

Megiddo - The Solomonic "Chariot City"

(This article is composed from several sources: [Bible Places](#), [Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), and [Bible Walks](#) by rhm)

Megiddo is located 30Km south east of Haifa, and is located at a strategic entrance through the eastern Carmel hills where an ancient trade road (Via Maris) links the North (and Assyria) and South (Egypt). In this site an important City once flourished from the bronze ages and biblical periods, and mentioned in the Old Testament as a strong City that played an important role in the history of the Biblical Israel. It was abandoned after the Persian times since the site was relocated in nearby locations. This left the foundations of the city virtually intact from the biblical times.

Today, this Tell (a layered hill with ruins of ancient cities) is an archaeological park. A modern highway passes at the exact same point, and a modern Kibbutz with the same name is located nearby.

History of Megiddo

40TH C BC	Early settlement
20TH C BC	The city massive walls were built
18Th C BC	A new gate is constructed in the north side
15TH C BC	The gate and walls were rebuilt.
15TH C BC	Mentioned in the Amarna letters, a 14th century BC Egyptian archive of clay tablets: The city rebelled against the Egyptians, and was conquered after a great battle and a 7 month siege (1468)
10Th/9 C BC	New gate and walls built by the Israelites (Solomon, Ahab or Jeroboam)
609BC	Battle between the Egyptians Army and the Kingdom of Judah (King Josiah, who died in this battle)
3RD C BC	The city was abandoned
1918AD	Battles between the British and the Turks in WW1
1949AD	Kibbutz Megiddo was established on the south side of the Tell.



Megiddo Aerial
Inhabited from the Chalcolithic period, Megiddo has approximately 26 levels of occupation. American excavators from the Oriental Institute worked from 1925 with the ambitious goal of excavating every level in its entirety. They made it through the first three levels before concentrating the work on certain areas.

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Tel (mound) Megiddo, known as Tel-el-Mutesellim (Hill of the Ruler) has been identified as one of the most important cities of biblical times. Located on a hill overlooking the fertile Jezreel Valley, Megiddo was of great strategic importance, as it commanded the eastern approaches of Nahal Iron (nahal, a dry river bed), part of the international highway



which led from Egypt, along the coastal plain to the Jezreel Valley, and thence to Damascus and Mesopotamia (the highway became known later as Via Maris, Way of the Sea). Numerous battles fought for control of the city are recorded in ancient sources; in the New Testament (Revelations 16:16), Armageddon (believed by some to be a corruption of Har Megiddo - the hill of Megiddo) is named as the site of the "Battle of the End of Days".

One of the largest city mounds in Israel (covering an area of about 15 acres) and rich in archeological finds, Tel Megiddo is an important site for the study of the material culture of biblical times. A total of 20 cities were built at Megiddo, one above the other, over the course of 5,000 years of continuous occupation; from the time of the first settlement at the end of the 6th millennium BCE to its abandonment in the 5th century BCE.





Middle Bronze Gate

Strongly fortified throughout the ages, Megiddo boasted a stone Syrian-type gate in the days of Canaanite inhabitation.

This gate is later than the bent-axis gate (straightened to accommodate chariots) and earlier than the famous "Solomonic" gate, part of the construction of King Solomon described in 1 Kings 9:15.

Several expeditions have excavated at Megiddo since the beginning of the 20th century. The most important excavations were conducted by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago between the years 1925 and 1939. All four of the uppermost cities of the tel, dating to the first half of the 1st millennium BCE, were excavated by this expedition. Several sections excavated to bedrock exposed the remains of the earliest city.

The finds corroborate written evidence concerning the importance of Megiddo, first as a royal Canaanite city, then as an Egyptian stronghold and administrative center, later as a "chariot city" of the kings of Israel, and finally as the controlling city of Assyrian and Persian provinces.

Excavations at Megiddo were renewed in 1994, with the aim of clarifying the tel's stratigraphy and chronology and of obtaining further information about architectural and cultural remains at the site.

A Royal Canaanite City and an Egyptian Administrative Center

A village had been established on the hill of Megiddo at the end of the 6th millennium BCE, but the first fortified urban settlement, remains of which were uncovered on bedrock in the eastern part of the tel, dates from the beginning of the 3rd millennium BCE. Within its walls was an elongated rectangular temple, with an altar opposite its entrance; it had a low ceiling, supported by wooden columns placed on stone bases. The renewed excavations have exposed several long, parallel stone walls, each 4 m. thick, the lanes between them filled with the bones of sacrificed animals.

Over the next 2000 years, a series of Canaanite temples were built, one on top of the other, on the site of this ancient temple.

Early Bronze Altar



Part of a large religious complex from the third millennium B.C., this sacrificial altar is striking in its size (10m diameter) and location (behind the temple). A staircase leads up to the altar, a small temenos fence surrounded it, and large concentrations of animal bones and ashes were found in the vicinity.

At the end of the 3rd millennium BCE, a circular bama (altar) of fieldstones, 8.5 m. in diameter and 1.5 m high, was built. Seven steps led to its top, upon which sacrifices were offered. This is an excellent example of the cultic bamot (altars) frequently mentioned in the Bible. (e.g., I Samuel 9:12-15) Then, at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE, a complex of three identical temples was added at the back of the bama, forming an impressive Canaanite cultic precinct. Each of these megaron-type temples consisted of a rectangular room with a bama at its back and an open courtyard at its façade, where a pair of round stone bases indicate pillars. Towards the end of the 2nd millennium BCE, a new Canaanite temple was built on the ruins of its predecessors; it had especially thick walls and included a small cultic chamber with two towers protecting its façade.

From the beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE, Megiddo was an important military center. The city was surrounded by mighty stone fortifications, strengthened by earthen ramparts with glaci (a sloped hard and smooth coating). The area within the walls was carefully planned and divided into several clearly defined quarters: the royal quarters containing the palaces; the administrative quarter; and the residential quarters. This plan did not significantly change until the 12th century BCE.

Toward the middle of the 2nd millennium, a new gate of unusually large dimensions, built of large ashlar on trimmed basalt foundations, was built in the city's northern wall. It included two pairs of chambers with a broad passage between them, providing convenient access to chariots. Next to the gate in the eastern wall stood the palace of the Canaanite kings of Megiddo. This was a very large and splendid palace, its rooms built around a courtyard. Gold jewelry and ivories found in the palace treasury provide evidence of the wealth of the kings of Megiddo and their political and commercial links with neighboring lands and cultures.

Megiddo is mentioned many times in Egyptian royal inscriptions from the 15th to the 13th centuries BCE. They attest to the city's importance as the center of Egyptian administration in Canaan and as a logistical base on the road north. Inscriptions in the temple of the god Amon at Karnak (in Upper Egypt) describe the first military campaign of Thutmose III in Canaan, at the beginning of the 15th century BCE. According to this description, the Egyptian army crossed the hills of Manasseh and then advanced via Nahal Iron to the

Jezreel Valley. The united army of the Canaanite kings, surprised by this military move, was soundly defeated; Megiddo was conquered after a seven-month siege.

His majesty [Thutmose III] speaks to his generals:

That wretched enemy [the Canaanites]... has come and has entered into Megiddo. He is there at this moment. He has gathered to him the princes of every foreign country that had been loyal to Egypt, as well as those as far as Naharin and Mitanni [in today's Syria]...

Then his majesty issued forth at the head of his army... He had not met a single enemy. Their southern wing was in Ta'anach, while their northern wing was on the south side of the Qina Valley... Thereupon his majesty [Thutmose] prevailed over them [the Canaanites] at the head of his army. Then they saw his majesty prevailing over them, and they fled headlong to Megiddo with faces of fear. They abandoned their horses and their chariots of gold and silver...

Six letters found in the archives of the Egyptian kings at el-Amarna, dating to the 14th century BCE, were sent by the king of Megiddo to his overlords, the kings of Egypt. In these letters, Biridiya, king of Megiddo, describes the growing threat to his city at the hands of Labayu (king of Shechem) and pleads for help:

To the king, my lord, and my Sun-god, say: Thus Biridiya, the faithful servant of the king. At the two feet of the king, my lord, and my Sun-god, seven and seven times I fall. Let the king know that ever since the archers returned [to Egypt], Labayu has carried on hostilities against me, and we are not able to pluck the wool, and we are not able to go outside the gate in the presence of Labayu, since he learned that thou hast not given archers; and now his face is set to take Megiddo, but let the king protect the city, lest Labayu seize it. Verily, there is no other purpose in Labayu. He seeks to destroy Megiddo.

With the decline of Egyptian control in the 12th and 11th centuries BCE, struggles for power took place among the Canaanites, Philistines and Israelites which left their mark upon the remains at Megiddo. The city was finally conquered by King David, who established it as an important regional center of his kingdom.

The Monarchic "Chariot City"



A model of the ancient city is shown here. This model shows the Israelite period, while the earlier periods lie below and could be raised by pressing a button. The north gate is seen in the front side. In the right-back side are the south stables and the water works.

Megiddo reached its peak under King Solomon in the 10th century BCE. He rebuilt it as a royal city, administering the northern part of the kingdom. The building of Jerusalem, the capital, and of Hatzor, Megiddo and Gezer, as part of centralized urban planning, is recounted in the Bible:

And this is the reason of the levy which king Solomon raised; for to build the house of the Lord, and his own house, and Millo, and the wall of Jerusalem, and Hatzor, and Megiddo, and Gezer. (I Kings 9:15)

Architectural features characteristic of the royal centers of the monarchic period have been found in all three cities. In the Megiddo excavations, such elements were encountered in the palaces, buildings, fortifications, administrative buildings, storehouses, stables and the water system.

During the reign of Solomon, Megiddo was surrounded by a sturdy casemate wall (two parallel walls with partitions between them, creating rooms). The casemates served as barracks for soldiers and for storage of equipment. A new city gate was constructed on the remains of the Canaanite gate in the northern part of wall. It included three sets of chambers with a passage between them; for additional security, towers and an outer gate were added outside this gate.

Within the city, large palaces were built, and next to them identically planned administrative buildings: a series of rooms around an open central courtyard. These were very well built, with extensive use of large ashlar, the thick walls supporting a second storey. Atop the doorposts were Proto-Aeolic stone capitals, with stylized volutes.

Megiddo was destroyed in the military campaign of Pharaoh Shishak in 926 BCE, and restored during the reign of Ahab, king of Israel (ca. 874 - 852 BCE) who made it a royal "chariot city." The new city's walls were 3.5 m. thick, constructed with offsets and insets and incorporating the Solomonic city gate. Noteworthy among the structures from the period of Ahab are several large, identical buildings, covering large areas of the city. Some archeologists believe they were storehouses, barracks or market-places, but most researchers regard them as stables.

Based on the biblical account, the stables were first dated to the reign of Solomon, but new evidence has established their date as early 9th century BCE, in the reign of King Ahab. The southern stable complex is divided into several compartments, each subdivided into three long, parallel halls: the outer halls for stalls, the corridors between them for use by the stable hands. The ceiling of the stables was supported by large, square stone pillars. Massive stone troughs stood in the stables, as well as perforated stones for tying the horses. In the middle of a large courtyard, surrounded by a stone wall, was a watering pool. It is estimated that Megiddo's stables could have accommodated 450 horses; the adjacent structures undoubtedly housed dozens of battle chariots - an impressive quantity in terms of the period.

Iron Age Watersystem

Needing secure access to its water supply, Megiddo utilized different watersystems over its history.

In the 9th c. B.C., Ahab constructed a massive system with a 30 meter deep shaft and a 70 meter long tunnel. This continued in use until the end of the Iron Age.



Tunnel to Spring



This Iron Age tunnel connected the bottom of Ahab's shaft to the spring. Before its construction, Megiddo residents had to leave the city walls in order to get water from the spring.

This tunnel was hewn from both ends at the same time (like Hezekiah's Tunnel) and its builders were only one foot off when meeting in the middle.

To safeguard the city's water supply in times of siege, a subterranean water system was hewn in the rock in the western part of the city, which made it possible to reach the spring at the foot of the hill outside the walls without being seen by the enemy. This project required considerable engineering ingenuity and an enormous amount of hard labor. The water system consists of a square, 25 m.-deep vertical shaft and an 80 m.-long horizontal tunnel. In order to hide the source of water from the enemy and to protect the users of the water system, a particularly thick wall, camouflaged by a covering of earth, was constructed at the entrance to the cave from which the spring emanates, blocking access from the outside.

Megiddo continued to serve as the seat of the royal governor during the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel. This is attested to by a seal, found in excavations at the beginning of the 20th century, bearing the inscription "to Shema, servant of Jeroboam." During the rebellion of Jehu, Ahaziah, king of Judah, fled to Megiddo and died there of his wounds. (II Kings 9: 27)

Megiddo was apparently conquered and destroyed in 732 BCE, during the campaign of Tiglath Pileser III, king of Assyria, against the Kingdom of Israel. (II Kings 15: 29)

The Last Days of Megiddo

The Assyrians made Megiddo the royal city of their province in the north of the conquered kingdom of Israel and rebuilt it in their finest architectural tradition. An orthogonal grid of streets divided the city into quarters. In the south of the city, a round, subterranean stone-lined silo, 11 m. in diameter, with two narrow flights of stairs along its sides, was found. At the end of the 7th century, apparently during the reign of Josiah, king of Judah, a rectangular fortress was constructed on top of the eastern side of the tel, but it remained in use only until Josiah's fall in 609 BCE, when it was destroyed.

In his days Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt, went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates; and king Josiah went against him; and he slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him. (II Kings 23: 29)

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From then on, Megiddo fell into decline; it was finally abandoned during the Persian rule, in the 5th century BCE.

The new excavations are being carried out by I. Finkelstein and D. Ussishkin on behalf of Tel Aviv University in cooperation with B. Halpern on behalf of Pennsylvania State University.