

## Archaeology and the Bible

### Course 4 – Gehenna, Akeldama & Megiddo

#### Slide 1 – Intro Slide

Tonight we want to look at the evidence for the Biblical sites of Gehenna, Akeldama and Megiddo, three very significant locations that have played major roles in Bible history throughout the centuries. We are going to start by looking at the Valley of Hinnom and its early background. Gehenna is the Greek form of the Hebrew phrase that means, the vale or valley of Hinnom.

Gehenna was a valley west and south of Jerusalem. In this valley the Canaanites worshiped Baal and the god Molech by sacrificing their children in a fire that burned continuously. Even Ahaz and Manasseh, kings of Judah, were guilty of this terrible, idolatrous practice.



#### Slide 2 – Baal

Baal was a Semitic word meaning “lord” or “master.” He was the chief god worshiped by the Canaanites. There were many Baal gods. The cult was conducted by priests who conducted immoral acts of worship in fields and in high places.

This carving discovered in Ras Shamra in 1932 represents the Baal who was the storm god. He holds a club in right hand and a lance in his left. The lance extends upward in the form of a tree or a symbol for lightning.

*Read 2 Chronicles 28:1-4*

**Question** – Where were the idolatrous sacrifices offered up by Ahaz, King of Judah?

**Read 2 Chronicles 33:1-6**

**Question** - What do we learn about Manasseh, King of Jerusalem?

**Read Jeremiah 7:30–34; 19:2-6**

### Slide 3 - Moloch

Here is an illustration of the Baal, or pagan God that was called Moloch. This was the god that God's own people were offering their children up to in worship as living sacrifices.



**An 18th century illustration of Moloch.**

**Question** – What can we learn about Moloch outside the Bible?

The god Moloch was entirely evil. In the 8th-6th century B.C., firstborn children were sacrificed to him by the Israelites in the Valley of Hinnom, south-east of Jerusalem. These sacrifices to the sun god were made to renew the strength of the sun fire. This ritual was probably borrowed from surrounding nations, and was also popular in ancient Carthage.

Moloch was represented as a huge bronze statue with the head of a bull. The statue was hollow, and inside there burned a fire which colored the Moloch a glowing red. Children were placed on the hands of the statue. Through an ingenious system the hands were raised to the mouth (as if Moloch were eating) and the children fell into the fire where they were consumed by the flames. The people gathered before the Moloch were dancing on the sounds of flutes and tambourines to drown out the screams of the victims. According to some sources, the Moloch in the Old Testament is not a god, but a specific form of sacrifice. The god was Baal. MLK has been found on stele at the infant necropolis in Carthage.

**Read Acts 7:39-43**

In Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin before they stoned him to death he is quoting Amos the prophet's prediction of the captivity into Babylon because of their pagan worship.

## **Jewish Rabbinic Commentary on Moloch**

The 12th century rabbi Rashi, commenting on Jeremiah 7:31 stated: Tophet is Moloch, which was made of brass; and they heated him from his lower parts; and his hands being stretched out, and made hot, they put the child between his hands, and it was burnt; when it vehemently cried out; but the priests beat a drum, that the father might not hear the voice of his son, and his heart might not be moved.

A rabbinical tradition attributed to the *Yalkout* of Rabbi Simeon, says that the idol was hollow and was divided into seven compartments, in one of which they put flour, in the second turtle-doves, in the third a ewe, in the fourth a ram, in the fifth a calf, in the sixth an ox, and in the seventh a child, which were all burned together by heating the statue inside.

## **Classical Greek and Roman accounts**

Later commentators have compared these accounts with similar ones from Greek and Latin sources speaking of the offering of children by fire as sacrifices in the Punic city of Carthage, which was a Phoenician colony. Cleitarchus, Diodorus Siculus and Plutarch all mention burning of children as an offering to Cronus or Saturn, that is to Ba'al Hammon, the chief god of Carthage. Issues and practices relating to Moloch and child sacrifice may also have been overemphasized for effect. After the Romans defeated Carthage and totally destroyed the city, they engaged in post-war propaganda to make their archenemies seem cruel and less civilized.

**Paul G. Mosca**, in his thesis described below, translates Cleitarchus' paraphrase of a scholia to Plato's *Republic* as: "There stands in their midst a bronze statue of Kronos, its hands extended over a bronze brazier, the flames of which engulf the child. When the flames fall upon the body, the limbs contract and the open mouth seems almost to be laughing until the contracted body slips quietly into the brazier. Thus it is that the 'grin' is known as 'sardonic laughter,' since they die laughing."

**Diodorus Siculus** (20.14) wrote: "There was in their city a bronze image of Cronus extending its hands, palms up and sloping toward the ground, so that each of the children when placed thereon rolled down and fell into a sort of gaping pit filled with fire."

Diodorus also relates relatives were forbidden to weep and that when Agathocles defeated Carthage, the Carthaginian nobles believed they had displeased the gods by substituting low-born children for their own children. They attempted to make amends by sacrificing 200 children of the best families at once, and in their enthusiasm actually sacrificed 300 children.

**Plutarch** wrote in *De Superstitiones* 171: "... the whole area before the statue was filled with a loud noise of flutes and drums so that the cries of wailing should not reach the ears of the people.

In the time of Jesus the Valley of Hinnom was used as the garbage dump of Jerusalem. Into it were thrown all the filth and garbage of the city, including the dead bodies of animals and executed criminals. To consume all this, fires burned constantly. Maggots worked in the filth. When the wind blew from that direction over the city, its awfulness was quite evident. At night wild dogs howled as they fought over the garbage.

The prophet Jeremiah predicted that God would visit such destruction upon Jerusalem that this valley would be known as the “Valley of Slaughter” (19:2, 6). In his religious reforms, King Josiah put an end to this worship. He defiled the valley in order to make it unfit even for pagan worship.

**Read 2 Kings 23:8-16** – God used King Josiah to make a statement to all the earth.

**Question** – What would happen if we did that today?

#### Slide 4 – Valley of Hinnom

So, the Valley of Hinnom, Gehenna, became an disgusting place in Jerusalem and was associated with pure evil and a complete disregard for the commands of God or even a respect for human life!



In Jesus' day the valley had become a garbage dump. The fires burned day and night and wild animals fought over scraps of food or flesh. Jesus used this awful scene as a symbol of hell. In effect he said, “Do you want to know what hell is like? Look at Gehenna.” So hell may be described as God’s “cosmic garbage dump.” All that refuse to accept the grace of God in Christ Jesus are making the only other choice that is available and that is to reject Jesus as Lord and Savior. Those who deny God’s love, mercy and willingness to give us the Holy Spirit of God have declared themselves unfit for heaven will be cast into hell. The Valley of Hinnom was the perfect object lesson to show the foolishness and gross misuse of free will to those who would choose to reject Christ. One look at that illustration of horror, filth and evil history should have awokened the coldest heart.



#### Slide 5 – Gehenna today

A modern day picture looking down at the valley.

### **Read Matthew 27:1-8**

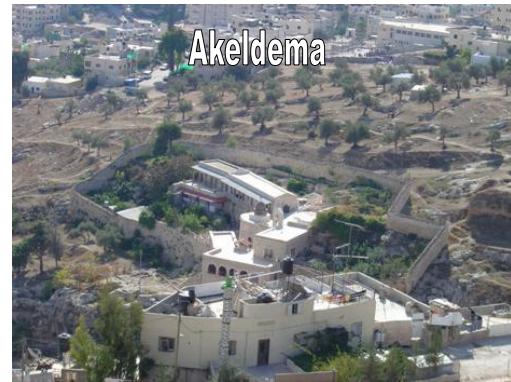
So we see the bad news for the Valley of Hinnom continues. In the New Testament, this was the place where the chief priests bought a potters field with Judas Iscariot's infamous 30 pieces of silver. Not wanting to keep the money, they decided to use it to buy a burial place for foreigners. "That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day."

The version of the story in Acts turns quite gory.

### **Read Acts 1:18-19**

#### **Slide 6 – Akeldema**

This is a shot of the location of Akeldema, the Field of Blood, that lies within a section of the Valley of Hinnom. It seemed a sad but fitting place for Judas to end his betrayal as he takes his own life in the valley that God's own people had used throughout history to betray Him and turn to other gods. Think how disgusting the decent into that Valley to commit suicide would have been.



#### **Slide 7 – Akeldema Today**

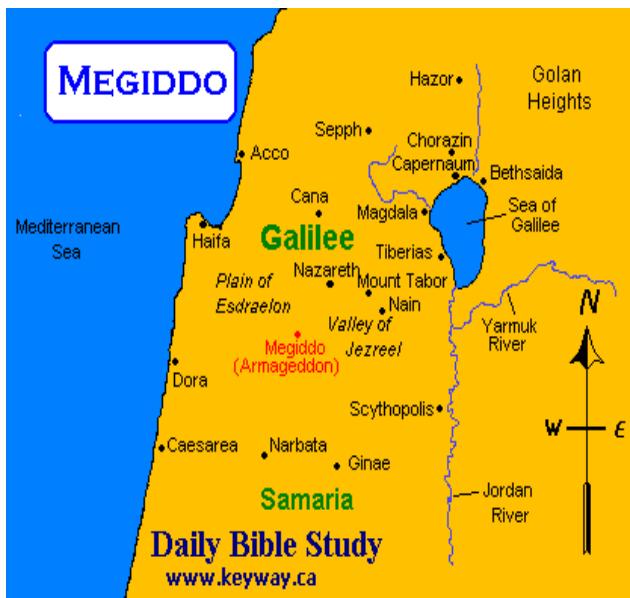
Bad press or not, the Valley of Hinnom is a big part of the history of Jerusalem. And despite what you may imagine from the grim description above, it also makes for one of the most picturesque walks you can take in the Holy City.

## Slide 8 – The Plain of Megiddo

God brought down the false idols and altars to Baal. Now let's focus on another war, the battle of Armageddon. It might actually help us to first look at what it was, where it was and is now, and what has happened there in the past.



## Slide 9 – Map of Megiddo



The Mount of Megiddo is located on the south side of the Plain of Esdraelon, or Plain of Jezreel, running from Haifa to below Nazareth in northern Israel. On the opposite side of the valley you can see Nazareth, the home town of Jesus Christ until His ministry began, when He moved to Capernaum on the north shore of The Sea Of Galilee.

The name *Megiddo* is derived from the original Hebrew word pronounced *har-Megiddon*, from which we get the English pronunciation *Armageddon*. Megiddo in Hebrew means something like *rendezvous*, or *place of troops*.

Megiddo has had a very long history, going back past 3,000 B.C., mostly due to its strategic location on a pass through the Carmel mountain range. Those who held Megiddo controlled one of the best direct trade and military routes between Egypt and Mesopotamia (Iraq). The site has had at least two dozen different occupiers (The Ancient Egyptians, Ancient Assyria, Ancient Babylon, Ancient Greece, Ancient Persia and Ancient Rome). Due to its strong defensive position, it was not one of the earliest cities taken by the Israelites after they entered the promised land under Joshua. By the time of King David however, the city came fully under Israelite control.

David's son, King Solomon, rebuilt Megiddo as a major center. Solomon always did things in a big way. At Megiddo he stabled 450 horses and fortified it. After the division and decline of the northern and southern Israelite kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Megiddo briefly fell under Egyptian and Assyrian control before eventually being destroyed and left a ruin, as it is remains today.



### Slide 10 – The Plain of Megiddo

As you can see it isn't a great city or route, just a great plain that stretches for miles with fields as far as you can see.

On September 19, 1918, near the end of World War 1, British forces under General Edmund Allenby defeated Turkish forces at the **Battle of Megiddo**. That is when Palestine was transferred from Turkish to British control. Then, 30 years later, the British permitted the Jews to declare the modern state of Israel.

Armageddon is only mentioned one time in the Bible. It is of course most well-known from its single mention in The Bible, as a place where a great end-time gathering of armies is prophesied to occur .

#### **Read Revelations 16:12-21**

It's significant that the Bible reference to Armageddon is that of a place where a great mass of troops will *gather*, but it never mentions a fight. What happens after they gather?

One of my professors had a theory that this great battle did in fact happen but the battle was waged as all the troops and powers on earth and the prince of this world gathered together at the cross thinking there was a great victory about to take place. Then Jesus says, "It is finished. It is done" and it was. Satan had lost the power that made him great. Death had no more sting and the grave had no more victory. It is an intriguing idea.



### Slide 11 – Excavations at Megiddo

Some of the ruins have allowed us to glimpse at the various occupations of Megiddo.

Megiddo was among the first sites excavated in Palestine. Extensive excavations of the mound reveal not less than 25 strata or layers of occupation. Work started in 1925 and continued until the outbreak of the World War II in 1939. One of the most significant finds was the water system, consisting of a vertical shaft 120 feet deep connected by a tunnel 215 feet long to a spring located outside the city walls, built during the mid-9th century BCE to protect the city's water supply war time.

The oldest surviving record of its name appears in the Temple of Karnak where Thutmose III (1479-1426 B.C.) of Egypt recorded an account of his battle at Megiddo in 1468 B.C. inscribed on the walls. Thutmose led his army through the narrow 'Aruna pass to take the Syrian army by surprise. After a 7 month siege the Syrians were defeated and enabled Thutmose to annex Canaan into his New Kingdom empire as a vassal province. This victory initiated a period of Egyptian superiority in Canaan in which Megiddo played an important role for hundreds of years.

Later six tablets were discovered at Armana Tablets comprising the diplomatic archives of the late 18th Dynasty of Egypt. They found letters sent by Biridiya, king of Megiddo, to pharaoh Amenhotep IV (Akhetaton, 1353-1336) in the 14th century B.C. In these letters, Biridiya consistently reaffirmed his loyalty to his Egyptian overlord. He pleaded also for Egyptian military assistance (100 archers!) in order to repel 'Apiru bands which were active in his vicinity. Further mention of the town appears in the records of the Egyptian 19th Dynasty pharaohs Seti I, Rameses II and Merneptah. We have overwhelming records of this city before the Israelites came.

In the 13th century Deborah and Barak overcame Sisera near the site. (Judges 4). According to the Hebrew Scriptures, during the Israelite conquest of Canaan Joshua defeated and killed the King of Megiddo (Joshua 12:21). Although allocated to the tribe of Manasseh (Joshua 17:11), this tribe was unable to occupy Megiddo (Judges 1:27). The city remained outside Israelite control until the time of David; the destruction of the city in ca.1000 B.C. was probably the work of David's hand.

In 967-927 B.C. Solomon greatly enlarged the city, erected many large public buildings and surrounded it with a casement wall with an elaborate gate complex. It served him not only as a district administrative capital of the United Monarchy but also as one of three major chariot

cities used to control movement along the "Way of the Sea". The elaborate fortifications, palaces, and water systems of Israelite Megiddo are among the most significant architectural remains unearthed in that area from the Iron Age.

Although destroyed in the campaign of pharaoh Shishak in 922 B.C., the city was rebuilt to even greater magnificence by either Omri or Ahab in the middle of the 9th century B.C. The Israelite city fell to Tiglath-Pileser III king of Assyria in 732 BCE. The Assyrians made Megiddo the capital of the Assyrian province of Galilee.

With the collapse of the Assyrian empire the great religious reformer King Josiah of Judah led his troops to Megiddo to confront Pharaoh Necho II of Egypt. Killed in a clash at Megiddo about 609 B.C. Josiah failed in his futile, last minute, attempt to prevent the Egyptian force from joining the crumbling Assyrian army in its last-ditch efforts against the Babylonians (II Kings 23:29). Megiddo then remained an open settlement abandoned sometime in the Hellenistic, or Greek period.

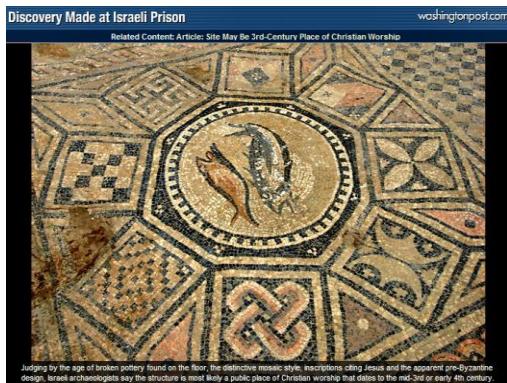


### Slide 12 – Excavations at Megiddo - church

In 2005, Israeli archaeologist Yotam Tepper of Tel-Aviv University discovered the remains of a church, believed to be from the third century, a time when Christians were still persecuted by the Roman Empire. The remains were found at the Megiddo Prison, which is located a few hundred meters south of the Tel. Among the finds is an approx. 54 square meter large mosaic with a Greek inscription stating that the church is consecrated to "the God Jesus Christ."

The mosaic is very well preserved and features geometrical figures and images of fish, an early Christian symbol. It is speculated that this may be the oldest remains of a church in the Holy Land. The remains were found within the grounds of a military prison, and Israeli authorities are currently speculating about moving the prison. An inscription in the Megiddo church calls for a Roman officer, "Gaianus," who donated "his own money" to have a mosaic made.

Archaeologists now say this is the oldest known Christian church in all of Israel—and perhaps the oldest in the world. The church is old, very old. Details such as the table used in place of an altar (which came later in church history) and the writing embedded in tile (such as "sacred names"—abbreviations of the name of Christ) date the church construction at around the third century—likely a few decades before Constantine and the Edict of Milan (313 AD).



### Slide 13 – Excavations at Megiddo - Fish

One clue that this church was built and used during the period of harsh persecution before Constantine and the Byzantine period are the fish symbols inlaid in the mosaic.

The fish symbol was reportedly a way that early underground Christians could secretly identify each other—and it predates the use of the cross as a symbolic design in Christian art. (The crucifix becomes a symbol for Christianity only after Constantine. Prior to that, early Christian art in the hidden catacombs and house churches feature the empty tomb, the shepherd's staff, and the fish.)

Why a fish? Perhaps it recalls the fish that Christ used to feed the multitudes. Tertullian is said to have connected the idea of water baptism to fish ("We little fishes are born by our Fish, Jesus Christ, in water and can thrive only by continuing in the water.") But, more handily, "fish" in Greek is spelled: **ΙΧΘΥΣ** (transliterated as *ichthus*, *icthus*, or *ikhthus*) and also serves as an acrostic for the five words: Ιησους Χριστος Θεος Υιος Σωτηρ ("Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior").

Other clues helping date the church include potsherds, the style of Greek writing in the inscriptions, and peculiar geometric patterns used in the mosaics. (However, there are no mosaic patterns from this time period in Israel to compare them to, so they will be compared with similar patterns from Antioch and Rome.) At the very least Yotam Tepper (the excavation's top archaeologist, also named as "Yotam Tefer") says the lack of other signs indicate this church was no longer being used by the fourth century—such as an altar in place of a table (the altar is a later development) and the style of the building (it is not in the Basilica style, which usually features colonnades, a central nave, and a rounded apse, and is typical of later development).



### Slide 13 – Excavations at Megiddo - Officer

The tiled mosaic includes not only fish and geometric symbols, but it commemorates Akeptus (or "Aketous", or "Ekeptos"), a woman who donated money to build the church; Porphyrio, a Roman officer who donated the money for the mosaic floor ("Gaianos, also called Porphyrio, centurion, our brother,

having sought honor, with his own money, has made this mosaic. Brouti has carried out the work."); and four other women are also commemorated on the eastern side. Akeptus is also commemorated for donating the table ("Akeptus, the devout, dedicated the table to God, Jesus

Christ, as a memorial”). The table was probably used to commemorate the Last Supper as a common-meal (communion) table.

**Slide 14— Archaeology and the Bible**  
**Gehenna, Akeldema and Megiddo**