

WALKING THE HOLY LAND

Archaeology, Sacred Places & Surprising Human Stories | PART 2

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WHAT THIS LECTURE EXPLORES

Kings and archaeology

Saul, David and Solomon: Bible stories, inscriptions, excavations and their uncertainties.

Mount Zion

The moving name of Zion, King David's Tomb, and Jerusalem's Christian sacred places.

Sacred traditions

The Last Supper, the Cenacle, the Eucharist, foot washing, Pentecost and Dormition Abbey.

The Holy Land today

Hebrew, a song by Ehud Banai and a recipe for tahini cookies.

1. Saul, David & Solomon: the stories

The first kings of Israel. Three Biblical books: Samuel, Kings and Chronicles compiled between the 9th and 5th centuries BCE using earlier writings from the prophets Samuel, Nathan and Gad, these books give a detailed description of the united monarchy of Saul, David & Solomon.

David and Goliath

A teen, Shepard, from Bethlehem. Played harp (ancient version). God instructs Prophet Samuel to anoint him as a king in his teens (to mark him for a sacred role).

King Saul & his army are fighting Philistines.

The battle is situated in the Elah Valley, between Israelite and Philistine territory (1 Samuel 17). David's sling is the weapon that defeats the giant in the biblical account. After the victory David was invited into King Saul's inner circle. He marries Saul's daughter Michal

After King Saul and three of his sons are killed by Philistines, near Gilboa mountain, David becomes the king. First in Hebron, later in Jerusalem.

Michelangelo's David

A Renaissance depiction of David just before his fight, rather than a contemporary portrait. Notice the difference between an idealized European marble sculpture and an ancient Israelite. He is not depicted as a teenager and he is not circumcised as he certainly was.

The Ark arrives in Jerusalem

According to 2 Samuel 6, David brings the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem in celebration, with music and dancing, helping establish the city as a sacred center.

Where would David's palace have stood?

Archeologists and historians place royal Jerusalem in the City of David, on the narrow ridge south of the Temple Mount. Archaeologists found a giant 66 foot high stepped stone structure that likely was the base of the David's palace. They also found giant stones that may have been a part of the palace.

The Bible records that the *Phoenician* King Hiram sent *stone masons* to work on David's palace (2 Samuel 5:11). This fits with the discovery of the beautifully worked Israelite-Phoenician-style stone capital that was found below the now-uncovered Large Stone Structure.

Many bullae (stamps) were found mentioning people from the Bible serving at the court. Further suggesting this is the place of the Royal Palace.

Three kinds of historical evidence

How do we know what happened here:

Extra-Biblical:
Josephus
Flavius,
Amarna Letters,
Egyptian
Pharaohs,
Pilgrim
accounts,
Senacherib
walls,
and more



Old & New
Testament

Archeology

Jerusalem's many conflicts

Jerusalem's repeated bouts of demolition aren't exactly good for the safe-keeping of ancient history and archaeology.

According to the historian Eric Cline: Jerusalem survived at least 118 conflicts, two complete destructions, 23 sieges, 52 further attacks, 44 captures or recaptures and 20 revolts.

Add to this the significant challenges associated with researching and excavating land that sits beneath the most politically and religiously volatile city and territory on Earth, and it is undeniable: This history is difficult to uncover and understand.

2. Searching for David in archaeology

Tel Dan Stele

Found at Tel Dan in northern Israel. The Aramaic inscription refers to a king of the “House of David,” an important extra-biblical reference to a Davidic royal dynasty. Aram-Damascus King Hazael writes: “I killed Jehoram son of Ahab king of Israel and killed Ahaziah son of Jehoram *king of the House of David*”

Mesha Stele (Moabite Stone)

Discovered in 1868 and dated to the ninth century BCE. It celebrates the achievements of King Mesha of Moab in the Moabite language. The possible reading “House of David” in a damaged line is debated, unlike the more widely accepted Tel Dan reference.

What inscriptions can and cannot tell us

The mention of a Davidic dynasty supports the historical importance of a royal line bearing David’s name, but does not independently verify the David and Goliath story, the size of David’s kingdom, or a specific palace.

Khirbet Qeiyafa

The city stood directly between the geographic boundaries of Israelite and Philistine land, overlooking the Elah Valley, where the battle between David and Goliath occurred

Possible Shaaraim mentioned in the Bible

Case-mate walls: known feature of Judahite cities.

Temple miniatures

Thousands animal bones - no pig bones among them. Therefore it is a Judean city.

Also, a large pottery sherd covered in ancient script – identified as an early Hebrew precursor.

Finally, a number of olive pits excavated from Khirbet Qeiyafa were carbon-14 dated. The analysis returned a date range of around 1020 to 980 b.c.e., directly within the biblical chronology of kings Saul and David.

This archeology supports the existence of an early organized kingdom in Judah.

Where is King David buried?

On today's Mount Zion visitors enter a shrine traditionally called King David's Tomb, marked by a cenotaph. The shrine is a place of long-standing veneration, not an archaeologically established identification of David's actual burial place. The Bible places David's burial in the City of David (1 Kings 2:10).

We have a story of Benjamin of Tudela, the first traveler who wrote a travel itinerary in Hebrew. Spanish Rabby & traveler & gemstone trader. Spent 7 years travelling around the world (Israel, Iran, Egypt territories). Is the end of the 12th century. He heard a story about how this tomb was discovered. Two workers came late to work and found a huge stone. Moved the stone, found a cave. Very dark room, light coming from behind. Table with crowns. Tomb. They wanted to steal and not work the rest of their lives. Strong wind pushing them in the ground. Header sound: leave this place or you will die. Went to police. Police said: let's ask the bishop. Bishop said: lets ask the jew. Found one Jew: Rabi Avraham. A painter. He said: Of course, it is a tomb of kind David. Police went back to look for two people who found this tomb. They were found dead on the next morning. Tomb was sealed.

So, this gave rise to a Crusader tradition of association of this place with David's grave.

Muslim, Jews and Christians pray there.

So, this tomb is built on a myth?

No remains found anywhere: not here and not in the City of David.

Mystery... Maybe one day something will be discovered.

3. Solomon: Temple, trade and gates

The First Temple

Solomon ruled a vast and wealthy kingdom.

The crowning achievement of Solomon's reign was the construction of the temple in Jerusalem. His father David had spent the final years of his life planning for this magnificent structure. He aimed to make it the pinnacle of architecture, beauty and brilliance. Just before he died, he told his son: "Take heed now; for the Lord hath chosen thee to build a house for the sanctuary; be strong, and do it" (1 Chronicles 28:10). This would be Solomon's most important and impressive task.

This Temple is called the First Jewish Temple and it stood until 586 BCE when Babylonians

completely destroyed it.

Arc of the covenant was inside this Temple and it disappeared since then.

An international kingdom

King Solomon made the powerful kingdom he inherited even more expansive and powerful. He began by suppressing every last spike of rebellion and treason. He secured an alliance with Egypt by marrying the daughter of Egyptian Pharaoh.

Famously, Solomon married 700 wives, many from faraway exotic lands. Many were likely the result of a political alliance, giving Solomon influence in Egypt, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Zidon, Turkey and Elsewhere.

Economically, the kingdom thrived. Subjugating the surrounding nations meant that Solomon now controlled the two main trade routes connecting Egypt to Mesopotamia. This provided a huge boost of revenue, allowing for a new monumental building program.

Solomon had a first-class merchant navy that sailed the known world, shipping gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks back to Jerusalem. His fleets were divided between the Red Sea in the south and the Mediterranean Sea to the west (1 Kings 9:26-28; 10:22-23). Israel's king became a major arms manufacturer and a merchant man, importing goods from Egypt, and selling chariots and horses to kingdoms as far north as Turkey (verses 28-29). More than 20 tons of gold were imported every year (verse 14). Silver was so common that it became worthless (2 Chronicles 9:20, 27).

The Bible declares that the "riches and wisdom" of Solomon were unmatched by *any* king during his lifetime. "

Clay tablet discovered in TLV: "Ophir gold to Bet Horon: 30 shekels."

Dated 700 BCE, 300 years after Solomon.

What is Ophir? Like Disney's ElDorado land filled with gold.

Bible. Kings 9.

"Solomon's gates and stables"

Archeologists discovered monumental gates, stables and buildings at Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer, that Bible Kings 9:15 connects to King Solomon. However their precise dating and attribution to Solomon is disputed for now.

4. Where is Mount Zion?

The moving name

The word “Zion” first appears in the Old Testament (2 Samuel 5:7) as the fortress David captured, and identified with the City of David.

“Mount Zion” - “the city of the Great King” - place where god dwells and reigns.

“Zion” = synonymous with Jerusalem.

By the Second Temple periods the Jerusalem built-up city expanded onto the **western** hill, higher and broader than the original City of David.

Byzantine times Christian pilgrims began to call the **western** hill “Mount Zion,” assuming the larger, more prominent hill must be David’s city and the biblical Zion.

Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions in the Middle Ages generally followed the Byzantine convention.

More than one Mount Zion

Now we have a few Mt Zions around the world: 36 in USA, 5 in Australia, 6 in Jamaica.

Why?

The name traveled because of Jerusalem’s symbolic importance.

In contemporary language, “Zion” - powerful theological metaphor for God’s dwelling, the people of Israel, and the redeemed Jerusalem

Zionism - the movement for a Jewish state in the historic land of Israel.

Jewish, Christian and Muslim groups adopted Zion for their places of worship that symbolize God's holy mountain, the city of the Great King David.

What you see on the Mt Zion hill today

The photographs show David’s Tomb, the Cenacle (traditional Last Supper Room), Dormition Abbey, Christian sites and cemeteries. One panoramic photograph is credited to אורי אלוני (Ori Aloni), Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

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5. The Last Supper and the Cenacle

The biblical setting

The New Testament places Jesus' final meal with his disciples in Jerusalem before his arrest. The presentation compares Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper mural (c. 1495–1498, Milan) with Christian sculptures and other artistic representations.

The Cenacle

This upper room on Mount Zion is traditionally identified as the place of the Last Supper. Its surviving medieval architectural features, including Gothic arches and decorated capitals, are centuries later than the first-century event; the identification rests on religious tradition.

Dinner guests and the Eucharist

Jesus shares bread and wine with the disciples. Christian traditions link this meal to the Eucharist or Holy Communion.

Judas Iscariot

The disciple associated in the Gospels with Jesus' betrayal is singled out in depictions of the meal, including Barcelona's Sagrada Família façade. Note the difference between Gospel narrative and each artist's imaginative depiction.

Washing the disciples' feet

John 13 describes Jesus washing his disciples' feet as an act of humility and service. This ritual is reenacted in Christian observance, especially around Holy Thursday.

Pentecost

Another important event takes place in the same Last Supper room 50 days after.

Shavuot tradition, 50 days after Passover.

Shavuot originally marked the end of the grain harvest period and later became associated with the commemoration of the giving of the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Jesus's students – apostles are back in Jerusalem for high holiday

Gather in the same room

Miracle happens: descent of Holy Spirit, fire, dove, & they start Speaking in different tongues.

A sound like a violent/rushing wind fills the house.

Tongues like fire appear and rest on each of them.

They are filled with the Holy Spirit and begin speaking in other languages; Jews from many nations hear the message in their own tongues.

Some mock (“they’re drunk”), but Peter stands up, says it’s not drunkenness, proclaims Jesus’ death/resurrection, and calls for repentance and baptism.

Transformation and the beginning of the church

From here apostles go around the world to evangelize

6. Dormition Abbey, Mary and Mount Zion

Dormition Abbey

A striking German Benedictine church on modern Mount Zion. Its name recalls the Christian tradition of Mary’s Dormition (“falling asleep”).

Mary and the women

The mosaics and sculptures show Mary and other female figures of Christian sacred history. In the Dormition tradition, Mary’s earthly life concludes here; this is a devotional identification and different Christian traditions place differing emphasis on the location and manner of her passing.

7. The language and sound of the Holy Land

What did David speak?

In the historical setting of the early Israelite monarchy, Hebrew or an early Northwest Semitic variety related to biblical Hebrew is the relevant linguistic context.

What did Jesus speak?

Aramaic was a major everyday language among first-century Jews; Hebrew had religious and literary roles, and Greek was also present in the region. The lecture’s question invites us to distinguish the Bible’s languages from modern spoken Hebrew.

LISTEN AGAIN

“Hebrew Man” — Ehud Banai

“Speak up the language of the Hebrew man, loud and clear.”

[Watch on YouTube](#)

DAVID (2025) — animated film trailer

[Watch on YouTube](#)

Boney M. — Rivers of Babylon

[Watch on YouTube](#)

8. Take a little Israel home



TAHINI COOKIES - A RECIPE FROM A REAL CHEF

INGREDIENTS

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 packet baking powder (about 10 g)
- 1 cup raw tahini, well stirred
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 200 g softened butter (about 1¾ U.S. sticks)
- Optional: almonds, pecans or other nuts

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 360 F (as written on the slide; confirm temperature).
2. Mix all ingredients until smooth. Divide into 40 balls.
3. Arrange on parchment with 2 inches between cookies.
4. Bake about 15 minutes until lightly golden. They firm up as they cool.
5. Cool and store in an airtight container.

Tahini supplies plant protein, iron and B vitamins.

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