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Goliath's Hometown Found?, pg. 1
Israel's Third round of Elections, pg. 4
Ministry News , pg. 4
Family News, pg. 5

Goliath's Hometown Found?

Based on an article Ariel David, Ha'Aretz, July 2019

The monumental ruins emerged in recent months beneath the remains of a later and well-explored layer of the Philistine settlement, indicating that researchers stumbled on an older city built over by subsequent generations. Goliath's hometown would apparently have been this earlier city, not the one under archaeological investigation for decades. The discovery suggests that Gath was at the peak of its power much earlier than previously thought, around the time when the city features in the biblical narrative as a fierce rival of the early Israelites and the hometown of Goliath and other outsized warriors. "I've been digging here for 23 years, and this place still manages to surprise me," says Aren Maeir, a professor of archaeology at Bar-Ilan University who leads the expedition in Gath. "All along we had this older, giant city that was hiding just a meter under the city we were digging."

Located in southern Israel, the site is known today as Tell es-Safi—a mound made up of the stratified ruins of multiple settlements left over by millennia of human habitation. Finds at Tell es-Safi range from remains dated to the 5th millennium B.C.E. to a medieval Crusader castle and a modern Arab village destroyed in Israel's 1948 War of Independence. Most scholars accept the identification of this site as the biblical Gath, in large part because of its location and the major Philistine-era remains found there. Gath is mentioned in the Bible more times than any of the five major Philistine cities (the others being Ekron, Ashdod, Ashkelon and Gaza). Gath is said to have hosted the Ark of the Covenant for a brief time after the Philistines captured it from the Israelites (1 Samuel 5:8) and it is where David sought refuge twice from king Saul, eventually becoming a mercenary for the city's ruler, Achish (1 Samuel 21 and 1 Samuel 27).

A Hidden City Emerges

Archaeologists have been digging Philistine Gath for decades, uncovering temples, mud brick houses and massive oil presses that paint the picture of a bustling city sprawling over 500 dunams (50 hectares) with a population of around 5,000-10,000.

"This was the largest Philistine city and probably one of the largest in the Iron Age Levant," Maeir says. "Larger cities were only found outside the Levant, such as in Egypt and Mesopotamia."



The so-called "Goliath inscription" from 9th century B.C.E. Gath Prof. Aren Maeir
The Tell es-Safi/Gath Archaeological Project, Bar-Ilan University

Philistine remains were dated to a period called the Iron Age IIA, roughly from the end of the 10th century B.C.E. to the late ninth century B.C.E., when the city was destroyed in a conflagration, probably in the conquest of the area by the Aramean king Hazael around 830 B.C.E. – an event recorded in the Bible (2 Kings 12:17). Philistine Gath never recovered; it was later rebuilt as a small Judahite settlement, destroyed again by the Assyrians at the end of the eighth century B.C.E.

Until now, researchers thought that Philistine Gath flourished mainly during the brief window between the late 10th century B.C.E. and Hazael's arrival, although that period is a bit later than the dating of most of the biblical stories in which the city features. Saul and [David](#), who so had dealings with the Gittites, would have lived in the late 11th-early 10th centuries B.C.E. "Up until now we thought that the city from the Iron IIA, the one that was destroyed by Hazael, was the largest and most important period in Gath," says Maeir. "This year we got a different story."

Over the summer's digging campaign, which ended last week, archaeologists decided to investigate the foundations of large terraces located in Gath's lower city, which was inhabited during the Iron Age. The dig revealed that those terraces were resting on massive fortifications and larger buildings made of huge stone boulders and fired bricks – a method that makes them stronger than traditional sun-dried mud bricks. In some areas, these walls are four meters thick or more. The pottery associated with the walls dates to the early Iron Age, to the 11th century B.C.E. or possibly earlier. No comparably colossal structures are known in the rest of the Levant from this period – or even from the later incarnation of Philistine Gath, Maeir says. "Whatever it is, it's enormous," Maeir told Haaretz during a tour of the site last week. "It's as if the site of Gath in the early Iron Age dwarfed the later city."

The monumental structures dovetail with the image of Gath as a major regional power in the early Iron Age – a picture that can be evinced from the Bible and the archaeological evidence in the surrounding region. Settlements in the nearby Elah valley, such as Azekah and [Khirbet Qeiyafa](#) show signs of destruction during this period, suggesting that Gath was aggressively preserving its local hegemony over the afore-mentioned cities, Maeir says.



An oil press and buildings from the lower city of the Iron IIA Philistine city in Gath, Ariel David

David sought refuge in Gath from the jealous king Saul. The walls recently uncovered there would have been the ones he saw as he entered the city. On his first visit, it would have been upon these fortifications that the future king of Israel, fearing that the Gittite king Achish would harm him, feigned madness “and scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard.” (1 Samuel 21:13) Goliath, the ginormous Philistine champion hailed from there (1 Samuel 17:4), as did Achish.

The Walls David saw

An inscription found on a potsherd at Tell es-Safi and dated to the ninth century B.C.E. (more than a century after David’s time) does mention names that are etymologically similar to Goliath’s. But the so-called “Goliath sherd” only proves that this may have been indeed a common Philistine name – not that there was a famous champion of this name who went mano-a-mano with David at the turn of the 11th century B.C.E or that this warrior was unusually sized. Goliath is far from the only hulk to populate the pages of the Hebrew holy text. The Bible is pretty adamant that all kinds of mysterious gigantic people – “Rephaim,” “Anakim” and others – used to walk the earth and that their last descendants could be found amongst the Philistines, particularly in Gath (see for example Joshua 11:22 – “*There were no Anakim left in the land of the sons of Israel; only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod some remained,*” or 2 Samuel 21:16-22).

We know that after Hazael destroyed the city its ruins were still known and impressive enough to be mentioned in the [book of Amos](#), which originated in the eighth century B.C.E. – about a century after the Aramean conquest. The Prophet Amos holds up the destruction of Gath as an example of hubris punished by God and a warning of impending doom for the prideful leaders of the Israelites (Amos 6).

The Greeks looked at the remains of massive, centuries-old fortifications at Mycenae and other Bronze Age sites and called them “[Cyclopean walls](#)” believing that only giants like the mythical Cyclops could lift such large blocks of stone. Many of the biblical stories that feature unusually large people are connected to the conquest of Canaan by Joshua and the Israelites, notes Thomas Römer, a renowned expert in the Hebrew Bible and professor at the College de France and the University of Lausanne. In Numbers 13, for example, the spies sent by Moses describe the Holy Land as a country of daunting cities and giant people. These traditions mainly serve to aggrandize the glory of God and the Israelites for their victories and to create a clear chronological distinction between the time before and after the conquest, says Römer, who did not take part in the research at Gath.

Why Two Cities?

Only small sections of the early Iron Age city at Gath have been uncovered so far, and Maeir’s team aim to dig up more over the coming years. One question they hope to answer is how old that town actually is, and whether it goes back to the early 12th century B.C.E. – when the Philistine culture coalesced on the coastal plain split today between southern Israel and the Gaza Strip. It is a mystery why the Philistines decided to abandon their swanky city from the early Iron Age and build another, slightly more modest settlement on top of it

while changing the entire urban grid (the Iron IIA buildings align with the cardinal points, while the older city has a 45 degree tilt). The massive restructuring shows no indication that the city was conquered or destroyed.

The book of Chronicles does say that David eventually seized his sometime-enemy-sometime-ally Gath (1 Chronicles 18), and that Solomon's son Rehoboam fortified it for Judah (2 Chronicles 11), but the remains under investigation indicate a Philistine city, not one inhabited by Judeans. "So we still don't know a lot about why a new city was built on top of the old one, with a different orientation for the buildings," the archaeologist says. "But one thing is certain, we are slowly awakening a sleeping giant."

Israel's Third Round of Elections

Following his indictment for a pattern of crimes said to have been committed over the course of years, Prime Minister Netanyahu is fighting for his life and sacrificing the good of the country for his own. After 14 years in power, he has labeled contestants within his own party as traitors for the mere fact that they dare run against him. He describes the National Chief of Police, The State Attorney and the Attorney General (all his own appointees and clearly in support of his policies) as leaders of a coup in an effort to enthrone "the left" (a derogatory term used to describe all who dare contest him politically). The sole reason Israel has been forced to undergo a third round of elections within 12 months is Mr. Netanyahu's effort to create a Government that will ensure him immunity from prosecution.

Following the past elections but last, he failed to form a Government and called for new elections, which resulted in his further losing public support. He then created a political bloc to ensure no other party could form a Government, was accorded a mandate to form one and failed. His rival, former Chief of Staff Benny Gantz, was stymied by the bloc and likewise failed to form a Government.

Mr. Netanyahu offered to form a unity Government with Gantz' party, on condition that he would continue to hold on to the Prime Ministership for six months, and on a platform created by his political bloc but was rebuffed: Mr. Gantz declined to form a Government led by an individual indicted for grievous crimes. Nor would he join a Government whose program and policies had been pre-determined by the bloc Mr. Netanyahu created, in which policies he would have no say. Instead, he proposed that Mr. Netanyahu relinquish the Prime Minister's office for two years, prove his innocence in court, and then return to take up the role of Prime Minister. His offer was rejected. He was then offered full pardon in exchange for an admission of guilt and withdrawal from public office. Again, he declined.

For all his achievements Mr. Netanyahu has become a burden on the country and on his party. He has put his personal interests before that of the nation and dragged Israel into unnecessary elections that will cost some 5 billion US Dollars and leave us with a caretaker Government and a paralyzed Knesset for what will add up to at least 12 months before a new Government is formed, at a time when Iran threatens to attacks from Syria and Lebanon, our economy is faltering, the education system is deteriorating and our health system is crying out for relief.

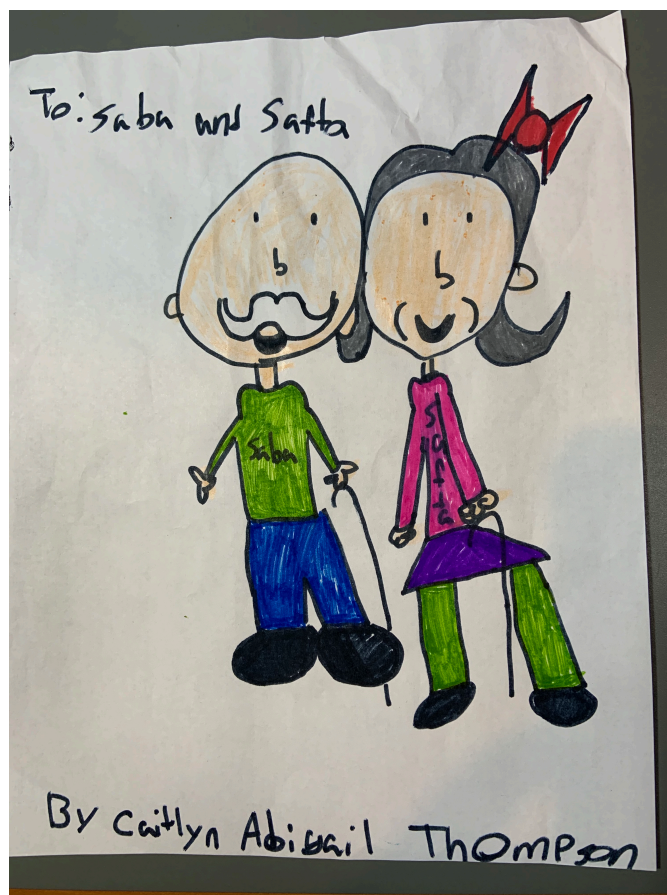
Ministry News

I am at the tail end of work on **Bible Study notes Ezekiel** and have completed the review of my translation of **the Gospel of Luke**. Discussion of the few remaining points will now be held on Luke, while I review comments on **the Gospel of John**.

In readiness for our departure from Israel (see below), have been **invited to minister in a number of churches** and am working on an appropriate sermon. My desire, as ever, is to encourage a greater commitment to biblical truth and a great devotion to God as he is known in Christ, rather than engagement with one's sense of spiritual achievement. I intend then to publish the sermon via media in the country.

As of March 1st, support for our ministry should no longer be sent to Berean Baptist Church. The next issue of MaozNews will provide information as to who will then be handling our finances. As of March 1st, my work, the nature of which will not change, will be conducted under the aegis of Reformed Baptist Network (RBNNet), a registered 501(c) 3, and will continue to be overseen by Faith Reformed Baptist Church in Media PA.

The following great work of art was drawn by our granddaughter, Caitlyn. Saba and Savta are Hebrew for grandfather and grandmother.



Family News

As just indicated, we have a **relocation date**: March 4 2019. Our belongings will be shipped, DV, mid-February. Bracha has not yet received a Green card, and our lawyer has requested that LA be our port of entry. We will stay with family while we **search for a home**. Houses in the Seattle area are by far more expensive than in Chattanooga. Needless to say, we shall need to sell the house we bought in Chattanooga in order to be able to make a reasonable down-payment for our new home. The main challenge is likely to be a mortgage, since my age (76) is not the most encouraging factor a banker will take into account when considering our application. Your prayers will be appreciated.

Since neither of us are entitled to Medicare, we will be looking into ways of ensuring ourselves once medical needs arise, catastrophic or otherwise. That will include ongoing dental and ophthalmic needs and the usual flus, running noses and the such like. Our intention is to register with Samaritans' Ministries for catastrophic needs, to seek a clinic that will accept a retainer, and to buy a dental and ophthalmic insurance policy.

At present we are sorting through our belongings, trying to decide what to bring with us to the US and what to give away, sell or throw away. Most of what we call "winter clothes" here in Israel are a joke in the colder Seattle area, and the summer in Seattle is shorter and cooler than here, so we need to rethink the whole issue of clothing. In other words, we are facing a major upheaval in the way we live: a fascinating challenge at our age, as well as an exciting adventure. Because shipping is costly and the price is based on volume, and because our electrical appliances are incompatible with US voltage (240 instead of 110, DC instead of AC), we will be leaving all our appliances and most of our furniture behind: it is cheaper to purchase items once we arrive in the in the US than to ship them. So, its "goodbye" to well-loved couches, familiar blankets and useful kitchenware; "hello" to new stuff with which we shall have to make an acquaintance. We'll be like newly-weds all over again.

Any advice friends wish to offer is most welcome. We've visited the US annually for many years, but living in the US is a whole new ball game (how's that for an Americanism?) – I've never filed an annual tax return, for example, and don't know how to do that. It's going to be quite a learning curve: teaching an old dog new tricks. November was spent in the US, mostly in Seattle, trying to learn the ropes, getting acquainted with housing options, seeking financial advice and looking into various options.

Avital and Eran, Tamar and Marcus are doing well. **Noam** has commenced her second year at college and is doing very well. She and Micah have developed what seems to be a serious relationship. **Maya** completes high school in June and, at the same time, two years of college. She intends to fulfill her duty as an Israeli citizen and join the army for the mandated 21 months, possibly preceded by an 8 month preparatory period.

Tamar is home-schooling two of her children: **Shai** is doing very well being home-schooled. He has developed better social skills, is more relaxed and is acquiring learning habits. **Eliya** (Didi to most folk) is also enjoying home-schooling. **Yotam** would also like to be home-schooled but, for the present, his parents believe he is better benefited by being out of the house and in the kind of more formal framework a (Christian) school provides.

Shlomit continues to work at two part time jobs, amounting to some 15-20 hours per week. **Keith** continues to seek gainful employment. Meanwhile, he is working part time as a janitor's assistant at a church. Other possibilities are being explored by friends in Phoenix. Once we relocate, we shall have to sell the house in which he and Shlomit are living, a reality which creates a painful challenge for all of us as a family. The children (**Jonathan, Caitlyn** – [Kaykay] –and **Elinor** – [Nuri]) are fine. The two oldest are being schooled in a public school. **Jonathan** is way ahead of his class in reading and math. He is decidedly unattracted to the social environment at school and hopes he can attend a Christian school next year. **Caitlyn** is learning to play the piano.

Bracha and I continue to enjoy amazingly good health. Bracha swims, zumbas and exercises in other ways. It is extremely difficult for us to think that we will soon be leaving the country we love and the body of Christians among whom we have labored for five decades and more. I am deeply concerned for the weal of the church in Israel and find it hard to think of

being so far away. Of course, I will continue writing for the church, and will seek to serve it as best I can from overseas. But there is nothing like day-to-day practical involvement, and nothing that can replace it. We both will be leaving a large part of our hearts behind.

In Christ by grace,

Baruch and Bracha Maoz

You can help by purchasing copies of Baruch's books from Barnes & Noble or from Amazon, by asking for them at your local bookstore and **by posting reviews of these books** on Barnes & Noble or Amazon websites. Positive reviews help us sell. Details below:

Come Let Us Reason Together (On the Unity of Jews and Gentiles in the Church). Christ as the fullness of divine revelation and his work as sufficient for our whole salvation, Presbyterian and Reformed.

Jonah: A Prophet on the Run a devotional commentary on the book of Jonah, Shepherd Press.

Malachi: A Prophet in Times of Distress a devotional commentary on the book of Malachi. Founders Press.

Colossians: The All-Sufficient Savior a devotional commentary on the book of Colossians. Founders Press.

Soon to be available: **Galatians: He Did it All** a devotional commentary on the book of Colossians. Founders Press.

The commentaries are suited for personal devotions and group studies

Baruch's sermons may be heard on **Sermon Audio**

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Funds sent for the ministry will be used exclusively for that purpose.

We reserve the right to use personal funds for the purposes of the ministry.

**As of March 1st, funds in support of our ministry should be sent to RBNet
Details to follow in the next issue of Maoznews**