Path Perfect: Reclaiming Jezreel

Based on the results of the LiDAR, the expedition conducted a landscape survey over approximately 1.16 square miles. They documented 25 cave tombs, 35 rock-cut tombs, 57 agricultural installations, 21 quarries, 68 cisterns, 94 walls and 26 natural caves that had been adapted for human use. These they documented using a handheld GPS unit, measuring, photographing and describing each one. They thus began to realize that Jezreel was much larger than scholars had previously imagined.

See Also: Why Was Jezreel So Important to the Kingdom of Israel?

Preliminary Report of the 2013 Jezreel Expedition Field Season

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Hardly had Dr. Norma Franklin and I emerged from her dusty four-wheel drive in the parking lot at Tel Jezreel to begin the day's visit when we were engulfed by a group of curious schoolchildren on a field trip.

Fig. 1. Aerial photo of Tel Jezreel (bottom center) and the Jezreel Spring (in trees, top right) (Photo courtesy of the Jezreel Expedition).

We were standing a stone's throw from the ancient wall and moat of this Bible-rich mound in northern Israel and Franklin was already deep into her flow of fascinating facts highlighting the unique significance of Queen Jezebel's old haunts. But the gregarious co-director of the Tel Jezreel Expedition immediately interrupted herself to engage the kids' teachers. We found out that they were Arab Israelis from the Khalil Jibran Elementary School in Nazareth on a field trip in the "neighborhood." In our first five minutes at this ancient biblical site, just an hour north of Tel Aviv, we had stumbled precisely on one of the many audiences Franklin wants to reach with her approach to the excavation – what archaeologists call the *longue durée*. It's the only view that can truly do justice to the approximately 9,000-years of history that lies beneath our feet.

Between my visit on that hazy March day and the writing of this article, the dynamic 2014 excavation season has come and gone, bringing with it intriguing new finds and a host of exciting new questions to answer. The theme of the 2014 dig season, Franklin told me after the season ended, was "the path." It's a real path, the one leading from the ancient mound of Jezreel to the spring that first gave the inhabitants life there in prehistoric times. But for those of us waiting to see how renewed exploration of this site, mentioned some 30 times in the Bible, enriches our understanding of the history and culture of this land, it's a precious new path to the past.

Did the curious cluster of kids around Franklin know that the great Lebanese-born poet after whom their school was named came from the same land as the much-maligned queen of this ancient hill? Hopefully their teachers did not miss the opportunity to convey it to them that day, because that's the beauty of archaeology in the land of the Bible, and of its peoples – the "then and now," are an intimately tangible tangle.

Fig. 2. Tel Jezreel on the horizon is the backdrop for this view of the dig in Area S, west, in the Masha, which holds promising secrets about Jezreel's long past (Photo courtesy of the Jezreel Expedition).

It was Jibran who wrote: "Is not the mountain far more awe-inspiring and more clearly visible to one passing through the valley than to those who inhabit the mountain?" That certainly seems true of Tel Jezreel – at first. From the floor of the Jezreel Valley, the eponymous mound is unmistakable. And indeed, when you first "inhabit the mountain" on a tour of a few hours, nothing jumps out at you – at first. When I visited in March, signs of previous archaeological work had grown indistinct – even of the huge moat and towers around the Israelite enclosure – overgrown with still-green winter vegetation. What's more, the reconstruction that brings history alive for visitors at stellar biblical sites like Tel Hazor, Megiddo or Be'er Sheva has yet to grace Tel Jezreel.

That is precisely the reason Franklin, whose Ph.D. dissertation was on Samaria and Megiddo (where she was a founding member of the Tel Aviv University excavation in 1992), chose Jezreel to excavate. "It's mentioned more than Megiddo, more than Hazor, yet previous excavations were concerned with only a small area of the upper tell, badly damaged by later construction," Franklin said. There's a neglected picnic ground there, she went on to say, where the least of a visitor's problems is avoiding the cow patties – there are also deserted graves and dangerous open pits. Before it's too late, Franklin and the dig's co-director Dr. Jennie Ebeling of the University of Evansville are determined to forge that path to the past, and give Jezreel a new voice.

But here, with all due respect, is where Jibran's image of the mountain can serve us no longer. Because it is the closer we look at this particular mountain that the more awe-inspiring it becomes as its hidden treasures come to light. And although millennia of history and archaeology bookend the biblical story of Jezreel, how can we not help starting with its infamous first family – Ahab and Jezebel.

Long before "painted lady" referred to desirable San Francisco real estate, Queen Jezebel had come to epitomize trouble. Many of us have the image of a sultry Bette Davis to help us picture that conniving, idol-worshipping Phoenician queen. I too had a clear image in

my mind of that “devil born without horns” – as Frankie Lane sang it. My own picture of Jezebel comes from a play by Frederick Olessi that I saw when I was about 13 years old in the basement of the Grace Baptist Church in Trenton, New Jersey. It must have been the disconnect of watching my friends’ mom, Geraldine Bryant, playing the scheming queen and my junior high school English teacher, Mr. Seaman, playing the hapless Ahab, that made it so memorable. Or perhaps, long before I learned how women turned powerlessness into power in the Bible, the immortal idea of Jezebel simply caught my attention even then.

It’s easy to picture Jezebel in her heyday, an ambitious young Phoenician-Canaanite princess, who made sure that her home-bred worship of Ba‘al would be embraced by her enthralled husband’s subjects. Fast forward to Jezebel in her dotage, Goldie Hawn-like in “Death Becomes Her,” before being pushed to her grisly demise. In the Bible, Jezreel is a backdrop for a morality tale involving Ba‘al worship, brought home by the prophet Hosea (1:4). That, and the enduring prurient interest in Jezebel, no doubt kept the location of Jezreel alive.

Fig. 3. "The Death of Jezebel," Gustave Doré (Photo: Wikimedia Commons).

Draped low and lazily across a rocky spur, Tel Jezreel lacks the typical steep-sided tabletop of the classic tell. But rising from the northwestern slopes of Mount Gilboa, the mound affords a breathtaking view of the valley that bears its name, which by the time ancient Christian pilgrims stopped here was called Esdraelon in Greek. Its location made it one of antiquity's most strategic cities – the famed Megiddo (biblical Armageddon) lies 10 miles to the west and Beth-Shean almost equidistant to the east. Jezreel controlled a junction of the international highway the Bible calls the Way of the Sea and the Romans knew as the Via Maris. Right here is where that road intersects with the Way of the Patriarchs leading south across the central mountain ridge to Shechem, Samaria, Bethel, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron and Be'er Sheva. It's been called Ahab's military staging post, because while Samaria was the capital of his kingdom, its rulers could ignore the strategic importance of Jezreel only at their peril.

The biblical Ma'ayan Harod – where Gideon chose a few good men to fight the Midianites, is only a mile from here. In 1260, the ruler of the Mamluk Empire, Qutuz, must have chosen to use the name Ayn Jalut, "the spring of Goliath,"

Fig. 4. View of the Jezreel Valley from the ruins of a building possibly built by Sultan Baybars to commemorate victory in battle (Photo courtesy of the Jezreel Expedition).

probably feeling quite the giant himself after defeating Ghengis Khan's grandson there. After that battle, which halted the Mongol advance from Asia and could arguably be said to have changed world history, Qutuz was murdered by his more famous successor, Baybars (1223–1277). The latter built a monument overlooking the ancient battleground to commemorate the battle – it may well be the small building that the Jezreel Expedition excavated in 2013 and 2014. Napoleon's forces fought the Ottoman Turks in the shadow of Jezreel on April 16, 1799 (although they named that clash "the Battle of Mount Tabor" with a clearer connection to a victorious biblical general – Barak). Other battles fought near here, all the way up to and including the 1967 Six-Day War, have rightfully earned this valley the moniker "battlefield of the Bible."

An international highway like the one through the Jezreel Valley is one factor critical to a city's fate. Water is the other. In fact, it comes first; where there's a well, there's a way, you might say. In the case of Jezreel, an abundant spring right in own its backyard kept it in business over the centuries. The area between Tel Jezreel and the spring – and the paths that link them, along one of which Franklin led me in March – are an exciting new focus in the efforts of the current expedition.

Fig. 5. The tower at Jezreel, as it looked in the late 1800s (Photo courtesy of the Jezreel Expedition).

As I share my tour that day with readers, I'd like to imagine the path Franklin took me on as the prototype for future visitors. We'll begin at the Iron Age, Israelite enclosure, then head over to a poorly preserved but intriguing building, and on down to the spring and over to a site that we are well within our rights to imagine as the biblical Naboth's vineyard. Finally, we'll head to the ruins of a Byzantine church and climb the remnants of a tower with a window that turns out to be one Jezebel *didn't* look out of.

For the Bible Tells Us So

The haze on the day Franklin took me to Jezreel was a disappointment at first for the photographer in me – there would be no good distance shots today, I realized. But then again, those conditions made it easy to picture the watchmen on Jezreel's walls, squinting into the distance, looking for a sign of the messengers their king, Joram, had sent out to meet the strangers raising dust in the distance. One thing they knew – the way a lone chariot was now speeding wildly toward the city gate could only mean one thing – the driver was Jehu.

From here, I would ordinarily be able to see the Mountains of Gilead, east of the Jordan. It was from there that the Bible says King Joram of Israel had come to his Jezreel home to recover from wounds inflicted by a battle against Hazael of Aram (2 Kings 9:15). That little R & R getaway, leaving his general Jehu in charge of the troops, would cost him dearly – a disciple of Elisha secretly anointed Jehu king. As quickly as Jehu's inner circle must have leaked the news, it obviously didn't go viral, because back in Jezreel, Joram had no idea what had happened, as the next part of the story reveals.

Fig. 6. Schoolchildren touring Tel Jezreel with their teacher, looking out at the Jezreel Valley and learning about "the battlefield of the Bible" (Photo: Miriam Feinberg Vamosh).

Joram took his visiting ally, his nephew King Ahaziah of Judah, and left the city to meet Jehu. He suspected nothing; apparently the irony of the meeting place – none other than the vineyard that his mother had wrested away from Naboth the Jezreelite – (2 Kings 9:21) was lost on him. It was Jehu's response to Joram's greeting that clued him in to his general's perfidy – that time-honored insult to one's mother, throwing in witchcraft for good measure (2 Kings 9:24). But it was too late. Jehu shot Joram in the back as he desperately wheeled around his chariot to flee. His men thwarted Ahaziah's desperate attempt to escape, and Jehu mortally wounded the Judahite monarch in his chariot (Ahaziah subsequently died at Megiddo). And little did Queen Jezebel know that her own servants would rally to Jehu's cause. The most famous hair and makeup appointment in biblical history ended with her eunuchs tossing her out of a window at the behest of their soon-to-be new master (2 Kings 9:32–33). Then Jehu trampled her to death beneath his horses' hooves. And all before he sat down to dinner that day.

More than a thousand years later, in the early fourth century CE, Eusebius, bishop of Caeasrea, knew Jezreel as Esdraela. A few decades later, in 333 CE, the Pilgrim of Bordeaux paid it a visit. He was followed about 50 years later by another pilgrim, Egeria, whose description was copied centuries later by Peter the Deacon, in 1137. The latter

wrote: “in Jezreel there is nothing left of Naboth's vineyard but its well, and the foundations of a tower. The tomb of Jezebel is stoned by everyone to this very day."

By that time, travelers were calling Jezreel “Le Petit Gerin,” or “small Jenin” a name the Knights Templar gave it to differentiate it from the city they built about 9 miles to the south. That recalls our emphasis on the highway through Samaria, along which the Palestinian city of Jenin still stands. Jewish travelers also mention the place. In around 1165, Benjamin of Tudela was the first to call it “Zerin,” maintaining the core of the valley’s Hebrew name, Yizra’el (“God will make fertile”). That name survived until modern times as the name of the village that stood here until 1948. Another Jewish traveler, Eshtori ha-Parhi, who also visited Zerin in the twelfth century, reconfirmed its identification with Jezreel.

In the sixteenth century, according to Ottoman tax records, Zerin boasted a total of four households which produced a variety of agricultural goods. About a century later, according to the Dutch scholar Olfert Dapper, that number had ballooned to some 150 households of Jews and Arabs, with highway robbery becoming an important second income for some residents.

In the nineteenth century, clergyman-scholar Edward Robinson connected Zerin with biblical Jezreel and soon enough scholars were pointing out the mound’s most outstanding feature, the massive tower – which I was to clamber up later with Franklin – as part of the palace of the Omride dynasty.

In 1904 the Ottoman government built a railway through the valley (part of the famous Hejaz railway by which Muslim pilgrims traveled to Mecca) to link the port city of Haifa with the region east of the Jordan River; one of its stations was a mile from Tel Jezreel at Ein Harod. The railway opened up the area, and in 1920, following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, its prohibition on land sales was lifted and the absentee owners of the land east of Zerin, the Sursuk family, living in Beirut, sold 15,000 acres to the Jewish

National Fund. The tenant farmers in the area were removed, leaving Zerin, owned by the el-Hadi family from the Nablus area, the most significant village in the region.

The strategic importance of Jezreel-Zerin manifested itself once again in Israel's 1948 War of Independence. A fierce battle was fought here in April 1948 between the Iraqi Arab Liberation Army and the Jewish pre-State Palmach fighters. It is commemorated by a stone bearing the names of the fallen that greets visitors near the parking lot at Tel Jezreel. The village fell in another battle five weeks later. However, sporadic fighting continued until August of that year, badly damaging the Crusader-era tower. After the war and the establishment of Israel, a group of young demobilized soldiers was sent to live in the village, due to the site's strategic value. Two years later, these young men and women established Kibbutz Yizre'el on a neighboring hill. The village, which consisted of fieldstone and mudbrick buildings, was left to deteriorate and eventually, in January 1967 it was bulldozed, except for the Crusader tower and the church.

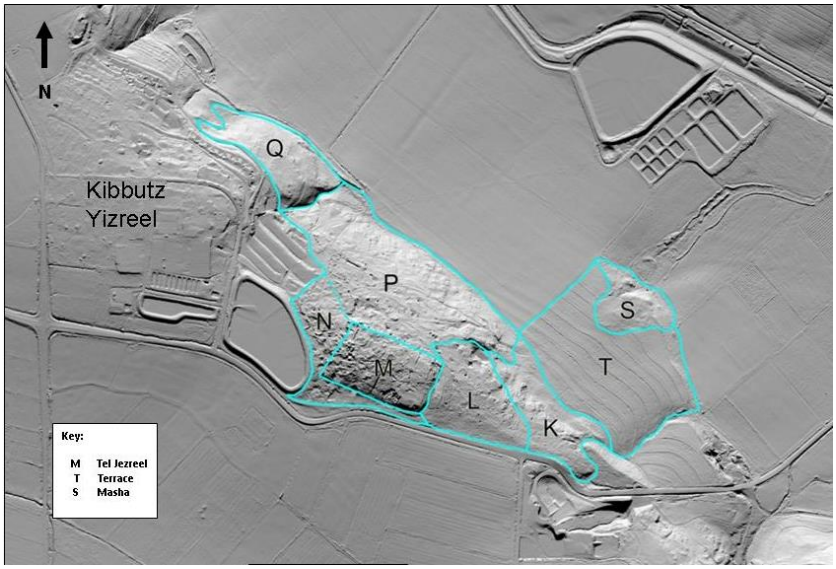

Fig. 7. LiDAR scan with excavation areas marked (Photo courtesy of the Jezreel Expedition).

In the 1950s, a transit camp was established here for Jewish refugees from Iraqi Kudistan who had come to live in the newborn State of Israel. Sadly, the only trace of that is a small, cemetery found during the 2012 survey, although this is where the grandparents of so many of the region's farmers today started out with nothing but the clothes on their backs. Part of the *longue durée* perspective would mean seeking out their stories, as well

as those of the Arabs villagers of Zerin, who fled in 1948 and are now believed to live in the Jenin area.

Decades of Digging

In the late 1980s, the Antiquities Department (eventually to become the Israel Antiquities Authority) conducted small-scale excavations ahead of preparations to build a museum at the site. They unearthed part of the southeastern tower and a rock-cut moat from the Iron Age, which sparked renewed interest in biblical Jezreel. A joint expedition by the Tel Aviv Institute of Archaeology and the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem, headed respectively by Prof. David Ussishkin and John Woodhead, was launched at that time. Excavating between 1990 and 1996, they focused on the enclosure phase, which they believed was part of Jezebel's Jezreel. They found signs of fiery destruction in the southeast tower, which they ascribed to the Arameans under Hazael in the ninth century.

In February 2012, the current Jezreel Expedition became the first dig in Israel to conduct an aerial scan using the laser-based LiDAR system. This system reveals the lay of the land normally hidden under vegetation, thus helping to highlight archeological features so that three-dimensional models can be produced to guide further exploration.

Four months later, based on the results of the LiDAR, the expedition conducted a landscape survey over approximately 1.16 square miles. They documented 25 cave tombs, 35 rock-cut tombs, 57 agricultural installations, 21 quarries, 68 cisterns, 94 walls and 26 natural caves that had been adapted for human use. These they documented using a handheld GPS unit, measuring, photographing and describing each one. They thus began to realize that Jezreel was much larger than scholars had previously imagined.

The Enclosure: the Date Debate

Fig. 8. Children from a school in nearby Nazareth on a class trip, playing in their "biblical backyard" at Tel Jezreel, not far from the ancient moat (Photo: Miriam Feinberg Vamosh).

The walk along the moat from the southeastern to the northeastern tower today reveals little of the powerful nature of this fortification in all its glory, filled as it is nowadays and covered with vegetation. But originally, the Ussishkin-Woodhead team found this rock-cut trench to be some 26 to 39 feet wide and 21 feet deep, a rectangle measuring about 515 x 948 feet. Within this was the enclosure bounded by a casemate wall. Two more towers were presumed to be parallel to the ones we saw at the other ends of the enclosure, although none were found. The fortifications on the north would perhaps not have had to be so massively built; the slope there is naturally steep as the GPS in my knees alerted me when Franklin led me down it toward the spring later that day.

The Ussishkin-Woodhead team found that to the south, the terrain is flatter – the ideal place for a gate. When they excavated, they found the remains of a six- or possibly four-chambered gate. Franklin says it would have been a very important gate indeed, as it faced south toward the capital city of Samaria and would have welcomed the Israelite kings coming from their capital city to the military outpost. And so she likes to call it the

Samaria Gate (recalling the way Jerusalem's Old City Jaffa Gate and Damascus Gate got their names from the cities to which they led).

Although the Iron Age enclosure was excavated in the 1990s, a report on it was not fully published. But inquiring biblical minds want to know: Did Ahab build this enclosure? How about Jehu or Jeroboam II? And who destroyed it and when? In fact, was it indeed destroyed as the consequence of some major historical event, or did it just decline in importance?

The large quantity of restorable vessels dating to the Iron Age II (ninth and eighth centuries BCE) that were found in the burnt room of the southeastern tower, and similar pottery found below the latest enclosure floor as well as above it, is one of the signs that people were living here in both the ninth and the eighth centuries BCE. But tempting as it is to do so, pottery has not been able to narrow the chronological field further. Since so far only the southeast tower has revealed evidence of destruction, we can no longer assume that it indicates destruction of the entire site. Research that Franklin conducted in 2008 led her to date the pre-enclosure remains to the Omrides (the dynasty named after Ahab's father) and the construction of the enclosure itself to a later eighth-century Israelite monarch, Jeroboam II. This is also in keeping with nearby Megiddo where the famous stables are now thought to have been built by Jeroboam II to develop the region's economic power base.

The debate over the dating of the enclosure reveals the challenge of understanding our biblical past. Because the mound was inhabited for so long, its building stones were constantly being robbed and reused. Under such circumstances, the ancient strata with their telltale pottery from different periods become mixed, making it difficult or impossible for archaeologists to use the pottery to date their findings. This may have led previous excavators to rely too heavily on the biblical narrative in deciding that the enclosure must date to the time of Ahab and Jezebel – the ninth century BCE. Thus we can't presume that the gateway discovered in the 1990s was the one where the heads of

Ahab's 70 sons were stacked (2 Kings 10: 1–17). But these massive stones help to set the stage, and nothing can compare to telling the story with this as our scenery.

What was inside this enclosure? Other than a building near the gate, excavated in the 1990s, no significant buildings have been found; it seems to have been an open area with a plastered surface, similar to the large, open plastered courtyards at eighth-century Megiddo. Deborah Cantrell of Vanderbilt University showed in her recent doctoral dissertation that highly trained chariot teams were the main fighting force of the Israelite army. Such a site would have been the perfect place to put chariot horses and their drivers through their pre-battle paces. And the large, flat basalt terrace Franklin took me down on our way to the spring would have made the perfect grazing ground. Calculations indicate that the amount of grain that could be grown in the fertile fields near the city could have fed more than 3,000 horses per year. This situation may be reflected in Isaiah 22:7: "Your choicest valleys were full of chariots and the cavalry took their stand at the gates."

"It Screams Iron Age"

Just north of the enclosure, in the excavation's Area M, in 2013 the expedition exposed the scant remains of a building the with four large masonry blocks – well-carved building stones called ashlars – attached to the bedrock, and rock-cut negatives for placing other ashlars, now long gone. The building had its own cave that would have provided excellent storage facilities and an independent water supply in the form of a rock-cut cistern. According to the expedition's prehistoric consultant, the cistern is what is known as a "seepage well" – a method prehistoric folk used for storing rainwater that percolated down between rock layers.

Fig. 9. Bedrock carved to resemble an ashlar in a finely built building on the mound; could this be an indication of the building's Iron Age date? (Photo: Miriam Feinberg Vamosh)

Franklin says that the earliest architecture here, the ashlars, the rock-cut negatives, the cave and the cistern, remind her of a building she knows very well – Ahab and Jezebel's palace at their capital in Samaria. In fact, Franklin said as we stood among the ruins that his building "screams Iron Age." However, here too, no datable pottery can securely pinpoint its earliest use. While excavating here, the team realized that although the 1990s excavators and others presumed that the Crusader tower marks the site of the palace from whose window Jezebel took her fatal plunge, or the point from which her watchmen saw Jehu, that tower has a view of Jenin to the south, and Jehu was coming from the east. This enigmatic building had a much better view of the valley floor and the road Jehu would have thundered up. Its location high on the hill, combined with the architecture, makes it a great candidate for an Iron Age (pre-enclosure) lookout or palace.

On to the Source

Fig. 10. Aerial view of the spring of Jezreel (in the trees) and the Masha (at right) (Photo courtesy of Todd Bolen, BiblePlaces.com)

It was time to begin our descent to the spring, from about 30 feet above sea level to about 1.6 feet below. The path we took, which was clearly visible in the LiDAR scan and the villagers were still using to reach the spring in the 1940s, cuts through the limestone hillside at certain points. The list of periods from which remains have come to light there create the kind of time span that can keep archaeologists busy at a site like Jezreel for a lifetime – Neolithic, Chalcolithic Early Bronze Age, Intermediate Bronze Age, Middle Bronze Age II, Late Bronze Age, Iron Age, Persian, Hellenistic, Byzantine, Early Muslim, Crusader, Late Muslim and Ottoman.

On the way down to the spring, Franklin pointed out a small, square, ruin that piqued the curiosity of the team when it was discovered in the 2012 survey. Situated on a promontory above the path and tentatively dated by a small-scale excavation in December 2013 (the expedition's Area P) to medieval times, its style recalls structures built to commemorate Muslim victories. Was this building – which not only controls the main path into Jezreel, but overlooks the battlefield where 40,000 troops fought – the monument that Sultan Baybars says he put up to commemorate the defeat of his Mongol enemies at the battle of Ayn Jalut?

Fig. 11. View of the Jezreel Valley from Tel Jezreel, looking northeast toward the Masha, covered with yellow mustard flowers in March 2014; the spring is hidden in the trees at left (Photo: Miriam Feinberg Vamosh).

Franklin now pointed out a modest rise below us to our right, covered with bright yellow wild mustard plants. Pretty, but this is no ordinary flower patch. Uncultivated for generations (unlike the surrounding area) it's called Masha, which means "shared." An important land-use term in this part of the world, Masha can refer to grazing land parceled out to a different family every few years. Scholars say Scripture reveals echoes of this practice too. For example, Micah warns the errant Judahites of his day that they "will have no one in the assembly of the Lord to divide the land by lot" (2:5).

Following the LiDAR scan and the 2012 survey, the Jezreel Expedition realized that the undisturbed ground of the Masha, designated Area S, may hold the key to understanding the occupational history of Jezreel. The team found pottery here going back to the Neolithic period (8300–4500 BCE), but mainly from the Early Bronze Age (3300–2000 BCE), Iron Age (1200–586 BCE) and Roman period (first century BCE–first century CE). The flint implements included cores (flints from which the ancients removed flakes to make their tools), awls, sickle blades (including many with sheen, indicating use), flakes and retouched tools.

In 2013, the Jezreel Expedition excavated squares in the eastern part of Area S. There they discovered at least four architectural phases of the Early Bronze Age, beginning

some five thousand years ago, sealed below a stony mantle consisting of fieldstone and broken ground stone artifacts. It is the enormous quantity of ground stone tools they found, mainly basalt bowls and grinding stones, which co-director Jennie Ebeling, who is a leading expert in such tools, has called “overwhelming.”

In 2014 the expedition focused on the western part of Area S, where the village path runs down to the spring. Just below the surface is a different story. Instead of a stony mantle, what emerged were architectural remains and a mix of pottery from all the periods, although most was from the Early Bronze Age. The architecture may well post-date that period; at the time of writing the team is still analyzing their results. This area will be expanded in 2015 and we are sure to be hearing a lot more about it.

The expedition also uncovered a section of cobbled path there that seems to connect to a section of path excavated slightly farther north that led to the spring, as did a narrower section of path east of this one cut through the basalt bedrock outcrop there. Bringing us up to modern times, the team found that the eastern path had been intentionally blocked with large basalt boulders, probably when the area became a front line position in the 1948 war. A great deal of effort was expended here; the paths were not just beaten down by generations of feet to and fro from the spring – small stones had been embedded in beaten earth laid over bedrock.

Speaking with Franklin again after the end of the 2014 season, I learned that this path and the architecture uncovered in the western part of Area S are the most intriguing discovery they made this year. They don’t know how old the sections of path in Area S are – perhaps they date back to the Early Bronze Age or the Iron Age – and some sections were still in use in modern times. There were also many medieval horseshoe nails around there, attesting to use at that time. More medieval horseshoe nails were found in a different section of the ancient path, in Area P higher up the hill and at an earlier level, Roman sandal nails were found. As for the elusive Iron Age – the expedition is still studying the LiDAR scan and old aerial photographs and may have hit upon an alternative path that could be an Iron Age link between the mound and the spring.

Fig. 12. Team members excavating the path and using a metal detector. Insert: a European medieval nail, among many found along the path (Photo courtesy of the Jezreel Expedition).

A path like this can become an archaeological wormhole, catapulting us back into the presence of ancient water drawers. In fact, when we reach the spring, the life-blood of the city that established itself over the millennia to the south, I can't help conjuring up possible ancient visitors here. Did Elijah quench his thirst here after running, in a burst of prophetic zeal, ahead of Ahab's chariot from Mount Carmel "all the way to Jezreel" (1 Kings 18:45–46). Was this the "fountain" the Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela visited some 2,000 years later, when he identified the village on the mound as biblical Jezreel?

The shade of the eucalyptus trees and the quiet spring water make it easy to imagine all this, Indeed, this is the location of the ancient water source, which at some point during the Ottoman period stopped flowing consistently and the villagers began calling it Ein el-Meita, the "dead spring." In the 1930s the British Mandate authorities helped dry up the surrounding swamp by bringing in soil (studded, by the way, with ancient potsherds). The good water was subsequently siphoned off for irrigation, perhaps in the 1960s, by the Israeli authorities. That left the spring almost dry,

Fig. 13. The Jezreel Spring as it looks today, a picnic ground popular with the locals (Photo: Miriam Feinberg Vamosh).

and so a decade or so later, slightly saline water unsuitable for agriculture was pumped here and the regional council turned the site into a beautiful picnic ground.

Subhead: Time for Church

Before we visited the church it was time for lunch, which was waiting in the dining room at Kibbutz Yizre'el. Franklin introduced me to Nitzan, who showed me where to pick up my tray and fruit juice before hitting the cafeteria line. Against the cheerful backdrop of dish clatter and kibbutznik chatter, we discussed the enterprise Nitzan manages for the community – accommodations for the expedition's team members each year as well as

for other educational groups. The dining room window frames a view of some of the prophet Elisha's old stomping grounds, Shunem. Of course it does.

After lunch, we walked back onto the mound from the kibbutz perimeter fence, this time approaching it from the west, stepping gingerly over indistinct mounds of latter-day ruins of the village of Zerin.

Fig. 14. Apse of the ancient church; the empty space next to the block of bedrock is part of the Iron Age moat (Photo: Miriam Feinberg Vamosh).

The church was probably the center of a village of Syrian Christians, according to historical sources, with one Jewish inhabitant, on whom Benjamin of Tudela may have called when he visited the site. Modern intrusions are not lacking – the concrete floor to which the kibbutz generator was attached in 1948 is still visible. Ussishkin and Woodhead's excavations determined that the church contained a single central hall (the nave) 80 feet long and 25 feet wide, an apse 19 feet wide and 10 feet deep, and was fronted by a large courtyard. Its earliest remains probably go back to Byzantine times. Amid a thousand years of potsherds, from Byzantine to Early Islamic times, and even some going back to the Iron Age and Early Bronze Age, archaeologists found poignant hallmarks of hardship from a millennium or so ago in Crusader times – about 25 burials, including infants and young children near the church wall.

The Crusader Tower

As promised this morning, Franklin now took me to the tower where generations of visitors generated their visions of Jezebel's last moments before her fall from power. I followed Franklin up the ancient stones carefully placing my feet wherever she did. When we reached the top, I spied the remains of a window framing a view of the valley.

"Ah-hah," I called up ahead, recalling what she had told me earlier in the "screaming-Iron Age" house "This is *not* Jezebel's window." My archaeological hostess was quick to confirm. "Look where you are," she said. I could clearly see now that my evocative picture window was facing south – the Crusader focus (on Jenin), not east – the biblical focus of the Mountains of Gilead. That meant that even if this building wasn't 1,300 years too young to have housed Jezebel, this would still be the wrong direction from which Joram's watchmen could spot Jehu coming.

Fig. 15. View of the Crusader-Ottoman tower interior. Not "Jezebel's tower," as many people once thought it might be, but evocative nonetheless (Photo: Miriam Feinberg Vamosh).

Naboth's Vineyard?

The story of Naboth's ancestral estate (I Kings 21) makes clear what Jezebel was capable of. King Ahab wanted it, Naboth refused to sell and Jezebel would have it by hook or by crook. She fabricated evidence that Naboth was a traitor and had him executed, which paved the way for the king to take the property. Elijah's ringing denunciation of Ahab for

this act has made its way into modern Hebrew — a power-packed version of the old “add insult to injury”: “Hast thou killed and also taken possession?” (1 Kings 21:19).

Here, on the northeast slope of Jezreel, in the expedition’s Area K, an ancient winery was discovered during the 2012 survey and excavated in 2013. It may well date back to the time of Naboth, and if so, it would be one of the largest wineries from that period. In biblical times, this must have been the jewel in the economic crown of Jezreel. Franklin tells me that when experts from the Golan Heights Winery sought additional good land to plant their vineyards in the region, they told the members of Kibbutz Yizre’el that in this exact area the terroire was perfect to cultivate fine wine grapes.

The area, measuring about 10 feet by 10 feet, includes two vats about 4 feet square and 5 feet deep, a plastered treading floor, a deep basin and rows of conical mortars or cup marks in the bedrock. The vats had footholds, presumably to get in and out for maintenance, and the main vat had two grooves cut into the rock, perhaps to support wooden beams that would have covered the vats during fermentation.

Fig. 16. The Winery, Area K, recalls the story of Naboth’s vineyard (Photo Courtesy of the Jezreel Expedition).

How about dating this fascinating installation to our ninth-century BCE biblical protagonists? The Jezreel Expedition team says that's difficult because hardly any pottery was found here – which is to be expected, the experts add, in agricultural surroundings like those of Naboth's vineyard as described in 2 Kings 9.

In 2014 the team excavated one of three silted-up nearby caves discovered during the 2012 survey. The team's agrarian expert pointed out that a nearby cave would have been essential for continued fermentation. But instead of use as a winery, it proved to be a burial cave from the Middle Bronze Age, which produced six scaraboid seals and bronze pins, apparently going back to about 2000 BCE, the Middle Bronze Age IIA.

In the future, when Jezreel is on the route of every biblical tour itinerary, this ancient winery could become the perfect backdrop to discuss such issues as ancient and modern values, the importance of the preservation of heritage as well as of "inheritance" (1 Kings 21:4); the clash of religious values between Israelites and others; and the role of women in biblical society. Indeed, Jezreel is fertile ground both literally and figuratively to face the challenge to which Franklin introduced me: "We can't always know the answers but we have to ask the questions."