

Finding Solomon's Gate at Gezer

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(CAMS 012)

The city of Gezer is mentioned numerous times in the Bible. The book of Joshua describes Joshua killing the king but notes also that the city remained occupied by Canaanites. Scattered across four chapters of 1 Kings are pieces of the story of Solomon's marriage to a pharaoh's daughter as well as how Solomon gained control of Gezer. When pieced together, the story tells us that an unnamed pharaoh¹ captured and burned Gezer and killed its Canaanite residents. Solomon married a daughter of the pharaoh (unnamed as well) and lived in the City of David until Gezer could be rebuilt (Handy 64). Locating Solomon's gate at Gezer is likewise the result of piecing together a story, one that contains sheer coincidence and the application of other discoveries.

While the story of Gezer as a gift to Solomon only exists in the Bible, the city is mentioned in other sources. The first known instance is from 1468 B.C.E. in a list of towns captured by Thutmose III (Dever, *Gezer I* 2). Throughout history the city has been known by other names, such as Jazar and Gazara.

Gezer is located about 15 miles inland from the Mediterranean, about 30 miles due west of Jericho. In Divided Kingdom geography, the city is located very close to the intersections of Judah, Israel, and Philistia. From the aspect of ancient Palestine, Gezer is of considerable significance, having been occupied as early as the fourth millennium B.C.E. At over 750 feet in elevation, the city overlooked a very important road intersection, where the Via Maris highway that ran between Asia and Europe joins a trunk road that passed through the Valley of Ajilon to Jerusalem and eventually into Transjordan. The location has visibility in all directions except to the south where the

¹ One or two Web sites indicate that the unnamed pharaoh was Siamun, but this appears to be far from widely accepted.

Finding Solomon's Gate at Gezer

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(CAMS 012)

Shephelah block the view². Based on size, Tell Gezer is larger than Megiddo, Jericho, and Lachish (Dever, *Gezer I* 1).

Unlike many other locations where the Bible goes into great detail on layout, we must use archaeology as a source of the specifics of this city.

The location of Gezer was found quite accidentally in 1870 by Charles Clermont-Ganneau. While reading the account of a 16th-century A.D. confrontation between Jerusalem's governor and a band of Bedouin written by Mujîr er-Dîn, Clermont-Ganneau noticed the similarity between *Tell el-Jazar* and Gezer. He explored Tell el-Jazar and found an inscription marking an eastern boundary of Gezer. Later, Clermont-Ganneau speculated other markings should exist which would delineate the overall extent of the city and thus revisited Gezer to search for more. While stonemasons were working to remove the original marker³, Clermont-Ganneau used a combination of guesswork and landmarks, eventually finding two other inscriptions (Clermont-Ganneau 225 – 231). This discovery puts Gezer in the rare category of being a site of ancient Israel mentioned in the Bible whose location is known without doubt (Yadin, *Hazor* 200).

The initial excavation of Gezer, funded by the Palestine Exploration Fund, took place from 1902 – 1905 and 1907 – 1909 by R. A. Stewart Macalister from University College of Dublin. The relative youth of the science of archaeology combined with Macalister's overly ambitious style and the fact that he was the only archaeologist at the site resulted in much criticism, although he published his research in a timely manner not

² Not used here, but perhaps of interest to the reader, is the Web site at <http://www.ebibletools.com/israel/gezer/index.html> which has photographs of Gezer, including several views in different directions from the city.

³ A photograph of one of the Gezer boundary markers can be seen at <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/images.jsp?artid=1368&letter=B&imgid=474>.

Finding Solomon's Gate at Gezer

Allen Huber
(CAMS 012)

usually encountered (Yadin, *Hazor* 201). Yadin goes on to placate Macalister's ineptness to some degree by proclaiming the publication to be "three sumptuous volumes...written in the beautiful style of the Victorian age..."⁴ Macalister identified eight layers, whereas later research identified more than four times as many, and, as evidence perhaps of Macalister's poor technical skills, he grouped the pottery he discovered into unusually large periods, some spanning many hundreds of years (Freedman 998). Examples of Macalister's poor documentation include lack of elevations, large distance measurement errors, and poor accuracy in compass bearings (Dever, *BA* 51). Almost all sources on Macalister's excavation of Gezer describe how his techniques were less than desirable and how his trenches destroyed the ability to follow many strata across the site. But one source offered a possible explanation for Macalister's goal of excavating the entire site in such a haphazard manner before his permit expired: a fear that rapid plundering of Palestine was being undertaken during turbulent times in the Ottoman Empire (Dever, *BA* 50). Fortunately, Macalister ran out of time and left considerable amounts of the site for future excavation.

In section 14, "The Maccabean Castle," Macalister described running a trench and eventually finding 300 feet of outer wall missing. Seeing interesting construction in this gap, he decided to uncover the whole area (Macalister 210) which was documented in his "Plan of the Maccabean Castle of Gezer" diagram on page 217. Visible in this diagram are a number of long, thick, parallel structures we now associate with a gate, although only one side was uncovered in this excavation. In his discussion, Macalister saw no importance to this structure, calling them cellar spaces (215). Due to his discovery of

⁴ Indeed, a single volume itself is a hefty collection with either a drawing or photograph almost every other page!

Finding Solomon's Gate at Gezer

Allen Huber
(CAMS 012)

Hellenistic pottery and Greek inscriptions, he found nothing to indicate that any of the findings are Solomonic. In Macalister's defense it must certainly be noted that the discovery of Solomon's gates of Megiddo and Hazor would not take place for decades, so this was not simply an instance of oversight. At the point in time he excavated Gezer, nobody had yet seen remains of any of Solomon's gates.

In 1934, another series of excavations was sponsored by the Palestine Exploration Fund. Directed by Alan Rowe, the excavation quickly hit bedrock and was abandoned (Freeman 998). Rowe himself, however, called the one-month excavation "of a successful and exciting nature (Rowe 19). Part of Rowe's agreement with the Fund and various officials was to excavate the western part of the tell which had not been touched by Macalister. His findings were interesting but of no factor in the gate's discovery, which is located in the south-central part of the tell.

Yiguel Yadin retells the story of his "astonishment and unbound excitement" when he viewed Macalister's "Plan of the Maccabean Castle of Gezer" and first realized that, just years after the discovery of Solomon's gate at Hazor, a virtually identical structure was documented by Macalister, just not as a gate (Yadin, *Hazor* 201-202). Once the gate at Hazor was discovered, Yadin soon proposed that Macalister's storage spaces are actually the three western chambers of a gate, and went on to offer a diagram of its suggested restoration (Yadin, *IEJ* 83 – 84). He proceeded to claim that the dimensions, other than minor modifications for local terrain, were virtually identical to Megiddo and Hazor, including the construction techniques. This encouraged a new round of excavation (Yadin, *Hazor* 202 – 203) which excited Yadin although he confessed to a little concern with being proven wrong.

Finding Solomon's Gate at Gezer

Allen Huber
(CAMS 012)

The Hebrew Union College's Jerusalem branch excavated Gezer from 1965 to 1973, beginning under the direction of Dr. William Dever. The results have been presented in a series of five volumes published between 1970 and 1990⁵. Unfortunately it appears that the discoveries in the area of interest here, known as "Field III" (Dever, *Gezer I* Plan 1), have yet to reach print, so we have to rely on what information Yadin has given us. He relayed information from the excavation of the Solomonistic gate, stating that Dever's team found the other side of the gate, as well as the discovery of red-burnished ware of the late 10th century B.C. If Solomon himself didn't have the city of Gezer rebuilt, someone at that time certainly did.

As noted earlier, Yadin's measurements that compared Gezer with other gates came close when using Macalister's plan, but some discrepancies existed. The more recent excavation discovered that the gate had been rebuilt using original stones, and a little further digging uncovered the original gate jamb. Using those measurements the gate dimension matched Megiddo and Hazor exactly (Yadin, *Hazor* 203 – 204).

So what does Gezer's gate look like? None of the sources offered any type of reconstructive diagram, just excavation plans, but a review of Yadin's dimensions should be of some value. The entrance passage is 4.2 meters in width while the overall gate width is 16.2 meters. The length of Gezer's gate is 19.0 meters, a little more than 1 meter shorter than those at Megiddo and Hazor, thus making the entire gate structure about 15% deeper than wide. All three appear to have towers on the inside of the gate, with Gezer's towers being 5.5 meters apart, just a little smaller than 6.1 found at Hazor and 6.5 at

⁵ *Gezer I* (1970) is a preliminary report, *Gezer II* (1974) discusses fields I and II, *Gezer III* (1990) reviews the ceramics found at the site, *Gezer IV* (1986) documents field IV, and *Gezer V* (1988) deals with field I caves. The ASOR site mentions a *Gezer VI* publication project, but not exactly what it will cover.

Finding Solomon's Gate at Gezer

Allen Huber
(CAMS 012)

Megiddo. The ashlar stone used to build the gates is common to other Israelite buildings from the ninth and tenth centuries and was also of higher quality than the stone used in the casemate walls (Yadin, *Hazor* 202). The stone construction described as “headers and stretchers”⁶ is shown in a photograph on the same page just referenced. As would be expected, there is no discussion whatsoever about the wood used in the gate doors themselves since it would not have survived.

There are no sources other than the Bible to prove that Solomon existed, married a pharaoh's daughter, and rebuilt the city of Gezer. But a wonderful series of events described enthusiastically by Moshe Pearlman in Digging up the Bible (197) took place when the gates discovered at Megiddo and Hazor confirmed gates were built at the correct point in history. Macalister never, despite the size of his reporting, identified a Solomonic gate, which just didn't sound right to Yadin. Yadin then went back to Macalister's diagrams and, using new discoveries elsewhere instead of digging again, noted a gate at Gezer virtually identical to the other two as stated in the Bible. Further excavation proved Yadin's idea to be correct. Several steps using new discoveries and a review of old ones were required, but all three of Solomon's gates have finally been found.

⁶ A *header* is a brick laid so its short end is exposed, whereas a *stretcher* is laid in a parallel manner.
<<http://www.nyc.gov/html/lpc/html/glossary/glossary.shtml>>

Finding Solomon's Gate at Gezer

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