

Biblical-era Structure Discovered in Jerusalem's City of David, Used During the First Temple Period

A unique structure, which was uncovered by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) on the eastern slope of the City of David, dates back to the First Temple Period and was used for ritual religious practices.

The structure contains eight rock-hewn rooms which contained various elements of ritual practice, including a standing stone (*matzeva*), an olive oil press and a winepress, both used to provide oil and wine for the rituals, and a carved installation with a drainage channel, which might have held an altar, along with several v-shaped marks carved in the floor, the purpose of which is not yet clear.

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In a small cave on the edge of the structure, a cache of objects dating to the eighth century BCE was uncovered, including cooking pots, jars bearing fragments of ancient Hebrew inscriptions, loom weights, scarabs, stamped seals with decorative motifs, and grinding stones used for crushing grains.

Eli Shukron, who directed the excavation for the IAA, said, "The structure ceased to function during the 8th century BCE, possibly as part of King Hezekiah's religious reform. According to the Bible, Hezekiah sought to centralize worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, abolishing the ritual sites scattered across the kingdom. The Bible describes how, during

the First Temple period, additional ritual sites operated outside the Temple, and two kings of Judah—Hezekiah and Josiah—implemented reforms to eliminate these sites and concentrate worship at the Temple.”

Shukron described how they knew the site dated to the 8th century, roughly the period of King Hezekiah,

“When we began excavating the City of David in 2010, we discovered that the site had been sealed with fill from the 8th century BCE, indicating it had fallen out of use during that time,” says Shukron. “The standing stone we uncovered remained upright in its original place, and the other rooms in the structure were also well-preserved.”

In the book of 2 Kings, Hezekiah is described as a king who “did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done.”

The Bible also describes Hezekiah’s reforms of popular worship intended to focus the people’s worship at the temple Solomon built.

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“He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it (it was called Nehushtan). He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel, so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him” (2 Kings18:4-5).

The structure found by Shukron’s team is the only known structure of its type from the biblical period in Jerusalem, and one of only a few found in Israel. The eight-room structure covers about 220 square meters.

Ze'ev Orenstein, the director of internal affairs at the City of David, told Fox News, "Nearly 3,000 years later, Jerusalem's Biblical heritage continues to be unearthed in the City of David, and with the passage of time, its relevance and meaning only continues to increase, with significance to billions, not just millions, around the world."

"This discovery in the City of David once again affirms the Jewish people's ongoing 3,000+ year-old bond with Jerusalem – not simply as a matter of faith, but as a matter of fact – from Bible times to the modern day," Orenstein said.

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