

## Tel Hazor A Journey into History

By Peter Abelow

*Part of an ancient gateway to Hazor from the period of King Solomon (tenth century BCE).*

One of the largest and most important Galilean cities in Biblical times, Hazor is currently the site of some of Israel's most impressive excavations. Yet many visitors to the Galil drive right by, probably not even realizing what they are passing.

Driving up Route 90 towards Kiryat Shemoneh, just beyond the town of Hatzor Hagalilit, one spots the first sign of something unusual. Breaking through the parched earth is a patch of greenery and pink, flowering oleander bushes—a sure sign of a natural spring.

It was the proximity of this abundant water source that undoubtedly drew the original Caananite residents,

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in the nineteenth century BCE, to build a fortified city on the adjacent hill. According to the Book of Joshua, Hazor was the leading kingdom of the region when Bnei Yisrael entered the land (11:11). The Navi also describes Joshua's victory over the alliance led by the king of Hazor:

*And all the cities of those kings, and all the kings of them, did Joshua take, and struck them with the edge of the sword, and he completely destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the Lord commanded. But as for the cities that stood still in their strength, Israel burned none of them, save Hazor only; that did Joshua burn (11: 12-13).*

Evidence of destruction by fire has been unearthed at various places on the site.

Hazor is one of the best examples of a tel in Israel today. (A tel is a man-made mound where civilization has been built on top of civilization.) Over twenty different layers of ancient history have been exposed at the site; ruins from various periods include temples,

fortifications and a large water system. The story of Hazor is still being written as archaeological teams returned in the summer of 2002 in search of a royal palace and royal archives.

One of the most impressive remains uncovered by archaeologists is a tenth-century BCE gateway. The gateway is similar in construction to gates unearthed in Megiddo and Gezer, cities that were built by King Solomon and mentioned in the Bible.

*And this is the manner 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).*

Stand in the ancient gateway. You can almost visualize the city's elders sitting there, just as they sat in the gateways of Hebron when Abraham negotiated for Me'arat Hamachpelah and in the gateways of Beit Lechem when Boaz assured his right to marry Ruth.

Another extraordinary ruin indicates that the residents of Biblical Hazor faced a classic problem: the need to build on high ground for defensive purposes without leaving the water source outside the city walls, in the valley below. It appears that in the ninth century BCE during the reign of King Ahab, the residents came up with a solution: the creation of a magnificent water system that remains one of the marvels of ancient engineering. Today, Jewish visitors to the site can retrace the path of our forefathers, descending steps around the perimeter of a square, vertical shaft to a sloping tunnel. The tunnel leads to a natural aquifer, 130 feet below the surface of the town. Thus the residents of

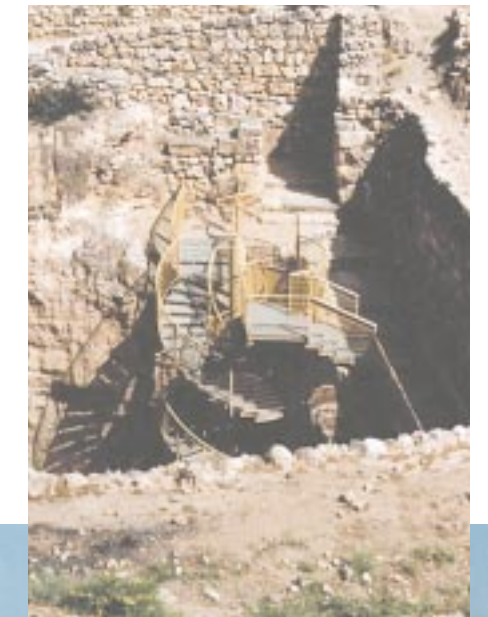
ancient Hazor had access to water without leaving the security of the city. This amazing water system is fun for children, as the oppressive heat gives way to the cool dampness of an underground tunnel; but it does involve going down—and then back up—approximately 150 steps.

To fully appreciate Hazor, visit the museum, where the tale of the city's “layer cake” of time, spanning 1,500 years, is told very effectively. The museum is located a few hundred yards up the road from the tel and just inside the entrance to Kibbutz Ayelet Hashachar. In the museum, visitors can trace the path of Hazor's history from its origins through the periods of Kings Solomon and Ahab to its final

destruction during the time of the Hellenists (second and third centuries BCE). Allow an hour to visit the site (especially if you intend to descend into the water system) and another twenty minutes for the museum.

For families, especially those with children who have studied Navi, Hazor is a wonderful place to visit. **JA**

*The descent into the ancient water shaft, which was built during the time of King Ahab (ninth century BCE).*



*A view of the ongoing excavations at Tel Hazor.*



*Remains of pillars from a large public building from the Israelite period (seventh-ninth centuries BCE).*