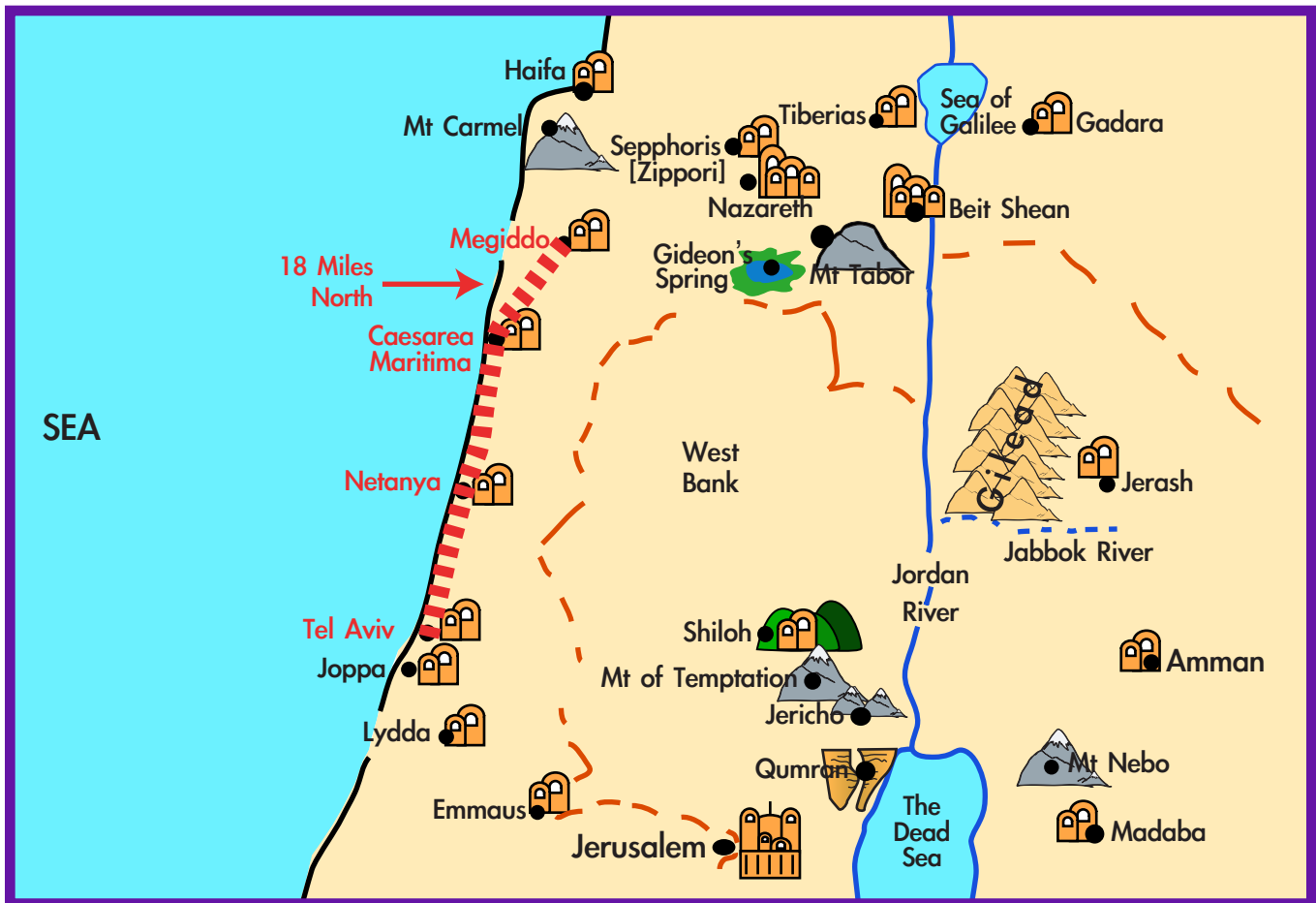


Tour of the Holy Lands - Megiddo



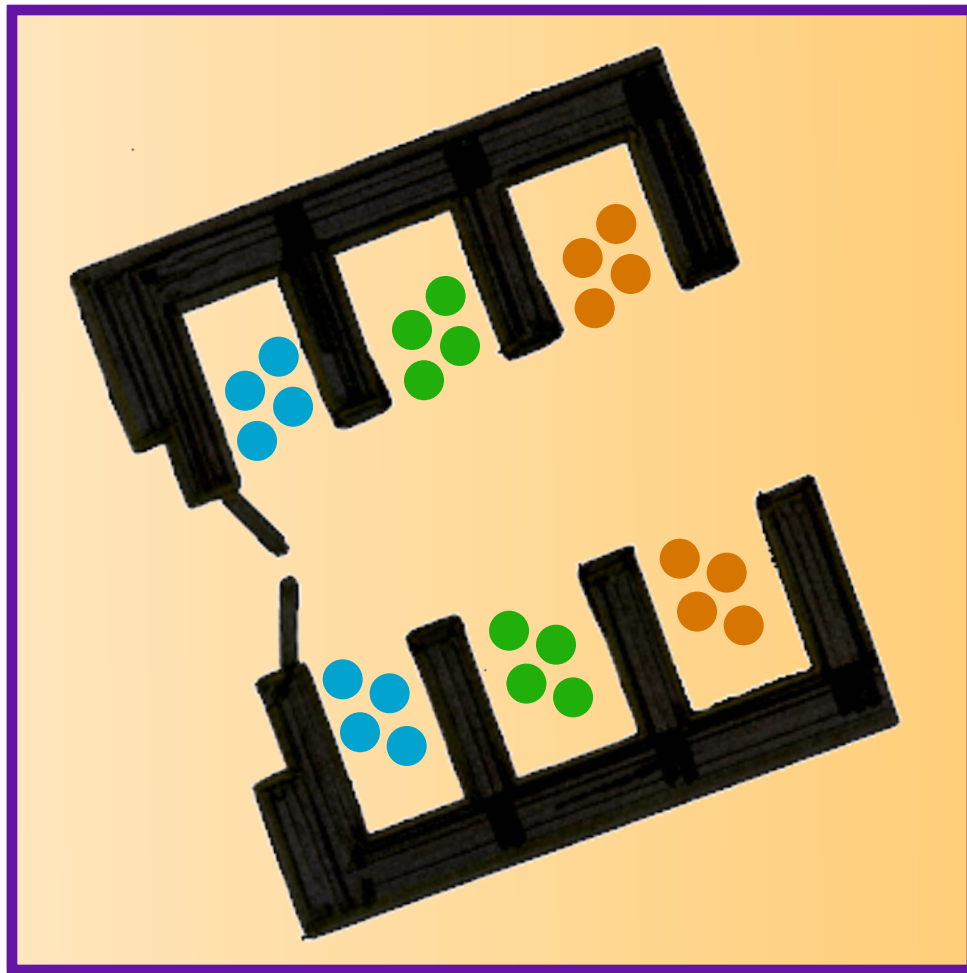
We drove about 18 miles to our next stop - Megiddo. They call Megiddo a "tell" – a mound or a hill made by man. Before and during Bible times, people worried about being attacked by foreigners and losing their lives or their land. One solution was to find a safe place to build a city. Usually it was on a hill so they could see their enemies coming. The hill had to have a secret water supply so that the people could stay in the city a long time if they were being attacked. The citizens living in the tell of Megiddo did many things to try to keep themselves safe. However, their enemies always found ways to destroy them.

Archaeologists found 20 different cities here, one on top of the other. The tell looks like a layer cake inside. After one city was destroyed another city was built on the rubble by new people.



One sure way to keep safe was to have only one gate into the city. Then the soldiers could concentrate on guarding just one area.

We are about to enter the gates now. We can see that the stone blocks are large and the road is rocky. There's room for a chariot to ride into the city through this opening.



Here is a helpful drawing of gates. There was a wooden gate on the outside that was locked every night. On the inside, there was a path lined with little open rooms on both sides, called chambers. Some cities had 2, some had 4, some had 6 chambers. Now we understand why it was called the "gates" rather than the "gate" of the city. In war time, soldiers would hide in the chambers to surprise the enemy. If the enemy should break down the wooden door, the first chamber of soldiers would attack them. If the first soldiers didn't stop the enemy, the second or third group of soldiers would attack. It seems like a very clever approach.



As we look at the chambers, we are able to picture the soldiers in their helmets, shields and spears ready to defend their city and their families.



The citizens found a whole different use for the gates in peace time. The cities put benches in the chambers for judges. The people came to the judges to settle arguments or to write important papers, for those who couldn't read or write. If the city had a king, he sat at the gates to settle problems. Sometimes, important speeches were made at the gates. Farmers would sleep in the city at night and leave through the gates every morning to work in their fields outside the city. When they came home in the evening, they could find out all the news as they passed through the gates.





Now that we're standing in the gates, we try to recall a Bible story that took place in the gates of a city. The story of Ruth in Bethlehem is one.



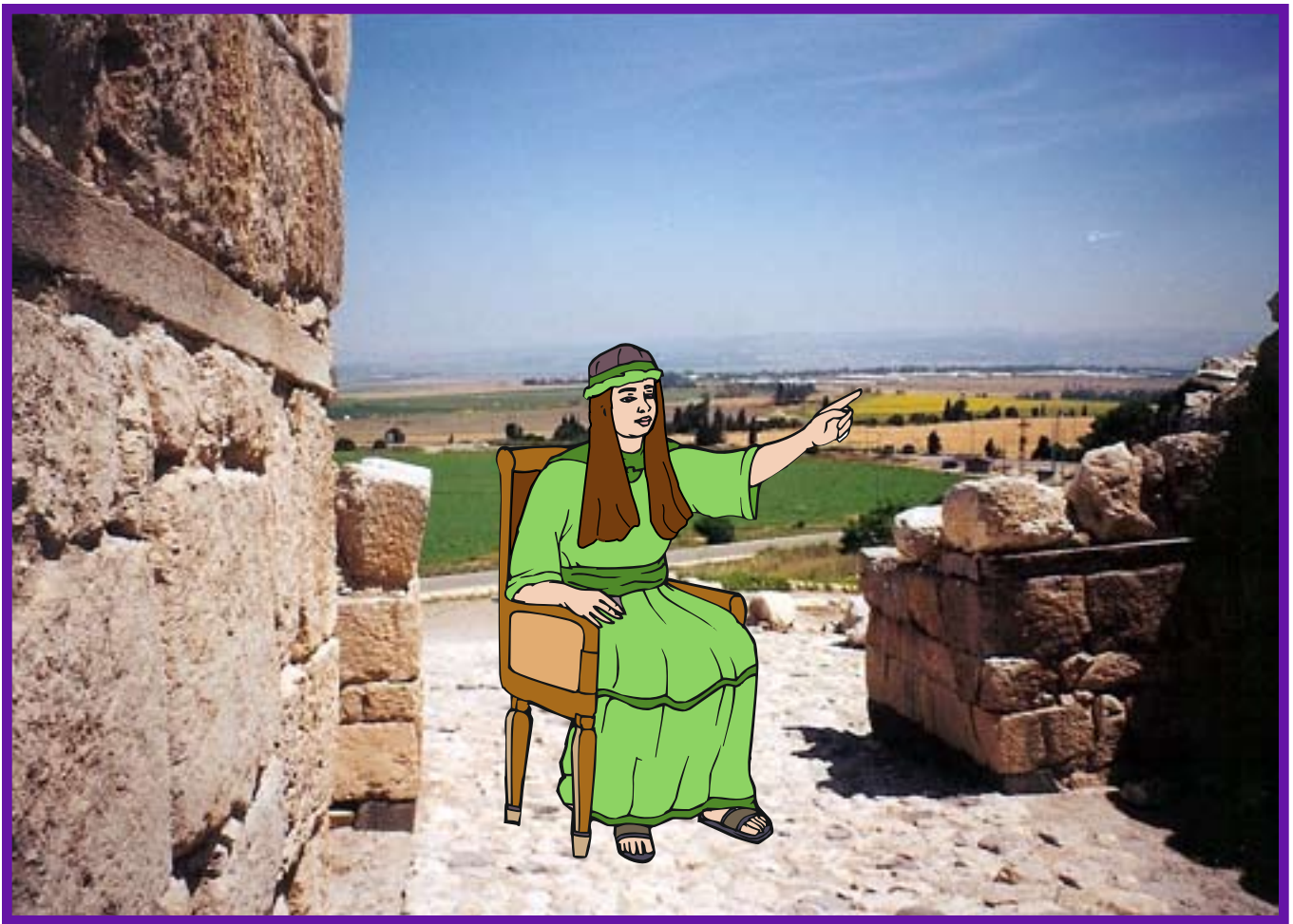


There was a special law in Israel that said if a man died without ever having children, his widow had to marry her husband's brother or other relative. Then their first child would belong to the dead husband. We find that hard to understand 3000 years later. But back then, people believed that having a son was the only way a man's name could survive. The widow Ruth was a foreigner, but she had been married to a Jew so the law applied to her, too. Ruth found a relative who would marry her. His name was Boaz and he loved her. But there was a closer relative, who lived in the city, who was legally first in line to marry her. In order to find that relative, Boaz waited at the gates because everyone was sure to come to the gates at least once a day.



We found the story in the Bible and read it aloud. (Ruth 4:1-12) Our voices echoed in the gates, and we imagined the voice of Boaz calling to the relative, then calling out for 10 men who could witness the agreement between Boaz and the relative. We pictured the relative pulling off his sandal and Boaz announcing his marriage to Ruth. We imagined their neighbors clapping and shouting for the newlyweds. It was as if we were right there with the crowd, watching and listening to it all happen.



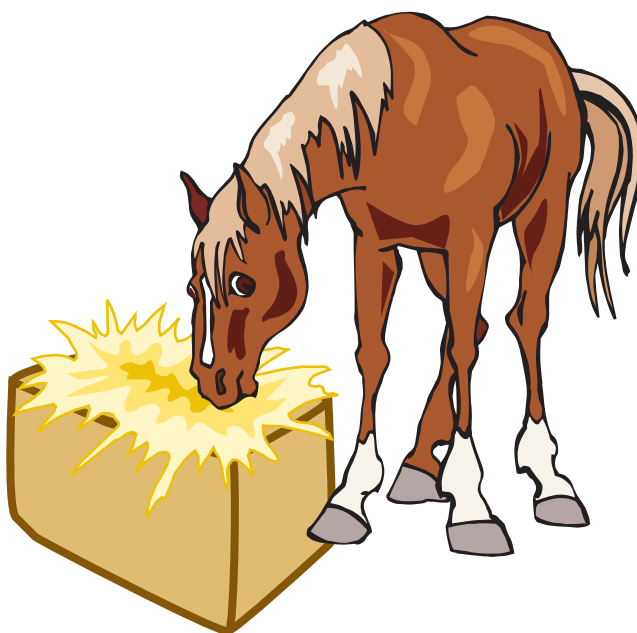


Another Bible story that took place at the gates of a city was that of Absalom (II Samuel 15:1-6) Absalom's father was David, the king. A good king should have come to the gates every day to settle arguments, but David had been neglecting his duties. So Absalom got up early in the morning and took his father's seat at the gates. He told each person, "If I were judge, I would make sure you got justice." That was how Absalom got the people to like him better than David, his father. Absalom did many other things to steal the hearts of the people away from his father. He wanted to steal his father's throne.



David had another son whose name was Solomon. He was the one who became king after David. They say he kept his horses here in Megiddo.

Look at this stone block. We see them all over the city. It's a feeding trough for the horses, called a manger. We'll remember this manger when we visit Bethlehem next week.

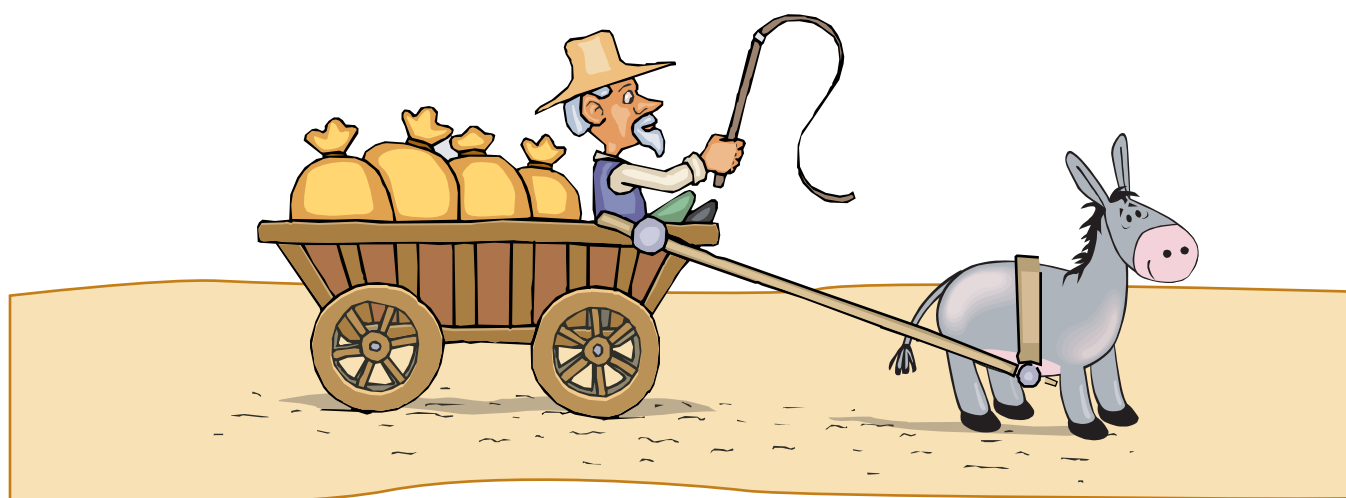




Here we see a huge hole in the ground, lined with stones, with steps leading to the bottom. It's a granary.



The farmers would bring their harvested grain and store it there so they could have bread in peace time and in war.



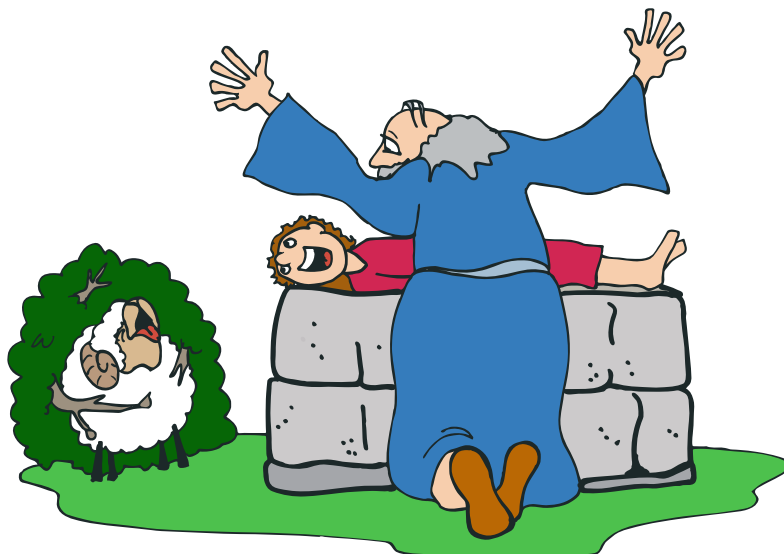


There's an even bigger hole here. Archaeologists dug down and down, and discovered a huge altar. In Bible times, people used to sacrifice animals to their gods and even to the Lord God.



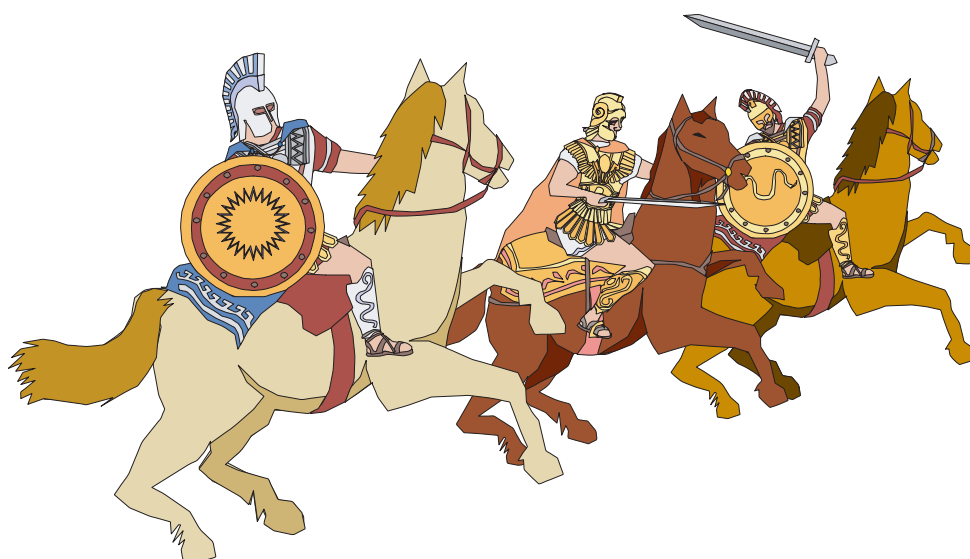


We can see a couple of people down there now, acting out a sacrifice. There's a Bible story about Abraham who almost sacrificed his son, Isaac. There's a happy ending to that story (Genesis 22:1-19).





Just beyond that huge hole was the edge of the tell. Beyond the tell, there are farmlands as far as our eyes could see. If we lived in Bible times, we would be looking at an important road cutting through the land. Foreign armies used to march along that road. It was the only road to Egypt to the South or to Syria to the North or to Mesopotamia to the East. That's why many countries wanted to own Megiddo, so they could watch the armies on the move. It might be the first news of a battle coming up.





In fact, if we lived in Bible times we might be watching a battle right now, right below us. We'd be listening to the clanging swords and the neighing horses. We might be seeing King Saul fight the Philistines, or Gideon fight the Midianites, or Deborah and Barak fight Sisera. Over 200 battles were fought right below us. Many scholars think that is the reason for the name, "Armageddon," found in the book of Revelation (Rev 16:16). Armageddon was a symbol of all the wicked forces of the world gathered together to fight the final battle against God, when evil will finally be destroyed. Look how the word "Megiddo" looks like it's inside the word "Armageddon."





Before we head back to the bus, there's one more surprise. We're going to find the secret water supply now.





There were stone steps leading down into a spring underneath Megiddo. The women of the city used to fetch water there every day. We found those steps, 183 of them, and followed the path of the women.



The water did not look very fresh today, and those pots full of water must have been very heavy to carry up all those stairs.





As we leave, we ask each other, "Would we rather live back then in Bible times, or today?"

