

# Newsbytes

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“Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him.” Tozer

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## Rare Jewel Found on Mt. Zion Reveals Babylonian Destruction of Jerusalem

First Temple-era Jerusalem was bigger than thought, archaeologists say, adding: ‘Nobody abandons golden jewelry and nobody has arrowheads in their domestic refuse’

A unique fragment of finely worked gold and silver seemingly torn from a larger artifact, found on Jerusalem’s Mount Zion, bears silent testimony to the violence 2,605 years ago when Babylonian forces quashed a rebellion by the vassal king of Judah and destroyed the city, burning it to the ground. The tiny piece found in the 2019 excavation season, whose discovery was announced Saturday night, lends credence to biblical descriptions of Jerusalem’s riches before its obliteration by an infuriated King Nebuchadnezzar in the year 586 B.C.E.

The international team, led by the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, also found more evidence of the conflagration in the form of ash layers on Mount Zion itself, adding to evidence previous reports that a destruction layer from the Babylonians had been found below Temple Mount. They also unearthed what seems to have been a significant structure from the Iron Age – the first time major architecture from that time has been found on the “western hill,” aka Mount Zion. That building, which lies beneath archaeological layers from later periods, has yet to be excavated, the team tells Haaretz, but they hope to do that next year.

Meanwhile, the discoveries now reported by the Mount Zion Archaeological Project bolster the hypothesis that Iron Age Jerusalem had been a sprawling city, not some hilltop village, suggest UNC Charlotte professors Shimon Gibson and James Tabor and Dr. Rafi Lewis, a senior lecturer at Ashkelon Academic College and a fellow at Haifa University.

The ash layers were dated to the Babylonian conquest with the help of pottery fragments, such as oil lamps typical of the period, and also Scythian arrowheads made of copper alloy and iron, a type found at other archaeological battle sites from the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E.

“For archaeologists, an ashen layer can mean a number of different things,” Gibson said. “It could be ashy deposits removed from ovens; or it could be localized burning of garbage. However, in this case, the combination of an ashy layer full of artifacts, mixed with arrowheads, and a very special ornament indicates some kind of devastation and destruction. Nobody abandons golden jewelry and nobody has arrowheads in their domestic refuse.”

Violently torn apart

The jewelry consists of a bell-shaped gold part clasping a bunch of silver grapes. Too little remains to definitely say what it’s from: perhaps an earring or tassel, say the finders.

The item seems to convey the brutality from millennia ago. “It went through trauma itself, was smashed somehow,” Lewis told Haaretz. “The little silver cluster of grapes is almost detached from its golden case, as if the jewel had been violently torn from somebody. You can almost sense the violence on the artifact itself.”



The silver cluster of grapes practically severed from their golden base, earring or tassel ornament, discovered in the Babylonian destruction layer on Mt. Zion. Mount Zion Archaeological Excavations UNCC

*In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god. (Daniel 1:1-2).*

This is first time an artifact resembling anything like this has been found in the clear archaeological context of the Babylonian destruction of the city, Lewis says: “No evidence of this kind of richness of material culture has ever been found inside the walls of Jerusalem before.”

Even if we don’t know what bigger object the gold and silver piece is from, it does support the biblical descriptions of Iron Age Jerusalem having been a place of riches.

“The biblical books of Kings and Daniel dwell on the wealth of Jerusalem that Nebuchadnezzar took back to Babylon, and describe feasting using the gold vessels and copper vessels which came from the city,” Lewis points out. “This small artifact that shows the potential of how rich Jerusalem really was.”

Precious items have been found in the past, including in the City of David site last year, and Prof. Gabriel Barkay’s 1979 discoveries inside an Iron Age burial cave at Ketef Hinnom (above the Valley of Hinnom, which surrounds Jerusalem’s Old City), where the tiny Birkat Kohanim (Priestly Blessing) scrolls were found along with earrings.

“Those seem similar to what we found, but Hinnom was outside the city at the time,” Lewis explains.

The archaeologists are not suggesting that the gold-and-silver earring or tassel was connected with the temple itself. “But it definitely belonged to somebody aristocratic,” Lewis sums up. “It’s not something a peasant would have lost or left behind.” Further suggesting that it was an inanimate victim of the Babylonian vengeance, he agrees with Gibson that nobody in his right mind would simply toss out a precious artifact like that.

#### Nebuchadnezzar ascendant

Around 2,600 years ago, the vassal king of Judah, Zedekiah, allied with the pharaoh of Egypt to throw off the shackles of Babylonian rule. Their revolt did not go well. Judah was attacked and after a long, onerous siege, Jerusalem was razed in 586 (or 587) B.C.E. for the first time in recorded history, if not the last. The Romans would repeat the act in 70 C.E., also to punish the city’s residents for their refusal to accept their hegemony and diktats.

Evidence of the Roman ire is legion, so to speak. Signs of the Babylonian destruction were more

challenging to find, yet in 2017, archaeologists reported achieving exactly that: discovering signs of the conflagration inside stone buildings at the southern foot of Temple Mount, at the City of David site. The two main archaeological schools regarding Jerusalem – “minimalists” who want hard evidence versus “maximalists” who seek proof of biblical veracity – have long argued about the size of the city during the late Iron Age. No Iron Age remains had been found in the western hills of Jerusalem before.

Now the newly found Iron Age edifice supports the view that Jerusalem had grown westward in the eight century B.C.E., swollen with refugees from the northern Kingdom of Israel, Lewis says. The building is in line with a fortification wall found in the 1970s in the Old City’s Jewish Quarter, which had evidently been built in preparation for assault by the Assyrians in 701 B.C.E. And the ash suggests that somewhat later, Babylonian battle spread down the hill too.

“We know that this is not some dumping area, but the south-western neighborhood of the Iron Age city,” said Gibson. During the eight century B.C.E. the urban area of Jerusalem grew from what is now called the City of David to the southeast, at least as far as the site of excavation.

The bottom line is it’s no surprise to find Iron Age building on Mount Zion, yet the fact is, it hadn’t been found before. It seems this area was important not only during the Second Temple period, but in the First Temple period, too.

“Our discovery is another nail in the minimalists’ coffin,” Lewis jokes. “Usually archaeologists deal with periods. Here we captured a moment in time, an event in an exact year, with everything that comes with destruction – ash, complete vessels, Scythian arrows” – and that jewelry fragment, silently suggesting extreme violence.

The Scythian-type arrowheads, which were common in the region in the sixth and seventh centuries B.C.E., were also used by the Babylonians. Gibson adds that the oil lamps found in the Mount Zion dig are typical high-based pinched lamps of the period.

“It’s the kind of jumble that you would expect to find in a ruined household following a raid or battle,” Gibson said. “Household objects, lamps, broken bits from pottery which had been overturned and shattered... and arrowheads and a piece of jewelry which might have been lost and buried in the destruction.”

King Zedekiah himself was captured and taken to Babylon together with the wealth of Jerusalem and its temple, the destruction of which Jews have been mourning ever since. Tradition holds that the temple was destroyed first by the Babylonians and later by the Romans, on the ninth day of the month of Av. How actually these two calamitous events in Jewish history – and some others too – came to be associated with the specific date of Tisha B’Av has been lost in time.

But as Jewish history expert Elon Gilad explains it, what’s certain is that sometime in the summer of 587 B.C.E., Babylonian forces besieged Jerusalem, and after much privation among the city dwellers, the enemy eventually breached the great stone walls, plundered the First Temple, and set it ablaze. The Jews were taken into captivity in Babylon where famously, “we wept, when we remembered Zion” (Psalm 137:1). And now we know the blaze spread beyond as well, to the greater city of ancient Jerusalem.

*So the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. On the ninth day of the [fourth] month the famine was sore in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land. Then a breach was made in the city, and all the men of war [fled] by night by the way of the gate between the two walls ... And he [Nebuzaradan, the Babylonian captain of the guard] burnt the house of the Lord, and the King’s house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, even every great man’s house, burnt he with fire.  
(2 Kings 25:1-9).*

The Mount Zion archaeological project is sponsored by Aron Levy, John Hoffmann, Cherylee and Ron Vanderham, Patty and David Tyler and others, and facilitated by Sheila Bishop for the Foundation for Biblical Archaeology. The Mount Zion project is within the Sovev Homot Park and is administered by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority.

## Franklin Graham has a warning for Christian 'influencers' renouncing their faith

Todd Starnes

I've noticed a disturbing trend among so-called Christian "influencers."

A small, but growing number of people made famous because of their faith are now using their platforms to reject the teachings of Christ.

John Cooper, the lead singer in the rock band Skillet, said it best in a Facebook post: "What in God's Name is Happening in Christianity?"

Cooper was expressing his deep concerns about so-called Christian leaders who are openly renouncing their faith and others who are turning their backs on biblical teachings.

"We are in a dangerous place when the church is looking to 20-year-old worship singers as our source of truth," he wrote. "We now have a church culture that learns who God is from singing modern praise songs rather than from the teachings of the Word."

Amen, brother! Preach!

"We must STOP making worship leaders and thought leaders or influencers or cool people or 'relevant' people the most influential people in Christendom," he wrote.

Over the past few weeks the Christian community has been rocked by revelations that Joshua Harris, the author of "I Kissed Dating Goodbye," had renounced his faith. And most recently, Hillsong's Marty Sampson announced his faith in Christ was on "incredibly shaky ground."

I asked Franklin Graham, the president of Samaritan's Purse and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, about this weird trend surrounding Christian leaders and influencers during an interview on my nationally-syndicated radio program.

They're in a very dangerous place to be out from under God's protection," Graham said during an interview on "The Todd Starnes Radio Show."

"For whatever reason they have decided they're going to turn their back on God and God standards." Graham said he is especially disturbed by Christians who publicly renounce their faith in Christ, citing a warning from the Book of Revelation.

"(God) warns churches that turn their back on him and these young men who have renounced their faith have made it so public," he said. "Why did they make it so public? I think they just want publicity. Otherwise, why didn't they just leave their faith and just be quiet about it?"

He wondered if the reason why was so that other Christians might join them and fall away from the teachings of the Bible.

"Shame on them," Graham said. "You'll stand before God one day and give an account to Him."

Cooper, in his Facebook post, pointed out a “common thread” among the leaders and influencers who are saying “no one else is talking about the REAL stuff.”

“This is just flatly false,” he wrote. “I just read today in a renowned worship leader’s statement, ‘How could a God of love send people to hell? No one talks about it.’ As if he is the first person to ask this? Brother, you are not that unique. The church has wrestled with this for 1500 years. Literally. Everybody talks about it. Children talk about it in Sunday school. There’s like a billion books written on the topic. Just because you don’t get the answer you want doesn’t mean that we are unwilling to wrestle with it. We wrestle with scripture until we are transformed by the renewing of our minds.”

Graham echoed that point during our interview on my radio show.

“I believe the Bible. I believe the Bible to be the Word of God. I believe every word of the Bible. I do not understand it all but I believe it all,” he said.

We must put our faith in Jesus Christ, not a celebrity influencer. And when we find ourselves facing difficulties in life, we must turn to the Bible instead of self-help books.

"I'm going to keep on doing what I do and I'm going to keep telling people how they can have a relationship with God how they can have their sins forgiven and how it can make and have that hope of heaven one day by putting their faith and trust in Jesus Christ."

And that should be our prayer for Christian “influencers” like Mr. Harris and Mr. Sampson – that one day they might truly put their faith and trust in Christ.

## Is The Palestinian Authority Preparing For A New Intifada?

Bassam Tawil/Gatestone Institute August 19, 2019

The Palestinian Authority (PA) spent the Muslim feast of Eid al-Adha this week inciting against Israel because of Jewish visits to the Temple Mount, or Haram al-Sharif in Arabic, in Jerusalem.

The site is also sacred to Jews and Christians: it is where the First and Second Temples had stood before being destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BCE and by the Romans in 70 CE. (The Western Wall, or so-called Wailing Wall, sacred to Jews, an ancient retaining wall of the Temple Mount, is all that remains of them.)

Depicting the peaceful visits as "incursions by Jewish settlers and extremists," PA officials and media outlets accused the Israeli government of repeatedly carrying out "provocations and assaults against holy sites in Jerusalem, particularly Al-Aqsa Mosque."

Mahmoud Habbash, religious affairs adviser to PA President Mahmoud Abbas, went as far as describing the Jews visiting the Temple Mount as "terrorists." Habbash, who also serves as Supreme Shari'a Judge, also accused the Jewish visitors of "defiling the Haram al-Sharif and provoking the feelings of Muslims." He further appealed to all Muslims to "defend Al-Aqsa Mosque against Israeli conspiracies and barbaric violations."

Habbash was echoing Abbas's notorious statement that Palestinians won't allow Jews with their "filthy feet" to "defile our Al-Aqsa Mosque."

Abbas's statement came during a meeting with a group of Palestinians from east Jerusalem in his office in the West Bank city of Ramallah. Abbas even encouraged Palestinians to engage in violence

by saying:

"We bless every drop of blood that has been spilled for Jerusalem, which is clean and pure blood, blood spilled for Allah, Allah willing. Every shahid (martyr) will reach Paradise, and everyone wounded will be rewarded by Allah. We will do everything in our power to protect Jerusalem."

A few days after Abbas made his statement in September 2015, Palestinians launched the "Knife Intifada" against Israel - which included a wave of terror perpetrated by individuals inspired by vicious incitement in the Palestinian media and urged on by Palestinian leaders. In the first 12 months of the terror attacks, mostly by stabbings and car-rammings, 40 Israelis were killed.

The PA government, headed by Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh, has also joined the anti-Israel campaign of incitement and praised Palestinian rioters who clashed with Israeli security forces at the Temple Mount on the first day of Eid al-Adha.

The rioters, who were trying to stop Jews from touring the holy site, threw rocks and chairs at policemen guarding the visitors. Shtayyeh's government said that the rioters were seeking to thwart Israeli schemes to "Judaize Jerusalem in the face of organized state terrorism."

Needless to say, none of the Jews visiting the Temple Mount was involved in violence or any kind of "provocation." The only violence that took place at the holy site came from Palestinians, who attacked the policemen with stones and chairs and hurled insults at the Jewish visitors.

The PA's rivals, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which occupy the Gaza Strip, in response to the Jewish visits, called for "escalating the Intifada (uprising) against Israel. When Hamas and Islamic Jihad talk about "escalating the Intifada," they are actually urging Palestinians to carry out various forms of terror attacks against Israel. The two groups are responsible for thousands of terror attacks against Israel in the past few decades.

Let this be made unquestionably clear: the PA leadership's incitement and the threats by Hamas and Islamic Jihad to step up terror attacks against Israel could trigger another wave of terrorism like the "Knife Intifada."

By describing any Jew who visits the Temple Mount as an "extremist settler," the Palestinian leaders are sending a message to their people that the peaceful Jewish visitors are legitimate targets -- and that it is open season on them.

By calling the visits "incursions" and "raids," the Palestinians are trying to create the false impression that Jews are violently storming an Islamic holy site. The Arabic word Palestinians use to describe the visits: Iktiham (storm or break in). This rhetoric is meant to imply that the "extremist settlers" are carrying out a violent action against innocent Palestinians and their holy sites, thus signaling the Palestinians to rise to defend themselves and their mosque.

In the eyes of Palestinian leaders, Jews are always the "aggressors," while Palestinians are the perpetual "victims."

Consider this: in the Palestinian lexicon, a Jew peacefully touring the Temple Mount is an "aggressor," while a Palestinian who throws stones and chairs at police officers and abuses the visitors is the real "victim." This is the image Abbas, Hamas and Islamic Jihad are seeking to create in the minds of their people and the rest of the world.

Why do Palestinians always refer to the Jewish visitors as "settlers"? Because they falsely assume that

most religious Jews live in West Bank settlements -- as opposed to Haifa, Ashdod or other Israeli cities, or are affiliated, in one way or another, with settlers.

Palestinians regularly refer to settlers as "illegal colonizers" and "herds of colonizers and extremists" as a way of delegitimizing them and justifying terror attacks against these Jews. It is the Palestinian way of saying: "We have the right to murder these Jews because they are illegal colonizers living on our land."

In the eyes of Palestinian leaders, the Jews visiting the Temple Mount are not only "extremists," but also "terrorists" -- supposedly like the Israeli government and its leaders -- and not like the Palestinians who attack the policemen and Jews during those visits.

## Temple Stories

By Daymond Duck August 18, 2019

In early Aug. 2019, four stories broke that, if true, indicate that Israel is edging closer to rebuilding the Temple, resuming the animal sacrifices, etc.

First, the Jews can't rebuild the Temple and resume the animal sacrifices without the ashes of a sacrificed, unblemished red heifer (Num. 19:1-22).

The Jews have gone to great lengths to raise an unblemished red heifer, and there have been reports that they now have one and perhaps more.

Anyway, on Aug. 7, 2019, it was reported that Jewish priests are practicing the rituals that are necessary for sacrificing a red heifer.

These priests want to make sure that they follow every jot and tittle of God's instructions and that they have enough ashes to purify all of the Jewish people.

Their practice includes sacrificing real cows because they now believe that they are close to a real opportunity to rebuild the Temple.

Second, on Aug. 5, 2019, it was reported that two Jews visited a very important rabbi in Israel (in late July) with a question from Pres. Trump, "When will the Messiah arrive?"

According to the report, there are many skeptics, but it added that some Jews believe that Pres. Trump will play a role in the rebuilding of the Temple.

They said Gentiles (the Romans) destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 A.D., so Gentiles must participate in the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple.

They added that Gentiles need to make amends for what they have done. According to them, Pres. Trump made partial amends when he moved the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, and he can complete the process by opening the door for Israel to rebuild the Temple.

The Jews will construct the Temple, but they need the participation of Gentiles.

The stated purpose of the two Jews visiting the rabbi was to get the rabbi's opinion on when the Messiah will appear so Pres. Trump will know how much time he has to act.

The rabbi didn't give a clear answer to the question (no one but God knows).

I honestly don't know what to think about this article, but if Pres. Trump is going to get involved in rebuilding the Temple, I suspect it needs to be before he leaves office.

Third, it is common knowledge to religious Jews that several disasters have happened to Israel on the Ninth of Av (the ninth day of the fifth month on the Jewish religious calendar).

The ten spies returned from the Promised Land in unbelief on the Ninth of Av, resulting in the Jews having to wander in the wilderness for 40 years, both Temples were destroyed on the Ninth of Av, etc. (for more examples, google Tisha B'Av). For this reason, the Ninth of Av is a day of mourning (a day of disaster) in Israel.

Anyway, the Temple Institute (the group that is making the clothing for the priests, the furniture for the Temple, etc.) recently released a video calling upon the Jews to stop focusing on the disasters of the past and to start focusing on the promises of the future (a rebuilt Temple, the coming of Messiah, redemption for Israel, peace on earth and hope for the world, etc.).

According to the Temple Institute, the Temple Mount has been in the hands of Israel for more than 50 years, and it is time to turn the day of mourning over past events into a day of rejoicing over future events. Fourth, early morning visitors to the Temple Mount have been seeing a group of ten or so wild foxes. This is very unusual because foxes usually hang out in deserted areas, but Jerusalem and the Temple Mount are anything but deserted areas.

It is also very unusual because this is the month of Av, and it is customary for the Jews to publicly read Jeremiah's book of Lamentations on the Ninth of Av.

There are five chapters in Jeremiah's book of Lamentations, and chapter 5 verse 18 talks about foxes walking upon the Temple Mount because Jerusalem and the Temple had been destroyed and there was no Temple on the Temple Mount. Also, there is a story about foxes on the Temple Mount in the Jewish Talmud (a collection of Jewish writings; Makkot 24b). The Talmud story says four rabbis visited the Temple Mount and saw foxes near the place where the Holy of Holies was located when there was a Temple. Three of the rabbis cried at the sight of the foxes, but the fourth rabbi laughed.

He said the prophet Micah foretold the destruction of Jerusalem (Mic. 3:12) and the prophet Zechariah foretold the restoration of Jerusalem (Zech. 8:1-15). He declared that the prophecy of Micah had proven to be true, so the prophecy of Zechariah would prove to be true.

The foxes on the Temple Mount in the month of Av and the verse in Lam. 5:18 are a reminder that the sin of the Jews angered God and brought on the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. But God's grace and mercy will ultimately prevail over His anger, and Jerusalem and the Temple will be rebuilt.

This is the point: Is it a coincidence that several foxes have appeared contrary to their nature in a highly traveled place in Jerusalem at a time when Jews read Scripture about foxes on the Temple Mount, and there is a story in the Jewish Talmud that ties it to the restoration of Jerusalem?

I am just naïve enough to believe that God inspired the Scriptures, He knows the future, and He may be using foxes to tell us something.

There is too much going on for all of this to be coincidence.

This is why some rabbis believe foxes were originally a sign of the Temple's destruction and, in the future, they would be a sign of the Temple's construction.