

A Small Golden Bell

Commentary for February 1, 2019 — ... Near the City of David?

This month's article, "Response to Gihon Temple Objections," may disturb you. Critics are beginning to question the motives of those who believe different than they do about the location of the Jerusalem Temples above the Gihon Spring. Their outraged opinions of you are not flattering. If you disagree with them, you are not just wrong; you may be evil and should beware of disparaging God. Read the "[February 2019 Newsletter](#)" first.

Archaeological finds in Jerusalem are often hyped beyond their real significance. In 2011, a small golden bell was discovered in a drainage tunnel just west of the City of David under the eastern slope of the Tyropoeon Valley.¹ The "City of David" website tells the story:

"In 2011, while excavating the upper part of the drainage tunnel, near the Temple Mount,² ancient Jerusalem revealed one of her most exceptional treasures found to date. What initially was thought to be a little plastic ball that somehow got mixed in during the excavators' comings and goings, turned out to be much more significant. The little ball was light in weight and the material it was made of was thin and delicate.

Assuming nothing, Eli Shukron, director of the Western Wall excavations at the time, rolled the little ball between his fingers, noting that there was something moving inside. He shook the little ball and it rang, clearly, like a bell. Intrigued, he examined it a bit closer, noticing a little loop at the top of the bell. It was obviously meant to be attached to something like a piece of jewelry or garment. An x-ray confirmed Eli's thinking. True to the character of a bell, this one indeed had a tiny chain with a clapper inside."



Top: Real size of the golden bell
Bottom: Detail of the bell

- ["The Golden Bell - An Ancient Lesson in Good Manners"](#)

What Shukron noticed was that this buried artifact was made of metal that had not tarnished even though buried for a long time. The small bell was made of gold.

What Was the Bell?

With understandable reasoning some identified it as one of the bells around the fringe of the High Priest's garment worn for ceremonial occasions as mentioned in the Book of Exodus:

¹ A 2007 video "[Ancient Tunnel Discovered by Jerusalem's Old City](#)," shows it led north to the wall west of the Haram esh-Sharif. See my December 2011 Commentary, "[New Finds in Jerusalem](#)."

² It was actually a sewer for waste as well as a channel for rainwater. The tunnel waste had to be kept separate from drinkable water at the south of the City of David and at the Pool of Siloam cited in Luke 13:4; John 9:7, 11. It turns out that the location of this find was closer to the City of David (the true site of the Temple) rather than near the "temple mount" which is the remains of Fortress Antonia.

“And you shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue ...

And beneath upon the hem of it you shall make pomegranates ...

and bells of gold between them round about:

A golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, upon the hem of the robe round about.

• *Exodus 28:31, 33–34*

Exodus seems to describe objects shaped as pomegranates made of an unstated substance alternating with gold bells. The Jewish historian Josephus, a Levitical priest, also mentions the garment worn by the High Priest with “golden bells” on the lowest fringes of the robe:

“The high priest is indeed adorned with the same garments that we have described ... over these he puts on a vestment of a blue [color]. This also is a long robe, reaching to his feet ...

To the bottom of which garment are hung fringes, in color like pomegranates, with golden bells by a curious and beautiful contrivance; so that between two bells hangs a pomegranate, and between two pomegranates a bell.”

• *Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 3:159–160*

Unlike many who comment on such archaeological finds, Eli Shukron does not jump to conclusions about any biblical connection. He does not say this bell was from the vestment of the High Priest of the Temple, as others have proclaimed. Shukron gave his own conclusion:

“We are talking about a bell, a tiny golden bell, very impressive in its design, apparently one of the bells once sewn on to the robe of a nobleman or other important Jerusalem personality. Someone who when he walked, everyone heard the sound of bells and made way for him. This is part of the story of that period. This is part of Jerusalem. What we find below tells the story of what occurred above, over 2,000 years ago.”

• *“Eli Shukron,” video*

He gives his own reasoning how the gold bell got into the drainage channel. It fell off the garment then was washed in the road to one of the inlets to the drainage tunnel.

Was it the bell of a rich nobleman, or was it indeed from the garment of the High Priest? Let me offer this possibility: the bell did not fall off above ground, but was knocked off when the person wearing the expensive garment with gold bells was in the tunnel, hiding from the Romans in 70 AD. Shukron and his excavators also found a Roman sword farther north from the bell. Josephus says people tried to escape capture and death from Roman soldiers by hiding underground in “caverns” either during or after the capture of Jerusalem in 70 AD (*Wars of the Jews* 7:26–36). This gold bell likely was from that period.

Whatever the case, this artifact, this tiny golden bell, is probably legitimate because it is consistent with several historical sources. Beyond that, such items as this can tell us little. Discoveries of coins are much better, written documents are the best, but those are rare.

This month’s article also deals with difficulties of interpretation. Read the evidence and the opinions of people who think differently than you do.

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