

SOLOMON'S QUARRIES

Solomon's Quarries, sometimes called Zedekiah's Cave, is an underground limestone quarry located thirty feet below the Muslim Quarter street level of the Old City of Jerusalem. The whole cavern measures 650 feet long and 330 feet wide at its maximum points. At one time, it was much longer, extending all the way to the Garden Tomb.



Outside Solomon's Quarries

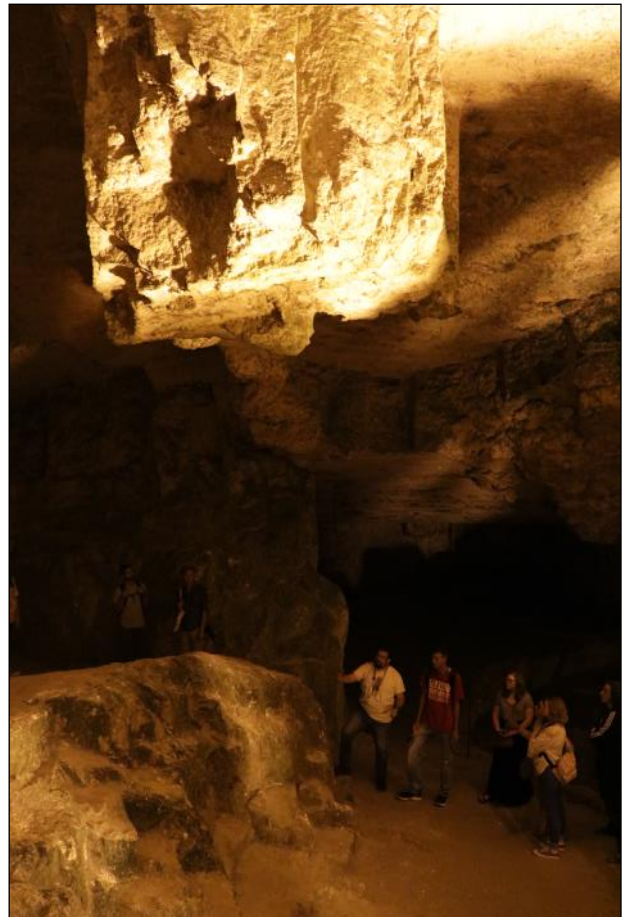
The entrance is just below the Old City wall between the Damascus Gate and Herod's Gate. After a narrow opening, the cave slopes down into a large auditorium-like chamber. Drops of water fall from the ceiling; these are referred to as "Zedekiah's tears." Beyond the auditorium are many rock galleries, carved out by ancient stonemasons. Visitors can see chisel marks and massive, nearly-completed blocks left behind.

The limestone is called *meleke* from Hebrew and Arabic words meaning “kingly” or “royal.” Because the *meleke* limestone is strong, easy to carve, and resistant to erosion, it is thought to have been used for royal buildings. Although the archaeological evidence is lacking,



Solomon could have had stones carved out of this cave around 970 B.C. in preparation for building the temple (1 Kings 5:15-18; 6:1). Herod the Great most likely used this quarry for stone blocks in rebuilding the temple and constructing the retaining wall of the temple mount, beginning about 20 B.C. It was convenient that the underground quarry was accessible in all seasons and in any weather. Josephus mentioned the “caverns of the kings” at Jerusalem, possibly referring to Solomon’s Quarries (*Wars* 5.4.2).

There is a legend that this cave was the hiding place of King Zedekiah. When he tried to escape from the Babylonian troops attacking Jerusalem, he fled through Solomon’s Quarries. The story says that God sent a buck running along the surface of the cave as Zedekiah was running below. The soldiers



chased the buck and arrived at the exit of the cave just as Zedekiah was coming out, enabling them to capture him. Thus the name “Zedekiah’s Cave” was given. The Bible, however, says that Zedekiah fled through an eastern gate by the king’s garden and was overtaken by the Babylonians in the plains of Jericho (2 Kings 25:4-6; Jer. 39:4-5; 52:7-9).

The Ottoman sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (1494-1566) probably mined here to build the current city walls. Then he sealed the quarry around 1540 for security reasons. In 1854, American missionary Dr. James T. Barclay was walking his dog in Jerusalem when the dog disappeared through an opening where he was digging. After dark, Barclay and his two sons dressed as Arabs and investigated the hole. Once inside, they found a vast cavern as well as the skeletons of previous visitors. (Dr. Barclay also discovered Barclay’s Gate at the temple mount. He was the first international missionary in the Restoration Movement sent out by the American Christian Missionary Society. After he returned to the United States, his book on Jerusalem entitled *The City of the Great King* was published in 1858.)

Renovations to the cave took place in the late twentieth century, including the addition of paths and the installation of lights. Now it is accessible to tourists.