA GOODARD/ARMSTRONG INSTITUTE OF BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY





The *Archaeological Discovery* article revealed several compelling proofs for the presence of an original sluice gate within the tunnel.

The first and most important proof is the discovery of four 8-centimeter-long iron bolts or nails sunk into the bedrock walls of the tunnel, 71 meters from the tunnel’s exit. The badly corroded bolts are symmetrically placed, two on each side of the tunnel’s walls. Traces of petrified wood (almost certainly cedar) were found on the bolts, indicating that they secured some kind of wooden frame within the tunnel.

Interestingly, at this exact point in the tunnel the ceiling is significantly higher. A higher ceiling would have been necessary for a tall, vertically sliding gate to rise and fall.

What about the operation of the gate? How was it raised and lowered? The researchers note another unique feature not far from this point in the tunnel. Here, a narrow shaft extends from the tunnel’s ceiling (see image) through to an accessible subterranean passage (known as Channel II) and out to the surface. According to the scientists, a rope passing through this narrow

“shaft to surface” would have allowed operators to raise and lower the gate.

To test this theory, the researchers searched for evidence of rope material. Sure enough, in the plaster material of this part of the tunnel ceiling, they discovered calcified wool fibers—evidence of rope.

On the ceiling directly above the location of the sluice frame, they also found a significant amount of blackened mortar with traces of smelting ore. They believe this mortar secured some form of device (since lost) through which the sluice gate rope is believed to have passed. The narrow surface shaft, through which the sluice gate rope is believed to have been controlled, was independently accessible from above, within the subterranean Channel II. This sheltered channel would have given the operators secure control over the spring waters, particularly under siege conditions.

Further evidence of a sluice gate is present on the walls of Hezekiah’s tunnel. If you have walked the

also the spring environ was designed and eventually constructed about 71 meters from the tunnel’s southern exit” (emphasis added).

The evidence for a sluice gate is compelling.

A sluice gate is typically a wood or metal sliding barrier set into grooves on the side walls of a waterway. The gate can be raised or lowered to control the flow of water through the passage. Placing a sufficiently sealing sluice gate at some point within the tunnel would have allowed the water level to rise high enough to fill the raised, upper catchment system around the mouth of the Gihon Spring. The sluice would have also allowed a degree of selective control over water levels for the upper and lower parts of the city. If one part of the city or the other needed a greater supply of water, levels could be adjusted accordingly with the sluice gate. This degree of control would have also proved helpful in a siege situation, giving the ability to selectively cut off easy access to water, depending on the situation.



tunnel, you have probably seen the horizontal residue lines of silt and mud staining on the tunnel walls. Through much of the tunnel, this “dominant waterline” is 1.5 meters high, suggesting the water was at one time consistently dammed to this regulated height. Logically, this required some sort of damming device—like a sluice gate.

On this point, Shimron, Gutkin and Uvarov pointed out the importance the tunnel engineers placed on sealing gaps and cracks in the bedrock leading up to the sluice gate. They noted the heavy use of hydraulic plaster, carbon-dated to the eighth century B.C.E. This, together with the dating of the fine sedimental laminae along the tunnel walls, “indicate[s] that some of the most pronounced and highest watermark levels were deposited between the eighth and fourth centuries B.C.E., thereby confirming water level control already during this period,” they wrote.

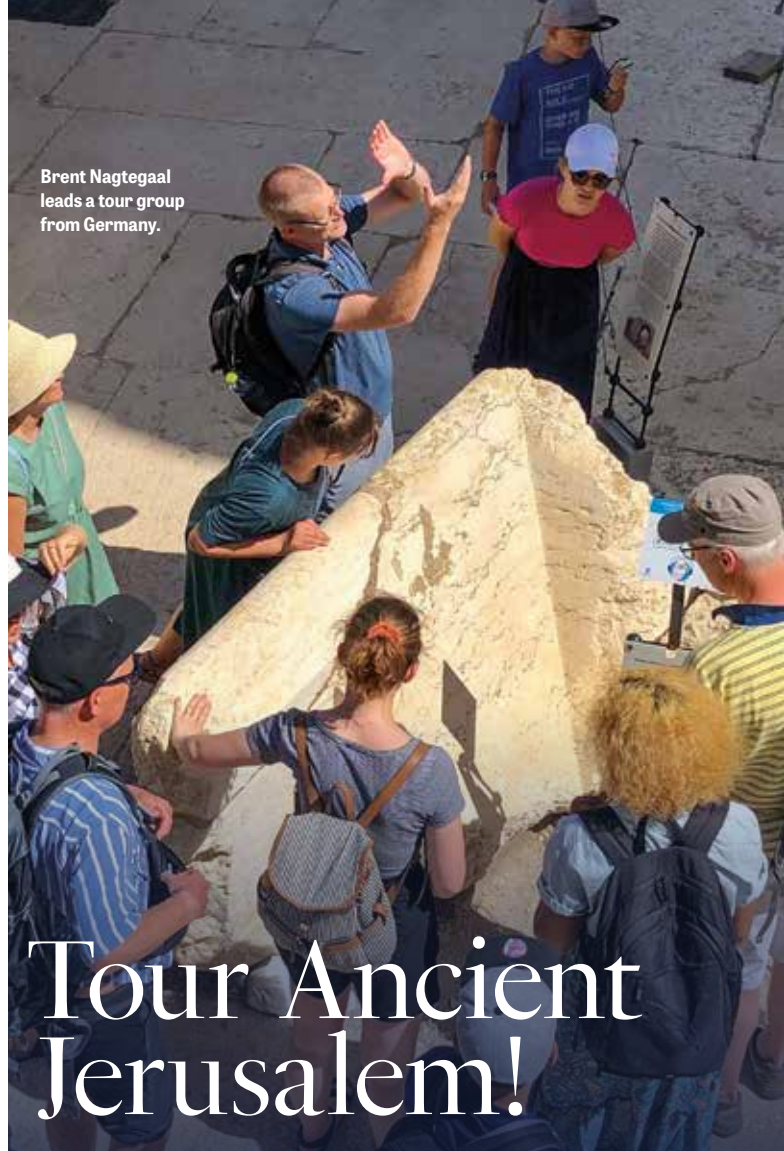
“The construction of the sluice gate and the application of plaster along the full length of the tunnel would have required a dry tunnel for carrying out this task. The most convenient time for this would have been prior to allowing water flow south towards the Siloam Pool—that is during Iron Age II” (ibid).

Finally, the authors noted that not only would this structure have been a significant innovation of its own right, but it would also constitute “to the best of our knowledge, the oldest sluice gate known.” “To the best of our knowledge no sluice gates have been recorded that predate the Roman ~first-second century C.E. period. The oldest Iron Age structures referred to as sluice gates were found in the Judean Desert (Stager, 1976). Constructed to raise the level of water behind a stationary stone dam, these structures are weirs rather than sluice gates. Consequently, if Hezekiah’s tunnel sluice ever functioned as a movable blocking wall, it may well be the oldest sluice gate on record.”

Such an innovation would hardly be surprising for the likes of the Jewish nation, however—whether in modern times or anciently. 2 Chronicles 26, for example, records the ingenuity of Jerusalem’s engineers during the reign of King Uzziah (in the early eighth century). “And he made in Jerusalem engines, *invented by skillful men*, to be on the towers and upon the corners ...” (verse 15).

This new research only adds a new layer of intrigue to the already incredible engineering feat that is Hezekiah’s tunnel. “Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and all his might, and how he made the pool, and the conduit, and brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?” (2 Kings 20:20). ■

Brent Nagtegaal leads a tour group from Germany.



# Tour Ancient Jerusalem!

Imagine being able to visit King David’s palace, glide your hand over stone walls built by King Solomon, walk through an ancient gatehouse used as a pulpit by Isaiah and other biblical prophets, or walk through the 1,740-foot tunnel carved from stone by King Hezekiah.

Visit Jerusalem and you can experience all this biblical history and much, much more!

Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology provides personal tours of the City of David and the Ophel. Tours are led by either Brent Nagtegaal or Christopher Eames, both of whom live with their families in Jerusalem and have worked extensively on the Ophel and in the City of David.

**To book your tour, e-mail  
tours@ArmstrongInstitute.org**

# MORE RARE Discovered!



AS TENSIONS INCREASED BETWEEN JUDEA AND ROME in the first century c.e., the Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem searched for ways to demonstrate their resolve and determination to remain in the city. They wanted to show Rome that Jerusalem was their home and that they planned to inhabit the city perpetually.

One measure to demonstrate their rebellion and show they had no plans to abandon the city was to mint new currency. The creation of new coins symbolized tenacity and hope, and it provided a morale boost to Jerusalem's increasingly despairing Jewish inhabitants.

In his great work *The Jewish War*, priest-turned-historian Josephus Flavius provided a gripping firsthand account of the Great Revolt, which began in c.e. 66. Across Israel, a lot of archaeological evidence has been discovered that supports the literary account of the Great Revolt. Among this evidence, archaeologists have found many revolt coins minted in Jerusalem by rebelling Jews.

Revolt coins are typically made of either silver or bronze. They are labeled with the year of the revolt in which they were minted. Year One corresponds to c.e. 66, while Year Four and Five coins correspond with c.e. 70, the year Jerusalem was finally destroyed. Although the revolt continued until the famous Masada fortress was captured in c.e. 73, no six- or seven-year coins have ever been discovered. This is why scholars believe revolt coins were minted in Jerusalem. When Jewish rule over Jerusalem ended in c.e. 70, so did the minting of new coins.



# COINS

## Evidence of the final moments of Jewish rule in Jerusalem

BY BRENT NAGTEGAAL

While revolt coins (especially Year Two coins) have been found in excavations across Israel, most have been found in Jerusalem. And in Jerusalem, the richest deposit of revolt coins has been the Ophel, the area immediately south of the southern wall of the Temple Mount.

On the Ophel, archaeologists are even finding Year Four (C.E. 69–70) coins. The discovery of Year Four coins was once rare; by C.E. 69, much of Judea had already been conquered and Jerusalem remained the Jews' final stronghold. Amazingly, Year Four coins are now being discovered fairly frequently.

Many Year Four coins were discovered this summer in our excavation with Prof. Uzi Leibner. The discoveries this summer come on the heels of our discovery of a hoard of two dozen Year Four coins in 2018. That year, the late Dr. Eilat Mazar of Hebrew University led her final excavation on the Ophel with support and funding from the Armstrong International Cultural Foundation.

The main goal of the 2018 season was to excavate a large cave-turned-cistern that was used as a hideout by Jews during the revolt. Inside this cave, we discovered a wealth of evidence of the very last moments of the Jewish revolt—including 24 Year Four coins.

Given the time frame, it's understandable that many Year Four coins were discovered in the rebel hideout from immediately before Jerusalem fell. Interestingly, the coins were not found all together, as

COINS PAGE 23 ►

## CREATING THE SHEKEL

**I**N C.E. 69, DEFEAT WAS INEVITABLE for the Jews still living in Jerusalem. As they fled the city or died inside it, these people believed Zion would one day be redeemed. Nearly 2,000 years later, Zion once again belongs to the Jews. At the birth of the modern state of Israel in 1948, the government began to mint its own coins. At first, Israel pegged its own newly minted pound to the British pound. In 1980, Israel's government decided to change to the new Israeli shekel, recalling the name given to weights and currency during the first and second temple times.

For the coin images, the government decided to use historical motifs, archaeological discoveries and even copied designs of ancient coins. For example, the half shekel has the ancient lyre or harp, while the five-shekel coin features a proto-Aeolic capital, a type of royal architecture harkening back to biblical times. The five agorot (5 percent of a shekel) is patterned after the Year Four coin from the Jewish revolt. While the five agorot coin was withdrawn from use in 2008, the modern 10-shekel coin (Israel's most valuable coin) has the same ancient script and words from the fourth-year revolt coin: "For the redemption of Zion." ■






# Excavating the Ophel

After a four-year hiatus,  
we recently renewed  
archaeological excavations  
on the Ophel. BY BRAD MACDONALD





**I**T'S A RUNNING JOKE IN THE WORLD OF ARCHAEOLOGY: The best finds are typically made on your final day of excavation, just as you're about to pack up and head home. This is exactly what happened to us on the last day of excavation on the Ophel in 2018.

We were excavating with Dr. Eilat Mazar and archaeologist Amir Cohen-Klonymous, finishing up Phase 2c of the Ophel excavations. The day was spent removing material at the lowest level of a large Byzantine structure. In the final hours of excavation, we unexpectedly began to uncover a series of grand and immaculate Second Temple-period stone steps at the base of the structure.

We were excited and more than a little curious. Where did these magnificent steps lead? The size and design of the steps suggested they were part of an impressive Second Temple-period structure. How large was it? What was the building used for? How exactly did the steps relate to an existing series of water tunnels directly beneath (and connected to) this structure?

Dr. Mazar was pleased with what we accomplished in Phase 2c of the Ophel excavation, which included the unearthing of a large cache of Jewish Rebellion coins. But Phase 2c ended with a dramatic and intriguing discovery and a bunch of questions. (Great archaeological sites are like great restaurants; they leave you wanting more.)

In July, we returned to the Ophel to continue excavating—and to hopefully get some answers. Here's an overview of where we excavated, the periods we excavated, and the questions we wanted to explore. It's too early to reveal in detail what we found; the finds continue to be analyzed and documented. But we can tell you this: The latest phase of the Ophel excavation significantly expanded our understanding of the area and furnished a veritable treasure trove of fascinating and remarkable finds.

While we were excited to return to the Ophel, we were also a little sad, as this was our first excavation without Dr. Eilat Mazar. While we missed Eilat greatly, we were privileged to work under the direction of one of her friends and colleagues, Hebrew University archaeologist Prof. Uzi Leibner. Professor Leibner is the head of the Institute of Archaeology at Hebrew University and specializes in the Greek, Roman and Byzantine periods. He's also a born teacher. On the dig, Prof. Leibner routinely took the time to explain to our students what they were uncovering, to solicit their thoughts, and to share his personal thoughts on the Second Temple-period structure that came more into focus every day.

We also dug alongside our good friend Amir Cohen-Klonymous. Amir was area supervisor over the upper

area, containing the beautiful Herodian steps. The other area supervisor was our very own Christopher Eames, who oversaw the excavation of the subterranean tunnel network connected to the Second Temple-period structure above.

## A Brief History

It is hard to overstate the importance, both archaeologically and historically, of the Ophel. Situated north of and adjacent to the City of David, the land was originally acquired (and likely partially developed) by King David (2 Samuel 24:18-25). When Solomon became king in the 10th century B.C.E., he commenced a massive northward expansion of the City of David.

On the Ophel, King Solomon constructed his impressive palace (which the Bible relates took 13 years to build), a massive royal armory (see 1 Kings 7), a series of fortification walls and gatehouses and, most notably in his northern expansion, the temple and its associated structures. The Bible says that subsequent kings of Judah (particularly Uzziah, then his son Jotham) added to Solomon's royal complex (2 Chronicles 26:9; 27:1-6).

The Ophel was the seat of Israel's (then Judah's) government and religion for roughly 400 years, from the middle of the 10th century B.C.E. to Jerusalem's destruction in 586 B.C.E. The area remained the nucleus of the Jews' politics and religion throughout the Second Temple period, especially during the reign of Herod the Great, all the way up until Jerusalem's 70 C.E. destruction.

Most of our archaeological work with Dr. Eilat Mazar on the Ophel focused primarily on the Iron Age period. However, before you can excavate Iron Age material, you have to excavate later periods that typically cover and obscure the earlier material. This was the case with the 2018 Ophel dig, where we excavated through Islamic and Byzantine period remains, before reaching earlier, Herodian and Hasmonean material.

The 2018 excavation was divided into two primary areas of excavation. The first was Area M, which consisted of a large cave. The material in this area was mainly Herodian and included the discovery of a Year 4 coin hoard (from the final year of the Jewish Revolt, 70 C.E.). This hoard remains one of the largest Year 4 coin assemblages ever discovered in Israel.

The second area of excavation was Area D. This area was situated adjacent northwest of a large mikveh (ritual bath), and included a large upper Byzantine structure, situated alongside what was identified by Dr. Mazar as the Byzantine "Monastery of the Virgins,"



mentioned in classical texts. In 2013, we uncovered the Menorah Medallion gold hoard (one of the top three largest gold hoards ever discovered in Israel), in the southwest wing of this structure. Area D contains both Byzantine and Herodian-era remains.

This summer we continued to excavate Area D. The dig was divided into two main areas. The first area (supervised by Amir) contained the Byzantine structure and the Early Roman remains beneath. The second area (D1, supervised by Christopher) was a series of subterranean chambers and drainage tunnels made up of finely carved ashlar stones, most of which are situated below the Byzantine and Herodian structures.

## The Mikveh

One of the most visible and iconic architectural features on the east side of the Ophel is the large four-way, stepped rectangular mikveh. This Second Temple-period feature was discovered during the 1980s by Meir Ben-Dov. It is evident that the Second Temple-period structure that is beginning to emerge orients toward this ritual pool. The network of tunnels connects directly to a drainage port at the base of the mikveh.

The orientation of the mikveh, as well as the entire structure, is noteworthy. The structures on the eastern edge of the Ophel, from the Roman period onward, are cardinally oriented—they run parallel with the southern wall of the Temple Mount. Interestingly, the structures we have uncovered from the Iron Age to Herodian periods—the first and second temple periods—are clearly rotated precisely 45 degrees, along the ordinal (or intercardinal) points of the compass.

The Second Temple-period structure now coming into focus, as well as the mikveh and underground tunnels, all fall into the latter category (illustration, page 14).

The mikveh remains somewhat of a mystery. The pool is not a standard single-direction ritual mikveh. Rather, it has steps on all four sides and more closely resembles the design of the (much larger) Pool of Siloam, south of the City of David. Is this significant? What does the mikveh's unique design and large size tell us? (If you're interested in learning more about this bath, read chapter 1.7 of Dr. Eilat Mazar's *The Ophel Excavations to the South of the Temple Mount, 2009–2013, Final Reports Vol. II*, by Asher Grossberg).

The mikveh's design isn't the only enigma. We know this site was extensively excavated in the 1970s under the direction of Professor Mazar and Ben-Dov. However, almost all of the original documentation for this area is missing. Without this information, we don't know exactly what was originally found. The challenge is amplified by the fact that part of the remains, including at least part of the rectangular mikveh, were reconstructed following the 1970s excavation (covering up the original material). What did this area, particularly in and around the mikveh, look like *before* it was reconstructed? Would this offer clues to the function of the original building and the related below-ground system we are uncovering?

These are just some of the questions we were hoping to begin to answer.

The tunnels are another enigma that we're trying to understand. We were already generally aware of the extent of these tunnels, as they have been investigated and drawn by the site architect. But until this





excavation, they were largely filled with “fill” (earth), barely allowing passage, even on hands and knees. Why is there a series of bisecting tunnels and chambers underneath the area? What purpose did these serve?

There is some beautiful architecture in these tunnels—why? One thing we do know is that the subterranean structure was built from the ground up and supports the upper Second Temple-period building that stands above it. There seem to have been access points along the tunnels from various parts of the building above, certain of which remain inaccessible from above until further excavation. We know this subterranean network did not serve merely as the drainage system for the large mikveh and associated building. We also learned that there were several phases to the historic use of these tunnels.

For the first time, we excavated these fascinating tunnels to hopefully find out their exact purpose and extent. (And as with any subterranean fill within a water system, there is the promise of exciting discoveries that were quite literally “flushed” down into it!)

In order to retrieve the potentially rich finds that washed into this subterranean system, we both dry-sifted and wet-sifted all of the material removed from the tunnels. The dry-sifting (a process that separates out fine earth and larger stones, and enables sorting of the larger, more visible finds) took place on-site. The material was then sent to Mount Scopus to be wet-sifted by the Temple Mount Sifting Project, an experienced wet-sifting team run by Dr. Zachi Dvira.

Although we do not yet have a complete or detailed understanding of this Second Temple-period structure, we uncovered much more evidence revealing its

monumental nature, including more large and impressive steps and walls.

The evidence suggests that the building, with its fine and grand architectural features (some of the finest Herodian architecture on this side of the Ophel), was directly related, in some form or other, to the function and use of the temple. One of the strongest proofs of this is the discovery in the area of numerous (more than a dozen so far) second temple purification baths.

What was the nature of the relationship between this building and the temple? What was the structure used for exactly? We don’t have the answers to these questions—yet.

Biblical history provides some insight. The book of Nehemiah, for example, notes that the Ophel was the dwelling place of the Nethinim, the temple servants, at the time of the second temple (Nehemiah 3:26-31; 11:21).

2 Chronicles 27:3 also describes King Jotham’s temple-related building projects, together in context with the Ophel. Asher Grossberg (who wrote the chapter on the mikveh for Dr. Mazar’s *Ophel Final Reports, Vol. II*) notes a historical reference to a potentially similar, raised upper pool/mikveh relating to the house of a high priest. Was this structure used by temple priests?

We concluded the excavation on August 11. Remarkably, this dig ended much the same way our 2018 dig ended: that is, with a bunch of exhausted, satisfied, grateful diggers; the base of a monumental Second Temple-period structure further exposed; a treasure trove of incredible finds; some questions answered; and more fascinating questions yet to be answered.

Like a great restaurant, we are already eager to return!

# 2022 Ophel Excavation

## BYZANTINE BUILDINGS

Buildings from the Roman period onward are all cardinally oriented and run parallel with the southern wall of the Temple Mount.

## MIKVEH

The mikveh and all structures uncovered from the Iron Age to Herodian periods—the First and Second Temple periods—are rotated 45 degrees to the above, later period structures, along the ordinal/intercardinal points of the compass.

**NORTHWEST, SOUTHWEST,  
NORTHEAST, SOUTHEAST:**  
Iron Age to Herodian period



**NORTH, SOUTH, EAST, WEST:**  
Roman period and later

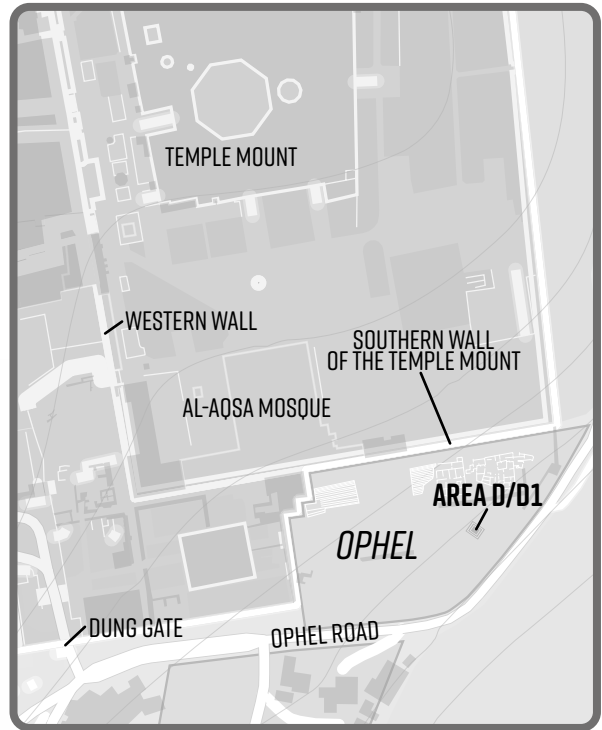


**INITIAL DISCOVERY  
OF IMPRESSIVE  
ASHLAR STEPS**

**THE STAIRCASE CONTINUED  
TO BE UNCOVERED IN 2022,  
FURTHER REVEALING THE  
STEPS WERE ORIENTED  
NORTHWEST AND  
DESCENDING DOWNWARD  
AWAY FROM THE MIKVEH.**

## AREA D

Area Supervisor:  
Amir Cohen-Klonymous



## SECOND TEMPLE- PERIOD BUILDING

2018 Excavation

2022 Excavation



**AREA D1  
SUBTERRANEAN WATER  
TUNNEL SYSTEM  
(UNDERNEATH AREA D1)**

Area Supervisor:  
Christopher Eames

# THE CAPITAL OF THE NORTH

Understanding ancient Samaria through the lens of biblical archaeology **BY SETH MALONE**

**A**MONG ALL THE BIBLICAL SITES IN ISRAEL, THE CITY of Samaria is unique. Most cities in the ancient Levant were built on a mound, or “tel.” After a tel’s previous inhabitants were destroyed or moved out, a new civilization would build on top of the old city. But this wasn’t the case with Samaria. This city was built on virgin soil—into solid bedrock.

Samaria was founded by the Israelite king Omri during the mid-to-late ninth century B.C.E. It served as Israel’s capital for roughly 200 years until Sargon II of Assyria besieged the city and finally conquered the kingdom in 721 B.C.E. After subjugating Samaria, Assyria’s king imported non-Israelite inhabitants from Babylon, turning it into a fully functioning Assyrian city (2 Kings 17:24). The city was inhabited through Babylonian, Persian and Greek rule. Under Roman rule, it was renamed “Sebaste.”

The first archaeological excavation on the hill of Samaria occurred more than 100 years ago, from 1908 to 1910 by archaeologists from Harvard University. Another excavation, from 1931 to 1935, was sponsored

by Harvard University, the British Academy, the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem, the Palestine Exploration Fund and Hebrew University.

While the history of ancient Samaria spawns much controversy and scholarly debate, it stands as a monument in archaeology, demonstrating biblical historicity and adding cultural insight to the biblical account. Let’s take a look at the history and archaeology of this key Israelite city.

## **Why Samaria?**

When the united monarchy split into the twin kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the 10th century B.C.E., the northern kingdom of Israel was clearly the more physically fortunate.

The kingdom of Judah’s territory consisted primarily of the lowlands, the Judean mountains and the Negev desert. Judah was bordered by Moab and Edom, two nations that were not exceptionally opulent or powerful, but possessed enough military and geopolitical might to be a nuisance (e.g. 2 Chronicles 20).





TYRE ●

PHOENICIA

SYRIA

● MEGIDDO

● JEZREEL

ISRAEL

SAMARIA ★

● TIRZAH

● SHECHEM

● PENUEL

AMMON

★ JERUSALEM

PHILISTIA

JUDAH

DEAD SEA

MOAB

The kingdom of Israel inherited vastly more territory (about 2.5 times more land than Judah), and the land itself was lush and more fertile. Israel inherited the prized Jezreel Valley, as well as the well-fortified cities of Megiddo and Hazor. Meanwhile, Israel's main neighbor was the Phoenicians, a wealthy, cosmopolitan people who, thanks largely to the efforts of kings David and Solomon, were supportive and friendly.

In spite of all its material advantages, Israel lacked one crucial asset. As noted by British archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon, Judah's possession of the city of Jerusalem gave it enormous prestige and influence (*Royal Cities of the Old Testament*). Jerusalem was a well-fortified capital that carried political and religious import, as well as extravagant wealth. Established by the priest Melchizedek in the 20th century B.C.E., and massively developed by Israel's greatest monarchs (King David and King Solomon), Jerusalem possessed unmatched history and meaning. The city was home to the temple, the seat of Israel's religious worship.

Israel's first king after the split of the united monarchy, King Jeroboam, understood how central Jerusalem was to the political, cultural and religious identity of his people. This is why, when he led Israel to break away, his first priority was replacing Jerusalem as national headquarters. He immediately began his search for a new capital (1 Kings 12:26-27).

Israel's first capital city was Shechem, then Penuel (verse 25), and later Tirzah (1 Kings 15:21; King Baasa had originally planned to fortify Ramah, but later opted for Tirzah). By the time Omri came on the scene around 885 B.C.E., the throne had been usurped by a chariot captain named Zimri (1 Kings 16:9-12). Zimri reigned for just seven days before Omri, an army captain at the time, besieged Zimri at Tirzah and took the throne from him (verses 16-19). This coup d'état launched a four-year civil war.

For Omri, this internal conflict reinforced the importance of centralized power. For Israel to thrive as an independent and respected kingdom, it needed a fortified capital!

Archaeologists have identified the modern-day Tel el-Far'ah as biblical Tirzah. Archaeological excavations have revealed evidence of a massive building project at the site that appears to have been commissioned by Omri. But this superstructure was never finished.

The Bible shows that two years after the end of the civil war, the king set his sights on a new plot of land: "And he bought the hill Samaria of Shemer for two talents of silver, and he built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, after the name of Shemer, the owner of the hill, Samaria" (verse 24). Archaeological remains at the site confirm that just

as construction at Tel el-Far'ah stopped, construction at Samaria began. Tirzah was effectively abandoned when Omri began construction on Samaria.

While Omri built the city on virgin ground, his choice was not random. Around 100 pre-Omride bottle-shaped cisterns have been discovered in Samaria, which would have belonged to Shemer, the original owner of the land (for more on this, read Norma Franklin's *Samaria: From the Bedrock to the Omride Palace*). These cisterns held a total capacity of around 350,000 liters, which suggests Shemer presided over a large agricultural operation. While over half of the cisterns were found on the lower slopes of the hill, more than 30 were found on top of the hill, where Omri built his acropolis. In addition to the cisterns, numerous wine and oil presses were present nearby (ibid).

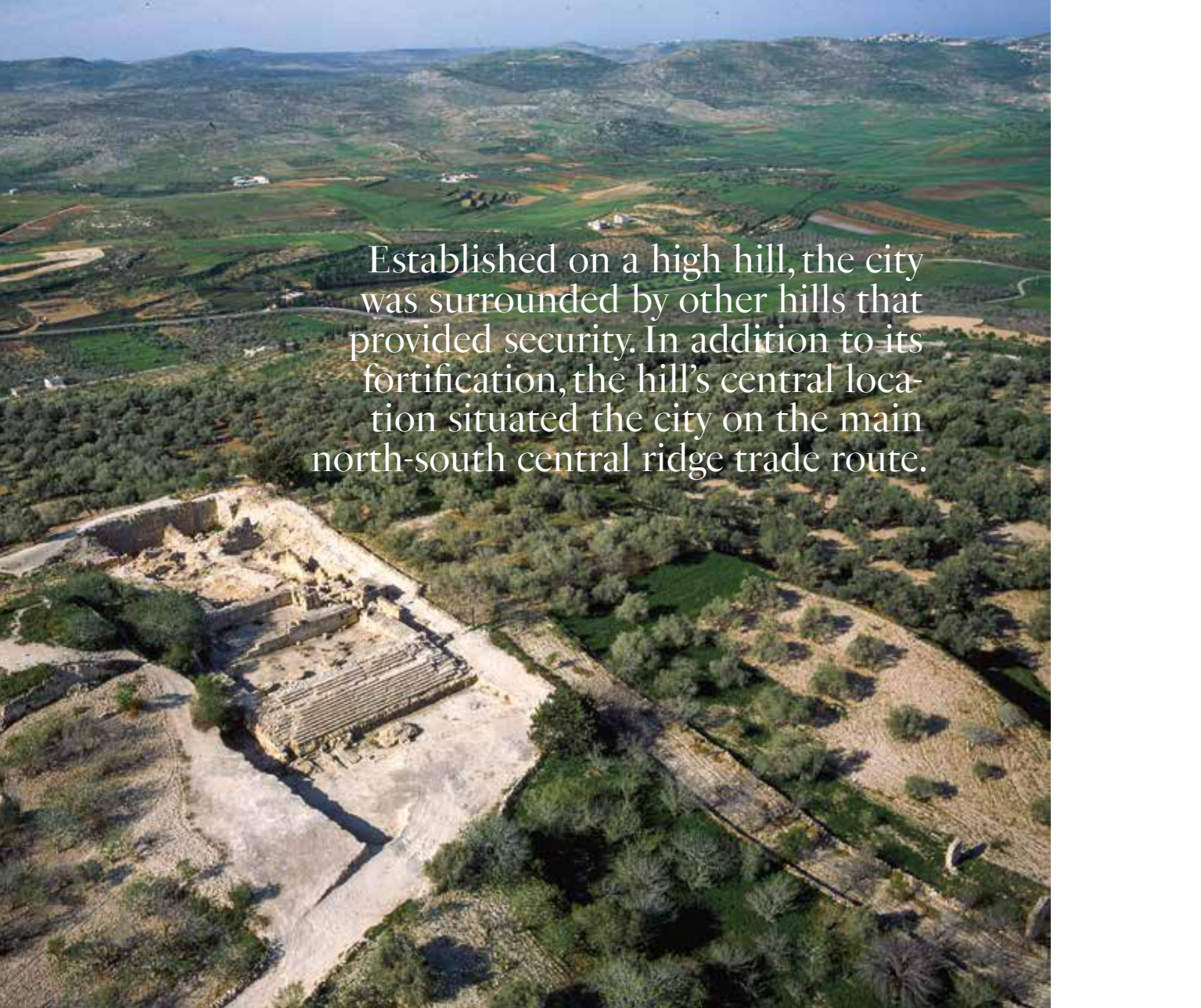
Samaria's location was also advantageous both militarily and strategically. Established on a high hill, the city was surrounded by other hills that provided security. The hill's central location situated the city on the main north-south central ridge trade route, easily accessible to cities like Jezreel and Shechem. Jezreel was located in one of the most coveted, fertile regions in the kingdom, and at Shechem one could find the great tree of Moreh, an altar that Abraham built, and Joseph's bones, not to mention the city was the first capital of the northern kingdom. Those in Samaria had easy access to both cities.

## Was Samaria Actually the Capital?

One of the big questions regarding Samaria among academia today is the role it played as Israel's capital. While the Bible makes it clear that the capital of Israel was at Samaria and that Israelite kings lived in Omride palaces there, the Bible indicates that Jezreel was also a key city. 1 Kings 21 says that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard "in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab, king of Samaria" (verse 1). While the term "Jezreel" could







Established on a high hill, the city was surrounded by other hills that provided security. In addition to its fortification, the hill's central location situated the city on the main north-south central ridge trade route.

be referring to the greater region of Jezreel, the evil queen Jezebel was definitely killed in the *city* of Jezreel (verse 23; 2 Kings 9:30-37). It was also where Ahab's son, Jehoram, was sent to be healed (verse 15), where Judah's King Ahaziah went to meet him, and where Jehu went to assassinate both of them and assume the throne of Israel.

A number of theories attempt to explain Jezreel's prominence, especially in relation to Samaria. Some believe that when the Bible says "Jezreel," it means Samaria. Others theorize that Samaria and Jezreel comprised two Israelite capitals—that they served as a winter and a summer capital, or as an Israelite and a Canaanite capital, or that perhaps Jezreel served a more religious

function as opposed to Samaria. Archaeologist Prof. David Ussishkin asserts that Samaria had a more royal, palatial function, while Jezreel was more of a military hub.

Excavations at Jezreel dating to the ninth century B.C.E. show that a large fortification wall was constructed at the same time Omri was building up Samaria. The construction of these walls, however, was very different from those at Samaria. The walls of Samaria were built from high-quality ashlar (worked stones) laid with incredible precision. The walls at Jezreel, however, were constructed using cyclopean masonry—using uncut, un-quarried boulders and stones. This difference in construction suggests the cities each had unique and different functions.

Ussishkin believes that, while Israel's capital was at Samaria, it was not logistically feasible to build a central military base there. (For one, it would have been especially difficult for Israel's greatest military branch, chariots and war horses to be based in the hills.) So the Omrides constructed a military base at Jezreel, which was located in close proximity to both Samaria and Megiddo (another large Israelite city of great importance). Situated in the lush Jezreel valley, the city would have had easy access to barley and chaff—feed for the war horses. Jezreel's military function also explains why Jehoram might have been sent back to the city to be healed of his battle wounds, and why Jehoram and Ahaziah were able to escape so quickly on chariots when Jehu came against them.

## Walls of the Acropolis

Perhaps nothing has sparked more archaeological debate regarding Samaria than the dating of the many walls found on the acropolis, where the royal palace would have been located. Among all the debate, however, archaeologists agree that there were six main building periods and six main pottery periods. Different archaeologists assign different dates to these periods, but a general picture comes into focus when we analyze the phases of use.

The Bible records that Solomon recruited the services of expert Phoenician craftsmen in the construction of the temple (1 Kings 5). King Omri had a similar vision of quality and precision in mind when he constructed his palace; he also sought assistance from the Phoenicians. As noted by Kenyon, the ashlar masonry of Period I was extremely exact. Bosses (raised ornamental features) were carved on the stones of the outer retaining walls, a typical Phoenician architectural style (see Kenyon, Crowfoot and Sukenik's *Samaria-Sebaste I: The Buildings of Samaria*). Some of the preexisting cisterns were also truncated during this period.

To fortify the acropolis, a so-called "inner wall" was constructed. This inner wall, however, was actually comprised of three separate walls: one to the north, one to the south, and another to the west (the eastern slope was the least steep and would presumably have been used for entrance into the city, which could explain the lack of a fourth wall). These three walls weren't all built at the same time. The southern wall was built first in Period I, and the other two were built later in Period II (the northern wall was originally dated to Period I, but as Franklin opines, this wall was actually part of Period II construction).

In addition to these three inner walls, a large casemate wall was constructed along the palace perimeter

during Period II. Along this casemate wall, a "pool of Samaria" was discovered, which some theorize was the same pool Ahab's chariot was washed in after his death (1 Kings 22:38: "And they washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood ...").

If this "pool of Samaria" along the Period II casemate wall is the one Ahab's chariot was washed in, then Period II can be dated to Ahab's construction (mid-ninth century B.C.E.), and Period I would correspondingly be dated to the time of King Omri (early ninth century B.C.E.). This is the prevailing belief held by Kathleen Kenyon, though some, like the archaeologist George Ernest Wright, have tried to place Period II in a later, post-Omride-dynasty era.

Debate about Period II aside, the difference between the Period I Phoenician-style masonry and the Period III masonry is stark. Whereas Period I saw exact, precisely quarried ashlar, the later Period III utilized coarse, rough ashlar. This could correspond with a post-Omride era. By the end of the Omride dynasty (Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah and Jehoram) when Jehu came on the scene, Israel entered a period of war, economic subjugation (as famously relayed by the Black Obelisk) and political upheaval.

Period IV saw a lot of reconstruction. While the masonry was similar to Period III, the pottery was markedly different. Kenyon attributed this to the period of Jeroboam II (first half of the eighth century B.C.E.), the king which 2 Kings 14:27-28 say "saved" an ailing Israel and "recovered" lands for them. It makes sense that renovation and reconstruction would have been a function of this endeavor. Finally, Periods V and VI ended with Sargon II's conquest of Samaria, toward the end of the eighth century B.C.E.

Again, different methods of dating are used by different archaeologists, and the dating gets more nuanced when leaving aside the masonry and analyzing the pottery. But this is the general picture from Samaria's walls.

## Ivory Assemblage

The Bible tells us that Israel had good diplomatic relations with Phoenicia. In addition to Phoenician influence in Samaria's original construction, we know that Ahab's wife, Jezebel, was from Zidon (1 Kings 16:31), one of the chief Phoenician cities. But the Phoenician connection is also made evident by an assemblage of ivories found in Samaria.

These ivories were discovered during the two phases of excavations from 1908 to 1935: the Harvard Expedition led by Egyptologist George Andrew Reisner, and the joint excavation led by Sir John Winter Crowfoot. The ivory assemblage is often highlighted as the greatest confirmation of detailed Bible historicity



A common theme in these ivories is the “woman at the window” (a specific motif that can be directly associated with a couple of biblical accounts, not least that of Jezebel in 2 Kings 9:30, as well as Sisera’s mother: Judges 5:28). The “woman at the window” scenes discovered at Arslan Tash and Nimrud are quite different stylistically to the “woman at the window” found in Samaria.



discovered in Samaria. 1 Kings 22:39 says that Ahab famously built an “ivory house”—the word “house” simply referring to any structure or room.

Much has been written on the massive assemblage of around 12,000 ivory pieces discovered at the site (not to mention many more charred pieces) and their relation to this passage. One of the most notable observations is that the ivories contain many Egyptian religious themes. Yet to an Egyptologist, the artistic style of the ivories is clearly not Egyptian, as noted by Kenyon. The ivories found at Samaria are distinctly Phoenician in style (where Egyptian motifs were heavily utilized), which makes sense considering Samaria’s Phoenician masonry and Phoenician queen.

Similar assemblages of ivory have been found at other Middle Eastern sites—the most notable being Arslan Tash (ancient Hadātu) in Syria, and Nimrud, in Assyria. But the ivories discovered at Samaria are quite different stylistically from ivories discovered at other sites.

There are three main styles of art found on Iron Age ivories: North Syrian, Phoenician and South Syrian (which is an intermediate style between North

Syrian and Phoenician). The Arslan Tash ivories are categorized as South Syrian, *not* Phoenician like the Samarian ivories. Although these differing ivory assemblages indicate a similar prevailing culture, they come from two different places or, at least, two different artists.

It is tempting to conclude that the ivories found at Nimrud were taken and pillaged from Ahab’s collection. After all, Nimrud was the capital of Assyria under Sargon II, who captured Samaria. But the ivories found in Assyria, though depicting the same scenes found on the Samarian ivories, are carved in a completely different style. Nimrud archaeologist Sir Max Mallowan said that some ivories were probably carved to suit the Assyrian style (Mallowan, *Nimrud and its Remains*, Vol. I). Despite the suggestion that they were pillaged from the Assyrian invasion of Samaria, it doesn’t make much artistic sense that Ahab’s ivory house would have the same scenes carved in completely different styles. Even if he did, why would the Assyrian looters leave some 12,000 pieces behind? In fact, given how many of the Samarian ivories were destroyed, and that the rest were found

# Understanding ancient Samaria is crucial to understanding biblical history. As the capital of the north, Samaria was more than just a city, it was a symbol for the kingdom of Israel.

under a pile of mud-brick, it is entirely plausible that the marauding Assyrians were unaware of the ivory inside the structure they were destroying.

Stylistic debates aside, these contemporary ivories give insight into what might have been present in Samaria. The ivories at Arslan Tash, for example, were decorated with glass inlays, gold leaf and even paint. Ivory-decorated bedsteads were also uncovered at Nimrud, which could have existed in Samaria per Amos 6:4 (a verse that decries the lazy, inequitable opulence of Samaria).

The ivories at Samaria, for their part, were probably affixed to something, such as a wall or a piece of furniture, seeing as they were mostly carved in low relief. (One exception is a pair of lions, which were carved in the round and had two holes in each ivory. Perhaps these were worn on a necklace.) The ivories also give insight into the royal architecture of the time, namely volute capitals and triple-recessed frames depicted on the scenes. These ivories paint a vivid picture of the Samaria of the Bible, depicting the luxurious and opulent lifestyles of Israel's kings.

Most importantly, the fact that the ivories from Samaria, Arslan Tash and Nimrud depict similar scenes shows the prevailing cosmopolitan zeitgeist during Iron Age II, of which the northern kingdom of Israel took part.

## Assemblage of Ostraca

Also uncovered at Samaria was an assemblage of ostraca (potsherds with engraved writing) near the southeastern section of the palace. These ostraca, dated to periods IV and V, are administrative records of shipments of oil and wine. They are dated in regnal years, indicating a king that ruled for either 9, 15 or 17 years, thus narrowing down the identification of the king in question to the reign of either Jehoahaz, Jehoash or Jeroboam II. The style of script rules out Jehoahaz, and the fact that the epigraphs were written on ostraca and not on papyri indicates either the late years of

Jehoash or the early years of Jeroboam II (as described in "Algorithmic Handwriting Analysis of the Samaria Inscriptions Illuminates Bureaucratic Apparatus in Biblical Israel," in PLOS One).

The fascinating part of these ostraca is who wrote them. A recent undertaking at Tel Aviv University used computer algorithms to analyze the handwriting to determine the probable number of scribes. A similar operation has been performed on 18 ostraca from Tel Arad in Judah, dating to 600 B.C.E. With these ostraca, a total of six writers was originally proposed, though upon further inspection, the number is now closer to 12 scribes for the 18 epigraphs. This indicates widespread literacy in Judah during the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E.

However, the Samaritan ostraca tell a different story: Using the same algorithm to analyze 31 epigraphs at Samaria, scientists discovered that the ostraca were penned by only *two* scribes. This was interpreted in the above-mentioned article as an indicator that literacy was very low in Samaria at this time, before a resurgence in literacy around the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E. Still, this point of literacy has been contested: While the Tel Arad ostraca represent the letters of numerous military servicemen, the Samaritan ostraca simply represent the work of the equivalent of an accountant's office (listen to our podcast "[Reexamined: Biblical Era Writings Reveal Royal Administration in Israel](#)" at [ArmstrongInstitute.org/go/writings](#)). Thus, in the case of determining literacy in the northern kingdom, care should be taken in extrapolations from such a limited, nonrepresentative data set.

## In Summation

Understanding ancient Samaria is crucial to understanding biblical history. As the capital of the north, Samaria was more than just a city, it was a symbol for the kingdom of Israel. Even the name "Samaria" became synonymous with the entire kingdom it ruled.

The archaeological findings at Samaria paint a detailed picture of what the ancient city was like, highlighting the luxurious lifestyle of the monarchs and the cosmopolitan nature of its society. The discovery of cisterns from a pre-Omride era, the grand ninth-century masonry at Jezreel, the Samaria pool, the ivories and the ostraca all come together to give cultural background for understanding the ancient city.

The findings at Samaria clearly and powerfully support the biblical account. Sure, there is still room for debate regarding minute specifics of dating or artistic style, but the archaeological finds at Samaria provide a more-than-coincidental portion of evidence supporting the historicity of the biblical account. ■



► **COINS** FROM PAGE 9

one might expect. Rather, the Year Four coins (along with a number of Year Two and Three coins) were found littered throughout the 7-by-14-meter cave. They were found in strata correlating to the last year of the Roman revolt. And they were found alongside broken pottery vessels, including jars and cooking pots. The cave had not been disturbed since the Second Temple period, providing a “time capsule” of Jewish life during the revolt.

The coins are decorated with various Jewish symbols, including the traditional “four plant species” of the Feast of Tabernacles—palm, myrtle, citron and willow—and a goblet or chalice that was likely part of the temple service.

One element missing on the revolt coins, which is found on other coins, is the minting authority responsible for creating them. This is usually a specific leader or council. There is no identifying authority in the text on the revolt coins. However, the use of symbols associated with the Jerusalem temple, as well as the fact that the temple was the main silver treasury, leads scholars to believe that the minting authority was temple officials.

Along with the motifs, the coins feature ancient Hebrew script, rather than the typical square Hebrew script of 2,000 years ago. This could be because the Jews wanted to link back to their ancient heritage or because the ancient text carried with it a more innate “holiness” than the new script. As for the text itself, the coins from the second year of the revolt display the text “For the freedom of Zion” in ancient Hebrew. The Year Four (C.E. 69–70) coins’ inscription reads “For the redemption of Zion.” Scholars believe that the change is indicative of the mood shift of the rebels as their defeat became inevitable.

The Year Four coins also reflect a change in the shape of some of the Hebrew letters. These changes could be due to the fact that there was a new minting authority or new mint itself, perhaps led by rebel leader Simon Bar Giora, who began to dominate Jerusalem in the final year of the revolt.

Both the hoard of Year Four coins in the Ophel cave in 2018 and those found in the current season were discovered in the right context. In 2018, they were found in a previously undisturbed cave that had been the final hiding place for Jews seeking to escape Roman barbarity. This summer, they were found in the C.E. 70 destruction layer.

“It’s not a usual phenomena that we can come to such a closed cave, untouched for 2,000 years, including the very last remains of life of the people who were sieged in Jerusalem, suffered in Jerusalem, till the very last minute of the Second Temple period,” Dr. Mazar said



A collection of revolt coins discovered during our 2018 Ophel excavation

in 2018. The same can now be said for the discovery of the above-ground C.E. 70 destruction, replete with Year Four revolt coins.

The discovery of the coins this summer was all the more impactful as they were found in the weeks and days leading up to Tisha B’Av. Commemorated on August 6–7, Tisha B’Av is an annual fast day on which many Jews remember the destruction of both King Solomon’s temple and the second temple.

The discovery of these coins—just before Tisha B’Av—was an important reminder: When we practice archaeology, we are not unearthing lifeless, inert stones, pottery and coins. Rather, all the walls, pottery and coins we uncover are filled with history, with stories and memories of real people—in this case, stories of pain, suffering and tremendous heartache. ■

# OUR HOME in Jerusalem







**T**HE NEW OFFICE OF THE ARMSTRONG INSTITUTE OF Biblical Archaeology is situated in the Jerusalem suburb of Talbiyeh. This neighborhood is adorned with mature trees, beautiful flowering gardens and many fine homes and buildings. The area was largely developed in the 1920s and 1930s, mainly by wealthy Christian Arabs who built homes in the Renaissance and Arab styles.

The house, originally called Villa Catana, was built in 1926 by Antonio Catana, a Christian businessman whose family belonged to the local Latin community. Antonio and his family lived in the home until 1948, when they relocated to Beirut.

The villa is built in the Liwan style, which characterizes Arab homes from this period in the Talbiyeh and Katamon neighborhoods. The front of the house is dominated by a wide staircase that leads up to the impressive steel double-doors. Guests approach the staircase via a beautifully landscaped courtyard, one that includes a mature olive tree, pomegranate tree and citrus tree.

In 1948, the home was transferred to the Custodian General of Absentees' Property. It changed owners many times over the years until it was transferred to Hebrew University in the 1970s. The timing of the university's acquisition of the building is interesting, as this is when Prof. Benjamin Mazar and Hebrew University formed an "iron-bridge" partnership with Herbert W. Armstrong and Ambassador College.

In 1978, the university sold the building to Canadian businessman Charles Bronfman, who later transferred the property to the Karev Foundation that he founded. The villa was renovated by architects Jeff and Debbie Remez. Two floors were added to the structure: a water cistern became the basement floor, and in 2001, the tile roof was raised slightly for the addition of a second floor.

Together with his wife, Andrea, Bronfman provided enthusiastic and generous support to the Israel Museum, particularly its archaeology department. The Bronfmans were central to the creation of the Samuel Bronfman Biblical and Archaeological Museum, named after Charles's father. In 1997, the Israel Museum recognized the Bronfmans' outstanding contributions by making them Honorary Fellows of Israel Museum.

The building was empty from 2014 until July 2022, when it was secured in a long-term lease by the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology. Immediately after signing the lease agreement, our staff got to work with the aim to restore the building and its gardens to their former beauty. Today, Villa Catana is the home of the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology.

We invite *Let the Stones Speak* subscribers to visit us in Jerusalem. To arrange your visit, please e-mail [letters@ArmstrongInstitute.org](mailto:letters@ArmstrongInstitute.org) ■



HERBERT W. ARMSTRONG



MOSHE KOL



YITZHAK NAVON



MENACHEM BEGIN

# A Warm Friend of Israel

The inspiring story of one man's love for Israel

BY BRENT NAGTEGAAL

**H**ERBERT W. ARMSTRONG HAD NO POLITICAL party, no royal office, no government commission. He possessed no personal fortune, nor was he backed by any state or corporate interest.

Yet he met personally with dozens of heads of state: prime ministers, presidents, kings, emperors, princes and princesses—and the list goes on. Leaders across the globe respected his message, extended him personal invitations, and collaborated with him. Several became his close friends.

A prolific author, educator, philanthropist and minister, Mr. Armstrong traveled the world sharing his knowledge. Though he met with the greats of the world from Asia to Africa to Europe and beyond, his greatest affection was for one tiny, new country at the heart of the world. He loved Israel, and Israel loved him back.



As a devoted student and teacher of the Bible, Mr. Armstrong believed in the glorious future of Jerusalem. During one four-year period, he traveled to Jerusalem 50 times.

The first official to welcome Mr. Armstrong into “a partnership with Israel” was Tourism Minister Moshe Kol. From that initial partnership at the Knesset in 1968 to his death in 1986, Mr. Armstrong had personal meetings with President Zalman Shazar, Prime Minister Golda Meir, President Ephraim Katzir, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Prime Minister Menachem Begin, President Yitzhak Navon, President Chaim Herzog and Prime Minister Shimon Peres. Mr. Armstrong also formed a strong bond with the mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek.

### The Start of Something Special

Mr. Armstrong’s friendship with Israel began in 1968 when he became interested in a major new archaeological project in Jerusalem. The dig was situated adjacent to the Western Wall, in territory gained during the Six-Day War. Prof. Benjamin Mazar, director of the Israel Exploration Society and former president of Hebrew University, had been commissioned to lead the excavation. When Mr. Armstrong saw for himself the scope of Professor Mazar’s excavation, he was seized with enthusiasm to support Mazar in the project.

Before the year was finished, Mr. Armstrong was invited to meet with Professor Mazar and Israeli leaders in a private room of the Knesset. It was there that Moshe Kol proposed a “partnership with Israel,” which he called “an iron bridge that can never be broken” between Ambassador College and Hebrew University. Dr. Josef Aviram, dean of the College of Humanities at Hebrew University, also attended the meeting, along with other leaders, offering Mr. Armstrong and the Ambassador men such a warm welcome that Mr. Armstrong found it “inspiring, astonishing and most unusual.”

Soon afterward, Professor Mazar and Professor Aviram accepted Mr. Armstrong’s invitation to visit the Ambassador College students in California and Texas. The archaeologists turned down three other major American universities seeking involvement in the project and offered Ambassador College a 50/50 joint participation.

### The Stones of Jerusalem

Between 1968 and 1976, scores of Ambassador students excitedly packed up and flew to Israel to volunteer on the excavation, a massive site on the southern wall of the Temple Mount. In addition to supplying what was praised as the excavation’s most enthusiastic laborers, Ambassador College shouldered half of the cost of the “big dig.” This excavation yielded artifacts dating back to the First Temple period (during the time of the temple originally built by Israel’s King Solomon).

Professor Mazar and Mr. Armstrong had a strong bond, which came easily due to the fact that they shared similar traits. Both were straight-talking and uncompromising. Both were interested in taking the Bible and objectively proving the truth rather than skewing it to fit preconceived beliefs.

After Mr. Armstrong’s death, Professor Mazar wrote, “During the years of our association with him, all of us developed the highest regard for his wonderful personality and qualities. His deep devotion to the ideals of peace and justice in the spirit of the biblical prophets was appreciated by his friends in Israel. His feeling for





Israel and Jerusalem was manifested in his true interest in the archaeological excavations near the Temple Mount and in the City of David. His name will always be attached to this most important undertaking carried out in Jerusalem.”

Following Professor Mazar’s excavation, Mr. Armstrong continued to support archaeology in the City of David. From 1980 through the summer of 1985, he sent students and donations to support excavations there led by Yigal Shiloh. Dr. Shiloh graciously accepted the volunteer help, saying he would use Ambassador students exclusively on his archaeological projects if he could. The Ambassador International Cultural Foundation also contributed to an excavation at Tel Zeror in northern Israel. Mr. Armstrong’s support for archaeology spanned 18 years.

### Reviving the Legacy

The excavations conducted by Hebrew University and Ambassador College finished in 1985. The following year, Herbert W. Armstrong died after more than 50 years of active, vibrant, passionate years of service to the cause of peace and abundant living for all of mankind.

However, those whom Mr. Armstrong entrusted to continue this work rejected his legacy. The college was closed and the campuses sold. The humanitarian and cultural activities of the foundation ceased.

Yet some refused to let the work of Herbert W. Armstrong die. In 1989, another tiny new beginning

took place when Gerald Flurry began working to keep Mr. Armstrong’s legacy and work alive.

The Armstrong International Cultural Foundation began in 1996 as the Philadelphia Foundation. Early that year, it took over a project the defunct Ambassador Foundation had abandoned: a collaboration with the Al-Hussein Society in Amman, Jordan, sending volunteers to work with physically and mentally handicapped children.

The foundation went on to support the Petra National Trust and Jerusalem’s Liberty Bell Park. And in 2006, a much greater door suddenly opened up.

During Benjamin Mazar’s excavations in the shadow of the Temple Mount, a young girl frequented the dig site, rubbing elbows with archaeologists, spending time with the Ambassador students, and taking a keen interest in the work. Her name was Eilat.

In 1986, digging again commenced near the Temple Mount. This time it was Eilat Mazar, the professor’s granddaughter, who was heading the project. The younger Mazar focused on the First Temple period at the eastern part of the site.

In August 2005, shortly after commencing digging in the City of David, Dr. Eilat Mazar announced that she and her team had discovered the remains of a large public building that dates to the 10th century B.C.E. Mazar believed that the evidence indicated this structure was none other than the palace of King David.

When Gerald Flurry read about Dr. Mazar’s





Gerald Flurry and Dr. Eilat Mazar discuss future projects.

spectacular discovery, he recalled the history between Eilat's grandfather and Mr. Armstrong. He instructed his son to make contact with Dr. Mazar and inquire about rekindling the relationship.

Dr. Mazar had many fond memories of the close relationship between her grandfather and Mr. Armstrong. "Without the support of Mr. Armstrong and the Ambassadors, the Temple Mount excavations would have never become, as it did, the most important and largest excavations in Israel at that time," she said. Dr. Mazar easily recognized the Armstrong foundation's roots and was thrilled to continue the tradition, remarking that she was "excited to have the Ambassadors back with us."

The Armstrong International Cultural Foundation and Herbert W. Armstrong College participated in all of Dr. Mazar's excavations in Jerusalem from 2006 to her death in 2021. They had the pleasure of helping her make a string of remarkable discoveries.

In addition, from 2012–2019, the foundation hosted acclaimed archaeological exhibits at its headquarters in Edmond, Oklahoma, featuring biblical seal impressions from the time of Jeremiah, as well as the seal impressions of King Hezekiah and Isaiah of Judah—all found during Dr. Mazar's excavations.

Today, the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology is thrilled to continue the legacy of Herbert W. Armstrong—an unofficial ambassador for world peace, a great educator, a close acquaintance of world leaders, and a warm friend of Israel. ■

## FEEDBACK

**Thanks for your fascinating publication! I particularly loved the "Shiloh" print edition sent to me.**

**Evelyn Sanders** GEORGIA, UNITED STATES

I greatly enjoyed reading the most recent issue of *Let the Stones Speak*. I've lived in present-day Shiloh for the last 19 years, so this issue particularly spoke to me. I would be very interested in getting copies of *Seals of Jeremiah's Captors Discovered* as well as *Seals of Isaiah and King Hezekiah Discovered*.

**Eliyahu Parker** SHILOH, ISRAEL

I'm certain that the info I gain from reading your publication will help my work as a tour guide and thus broaden my tourists' perspectives regarding the Bible and the land of Israel.

**Hughie Auman**, ISRAEL

I just received the first issues of the year of your interesting magazine. Yes, it really took the mail so many months to get here in Namibia. We are used to very long delivery times, also much of the mail is stolen on the way, so we can never be sure whether we will receive what is sent from overseas. But finally, the first two magazines of 2022 have arrived.

**Monika von Scheliha** WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA

## IN RESPONSE TO

### "AN OBJECTIVE LOOK AT RADIOCARBON DATING"

Thank you for your much needed article putting some balance and perspective on the whole carbon-dating process. There are too many assumptions to put a great deal of trust in dates obtained. I need a year range for me to take it seriously.

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