

Church unearthed in Israel may hold Zechariah tomb

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A man looks at a Byzantine period church decorated with an impressive mosaic floor after it was discovered following excavations in Horbat Midras, near the Israeli town of Beit Shemesh. Israeli archaeologists unveiled on Wednesday the remnants of a newly discovered Byzantine-era church they suspect is concealing the tomb of the biblical prophet Zechariah.

Israeli archaeologists unveiled on Wednesday the remnants of a newly discovered Byzantine-era church they suspect is concealing the tomb of the biblical prophet Zechariah.

The church, with intricate and well-preserved mosaic floors, was discovered on the slopes of the Judaeen hills at Horbat Midras, the site of a Jewish community in [Roman times](#), southwest of Jerusalem.

Underneath is a second layer of mosaics dating from the [Roman period](#), with a cave complex still further below which [archaeologists](#) think could be Zechariah's tomb.

"Researchers believe that in light of an analysis of the Christian sources ... the church at Horbat Madras is a memorial church designed to mark the tomb of the prophet Zechariah," the Israel Antiquities Authority said.

A statement noted, however, that more work is needed to confirm the hypothesis.

A Jewish prophet of the late sixth century before Christ, Zechariah is associated with the book of the Old Testament that refers to four horsemen and other visions prefiguring the coming of God in judgement.

The church at Horbat Midras was discovered after a gang of tomb raiders was found to be in possession of the church lintel -- part of the door structure -- which they said came from an underground location.

"Following the discovery, an [excavation](#) was carried out with the aim of revealing the secrets of the monumental building which the lintel belonged to," added the statement

"There is no doubt the discovery is extraordinary and of great importance in terms of research, religion and tourism," it said.

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