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wide reach and  
large buildings  
of the monarchies  
of Shaul, Dovid and  
Shlomo Hamelech

*By Lawrence H. Schiffman*

# Uncovering the Kingdom of Dovid



The Givati parking lot excavations in the City of David



Recent archaeological research is revealing the key role that cities played in the growth of ancient Israel during the United Monarchy of Shaul, Dovid and Shlomo. New findings have identified a string of planned fortified sites dating to the tenth century BCE that are among the earliest evidence for the process of urbanization that helped establish and defend the kingdom of ancient Israel. What these discoveries tell us about the urbanization process in the northern Shefeilah (the Judean foothills) throws light on the role of the significance of the cities throughout the land. Further, these discoveries show without any question the existence of a centralized government that we know to have been centered in Yerushalayim.

While urbanization sounds like a modern word, it in fact refers to a very ancient process. Cities serve many functions: to protect borders or trade routes, to provide safety for residents from marauding outsiders, to provide administrative and commercial centers, or as religious centers. For these reasons, cities were common in ancient Canaan before the Israelite conquest. Just recently, archaeologists preparing for a new water pipeline to be laid by the Mekorot Water Company at Tel Erani, on the outskirts of Kiryat Gat, discovered what is now probably the earliest evidence for Canaanite urbanization. They uncovered an early Bronze Age gate, fortifications and houses showing early evidence of the economic stratification that typifies cities. With the reoccupation of the Canaanite cities and the building of new ones by the Israelites, the process of urbanization was indeed key to the establishment of Jewish society in ancient Eretz Yisrael.



Researchers examine the mysterious channels unearthed in the City of David National Park in Jerusalem



Urbanization was key to the transition from the period of the *Shoftim* (Judges) to the rise of the United Monarchy under Shaul, Dovid and Shlomo. When *bnei Yisrael* first entered Eretz Yisrael, it faced not only a hostile population of Canaanites, but also a considerable number of large, fortified Canaanite cities. Archaeological research has demonstrated that a transition in the occupancy of many of the cities took place as Israelites replaced conquered Canaanites. The original Canaanite cities had been constituted as city-states under a chieftain and served as economic centers for the villages around. Indeed, without holding these fortresses and building additional ones, the ancient kingdom of Israel could not have sustained itself militarily or economically.

The recent research really begins with the excavation of Kiryat Qeiyafa by Hebrew University archaeologist Professor Yosef Garfinkel, author of a recent and very significant article on this topic. His excavations at this site revealed a city plan in which a circular casemate city wall (a double wall with chambers in between) had been constructed with houses on the inside of the wall facing a circular “Main Street,” and houses on smaller streets as well as a large public building in the middle. City gates were located on two sides and were of the type common in ancient Israelite cities, with three chambers on each side of the entrance area. This site yielded wood samples that allowed for carbon-14 dating to the tenth century BCE. The location of the

site was designed to protect the kingdom against attacks by the Philistines who occupied the region below on the coastal plain. Kiryat Qeiyafa yielded what appears to be the most ancient Hebrew inscription ever discovered, also dating to the same time period. It left no doubt that this had been an Israelite city.

Since a similar urban plan was in use in numerous cities throughout Eretz Yisrael, some of which clearly date to this early period, it is reasonable to conclude that a central authority—the monarchy—had determined a general architectural plan to be used in the establishment of such urban centers. The recent discovery of the same urban plan at four other cities in the same area of ancient Yehudah, at sites including Beit Shemesh and Lachish, indicate that this system of cities was intended for both defense and control of the wider hinterland. In a number of cases, these cities guarded borders or roads that led to Yerushalayim. Archaeological evidence points to a somewhat later process of urbanization of the southern Shefeilah, primarily in the ninth century BCE. The Shefeilah was an extremely important part of ancient Israel, as it was excellent agricultural land and the source of a large part of the food supply.

The *Tanach* tells us of such building activity by Shlomo Hamelech as a result of the major governmental transition that took place during his reign (*Melachim* I, ch. 4). Whereas during the period of the *Shoftim*, tribal and local authorities ruled over the population in an unc centralized manner, the decision to establish a monarchy under Shaul Hamelech had to a great extent been stimulated by the need to fight off marauding Philistines. While Shaul did little to create an extensive administrative system, that was not the case with Shlomo Hamelech. He created a series of geograph-

ic regions, each controlled by a major urban center that also served as a fortress.

According to the *Tanach*, Shlomo rebuilt the large urban centers of Chatzor, Megiddo and Gezer, besides strengthening the fortifications of Yerushalayim and building the *Beis Hamikdash* (*Melachim* I 9:15). These three cities also have casemate walls and three chambered gates, following what we now know to be the standard form of Israelite urban planning inherited from the Canaanites before them. While there has been an attempt in recent years to reevaluate the Solomonic dating of the fortifications at Chatzor, Megiddo and Gezer, and to claim that they date to later periods, the research we are reporting here argues strongly for dating these fortifications to the time of Shlomo Hamelech.

Even if the structures identified as Solomonic should turn out to be later, similar fortifications for these cities had already been built by the Canaanite inhabitants when they occupied these very same sites. The recent research argues strongly against those who doubted the historical outline presented in the *Tanach*. One way or another, whether these fortifications were taken over when the Israelites moved in or whether they built them, structures of this kind typified the Jewish urban centers of the tenth century BCE.

Therefore, what we observe in the sites in the northern Shefeilah is a small but extremely significant part of the wider urbanization process that helped to secure the United Monarchy throughout the land. The account of *Migdal Bavel* (the Tower of Babel; *Bereishis* 11:1-9) tells about urbanization gone awry and reminds us of its dangers; yet, successful urbanization was indeed a major contributor to the success of the United Monarchy of Dovid and Shlomo. Archaeology continues to uncover the world of ancient Israel, and to provide a greater appreciation of Biblical history. ●

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