During the last thirty years, archaeological excavations have revealed much information about the Philistines during the biblical period. In fact, three of the Philistine cities have been excavated (Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron), and fascinating aspects of their culture have been revealed. Not too long ago, a monumental inscription was discovered at Ekron, mentioning a list of the kings of the city from the end of the Iron Age, just a few years before the Babylonian destruction (ca. 604 BCE).

In spite of this work, until quite recently, with the beginning of our project, little was known about Goliath’s hometown, Gath. From the biblical text it would appear that Gath was the most important of the Philistine cities during the early period of Philistine history. It was from Gath that Goliath, the fabled champion of the Philistines came, and it was the king of Gath, Achish, who played an important role in the story of the young King David.

Although there once was a bit of a controversy regarding the exact location of Gath, based on present evidence most scholars believe that it was located at the site known as Tell es-Safi. The tell, which is situated approximately halfway between Jerusalem and Ashkelon, is one of the largest biblical sites in Israel. Settled continuously from the Chalcolithic period (5th mill. BCE) until modern times, it is a veritable mine of archaeological evidence from all periods. Although its impressive size and archaeological promise were noted during the last century, until recently, very little archaeological research had been conducted at the site. Aside from a brief, two-week excavation conducted in 1899 by Bliss and Macalister, only cursory visits and illicit robber excavations (by the late General Moshe Dayan) took place at the site.

Scientific knowledge about this central site, so important for the study of the history and culture of the biblical period, was completely lacking. To resolve this situation, an archaeological project was begun at the site. As of 1996, a team of archaeologists, led by Prof. Aren M. Maier of Bar-Ilan University initiated a long-term project at the site. Commencing with exploratory surface-survey work to define and plan the future work, the actual excavations were begun in 1997. Since then (1997-2016), the finds have been astonishingly rich and indicate that the project, which most probably will continue for several decades, will become one of the most important excavations in the Southern Levant. In the first phase of the project we have had noteworthy discoveries, and this without a doubt will continue in the next stages of the project.

At the very beginning of our fieldwork, an unusual find was noticed. Through the utilization of aerial photography, we discovered the existence of a previously unknown, manmade trench that surrounds the site. This trench, 2.5 km long, some 8 meters wide and more than five meters deep, surrounds the site on three sides. It is believed that this unique feature is an unparalleled siege system, set up by a besieging army to hinder escape from the besieged city. As of the 2001 season, we have been able to explicitly date this feature to the Iron Age II. It now seems likely that it may be evidence of the Aramean siege of Gath (II Kings 12:17). We can now say that this is the earliest siege system known in the entire world!

Another find of extreme importance was uncovered during the 1998 season. In the main excavation area, mere inches below the present-day surface, we excavated a level that was
completely devastated in a fiery destruction. In this level we discovered houses that collapsed during the destruction, sealing within them all the original objects that they had contained. This includes an extraordinarily rich assortment of well-preserved finds. These finds include several hundred pottery vessels of various kinds, shapes and functions, including those used for storage, cooking, serving, and cultic purposes. To this one can add various other objects such as ivory decorations and metal weapons. Altogether, these finds provide a well-rounded picture of the various kinds of objects used for different functions in these houses, illuminating daily life in the Land of Israel during the biblical period.

Most significantly, these remains can be dated to a very important period, the 9th century BCE. This is the period immediately after the separation of the “United Kingdom” of David and Solomon into the northern Israelite and southern Judean kingdoms. Recently, some scholars have questioned the veracity of the description of the events in this period as portrayed in the Bible. Accordingly, it is claimed that there is little if any non-biblical archaeological and historical evidence to that relates to this period. But in light of the extraordinarily rich finds that were discovered at T. es-Safi/Gath, it would appear that this at least from an archaeological point of view, this period is in fact well represented at this site. To this one can add that the rich finds appear to support view that Gath did in fact have a primary role among the Philistines cities during the earlier stages of their history.

One of the more important results of the recent season is that we now know quite clearly that also during the 10th cent. BCE – the time of kingdom of David and Solomon, Gath was a large and extensive city as well. Not only is there evidence of this phase on the “upper tell” – but now we have clear evidence of this in the lower city as well – including impressive fortifications and an apparent city gate. This informs us that during this period, the city of Gath was probably the largest city in the Land of Israel – and would appear that it was the major opponent to the incipient Judahite kingdom.

The results of the excavation have shed light on the fascinating topic of how, when and why the Philistine culture changed. Originating from various areas in the eastern Mediterranean, the Philistine culture appears in the Levant at the beginning of the Iron Age (ca. 1200 BCE). After settling in the region, the slowly underwent a process of cultural change, on the one hand retaining some of their original cultural traits, but on the other hand, incorporating many of the local ones as well (such as the local Semitic language, evidence of which has been found in the excavations, including the earliest Philistine inscription known to date, found in the 2005 season). As was reported in the world press, this inscription is quite an exciting find, since it mentions two names that are somewhat reminiscent of the original form of the name Goliath! Since the inscription dates to ca. 950 BCE, it comes from almost the same period as the battle of David and Goliath according the biblical chronology!

During the last seasons, we continued to expose substantial remains from this impressive destruction level. In addition, other archaeological levels, relating to periods before and after the destruction level were discovered, once again indicating the high potential and importance of the future excavations. We know have an almost complete stratigraphic sequence spanning the Late Bronze Age II (13th cent. BCE) until the late Iron Age II (ca. late 8th cent. BCE), and, in addition, levels from the Early Bronze Age III (ca. 2800-2200 BCE). Among the exciting finds from the last seasons, we can note the discovery of several of the earliest donkey burials in the Near East (Early Bronze Age), impressive fortifications from the Early and Middle Bronze Ages, numerous well-preserved finds of the Canaanite, Philistine, and Israelite cultures, and the impressive finds from Iron Age “lower city.” Among the exciting discoveries was a Philistine temple with two columns, somewhat reminiscent of the story of Samson in the Philistine temple in Gaza (Judges 17:29); and apparent evidence of the mid-8th century BCE earthquake mentioned in the book of Amos (1:1); a well-preserved stone altar with horns, quite similar in size to the description of the altar in the biblical tabernacle (Exod 30); and apparently remains of the city gate (perhaps mentioned in 1 Sam 21).
In the upcoming 2017 season, we plan to continue to excavate levels dating to these various phases, with particular emphasis on the Early and Late Bronze Ages, and various stages of the Iron Age, both in the upper and lower city. We will be excavating in several areas of the tell, and we expect to have a wide range of fascinating, and in fact, groundbreaking finds).

All this promises that we will have an exciting season of fieldwork, where cutting-edge science, enriching experiences, and thrilling new discoveries will be combined. We are sure that the entire team, staff, volunteers and students, from Israel and from throughout the world, will enjoy a most fulfilling summer!

IMPORTANT NOTE: We will be staying at lovely hotel in Neve Shalom (http://wasns.org). We are sure that the conditions will be as good, if not better, than in previous years.
Introduction:
The following should be seen as a list of recommendations for participants in the excavation. This list has been formulated on the basis of a familiarity with the climate, working, and living conditions in Israel and at the site. We believe that adherence to the list will assist in making your stay at the dig as comfortable as possible. Needless to say, this list consists of basic recommendations only – ultimately, you will have to decide what you need and what you do not! Included in the list are various types of equipment and supplies, but not their quantities. Please use your own discretion in deciding what to pack. Take into account that clothes can be washed on site by hand, or for an additional charge, at a local laundry. Please, try not to bring excessive and/or overly expensive personal effects. If you do forget something, most everything is available in Israel, although it may be more expensive and it may not be the brand that you are used to.

Clothing:
Overall, the climate in Israel at this time of year is very hot and dry, especially during the working hours at the site. Nevertheless, during the evening it can be relatively cool. Thus, one should have clothing appropriate for hot weather, although a light sweater or jacket for evening wear will also come in handy. Although many of us like to expose as much of our bodies as possible to the sun in hot weather, the expedition director advises that work in the field be conducted in light-weight, long-sleeved shirts and long pants, and needless to say, with a wide-brimmed hat. In addition, liberal use of sun-screen lotions is highly advised. Although it may seem like a great opportunity to get a tan, prolonged exposure to the sun is not particularly pleasant, nor good for your health! Note: towels, sheets, pillowcases and blankets are provided at the kibbutz base camp.

Suggested List of Clothing and Supplies:
Clothes:
- Wide-brimmed lightweight hat (preferably washable)
- Short sleeved and long sleeved cotton shirts
- Cotton shorts
- Cotton pants (slacks)
- Underwear
- Socks
- Sweater/Sweatshirt
- Lightweight jacket
- Pajamas
- Bathing suit
- Work shoes – preferably ankle height
- Extra shoelaces
- Sandals

Toiletries:
- Toiletries bag
- Soap
- Shampoo
- Sunscreen (ample quantities; high level of protection)
- Toothpaste & toothbrush
- Deodorant
- Athlete’s foot powder
• Anti-chafing cream
• Nail clipper
• Anti-bug spray/cream
• Medications if necessary (such as aspirin, antihistamines, etc.)
• Personal supplies (as needed)

**General Equipment:**
• Canteen/water bottle for personal use
• Work-gloves
• Trowel (preferably “Marshalltown” brand). Since this is not available in Israel, try to purchase one for your own use to bring to the excavation. Can be purchased on-line at: [http://www.marshalltown.com/productDetail.aspx?prodID=16945](http://www.marshalltown.com/productDetail.aspx?prodID=16945). For those coming from the UK, you might prefer the “WHS professional archaeology trowel” ([http://www.archtools.eu/whs-professional-archaeology-trowel.html](http://www.archtools.eu/whs-professional-archaeology-trowel.html)). Note: if you will not be using the trowel after the excavation, the project will appreciate it if you will leave us the trowel for use in future seasons.
• Duffle-bag/suitcase for gear
• Small bag/knapsack for carrying daily equipment
• Bag for laundry
• Money belt
• Pocket knife
• Camera and film
• Knee-pads to protect knees while working
• We highly recommend that you bring with you photocopies of: 1) the photo and information page on your passport; 2) credit cards that you will bringing; 3) your airline ticket. If any of the above is lost/stolen during your trip, having photocopies simplifies the process of getting replacements. 2-3 extra passport photos are good to have as well.

**Educational Supplies:**
• Writing supplies (notebook, paper, pencils, etc.)
• The Bible (always handy when doing “biblical archaeology”!).

**Suggested Reading:**
How to Get to Neve Shalom during the Excavation

From Ben-Gurion Airport (Lod):

**By Bus (takes considerably longer, but it is cheaper):**
From the airport there are no direct buses to Neve Shalom or the Latrun Junction. If you do want to take a bus, do go to the tourist information booth in the terminal to find out the best buses to take at the specific day and time that is relevant. If you arrive at the Latrun Junction during the excavation season (but not from Friday afternoon until Sunday morning before 10 am), you should call us and we will pick you up.

**By Taxi:**
You can get a taxi (make sure it is an official taxi with official taxi sign on top and sides of car) at the exit from the arrivals hall. Tell the driver that you want to go to Neve Shalom. If the driver does not know where Neve Shalom is, tell him it is near the Latrun Junction, just off of Route 3. Ask the driver to put on the meter BEFORE the drive starts. Make sure that the payment method is determined BEFORE you start the drive.

From Tel Aviv:

**By Bus:**
From the Tel Aviv central bus station there are no direct buses to Neve Shalom or the Latrun Junction. If you do want to take a bus, do go to the information booth in the bus station to find out the best buses to take at the specific day and time that is relevant. If you arrive at the Latrun Junction during the excavation season (but not from Friday afternoon until Sunday morning before 10 am), you should call us and we will pick you up.

**By Taxi:**
You can get a taxi (make sure it is an official taxi with official taxi sign on top and sides of car) either at the bus station or around town. Tell the driver that you want to go to Neve Shalom. If the driver does not know where Neve Shalom is, tell him it is near the Latrun Junction, just off of Route 3. Ask the driver to put on the meter BEFORE the drive starts. Make sure that the payment method is determined BEFORE you start the drive.

From Jerusalem:

**By Bus:**
From the Jerusalem central bus station there are regular buses to the Latrun Junction, such as 433, 434 and 435. These buses leave ca. every 20-30 minutes. Ask the driver to let you off at Latrun Junction. If you arrive at the Latrun Junction during the excavation season (but not from Friday afternoon until Sunday morning before 10 am), you should call us and we will pick you up.

**By Taxi:**
You can get a taxi (make sure it is an official taxi with official taxi sign on top and sides of car) either at the bus station or around town. Tell the driver that you want to go to Neve Shalom. If the driver does not know where Neve Shalom is, tell him it is near the Latrun Junction, just off of Route 3. Ask the driver to put on the meter BEFORE the drive starts. Make sure that the payment method is determined BEFORE you start the drive.

Contact Info during the Excavation:
Aren Maeir’s (project director) mobile phone number is ++972-54-6205082 (not on weekends) Amit Dagan (senior staff member) can be contacted on the weekend (++972-52-2336556).

Please tell your family and friends to regularly check the dig blog (gath.wordpress.com) for information and updates about the progress of the dig.

Our address during the excavation season is:
The Tell es-Safi/Gath Archaeological Project
c/o Neve Shalom Hotel
Doar Na Shimshon 99761,
ISRAEL

Contact info for hotel:
Email: hotel@nswas.info
Phone: ++972-2-999-3030
Fax: ++972-2-9917-412