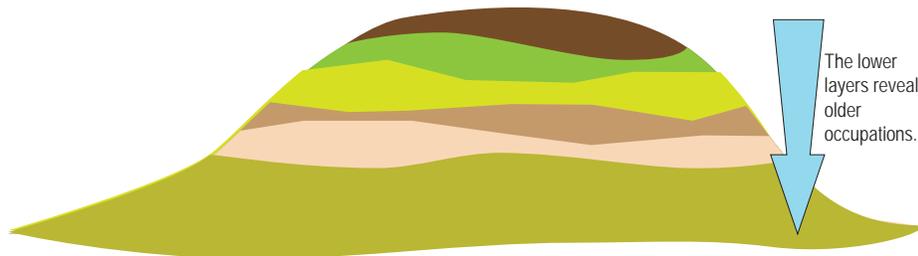


Does David exist?

Some question whether king David actually exists.

Is king David a real person, or a mythological figure created after the fact to support the notion of a divine origin for the nation of Israel?¹ Furthermore, what difference does it make whether or not some person named David was an early king of the nation of Israel?

Archaeology is a modern science.



About 150 years ago, some scholars began carefully excavating large mounds located around the world. Inside these mounds, they discovered the remains of ancient city occupations, hidden under the dirt. They carefully photograph and catalog everything uncovered, from building material, broken pottery, tools, and other

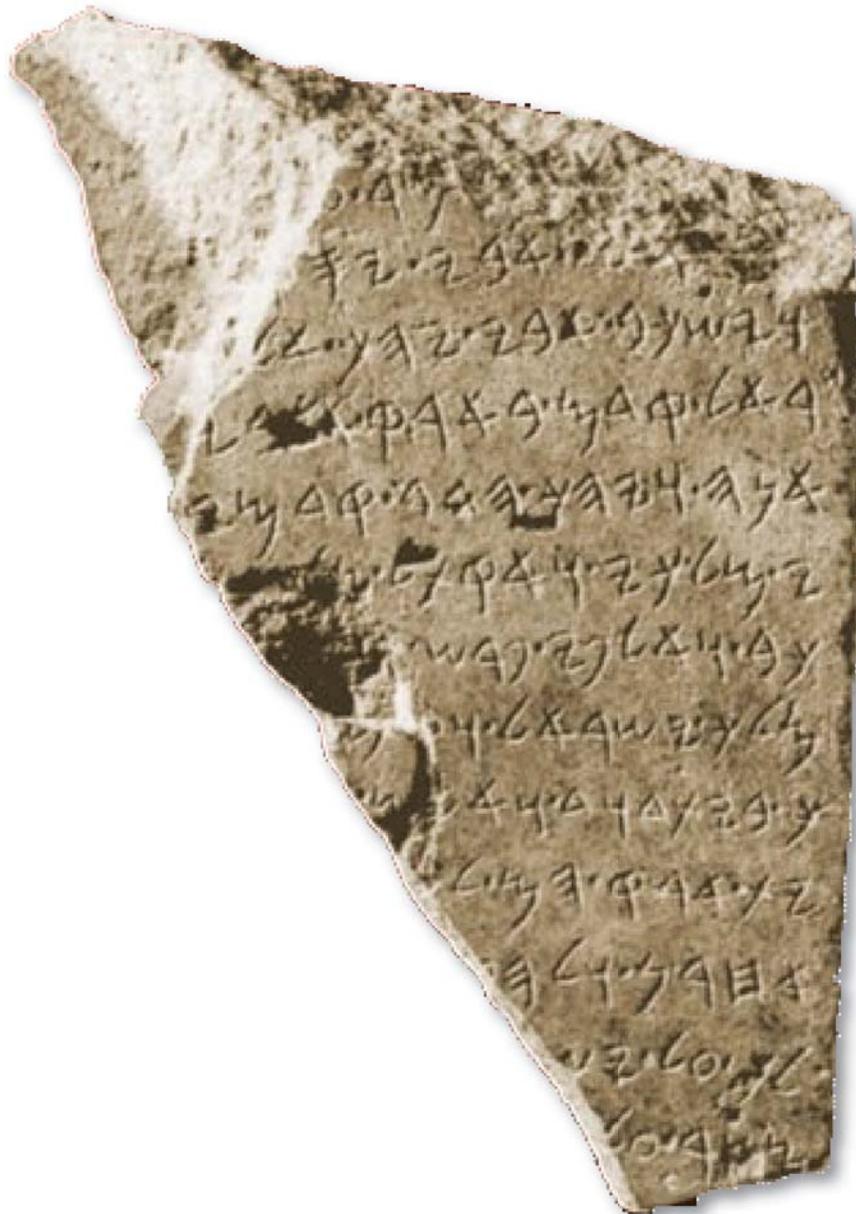
1. This may be a surprising question for many faithful believers who are familiar with the king David from the book of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, and the Psalms. Beginning about three hundred years ago, some European scholars begin to investigate the Bible from a scientific and historical point-of-view, and not from the position of faith in a religious text. This method of study has come to dominate academic study of the Bible as well as other ancient documents. Philosophical ideas dominate this method and its conclusions. Some consider the Bible just a book of myths, fairy tales, and legends, with little basis in fact or actual history. These academic ideas have filtered down to the common man on the street. They influence average people that the Bible has no credibility, is riddled with contradictions, and that faith in God has no basis in reality.

For example, "There are no literary criteria for believing David ... [who is] no more historical than Adam. ... None of these characters has left a trace outside the biblical text." Philip R. Davies, *In Search of 'Ancient Israel'* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield University Press, 1992), p. 12. Davies argues that the traditions of 'Israel' and the Davidic dynasty were late inventions from the Persian period. Davies is a member of a loose group of scholars known as 'biblical minimalists', or, the Copenhagen group. They include professors like Thomas L. Thompson, Niels Peter Lemche, Keith Whitelam, and Davies.

Even though biblical minimalist positions are rejected as extreme by the majority, similar skepticism in the accuracy of history presented by the biblical record is not, "The Old Testament contains popular historical traditions especially concerning the early history of Israel," Martin Noth, *The History of Israel*, second edition (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1958), p. 44; "Motifs from the following types of fairy tale were employed ... that other peasant lad who for a bag of gold and the king's daughter slays a giant (I Samuel 17) ... the historical value of the books of Samuel differs greatly from section to section," Georg Fohrer and Ernst Sellin, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, translated by David E. Green (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1965), pp. 89, 226; "The narratives of all three strands have a strongly legendary character," Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, translated by Peter R. Ackroyd (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 281; "The various independent traditions that have been combined to produce I-II Samuel are folk legends for the most part," James Maxwell Miller and John Haralson Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1986), p. 124; "David and Solomon are not mentioned in any contemporary extrabiblical text, and hence do not have any reliably direct anchor to Ancient Near Eastern chronology," Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *David and Solomon: In Search of the Bible's Sacred Kings and the Roots of the Western Tradition* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2006).

remains. The field of archaeology has developed into a highly sophisticated and scientific process of discovery.²

As excavators peel back lower layers of occupation, the site reveals occupations in reverse chronologically. One by one, the cities of ancient Canaan have been excavated, identified, and rediscovered.

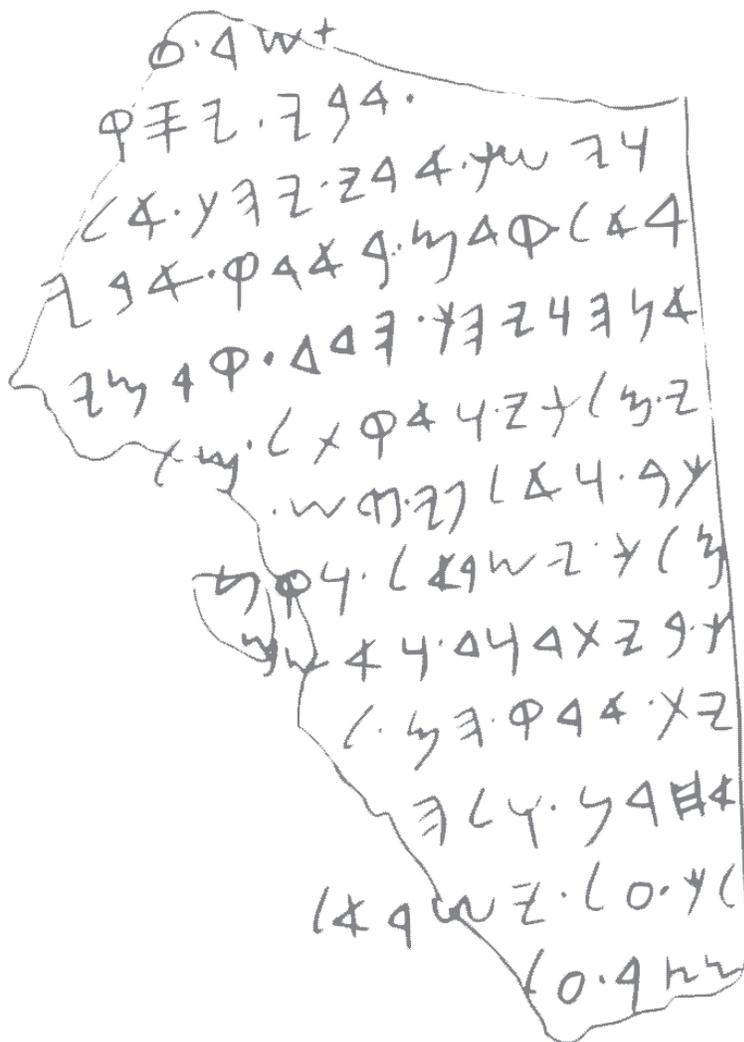


2. Excavators noticed that similar styles of pottery were found at certain layers at the different locations. Just like the date of a document is clear from the handwriting style, the style of pottery creates a signature that allows specific relative dating of the layers between sites.

Examine the Tel Dan inscription.

At the northern end of Israel, in the tribal region of Naphtali, is the ancient city of Dan. Dan is distant from the centers of power of Israel and Judah, but only about 50 miles from the ancient capital of the Syrian empire, Damascus.

In 1993, a monument was discovered in excavations at Dan, known as the Tel Dan inscription.³ The ruler of Syria, likely Ben-Hadad the son of Hazael, produced this monument. It describes campaigns against the enemies of Syria. The campaigns of Benhadad against Jehoahaz of Israel and Joash of Judah, around 800 BC, are known from the biblical text. "The Lord was furious with Israel and handed them over to King Hazael of Syria and to Hazael's son Ben Hadad for many years" (2 Kings 13:3).



3. The Tel Dan inscription also includes two other pieces from the same monument. There is some debate about their position relative to the main piece discussed here. The text important to the discussion here is found on the main piece, so the others are not included here.

This monument names the kings of Israel and Judah. It describes how Ben-Hadad killed both an Israelite king and a king from the 'house of David'.⁴ The broken text of the sixth through the ninth lines reads,

... the days of my reign. I would kill a king and ... thousands of chariots and thousands of horsemen ... the king of Israel, and I killed him ... king of the house of David. And the name of ...

Ben-Hadad claims to conduct successful military campaigns against neighboring states. He has already killed some king of Israel, and some other king from the 'house of David'.



The ninth line contains the relevant phrase, 'house of David'.⁵ The 'house of David' is the location where the king and the monarchy of Judah resides, that is, Jerusalem. The king of Syria describes the city of Jerusalem as the 'house of David' in about 800 BC because the center of the Judean kingdom retains the name of a recent important leader, that is, the person David.⁶

Examine the water fortifications of Gibeon.

According to the biblical text, around 1400 BC, the people of the city of Gibeon approached Joshua. They made a peace treaty with Israel by pretending to be a foreign nation from far away. "When the residents of Gibeon heard what Joshua did to Jericho and Ai, they did something clever. They collected some provisions and put worn-out sacks on their donkeys, along with worn-out wineskins that were ripped and patched. They had worn-out, patched sandals on their feet and dressed in worn-out clothes. All their bread was dry and hard. They came to Joshua at the camp in Gilgal and said to him and the men of Israel, 'We have come from a distant land. Make a treaty with us.'" (Joshua 9:3-6)

4. 'House of David' could mean the royal dynasty, the nation of Judah, the city of Jerusalem, or the area around Jerusalem.
5. Hebrew and Aramaic read from the right to the left. Note the dots, which separate words, like a space does in English. The first letter is a 'b', then a 'y', then a 't', which spells 'byt', or 'beth'. 'Beth' means house, like 'Beth-Lehem' or 'house of bread', 'Beth-el' or 'house of God', 'Beth-shemesh' or 'house of the sun', or, 'Beth-hesda' or 'house of grace'. The next three letters form another word, 'd', then 'v', then another 'd'. Hebrew and Aramaic words only contain the consonants, not the vowels. So, what does 'Dvd' spell? David. These two phonemes 'house' and 'david' form one expression together, 'the house of David'.
6. The production of the Tel Dan inscription, around 800 BC, would be just slightly more than 100 years after the death of Solomon. This is contemporary to the purported life of David. Compare the designation of Israel as 'the house of Omri' in other contemporary inscriptions, for example, the Mesha stele, the black obelisk of Shalmaneser III, the Nimrud slab of Adad-Nirari III, and others.

Even though the Gibeonites tricked the Israelites, Israel kept the agreement. Joshua assigned these allies a particular job. “[Joshua] made them woodcutters and water carriers for the community and for the altar of the Lord at the divinely chosen site. (They continue in that capacity to this very day.)” (Joshua 9:27)



The inhabitants of Gibeon were Hivites, located in the area of Benjamin, just a few miles north of Jerusalem. From 1956 to 1960, James Pritchard of the University of Pennsylvania led the excavation at a village sitting on a mound, el-Jib. He found absolute evidence there that el-Jib was located on top of the ancient city of Gibeon.⁷ The city was destroyed around 600 BC. That level of occupation laid underground until Pritchard rediscovered it in 1956.

The first summer of digging located the northeast foundation of an ancient wall, originally built about 1200 BC, and fortified around 1100 BC.

7. Pritchard found many ancient jar handles from the winery at Gibeon stamped with the name of the city.

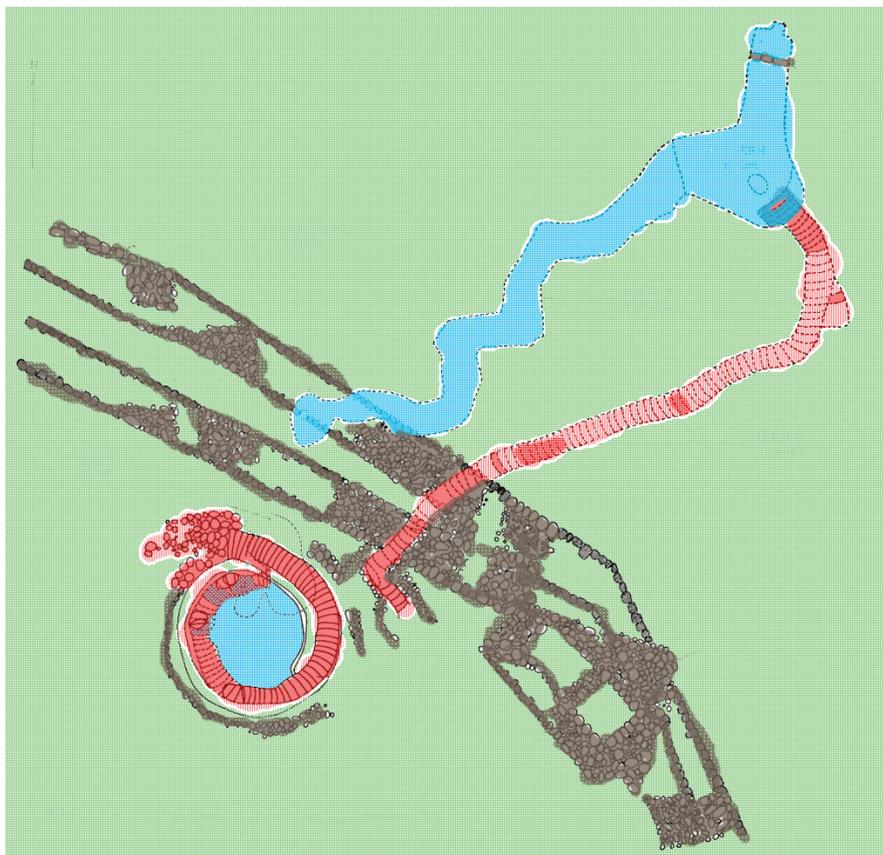


During the first season, Pritchard located a large shaft near the wall, about 40 feet in diameter. The shaft was dug out of a solid limestone bedrock about 40 feet deep. The quarryers left a corkscrew staircase with a rock rail around its edge. At the bottom of this pit, the corkscrew staircase continues down another 45 feet. At the bottom of this spiral staircase, there is a kidney-shaped water chamber. This shaft and staircase was built around 1100 BC.

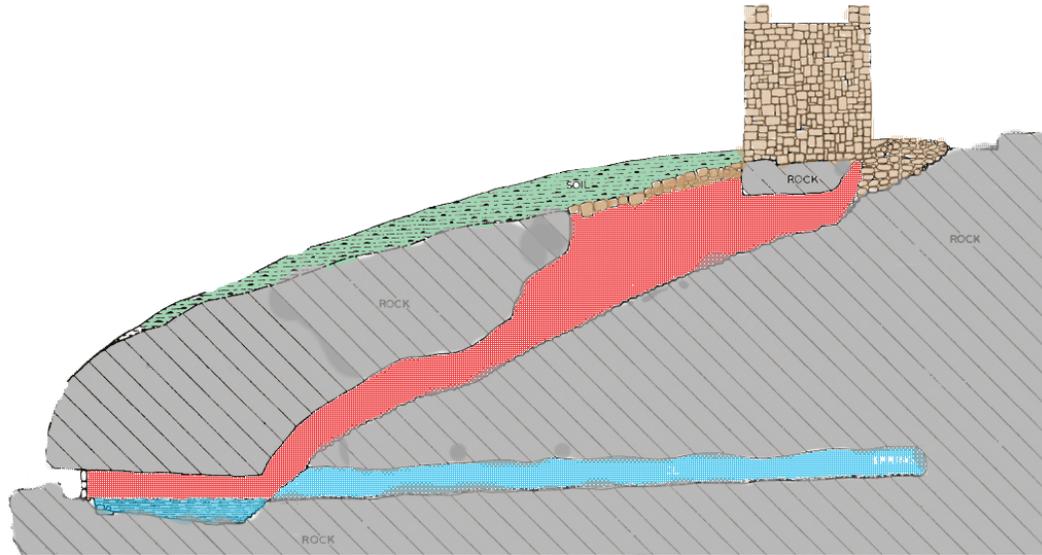
This original construction of this shaft required manually quarrying and removing about 3,000 tons of solid limestone. This would have been a massive project to complete with only manual labor, hand tools, and simple machines, but no power tools.

After the death of Saul and Jonathon, and after David was anointed king over Judah, Ish-Bosheth, another one of Saul's sons, led a rebellion against David. Those men gathered around a pool at Gibeon. "Joab son of Zeruah and the servants of David also went out and confronted them at the pool of Gibeon. One group stationed themselves on one side of the pool, and the other group on the other side of the pool. Abner said to Joab, 'Let the soldiers get up and fight before us.' Joab said, 'So be it!' So they got up and crossed over by number: twelve belonging to Benjamin and to Ish-bosheth son of Saul, and twelve from the servants of David. As they grappled with one another, each one stabbed his opponent with his sword and they fell dead together. So that place is called the Field of Flints; it is in Gibeon."

(2 Samuel 2:13-16). It is easy to picture the battle between the men of David and Ish-Bosheth around this great pool.



Nearby, Pritchard uncovered another large hole, between the circular pool and the northeast side of the city walls. Pritchard spent this summer and the next digging out the long tunnel, dug down out of the limestone bedrock, that led to a spring coming out of the bottom of the hill.



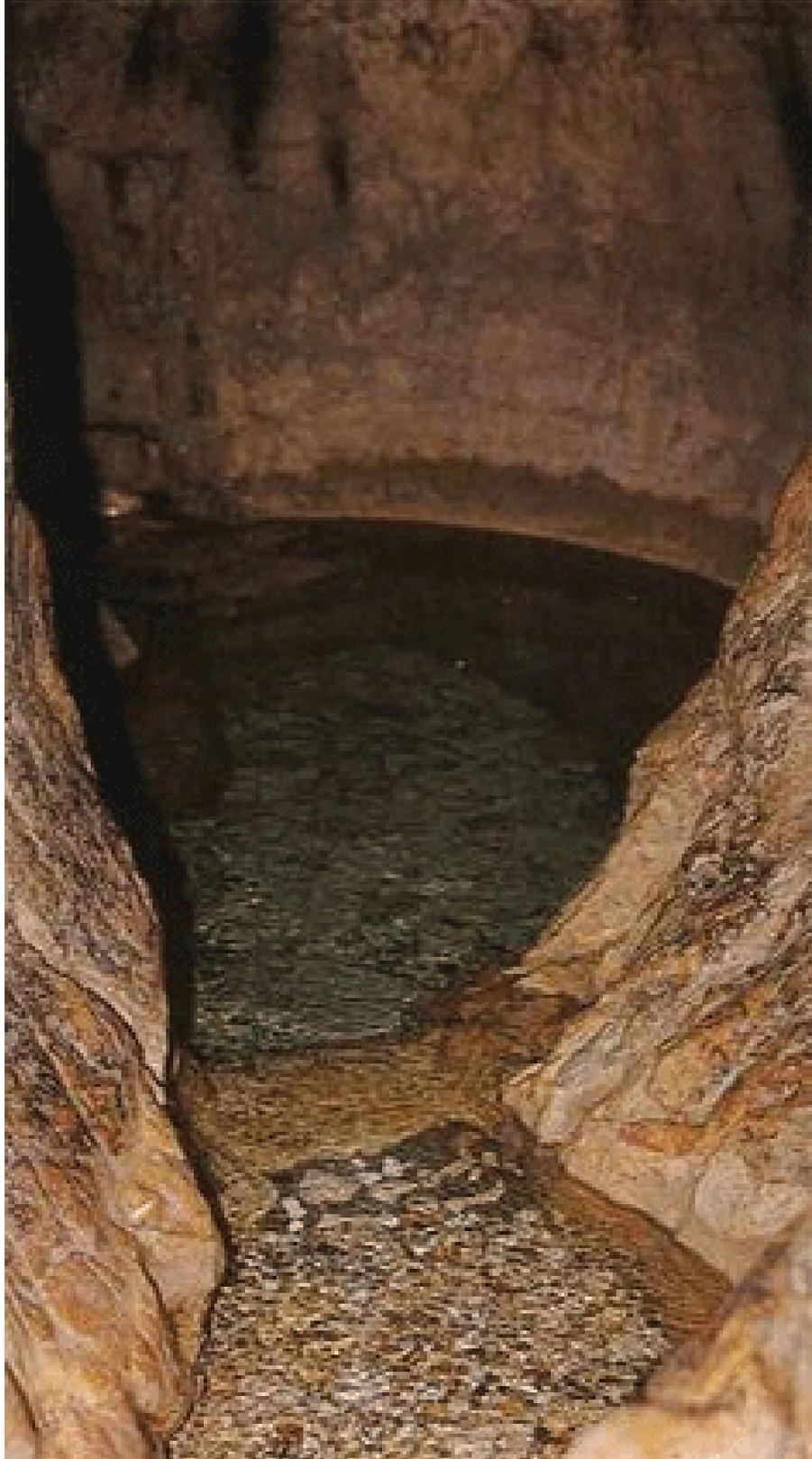
Around 1000 BC, the original work of this tunnel was started by digging a trench from the ground level outside the wall. The ancient diggers then quarried rock both up underneath the ancient walls, and also down to the location where the spring flowed out of the hill. They also created rock steps so that workers could travel up and down the shaft. There are 93 steps over 174 feet. This tunnel was capped with stones and then back covered with dirt. From outside the city, no enemy forces could tell that the tunnel existed.

They then dug another tunnel inside the hill to the source of the spring. This permitted the water to flow freely into a pool at the base of the shaft. They built a place where large stones could cover the entrance at the base to close it off from intruders. This tunnel enabled the inhabitants to have access to fresh water even while under attack or siege.⁸

The water fortifications in the ancient city of Gibeon were quite extensive and highly sophisticated.

8. Other similar tunnels are found nearby at Megiddo, Jerusalem, and Ibleam across the Jordan. There are also other tunnels with like construction located in Persia and Greece. Apparently, this design was not unique to Gibeon.





What do these discoveries say about king David?

The Tel Dan inscription supports the idea that David is a real historical figure. Does this *absolutely* prove that David existed? Well, no.⁹ But it does suggest that the claim that he does not actually exist is itself quite a stretch. This is a speculative, philosophical, specious belief that derives from a period preceding the great advances in archaeological excavations and research. It should be abandoned in favor of a conclusion supported by the actual evidence.

The existence of a specific physical feature, in a specific place, at the correct chronological time, also lends credibility to the historicity of the biblical narrative.¹⁰ The pool of Gibeon lay hidden underground for over 2500 years, but there it is, just as the biblical narrative depicts it.

How could the life of David be just a mythological fantasy when contemporary kings referred to Judah as ‘the house of David’? Is it likely that the biblical stories about David are merely just fantasy and legends when the exact places where specific events occurred are historical places? Who needs to be ashamed, and who can hold their heads high—those who claim that the Bible is full of fairy tales, or those who submit their lives to the will of the creator of the universe and invite others to do the same?

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9. Furthermore, it is impossible for me to *absolutely* prove to myself that I even exist. Should the standard of evidence be absolute, which is humanly impossible, or more like the standard of evidence in a criminal trial, that is, beyond a reasonable doubt?

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