

Solomon's Gates

Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer, and Jerusalem

While there is archaeological evidence of the historical biblical figure King David, there is little evidence that confirms the biblical account of his son Solomon and his reign as king leading a great and powerful united kingdom of significant regional influence.

Interpreting biblical archaeological finding is challenging as it is influenced by the archaeologist's view of the historicity of biblical narratives and, perhaps as well, their political bias regarding the land of modern day Israel.

This can be seen in the debate about the excavation of four sites containing large ancient monumental gatehouses.

1902-1909

Despite excavating Tel Gezer using dubious methodology, British archaeologist Robert Macalister found evidence of a large Canaanite city with defensive walls, towers, and gates dated to the Middle Bronze Age (2000-1550 B.C.), which indicated that Gezer was a fortified city.

1955-1958

Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin excavates Tel Hazor and, besides identifying massive Canaanite structures on the 200 acre site, discovers a six chambered city gate and casement wall. From dating of recovered pottery sherds, Yadin believes the large unique and distinctive structures were built around the 10th century B.C.

1958

Publishing his findings in the Israel Exploration Journal, Yigael Yadin presents his theory in two articles that the fortified gates at Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer were attributed to Solomon: "Excavations at Hazor, 1957, Preliminary Communique" and "Solomon's City Wall and Gate at Gezer." Yadin's compelling theory was based on:

Architecture: Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer each exhibited the same massive and fortified six chambered gate attached to casement walls with very similar dimensions and featuring ashlar masonry often associated with Phoenician craftsmanship.

Hazor: Yadin noted the monumental six chambered gate had a distinctive design and dated to the 10th century B.C., which was around when the United Monarchy of the Kingdom of Israel began. Consulting the Bible, 1 Kings 9:15 mentioned Solomon building the walls of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer.

Megiddo: Yadin reviewed the archaeological findings by archaeologists sponsored by the University of Chicago in 1936-1937. Finding a similar monumental six chambered gate; but, in close proximity of buildings with pillars and holes bored suggestive of horse stables, they believed that Megiddo was one of the chariot cities mentioned in 1 Kings 10:26. Yadin recognized the distinctive design of the monumental six chambered gate attributable to Solomon.



Tel Hazor (1)



Tel Gezer (2)

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Gezer: Reviewing the work by Robert Macalister, who misidentified the half excavated six chambered gate as a Maccabean castle (2nd century, B.C.), Yadin recognized the dimensions and ashlar construction of the exposed half six chambered gate as attributable to Solomon.

Stratigraphy: The gates at Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer were located at the 10th century B.C. stratum on the basis of pottery sherds. This implied that all three gates were built during the same chronological period using the same construction plan.

Textual: The Bible mentions the construction of the walls of all three cities, and the evidence was supportive of an established government capable of carrying out these massive construction projects at large cities separated by at least 90 miles.

The construction pattern Solomon used for the Temple, his own home and Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer:

And he built the inner court with three rows of cut stone and a row of cedar beams. (1 Ki 6:36)

So the great court all around had three rows of cut stone and a row of cedar beams even as the inner court of the house of Yahweh, and the porch of the house. (1 Ki 7:12)

Now this is the account of the forced labor which King Solomon raised up to build the house of Yahweh, his own house, the Millo, the wall of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer. (1 Ki 9:15)

King Hiram of Tyre provided the Phoenician craftsmen and materials to construct Solomon's building projects.

1) Then Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon, when he heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father, for Hiram had always been one who loved David.

2) And Solomon sent word to Hiram, saying, 3) "You know that David my father was unable to build a house for the name of Yahweh his God because of the wars which surrounded him, until Yahweh put them under the soles of his feet. 4) But now Yahweh my God has given me rest on every side; there is neither adversary nor calamity. 5) So behold, I intend to build a house for the name of Yahweh my God, as Yahweh spoke to David my father, saying, 'Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, he will build the house for My name.' 6) So now, command that they cut for me cedars from Lebanon, and my servants will be with your servants; and I will give you wages for your servants according to all that you say, for you know that there is no one among us who knows how to cut timber like the Sidonians."

7) Now it happened, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, he was very glad and said, "Blessed be Yahweh today, who has given to David a wise son over this great people." 8) So Hiram sent word to Solomon, saying, "I have heard the message which you have sent me; I will do what you desire concerning the cedar and cypress timber. 9) My servants will bring them down from Lebanon to the sea; and I will make them into rafts to go by sea to the place where you direct me, and I will have them broken up there, and you shall carry them away. Then you shall accomplish my desire by giving food to my household." 10) So Hiram gave Solomon as much as he desired of the cedar and cypress timber. (1 Ki 5:1-10)



Tel Megiddo (3)

1964-1974

American archaeologist William Dever excavated Tel Gezer with a focus on its stratigraphy and chronology... (continues)

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to understand its layers of different settlement and destruction. Among his discoveries, Dever found evidence that established that Gezer's six chambered gate was of the 10th century B.C. confirming Yadin's proposal that it was Solomonic.

1992-2012

Israeli archaeologists Israel Finkelstein and David Ussishkin conduct further excavation of Megiddo and made several significant discoveries. Pertinent to the dating of Megiddo's ashlar gate:

2000: Edited by Finkelstein, I., Ussishkin, D. and Halpern, B., *Megiddo III: The 1992-1996 Seasons* was published. In a chapter titled, The Iron Age Pottery Assemblages from Areas F, K and H and Their Stratigraphic and Chronological Implications, Finkelstein and colleagues observed that the ceramic typology of assembled pottery sherds of Megiddo were characteristic and more consistent to a date of 900-850 B.C.

2014: Published in the journal *Radiocarbon*, "Absolute Chronology of Megiddo, Israel, in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages: High-Resolution Radiocarbon Dating," Toffolo, Arie, Martin, Boaretto & Finkelstein show that radiocarbon dating of Megiddo's monumental structures (i.e. gate and stables) date to 900-850 B.C. not a century earlier.

The current findings of Megiddo, based on stratigraphy, ceramic typology, and high resolution radiocarbon dating, indicate that Megiddo's gate is firmly dated around 900 B.C. Finkelstein and other archaeologists propose that the gates found in Hazor and Gezer are likely of the same later period of construction.

Challenging biblical archaeology by denying the gates as Solomonic, and attributing their construction to the period of the Divided Monarchy and Northern Kingdom Israel King Omri, who reign somewhere around 880-875 B.C., this work produced vigorous and sharp academic debate. This meant that David and Solomon did not reign as a powerful kings over a united kingdom of regional power and influence, and were instead tribal chieftains leading small poor villages. Implied was that the Bible was of later composition and written to shape and influence how Israel saw itself.

Defense of Hazor's gate as attributable to Solomon

Prominent archaeologist of Hazor, as Area Supervisor under Yigael Yadin (1955-1958, 1968) and Excavation Director (1990-2023), Amnon Ben-Tor defended the 10th century B.C. dating of the monumental six chambered ashlar gate based on:

Pottery sherds and assemblages at the layer of the gate's construction were typical for the 10th century B.C.

Architectural dimensions of Hazor's gate to the monumental six chambered ashlar gates of Megiddo and Gezer were almost identical, which implied the existence of a powerful centralized government.

More recent excavations focused on the stratigraphy of Hazor confirmed Yadin's dating of the gate's construction to the 10th century B.C. In addition, radiocarbon dating of charred olive pits at this layer resulted in dates around 11-10 century B.C.

Defense of Gezer's gate as attributable to Solomon

2023: Published in a peer reviewed open access journal offered by the Public Library of Science (PLOS), Austrian archaeologist Lyndelle Webster and colleagues shared their findings in "The Chronology of Gezer from the End of the Late Bronze Age to Iron Age II: A Meeting Point for Radiocarbon, Archaeology, Egyptology and the Bible."

The study took charred seeds from several layers of settlement and destruction from the late 13th to 9th century B.C. to determine the history of Gezer on a fixed timeline.

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Pertinent to Gezer's monumental six chambered ashlar gates, the team dated its construction to the first half of 10th century B.C. and "not the 9th century B.C. as previously thought."

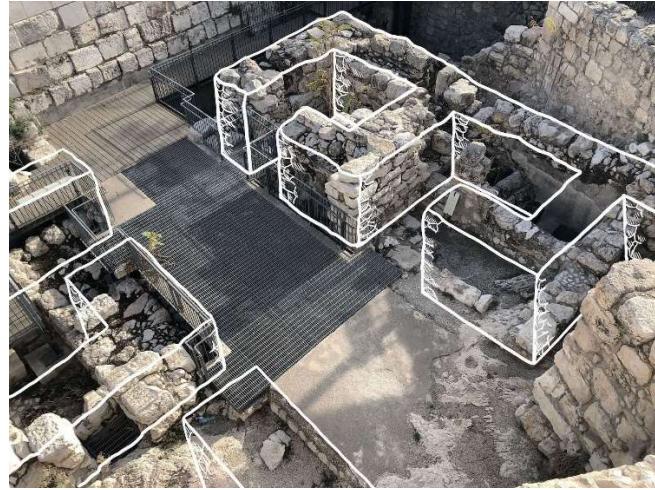
The large gatehouse in the Ophel of Jerusalem

As the result of excavations of the Ophel (1986-1987), Eliat Mazar and her grandfather Benjamin Mazar reported in 1989 the unearthing of a monumental structure they initially identified as a "Royal Gateway," which they dated roughly to late 9th – early 8th century B.C. While the monumental structure was fragmented from destruction and not fully excavated, the remaining 4 chambered ashlar gate was clearly visible.

2006: When excavating the Eastern Hill (2005-2008), Eliat Mazar discovers the Large Stone Structure which she associated with the Palace of King David, and the site becomes known as the City of David. Within the context of these findings and the biblical data, Mazar redated the "Royal Gateway" to the 10th century B.C.

2010: As director of the Ophel excavations (2009-2021), Mazar presented data confirming the dating of Ophel's massive ashlar gates to the 10th century B.C. of King Solomon.

Pottery sherds and assemblages were very similar to pottery assemblages of other excavations like Khirbet Qeiyafa and Khirbet al-Ra'i that firmly date to the 10th century B.C.



Jerusalem Ophel's Gatehouse drawn in overlay (4)

Architecture design and measurements (i.e. length, thickness, chamber size, casement wall, etc.) were almost identical to the monumental ashlar gates of Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer. The implied a powerful centralized government used the same engineering and construction blueprint to fortify the kingdom's cities.

	Jerusalem	Megiddo
Gate Length	10.4 m long x 14.8 m wide	10.2 m long x 14.6 m wide
Passageway Width	4 m	4.2 m
Wall Thickness	1.5 m	1.6 m
Chamber Size	2.8 m long x 2.4 m wide	2.8 m long x 2.2 m wide

Textual evidence from 1 Kings 9:15 speaks of the walls "of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer." All four gates feature the same method of construction involving rows of hewn ashlar stones, topped by a horizontal row of cedar beams, and likely topped by another series of ashlar stones (1 Ki 6:36; 7:12).

The identification of Jerusalem's gate as Solomonic has been debated for a variety of reasons. One issue with Jerusalem's gate was that its chambers were uniquely "closed;" instead of a three sided chamber, each chamber had four walls with a narrow opening. However, countering this objection were archaeological findings in Jordan at the large copper production site of Khirbet-en-Nahas.

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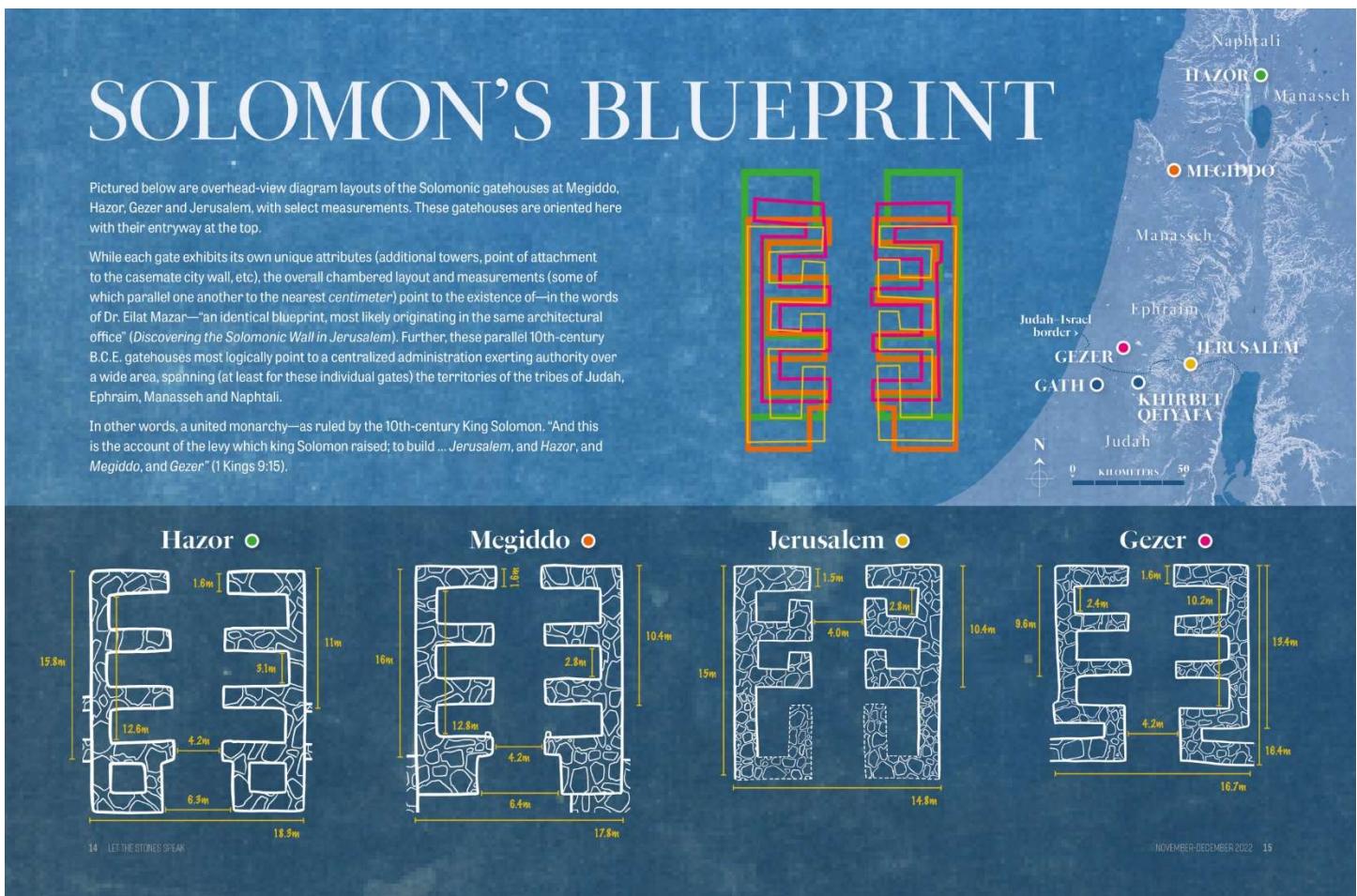
Systematically excavating Khirbet-en-Nahas (2002-2009), Thomas Levy and Mohammad Najjar found evidence of a large fortress settlement with a four chambered gatehouse with “closed” chambers. Architecturally, its monumental four chambered gate was considered as one normally found at the entrance to a border fortresses – in this case an industrial copper production complex.

Jerusalem's massive four chambered gatehouse is considered an inner gatehouse within a larger royal complex.

From careful high precision radiocarbon dating, the fortress was constructed and copper smelting was most active during the span of 10th to 9th century B.C. From this data, Levy and Najjar wonder if this Edomite mine was controlled by David and Solomon as the Bible indicates:

King David also set these apart as holy to Yahweh with the silver and the gold which he had carried away from all the nations: from Edom, Moab, the sons of Ammon, the Philistines, and from Amalek. Moreover, Abishai the son of Zeruiah smote 18,000 of Edom in the Valley of Salt. Then he placed garrisons in Edom, and all the Edomites became servants to David. And Yahweh granted salvation to David wherever he went. (1 Chron 18:11-13)

Khirbet-en-Nahas' closed four chambered gate, dating, and textual evidence provided an architectural parallel that supported Eliat Mazar's view of Jerusalem's gate as Solomonic.



Solomon's Gatehouse Blueprint (5)

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Unless further excavations take place, there may not be a unanimous conclusion about Solomon's gates; however, the evidence is very compelling. Given that Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer were cities of the divided monarchy of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and Jerusalem was of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, the inclusion of Jerusalem's gate as Solomonic is significant. Eliat Mazar's excavation of the Ophel, recovering King Hezekiah's clay bulla (who reigned during the late 8th century) and other significant biblical figures, established that Jerusalem was the center of government administration. And the only time that construction of identical and massive fortifications of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer could occur is when the kingdom was united under Solomon who governed from Jerusalem.

Addendum

Khirbet Qeiyafa (Arabic meaning uncertain)

An ancient fortress just over 5-1/2 acres, overlooking the Elah Valley near modern day Beit Shemesh, was excavated by Yosef Garfinkel (2007-2013).

Khirbet Qeiyafa's massive casement walls, fortified with 200,000 tons of stone, indicated a centralized government capable of large scale construction. The homes at the periphery of Khirbet Qeiyafa were attached and abutted the town's fortified casement walls. This pattern of fortification was distinctive of later Southern Kingdom of Judah city walls like Beersheba and Tel en-Nasbeh.

Of all the ancient cities in the divided monarchies of Israel or Judah, Khirbet Qeiyafa was the only one that had two gates. This distinction formed the basis of Garfinkel's identification of Khirbet Qeiyafa as the Bible's Shaaraim, which in Hebrew meant "double gate."

Thus David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and he struck the Philistine and put him to death; but there was no sword in David's hand. Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and put him to death and cut off his head with it. Then the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, so they fled. But the men of Israel and Judah arose and shouted and pursued the Philistines as far as the valley and to the gates of Ekron. And the slain Philistines lay fallen along the way to **Shaaraim** (Hebrew šā 'ārayim which translates to "double gate"), even to Gath and Ekron. (1 Sam 17:50-52)

Archaeological remains of a royal storehouse, large buildings, and artifacts clearly indicated that Khirbet Qeiyafa served in government administration.

The Khirbet Qeiyafa Ostracon, a pottery sherd with one of the earliest Proto-Canaanite script, proved that alphabetic writing existed.

Unlike nearby Philistine sites, there was an absence of pig bones consistent with pottery sherd assemblages indicative of ancient Israeli settlement.

Radiocarbon dating olive pits firmly placed the dating to 1020-980 B.C., which was the same period of the Bible's record of a powerful and extensive united kingdom under David.

Khirbet Qeiyafa is significant as a growing archaeological body of evidence establishing the existence of a centralized and powerful Davidic kingdom during the 10th century B.C., which is consistent with the biblical record. This direct evidence supports the circumstantial evidence of the gates found in Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer as Solomonic.

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Khirbet al-Ra'i (Arabic: The Ruin of the Shepherd)

Excavating the ruins of Khirbet al-Ra'i, located 2-1/2 miles west of Lachish, Yosef Garfinkel (2015-2019) recovered archaeological evidence establishing a clear transition of cultures, from its Philistine beginnings to a large substantial Hebraic settlement during the 10th century B.C.

Khirbet al-Ra'i's location atop a hill provided a strategic defensible location for a city and would sit at the border of Israel and Philistia.

Second only to Khirbet Qeiyafa, a large well preserve pottery assemblage, complete or nearly complete, was recovered adding to the library of ceramic typology of the early 10th century B.C. This preservation resulted from a sudden destruction that occurred during this period.

In consideration of all of the data, Garfinkel and his collaborators believe that they found the biblical city Ziklag, a location that has been under debate for some 150 years. Up until now, no proposed site has matched the geographical location, cultural transition, and time period as described by the Bible.

The Bible records when the Philistine king Achish gave Ziklag to David:

Then David said in his heart, "Now I will be swept away one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should utterly escape into the land of the Philistines. Saul then will despair of searching for me anymore in all the territory of Israel, and I will escape from his hand." So David arose and crossed over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to Achish the son of Maoch, king of Gath. And David lived with Achish at Gath, he and his men, each with his household, even David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelite, and Abigail the Carmelite, Nabal's wife. And it was told to Saul that David had fled to Gath, so he no longer searched for him. Then David said to Achish, "If now I have found favor in your sight, let them give me a place in one of the cities in the country, that I may live there; for why should your servant live in the royal city with you?" So Achish gave him Ziklag that day; therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. (1 Sam 27:1-6)

The Bible records when Ziklag was attacked that chronologically corresponds to the archaeological destruction layer found by Garfinkel:

Then it happened when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had made a raid on the Negev and on Ziklag and had struck Ziklag and burned it with fire; and they took captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great—they did not put anyone to death—and carried them off and went their way. Then David and his men came to the city, and behold, it was burned with fire, and their wives and their sons and their daughters had been taken captive. So David and the people who were with him lifted their voices and wept until there was no strength in them to weep. (1 Sam 30:1-4)

Not only contributing to the growing body of archaeological evidence of a large and powerful Hebraic kingdom, Khirbet al-Ra'i provides evidence of the rise of King David as the Bible described.

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