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World Heritage Site

The Biblical Tells: Megiddo, Hazor, Beer Sheva

In 2005, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) inscribed the three biblical tells of Megiddo, Hazor and Beer Sheva as World Heritage Sites of outstanding universal significance. These mounds, mentioned frequently in the Bible, were chosen out of approximately 200 tells 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, storehouses, stables 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:

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



The horizontal tunnel of the water system

Welcome to Megiddo National Park

World Heritage Site

Tel Megiddo National Park was officially declared a national park in 1966. In 2005, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) inscribed Tel Megiddo as a World Heritage Site, together with the biblical tells of Hazor and Beer Sheva.



The temple area and the High Place from the Early Bronze Age

At 190 dunams (47.5 acres), Tel Megiddo National Park encompasses the archaeological mound of Megiddo, which has an area of about 60 dunams (15 acres) and rises about 60 meters above its surroundings. In addition to the settlement on the upper part of the archaeological mound, remains of a lower city were found to the northeast near the entrance to the site.

During the biblical period Megiddo was one of the most important cities in the country. Its location allowed it to control the outlet of the Iron Valley (Wadi Ara) to the Jezreel Valley and the *Via Maris* (the Way of the Sea), an international trade route that linked the ancient world's centers of culture and power – Egypt and Mesopotamia. The springs and fertile soil at its foot made Megiddo a desirable place to rule, and therefore it became the arena of frequent battles for its control. A possible echo of these battles may be found in the biblical Song of Deborah: *“The kings came, they fought; then fought the kings of Canaan, in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo...”* (Judges 5:19). Christian tradition identifies Megiddo as Armageddon, where the great battle of the End of Days will take place between the powers of good and evil (Revelation 16:16).

Some of the most impressive archaeological remains in the country have been unearthed in the extensive excavations that have been taking place here for more than a century. They attest to the city's eminence, particularly during the Bronze Age and the Iron Age.

History of the Site

Flint tools and a few sherds discovered at Megiddo attest to human habitation at the site as early as the Neolithic period (the seventh and sixth millennia BCE) and in the Chalcolithic period (the fifth and fourth millennia).

The Canaanite Period

Megiddo flourished as an urban center beginning in the Early Canaanite period (the Bronze Age), in the late fourth millennium BCE, as attested by the impressive remains of a monumental temple. During the third and second millennia BCE it was a powerful Canaanite city-state and thus earned mention in several Egyptian documents.

During the reign of the Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III (the fifteenth century BCE) Megiddo belonged to an alliance of Canaanite cities that rebelled against Egypt, under the protection of the Kingdom of Mitanni. The annals of Thutmose III describe the battle that took place in the valley at the foot of Megiddo, in which the Egyptian army defeated the rebels, plundering hundreds of chariots, thousands of horses and large quantities of grain. The arrival of the Egyptian army through the narrow Arunah Pass (Wadi Ara) was also documented. After the battle, the Egyptians besieged Megiddo for seven months until they conquered it.

Among the fourteenth-century BCE El-Amarna Letters – a remnant of a Late Bronze Age international archive discovered in Egypt – were six letters sent by King Biridiya of Megiddo, at that time an Egyptian protectorate, to Pharaoh Akhenaton. In them, Biridiya reports on the taxes he paid to the pharaoh and complains of harassment by the king of Shechem. The Canaanite city of Megiddo was destroyed in the second half of the twelfth century BCE.

The Israelite Period

The books of Joshua and Judges mention Megiddo as one of the Canaanite cities that the tribe of Manasseh was unable to take over (Joshua 17:11-13; Judges 1:27). However, Megiddo is also mentioned in the list of towns whose Canaanite kings Joshua defeated (Joshua 12:21). The Bible also describes King Solomon's building of Megiddo, together with Hazor and Gezer: *“And this is the account of the levy which king Solomon raised; to build the house of the Lord, and his own house, and Millo, and the wall of Jerusalem, and Hazor, and Megiddo, and Gezer”* (1 Kings 9:15).

In the second half of the tenth century BCE, Pharaoh Shishak led a major military campaign through Canaan (1 Kings 14:25-26); Megiddo appears in the list of conquests inscribed on the walls of the temple in Karnak, Egypt. The fragment discovered of a stela he erected at Megiddo is additional significant evidence of Shishak's campaign.

One opinion holds that King Solomon built a large city at Megiddo with two palaces with ashlar (dressed-stone) walls. According to another view, these palaces were built in the ninth century BCE by a king of the Israelite dynasty of Omri. During the eighth century BCE, Israelite Megiddo reached the height of its prosperity. Impressive remains from this period include fortifications, stables and a water system.

During this period Megiddo was the arena for the struggle between the kings of Judah and Israel. Near Megiddo, the Israelite King Jehu slew King Ahaziah of Judah after Ahaziah fled *“by the way of the garden-house”* (2 Kings 9:27).

In 732 BCE, the Assyrian King Tiglath Pileser III captured the city and made it the capital of an Assyrian district that included the Galilee and the northern valleys. At the end of the seventh century, when the Assyrian Empire was in decline, the Egyptian Pharaoh Neco took over the region. On his orders, King Josiah of Judah was killed at Megiddo (2 Kings 23:29-30).

Final Days

Megiddo exited the stage of history after the Israelite period. During the Persian period only a few structures stood on the mound, and with the decline of the Persian Empire, these, too, were abandoned. At the beginning of the third century BCE, the inhabitants of Megiddo moved to Kfar 'Othnai, southwest of Tel Megiddo. Later, the Sixth Roman Legion was stationed nearby and the city of Legio was established.

Megiddo is usually identified as Armageddon of the New Testament book of Revelation 16:16, the scene of John's apocalyptic vision of the battle between the forces of good and evil, to be followed by God's reign on earth. Inspiration for this vision seems to have been drawn from the prophet Zechariah, who describes such a battle in the *“valley of Megiddon”* (Zechariah 12:11).

In 1918, during World War I, another battle took place at Megiddo, led by General Edmund Allenby in his efforts to wrest control of the Jezreel Valley from the Ottoman Turkish forces. Like Thutmose III before him, Allenby marched through the Arunah Pass (Wadi 'Ara). He took the Turkish soldiers by surprise and won the day. Following the great victory, Allenby took the title *“Lord Allenby of Megiddo.”*

Identification of the Site and the History of Research

Although the name Megiddo was not preserved in extra-biblical texts, the biblical citations of the name alongside the names of cities in the Jezreel Valley helped identify it as one of the archaeological mounds in that vicinity. The fourteenth-century Jewish traveler Estori Haparchi proposed in his book *Kaftor Vaferach* that Megiddo be identified at the ruins of the Roman army camp Legio, some 800 meters southwest of Tell el-Mutsellim at the entrance to Wadi Ara. Numerous eighteenth-century scholars agreed with him. In the mid-nineteenth century, the American Bible scholar Edward Robinson was the first to propose that Tell el-Mutesellim was in fact Megiddo.

From 1903 to 1905, Gottlieb Schumacher led the archaeological expedition at Megiddo under the auspices of the German Society for Oriental Research. He dug a wide north-south trench on the mound, unearthing the remains of a palace and magnificent tombs from the second millennium BCE.

In 1925, excavations were renewed at Tel Megiddo by the University of Chicago's Institute of Oriental Research, generously supported by John Rockefeller. The expedition had planned to expose the entire site, stratum after stratum, down to bedrock. When they realized that their ambitious plan would take years to complete and after 'stripping' the mound of all later remains down to the Assyrian stratum, the excavators decided to focus on four main areas. The Chicago excavation, led in their turn by Clarence Fisher, P.L.O. Guy and Gordon Loud, was interrupted in 1939 by the outbreak of World War II. Excavations were renewed only after the establishment of the State of Israel. Many of the opulent buildings seen at Megiddo today were excavated by the members of the Chicago expedition. They also built the complex that today serves as the national park's entrance pavilion, planted the many trees and even built a tennis court, which can still be seen.

From 1960 to 1971, Yigael Yadin excavated for five short seasons at Megiddo on behalf of the Hebrew University's Institute of Archaeology. Since 1992, the excavations at Megiddo have been conducted, under the direction of Israel Finkelstein and David Ussishkin, by Tel Aviv University's Institute of Archaeology. The goal of the current expedition is to clarify Megiddo's complex stratigraphy and chronology.



Touring Route

An accessible shuttle is available **for wheelchair users**. It will drop them off at the top of the tell to tour independently. When they return to the shuttle station, it will drive them back to the entrance pavilion.

Entrance pavilion

In the entrance pavilion, built in the 1920s, visitors can view a 10-minute film on Megiddo's history and a display about the excavations.

The doorway to the display, which provides explanations about Megiddo and its sites, is in the form of an ancient gate, which represents Megiddo in the Canaanite period. One room contains a large model of the mound. The pavilion also houses a shop offering books, maps and souvenirs, as well as a snack bar and restaurant.

1. Reservoir – The impressive staircase you see here descends from the Israelite period city gate (4) to a plastered pool. The source of the water is still not entirely clear.



The reservoir at the entrance to Tel Megiddo, from the Israelite period II



City gate at Megiddo from the Late Canaanite period

2. The Canaanite city gate – Flanked by four chambers, the gate was built during the Late Canaanite period (the Late Bronze Age). At that time, the city was not fortified, which meant that the gate was ceremonial rather than defensive – it served as the entrance to the palace complex of that period. During its last phase, when ovens were built in its chambers, the gate probably served as a kind of service wing of the palace. The gate went out of use after the palace was burned at the end of the Late Canaanite period.

The first course of the gate, which came into contact with the ground, was faced with slabs of basalt, more durable than the limestone of which the rest of the gate is built. The excavation unearthed the charred remains of olive wood beams that had been inserted between the courses of stone. The gate was preserved to a considerable height and therefore during conservation it did not have to be raised by much. A concrete line marks the beginning of the reconstructed portion. New wooden beams were inserted in the wall and the stone pavement in the passage was completed for the convenience and safety of visitors.

3. The Canaanite palace – On the other side of the Canaanite gate, on the right, is a massive stone wall, two meters thick, the sole remnant on the site of the palace of Megiddo's Canaanite ruler. The palace was built during the Middle Canaanite period, reaching its greatest size and opulence in the Late Canaanite period. It was a huge structure in local terms – the portion unearthed in the excavations measured 50 x 30 meters. Its plan, with a central, open courtyard surrounded by rooms and smaller courtyards, was influenced by contemporaneous Syrian architecture. Basalt steps alongside the stone wall were part of a street that ascended from the city gate to a plaza in front of the palace. The palace was destroyed in a conflagration in the mid-twelfth century BCE. An assemblage of hundreds of carved ivory artifacts was discovered in one of its rooms,



An ivory box carved with sphinxes (Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority)

dubbed the 'treasure room' by the excavators. The assemblage attests to the status of Megiddo's rulers at the time. Another sign of the rulers' eminence can be seen in the seashell flooring of one of the vestibules leading to the central courtyard and the remains of colored plaster on the courtyard walls. Most of the palace walls were removed during the excavation to expose earlier strata; however, the southern portion of the palace has not yet been excavated.

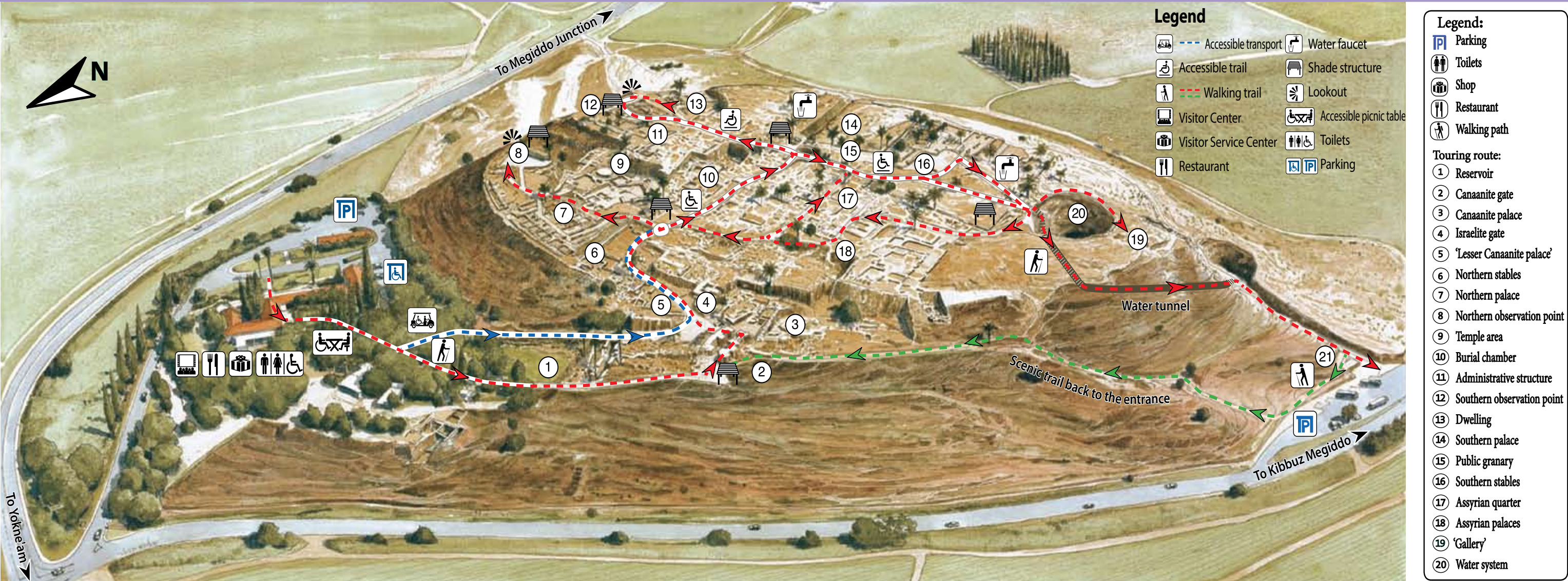
Ascend the wooden steps and move forward in time.

4. The Israelite gate – Some time after the destruction of the Late Canaanite period (the Late Bronze Age), the city was rebuilt, preserving the Canaanite character of its inhabitants and material culture. During the period of the Israelite monarchy the city once again attained importance and was extensively built up and fortified by the Israelite kings. Here you can see remains of the city gate from that time, which was incorporated into the fortifications. A two-chambered outer gate was situated at the top of a ramp that ascended to the city from the north. The inner gate you see here had six chambers and was connected to the outer gate by an L-shaped plaza. Some scholars believe this structure was merely the foundation of the inner gate. A staircase descended from the outer gate to the reservoir (1). Scholars once attributed the gate to King Solomon. However, Megiddo's present-day excavators believe it was built later, during the reign of Jeroboam II in the eighth century BCE. The western part of the inner gate was removed during the excavation. The remaining, eastern part of the gate was built of ashlar. The central chamber has not yet been excavated.

Continue eastward; about 30 meters along the path you will come to the corner of the courtyard of the 'lesser Canaanite palace.'

5. The 'lesser Canaanite palace' – To your left are the remains of the 'lesser Canaanite palace.' This structure was part of the Late Canaanite period palace complex, which included at least two impressive structures and the city gate (2). The plan of the 'lesser Canaanite palace' – a large courtyard surrounded by rooms – resembles the plan of the main palace (3), but on a more modest scale. The path crosses the southeastern corner of the courtyard, where two large stone basins stand *in situ* (in their original location).

Continue to the 'northern palace junction'; turn left toward the northern stables and the northern palace.



6. The northern stables – Two stable complexes were found at Megiddo – one on the northeastern part of the mound and one in the southwest. They reveal Megiddo's importance as a cavalry base or a center for commerce in horses. The construction of the stable-city is attributed to one of the Israelite kings, perhaps Jeroboam II, in the eighth century BCE or to King Ahab, in the ninth century BCE. Some scholars believe that the stables were used for other purposes – as storehouses, markets, or army barracks. On the left, part of a stable can be seen, including pillars and mangers. This northern part of the complex included 12 stables; the southern part was removed by the Chicago expedition to reach the level of the Early Canaanite period (the Early Bronze Age). The Tel Aviv University expedition completed the excavation of the stables and uncovered an impressive portion of the southern facade of the northernmost stables, which is slated for conservation and reconstruction. Additional stables were discovered on the southern part of the mound (16). The stable walls were built of mudbrick on a foundation of ashlar, some of which were probably robbed from the ruined northern palace (7). The large number of stables attests to a strong city government at the time they were built and to Megiddo's status as a major chariot city.



The northern palace

7. The northern palace ('Palace 6000') – Beneath the northern stable complex lay the remains of a square building featuring thick ashlar walls, dating to the Israelite period II. It is similar in size and character to the central building of the contemporaneous southern palace. Megiddo's excavators therefore assume it was also built in the center of a large square courtyard surrounded by walls or rooms. The precise plan is difficult to reconstruct; however, its facade probably faced south with a row of rooms in the northern and western sides with plastered floors. Yigal Yadin suggested that the building was a palace from the time of King Solomon, based, among other things, on the descriptions of Solomon's impressive building projects in the book of 1 Kings. However, some scholars now date the palace to the time of King Ahab.

8. The northern observation point – The Jezreel Valley stretches at the foot of this observation area. To the northwest is the Carmel Range; to the northeast and east are Nazareth, Mount Tabor, the Hill of Moreh and the Gilboa Mountains; to the southeast, the city of Jenin and the mountains of Samaria; and to the south, the city of Umm al-Fahm. On clear days, the mountains of Gilead appear on the eastern horizon.

9. The temple area – The deep trench visible from the observation point was dug by the Chicago expedition. In the far section of the trench, opposite the observation point, the mound's numerous strata can be seen – more than 20 cities – excavated down to bedrock. Remains found in a depression in the bedrock go back as far as the Neolithic period. Finds from the Early Canaanite period indicate the presence of a large un-walled settlement that stretched east toward the present-day road at the foot of the mound.

Below, you can see Megiddo's cultic area from the fourth millennium BCE to the beginning of the Israelite period. In the Early Canaanite

period, a series of temples was built here continuously, one atop the other. The earliest, dating from the Early Canaanite period IB, was a broadroom structure with an enclosed courtyard. Paving stones discovered in the courtyard bore incised Egyptian-style motifs, among them depictions of humans and animals.

Another temple from later in this period is the most monumental structure of its time known in the Levant. Impressive, finely finished basalt offering tables were sunken into its floor. Its four-meter thick walls reveal the importance of the site as early as the end of the fourth millennium BCE. This temple illustrates the process of urbanization underway in Canaan at the close of the fourth millennium BCE.

At the end of the Early Canaanite period (2300 BCE), three more temples were built over the earlier ones. They were of the megaron type, consisting of an open entrance area leading to a large room whose roof was supported by two columns. A circular altar, eight meters in diameter, predating the three temples, continued in use. Seven steps lead to the top of this altar, which survived to its full height and is clearly visible at the back of the largest of the three temples. Numerous animal bones were found at the base of the altar.

At the beginning of the Middle Canaanite period rites were performed in the open area. At the end of that period, the fortress-like 'Tower Temple' (dismantled by the Chicago expedition) was built over the remains of the above-mentioned three temples. Featuring thick walls and an entrance flanked by a pair of towers, the 'Tower Temple' continued in use until the end of the Israelite period I.

With the complete destruction of the Canaanite city in the Israelite period I, cultic practices ceased in the temple area after over 2,000 years.

Return to the 'northern palace junction' and turn left.

10. Burial chamber (the 'Aegean Tomb') – A large hole in the ground to the left of the path marks the location of the 'Aegean Tomb.' This impressive arched-roofed structure, partially built of ashlar, was preserved in its entirety. The sign presents an artist's rendering of the tomb's facade. Comparing it to similar structures throughout the Levant and Greece, the excavators deduced it was a burial structure. However, since it was found empty, both its purpose and its date are difficult to determine. It is unclear whether the structure stood out on the surface or was built underground and therefore it is difficult to ascribe it to a particular stratum. Even today, after renewed excavation around the burial chamber, controversy persists over its dating – to either the Late Canaanite or the Israelite period I. Efforts have been made in recent years to conserve the building and prevent its collapse. A number of upright stone slabs were found near the structure; the one on the left, on a large stone base, has recently been rebuilt.

Follow the path until you reach the public granary (15) and the southern palace (14), to which you will return. Turn left toward the eastern palace and the southern observation point.

11. Administrative structure from the Israelite period – To the left of the path is an opulent complex near the city wall dating to the Israelite period, which served as either a palace or administrative building. Its walls were made of fieldstones, with only the corners dressed for structural reasons. Few of the walls have survived, however the excavations unearthed seven proto-ionic capitals. Such capitals, depicting a stylized date palm, were typical of public buildings in the Israelite period.

12. Southern observation point – The shaded southern observation point overlooks the outlet of the 'Iron Valley to the Jezreel Valley and illustrates the strategic importance of Megiddo. You may be gazing at the very battlefield where the army of Thutmose III clashed with the Canaanites. The pillar you see here, with its message of peace in four languages, was installed to commemorate the visit to Megiddo by Pope Paul VI in January 1964.

The heavy ashlar seen here were dismantled from the southern palace (14). They reveal incised masons' marks identical to those found in the palace of the Israelite kings in Samaria, thus dating Megiddo's palaces to the ninth century BCE.

13. Dwelling – Two rows of three monolithic pillars each are vestiges of a dwelling from the Israelite period. The building was planned as a 'four-room house,' which was typical of sites from the Israelite period. The plan featured three parallel spaces with a fourth space perpendicular to them. The side spaces were used for storage, the middle was an open courtyard and the perpendicular space was the dwelling area. A small industrial zone near the dwelling was dated to the eleventh and tenth centuries BCE.

Retrace your steps to the southern palace and the public granary.

14. The southern palace – Nothing is left of the southern palace now except the courtyard and the gate you see here, the remains having been dismantled by the Chicago expedition to reach earlier strata. The plan of the southern palace resembles that of the northern palace (7). Near its outer gate, Schumacher discovered the seal with the inscription 'to Shem'a, servant of Jeroboam.' Apparently referring to Jeroboam II, this is the earliest seal of an Israelite king discovered to date. Unfortunately, the original seal was lost, leaving only a drawing. The palace has been dated to the tenth century BCE, with some scholars dating it later, to the ninth century BCE and the reign of Ahab.



Seal with the inscription 'to Shem'a, servant of Jeroboam' (Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority)

15. Public granary – The structure before you is a huge silo, 7 meters deep and 11 meters in diameter. Its walls are lined with field stones. Two staircases lead to the bottom, which was paved with pebbles. Kernels of wheat found between the stones along with the remains of straw identified the structure as a silo. Its volume was approximately 450 cubic meters, which meant it could store about 1,000 tons of wheat. The silo was built by one of the last Israelite kings, or perhaps during Assyrian rule. Some scholars believe the granary was built together with the stables to store fodder for the horses.

16. The southern stables – This is one of Megiddo's two stable complexes dating from the period of the Israelite kings. It includes five lengthwise structures that opened onto a large training ground, with a square trough in the center. Each structure was divided into three lengthwise units separated by rows of stone pillars flanking troughs. The excavators discovered bite-marks of horses on the troughs, as well as holes, probably to tether animals. Each structure featured a central hall with a thickly plastered floor. The horses would pass through this hall to side rooms with stone-paved floors. One of the five stables has been reconstructed.

From here, pass the water system, to which you will return later, and head to the Assyrian quarter and the Assyrian palaces.

17. The Assyrian quarter – The structures to the right of the path are vestiges of the city built after Assyrian conquest (732 BCE).



The reconstructed stable

The excavations revealed an orderly network of streets, two running north-south and two running east-west.

18. The Assyrian palaces – North of the path are remains of palaces – administrative structures that served the Assyrian governor during the period when Megiddo was the capital city of an Assyrian district. The northern of the two palaces was built before the southern one; the elaborate construction of the latter reveals Assyrian building techniques. The plan of both structures resembles palaces in Assyria, albeit on a smaller scale.

Before descending into the water system, you can visit the 'gallery,' taking the path to the left that skirts the water system.

19. The 'gallery' – Southwest of the water system a narrow passageway was discovered that ran beneath Megiddo's city wall. This was the secret passage to the spring, outside the city, built before the construction of the water system. The passage is built of finely dressed ashlar, some of which bear large masons' marks like those on the stones at the southern observation point. Some scholars date the 'gallery' to the reign of King Solomon in the tenth century BCE, while others attribute it to the reign of Ahab in the ninth century BCE.

There are 187 steps down to the water system, and 77 steps up to the exit on the other side. The visit to the water system is a very impressive way to end your visit to Megiddo. Visitors who have difficulty with the steps should now return to the entrance pavilion. Visitors to the water system will exit to a parking lot outside the site. It is preferable to have a car waiting for you there. If not, you can return on foot to the entrance pavilion via a path along the foot of the mound.

20. The water system – Megiddo's huge water system was hewn during the period of the Israelite kings, in order to bring water into the city without having to exit the walls. To this end, Megiddo's inhabitants dug a gigantic, 36-meter-deep shaft, from which a 70-meter-long horizontal tunnel extended to the spring, which emerged in a cave at the foot of the mound outside the walls. The tunnel was cut on an incline so the water would flow to the bottom of the shaft and the inhabitants could draw water while standing at the top. The outer entrance to the spring was sealed with a massive stone wall, concealed with earth so that an enemy besieging the city would not discover its location.

21. Scenic trail back to the entrance

Rules of Behavior at Tel Megiddo National Park

- Archaeological excavations at the site are ongoing. Beware of open pits and active excavation areas.
- Use marked trails only and do not enter sites that are not open to the public.
- Do not climb structures or walls.
- Do not damage the antiquities and do not collect souvenirs at the site.
- Please keep the park clean.
- Follow all instructions that are signposted or given by park personnel.

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