

Zedekiah’s Cave

Names (also known as)

Solomon’s Quarry, Zedekiah’s Grotto, Suleiman’s Cave, Royal Caverns, Caves or Quarries and an Arabic name Migharat al-Kitan (or Cotton Cave or Grotto).

Location/Description

The entrance to Zedekiah’s Cave is just beneath the Muslim Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, between the Damascus and Herod Gates. The cave slopes down into a vast 300-foot-long auditorium-like chamber. Spring fed drops of water, known as Zedekiah’s Tears, trickle through the ceiling. This spring originates from the same aquifer that feeds the Gihon Spring. The depth of the cave is 9.1 meters below the Old City streets and the inside height ranges between 4–15 meters.

Scriptural references

2 Kings 24 & 25
2 Chronicles 36
Jeremiah 39

Famous characters

Zedekiah, King of Judah, Solomon, King of Israel; Suleiman the Magnificent, Ottoman Sultan

Brief history

Legend has it that King Zedekiah of Jerusalem hid in this cave during the siege of the City by Babylon and may have used it as an escape route upon fleeing the City. Hence, the name Zedekiah’s Cave. The Scripture references to Zedekiah above do not mention a cave.

Only the mouth of Zedekiah’s Cave is a natural phenomenon. The interior of the cavern was carved by slaves and labourers over many years. It is assumed Herod the Great and Herod

Agrippa 1 used the main quarry of Zedekiah’s Cave for their many building projects. Josephus writes about the “Royal Caverns” of the Old City which may be a reference to Zedekiah’s Cave.

The Arabic name meaning Cotton Cave or Grotto has been applied because the cave was thought to have been once used as a storage place for cotton.

Suleiman the Magnificent (1494-1566), the Ottoman sultan who is reputed to have built the present walls around the Old City of Jerusalem, also apparently mined the quarry, but ultimately sealed it up around 1540 because of security concerns.

In 1854 the American missionary James T. Barclay followed rumours of an underground cavern near the Damascus Gate, and apparently with the help of his dog, discovered the entrance to the cave.

The most revered legend about the cave is that it served as the quarry for King Solomon’s construction of the House of the Lord during his reign. This legend is perpetuated by the Freemasons whose ritual claims King Solomon was their first Grand Master. An annual Masonic ceremony is conducted in the cavern each year. The first of these ceremonies was held in 1868.

Minor quarrying occurred in 1907 when stone was obtained to build the Turkish clock tower over the Jaffa Gate. Since the 1920’s the cavern has been used as something of a tourist attraction and entertainment facility.

Sources:

Zedekiah’s Cave – Wikipedia: citing a dozen references

Jerusalem, Israel, Petra & Sinai – Eyewitness Travel
www.bible.ca / Solomon’s Quarry

(Compilers – Tom and Leslie Colby)

