The transition from Stratum 4 to Stratum 3 in the eighth century BCE is manifested by the alteration of the city’s entire fortification system. The outer city gate (strata 5-4) was founded within the southern slope of the hill. One such pit was made into a dwelling and was found to contain ceramic vessels and an oven. The deep well discovered near the city gate may have been hewn as early as this time.

Some scholars link the earthquake that destroyed Beer Sheva to this period. The earthquake that destroyed Beer Sheva was recorded in 2 Kings 19:20, where King Hezekiah is said to have fled to the city of Elath to escape the Assyrian army led by Sennacherib. Sennacherib’s campaign in the region is mentioned in Assyrian records and is also referred to in the Bible.

**The History of Tel Beer Sheva**

Remains of early settlement at Tel Beer Sheva attest to its habitation in the fourth millennium BCE (the Chalcolithic period). Finds from this period include sherds, although no architectural remains were found. Numerous settlement sites from this period were found along the Beer Sheva and Besor streambeds.

After a gap of more than 2,000 years, at the end of the second millennium BCE (the Iron Age, also known as the Israelite period), settlement on the mound was resumed. The mound was then continuously occupied for about 500 years. Excavators identified nine strata from this period, representing the stages in the building and destruction of the site.

The campaign of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, is mentioned in 2 Kings 18:17-19:37, where the king of Judah, Hezekiah, is said to have paid tribute to Sennacherib. However, Hezekiah later rebelled against Assyria and called on the Babylonians for help. Sennacherib then led an army to invade Judah and destroyed Beer Sheva.

**The water system** — The water system was built to serve the inhabitants of the city mainly in time of siege, the well hewn near the city gate met their ordinary daily needs. The water system collapsed and became blocked at the end of the Hellenistic period, apparently due to an earthquake.

After taking in the view from the top of the stepped shaft, descend the stairs to the underground reservoir. You will be amazed at the size of the chambers, the thick plaster that prevented the water from seeping out, and the ancient support walls built to hold up the ceiling after its partial collapse. Take the stairs over a narrow and sliding channel to the wide feeder channel, through which water entered the reservoir. The exit from the water system is via a secondary opening hewn during work on the system in antiquity and blocked after its completion. It was reopened during excavations and now serves as an exit from the mound.

**The rules of behavior**

- Use marked paths only.
- Do not enter areas that have not been opened to the public.
- Do not damage the antiquities and the archaeological finds.
- Do not climb walls.
- Follow instructions of park personnel and signs.
- Facets for drinking water, garbage bins and toilets have been installed at the site for your convenience.
- Please keep the area clean.

**World Heritage Site**

**Biblical Tels: Megiddo, Hazor, Beer Sheva**

In 2005, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) inscribed the three biblical tels of Hazor, Megiddo and Beer Sheva as World Heritage Sites of outstanding universal significance. These mounds, mentioned frequently in the Bible, were chosen out of approximately 200 tels as the best examples of cities from the time of the Bible. The intensive archaeological excavations carried out at these mounds have produced exciting finds that shed light on the history of the various peoples of the land of Israel in general, and the history of the people of Israel in particular. Among the impressive archaeological vestiges are gates, walls, temples, storerooms, and water systems.

UNESCO determined six criteria for inscription, even one of which (other than Criterion 6) is enough to place a site on the World Heritage List. The biblical mounds were inscribed after having met four criteria, as follows:

1. The three sites represent an interchange of human values throughout the ancient Near East, forged through extensive trade routes and alliances with other states, and manifested in building styles that merged Egyptian, Syrian and Canaanite influences to create a distinctive local style.
2. The three sites are a testament to civilizations that have disappeared — that of the Canaanite cities of the open courtyard and the biblical cities of the Iron Age. These cultures manifest themselves in town planning, fortifications, palaces, and water collection technologies.
3. The biblical cities exerted a powerful influence on later history through the biblical narrative.
4. The three sites, through their mentions in the Bible, constitute a religious and spiritual testimony of outstanding universal value.

**Photographs from other INPA World Heritage Sites:**

- Tel Megiddo - the Canaanite cultic site
- Tel Hazor - buildings from the Iron Age period
The storehouse collapsed. Extensive storehouses were built near the gate and next to the water system. Such drastic changes may be interpreted as the result of the destruction of the Stratum 4 city in an earthquake.

The Stratum 3 city was restored in Stratum 2. A governor’s palace was built at this time, the city’s temple was dismantled and the stones of its altar were buried in one of the storehouse walls. A unique large house with deep cellars dubbed the “Basement House” was also erected at this stage. The destruction of the Stratum 2 city in a great conflagration has been dated to the end of the eighth century BCE, and was apparently connected to narration by King Sennacherib of Assyria in 701 BCE. The exposed remains of Stratum 2 were preserved at the site and comprise the major sites along the touring route.

After the destruction, a partial and unsuccessful attempt was made to rebuild the city (Stratum 1). However it was soon abandoned and remained in ruin until the beginning of the Persian period.

During the Persian period (fifth to fourth centuries BCE), a small fortress was built at the site. Alongside it, dozens of pits were dug to store wheat supplies for soldiers and mainly fodder for horses. During the Hellenistic period (third to second centuries BCE), a temple was built here. The stone base of its altar can be seen next to the Basement House.

During the time of Herod the Great and his successors (first century BCE to the first century CE), a large fortress containing a bathhouse was built on the mound. Two plastered pools belonging to this fortress can still be seen.

The last structure to be built on the mound was a diamond-shaped fortress built during the Roman period (second to third centuries CE). It was restored during the Early Arab period (seventh to eighth centuries CE).

During the Roman and Byzantine periods the main settlement moved westward and a large city was established in the area of modern Beer Sheva. That city was later abandoned, and rebuilt around 1900 by the Turks as an administrative center, where the present-day old city (the old Beer Sheva town center) now stands.

During World War I, Beer Sheva served as a staging ground for the Ottoman Turkish army which was preparing to capture the Suez Canal. When the British Army advanced from Egypt to Palestine, the Turks fortified Tel Beer Sheva and placed a cannon position on it. An infantry unit of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) conquered the site on October 31, 1917.

The History of Research

Excavations at Tel Beer Sheva were carried out from 1969 to 1976 by the Tel Aviv University team under the direction of Professor Ze’ev Herzog, and in its last season under the direction of Professor Zeev Herzog. After the continuity and character of the strata were clarified, the expedition set the goal of uncovering large segments of the last city on the mound (Stratum 2). Remains of the strata were clarified, the expedition set the goal of uncovering the entire city.

The Tour of the Site

The visit begins at the altar square, continues in a loop route up to the city gate and the adjacent well and passes through the gate. It takes in interesting sites on the way to the observation tower, and ends at the exit from the water system. The visit takes about one hour. A complex of mud-brick rooms has been built at the base of the mound where groups can enjoy experiential activities by reservation and at an additional charge.

King Hezekiah’s reform is documented, among other places, in 2 Kings 18:1-4:

“In the third year of King Josiah’s son of Eliakim of Israel, Hezekiah son of King Ahaz of Judah became king... He did what was pleasing to the Lord, just as his father David had done. He abolished the shrines and smashed the altars and cut down the sacred posts” (2 Kings 18:1-4).

The altar shows that the city had a cultic structure, built in the framework of the religious administration of the Judean monarchy. Its dismantling and burial attest to a change in the kingdom’s rituals. Based on the dating of Stratum 2 at the end of the eighth century BCE, the abandonment of the cultic site was connected to the religious reform initiated by King Hezekiah of Judah according to the Bible. (The temple discovered at Tel Azad was also done away with in this reform.)

2. The outer gate – The outer gate, in use in strata 3 and 4, consists of a stone foundation topped with mud-bricks. The reconstruction line is clearly marked.

3. The well – The well is located to the left and outside the gate. Hewn to a great depth, its water served the inhabitants of the city as well as commercial and military caravans that passed this way.

The altar is one corner of the square and was a reconstructed replica of the large, sacrificial four-horned altar whose stones were discovered incorporated into a storehouse wall. The original altar is on display at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

4. Drainage channel – This is marked by stone coverings incorporated into the pavement that leads from the main gate to the outer gate. The channel led surplus rain water away from the city to prevent damage to the walls. The channel exited via the outer gate, and apparently led to the water reservoir on the slope.

5. The main gate – Two high, thick-walled towers protected the front of the gate. On either side of the gate were chambers. Plastered benches found in one of these chambers served as seats for merchants or royal representatives. Currently the remains of the passageway, you can see the left side of the strata 3-2 gate, while on the right side and at a lower level, is the right side of the earlier gate (strata 5-4). Benches erected in one of the gate rooms served the elders, merchants, judges or prophets while conducting their activities in the gate.

6. The city square – This was the only open space within the city. All streets led to this central plaza, where the local market could be held or the inhabitants could gather. In the Bible, such an entrance square is called a “square of the city gate.”

7. The peripheral street – The peripheral street surrounded the eastern outline of the city and was parallel to the wall. It was approximately two meters wide. Additional streets were also found, which crossed the city in a straight line through the center.

8. “The governor’s palace” – This structure is outstanding in its size and plans, and is identified with the biblical house of the “city prefect” or the governor. It featured an entrance corridor and two paved halls which comprised the ceremonial wing, as well as residential units, a kitchen and a storeroom.

9. The early street – In the center of the peripheral street, you will notice an area dug to a depth of about three meters, in which the route of the earlier street was found. This led shows that the plan of the city was maintained from its beginnings in Stratum 5 until the end of Stratum 2. Further on, to the left you will see the remains of a plastered pool from the Herodian period.

11. The residential quarter – To the left of the street you will see the residential area. The dwellings in this part of the city are integrated into the casemate city wall and were built in a uniform fashion. They included three or four rooms: an anteroom that apparently served as a courtyard and a cooking area and had steps leading to the roof, two storage rooms one of which was apparently used for animals divided by a row of columns; and a back room that was part of the casemate wall and served as a bedroom.

Some scholars suggest that the well at the gate is connected to the one mentioned in Genesis in the story of the alliance of Abraham and Isaac. Here is the well in the garden of the city: and he went to the shebbath and held a banquet for his guests and a banquet in the garden of the city. (Genesis 18:6-10)