

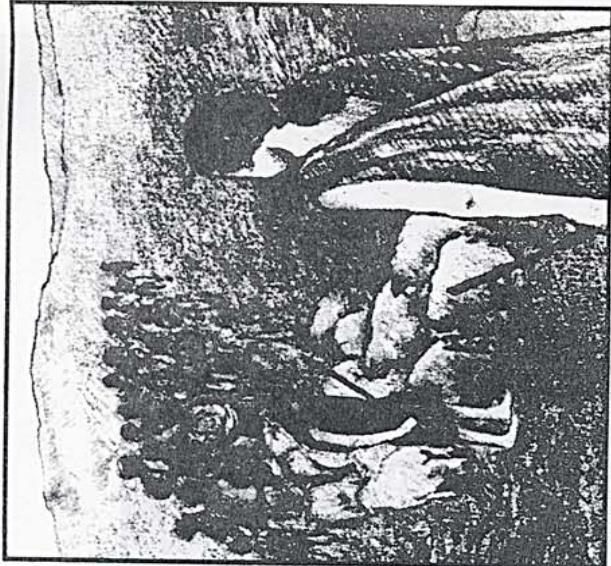
THE SECRET OF A TELL

Story by Jeffrey Zorn



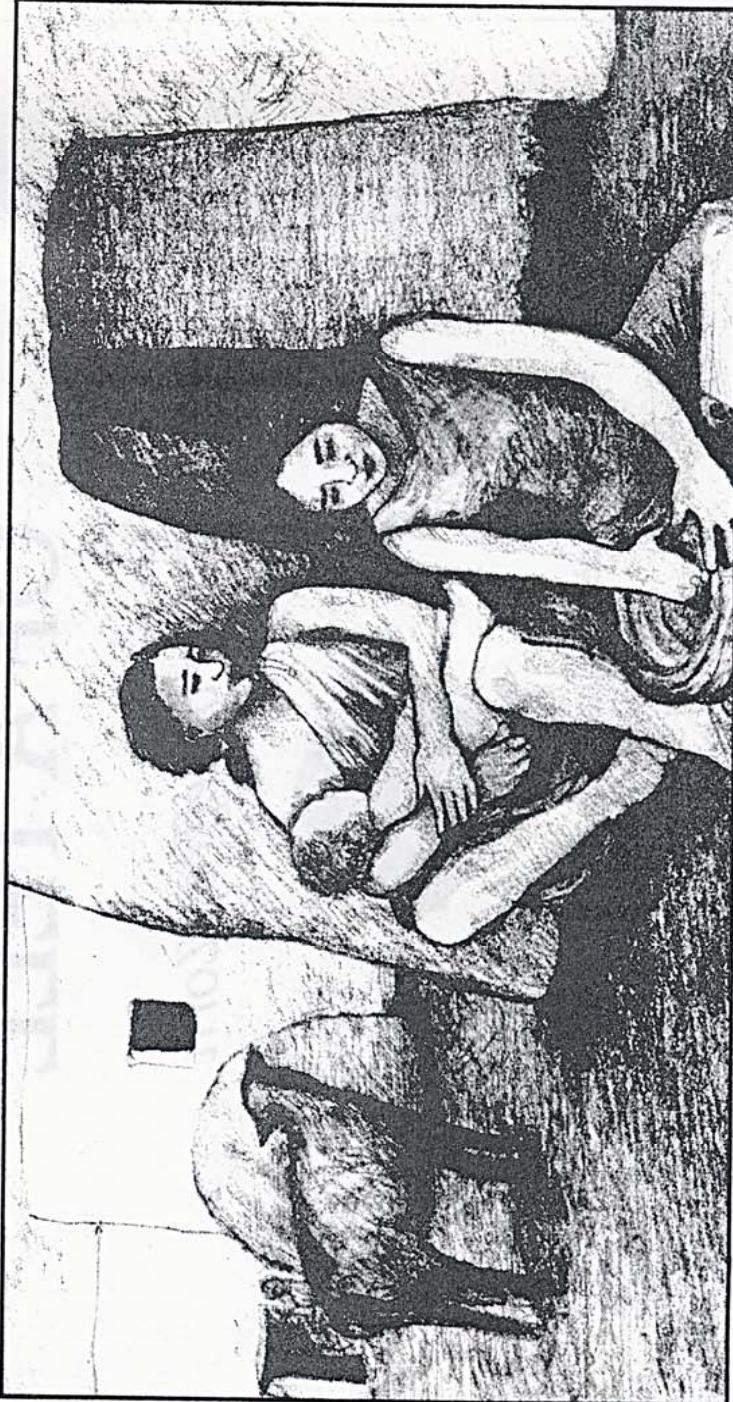
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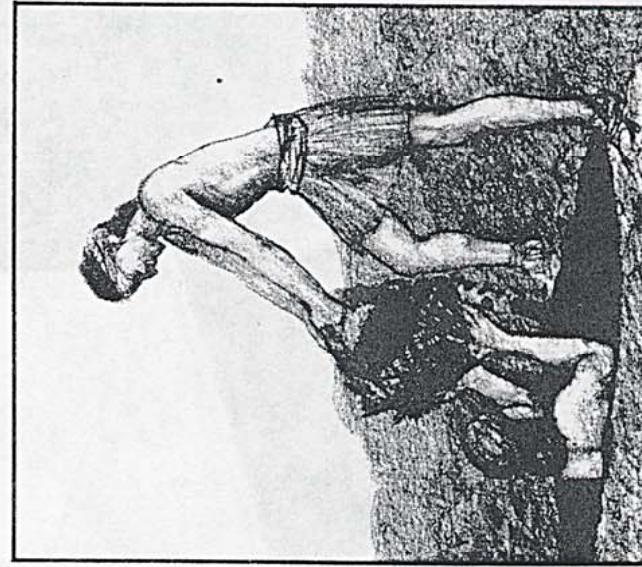
A tell is an ancient mound. Hidden beneath its surface are cities from long ago. How did these cities come to be buried, and how do we learn about them today? This is the story of such a tell, of how it came to be buried, and how archaeologists investigate it.

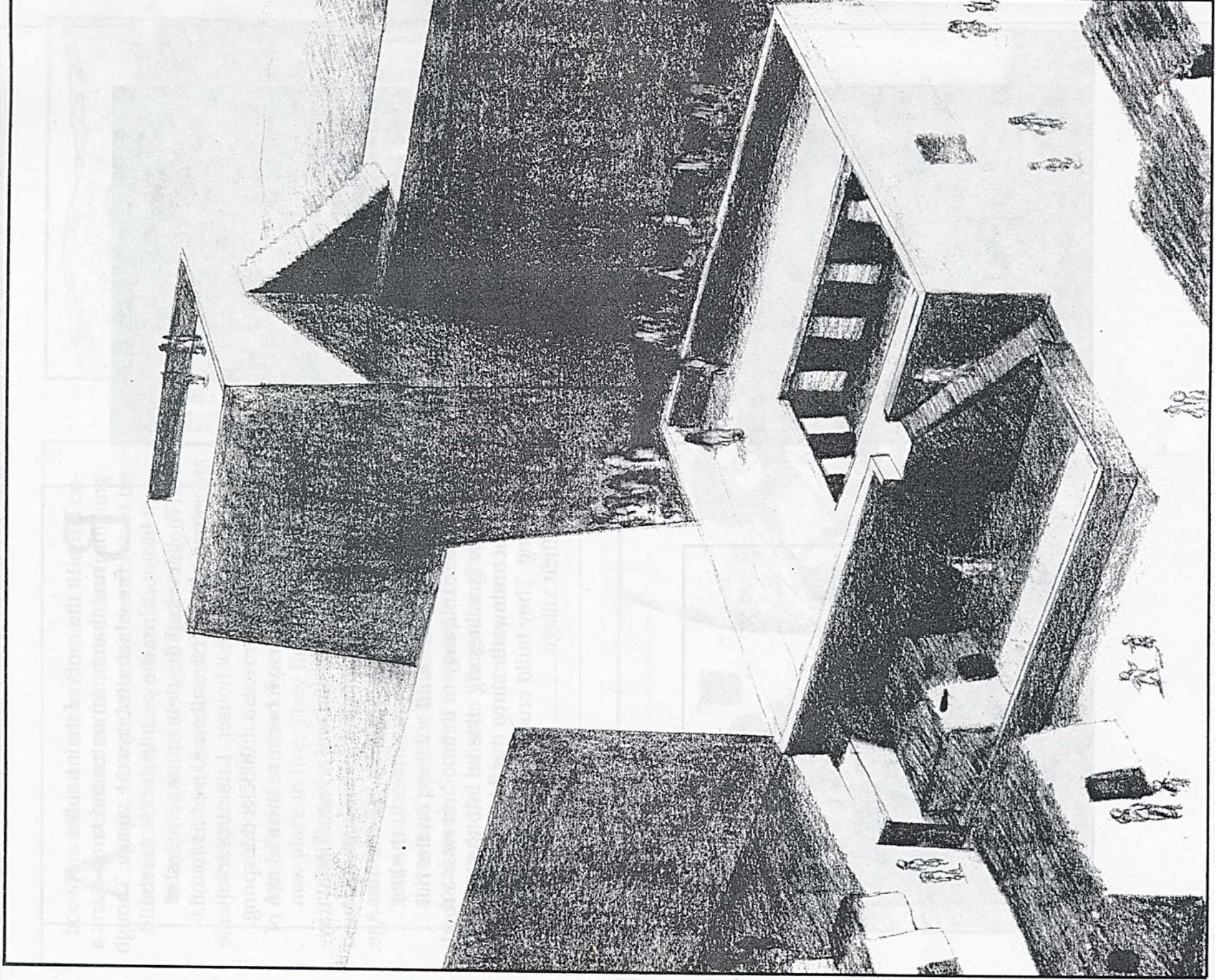
About 3000 B.C.E., in the Early Bronze Age I Period, a tribe of people is seeking a new place to live. They find a spring of water at the foot of a low hill. Water is scarce in their land; here is a source for them, their animals and their plants. They decide to settle on the hill and build houses for themselves and pens for their animals out of the local stone. Some of the people live in natural caves on the hillside. They raise grain and grind it into flour, which they store in large pottery jars.



But the roofs of their houses are wood and thatch. An untended lamp starts a fire which destroys the village. Though it lies in ruins, the people decide to rebuild. They level off the debris; the remains of some of the first walls are used as foundations for the new houses. Later an earthquake hits the village; worse, it blocks the spring. The survivors leave because their source of water is gone.

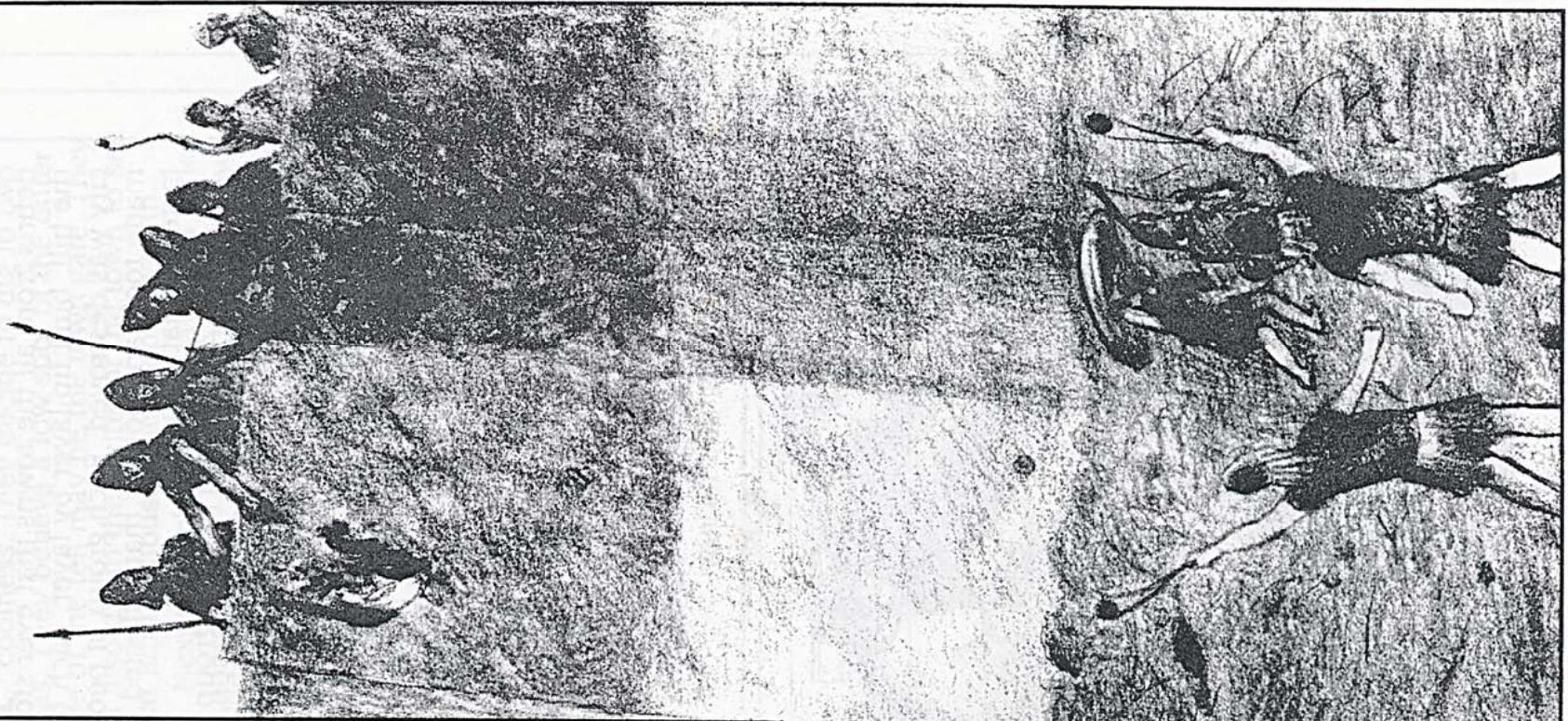
Centuries pass. Only an occasional traveler stops on the mound for the night. Around 1100 B.C.E., at the beginning of the Iron Age, a new group of people arrives at the site. They decide to build a village on the hill because it is easy to defend and near a road. These Israelites dig cisterns into the hill to collect rainwater since there is no longer any spring. They build crude houses and a wall for their village.





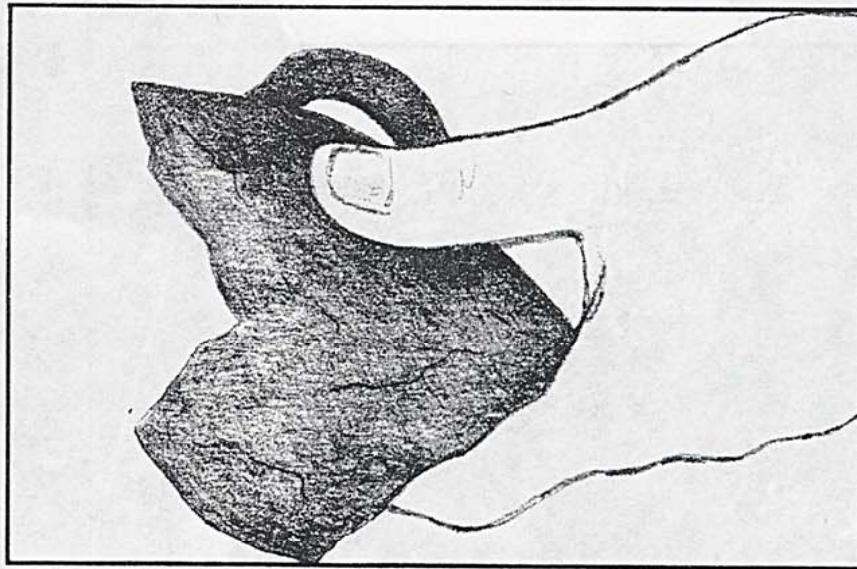
round 900 B.C.E. Asa, the king of Judah, is at war with the king of Israel. The little village is very near his border with Israel, so he decides to turn it into a royal fortress. The king summons all the people to build massive new walls; no one is exempt. The people of each village are assigned their own section of the wall to work on. They also build a handsome new house for the commander of the garrison. Around his more spacious dwelling the hovels of the people are crowded together. It is located near the city gate, the weakest point in the city walls.

The walls are strong, but in 587 B.C.E. King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon attacks the town with battering rams, spearmen and archers. The defenders fight back with slings and burning torches. Finally the Babylonians take the city and destroy it. The town's leaders and craftspeople are carried into exile. There is no one left to organize the people or rebuild the walls. Those left behind gradually leave their old town and move to other villages.



Time passes, winds and rain wear down the ruins and give the tell the appearance of a hill. Hidden within it are the debris from all the towns that ever stood on the hill, built up layer by layer, each time the city was destroyed. Each group of people made tools and pottery that reflected the tastes of that culture.

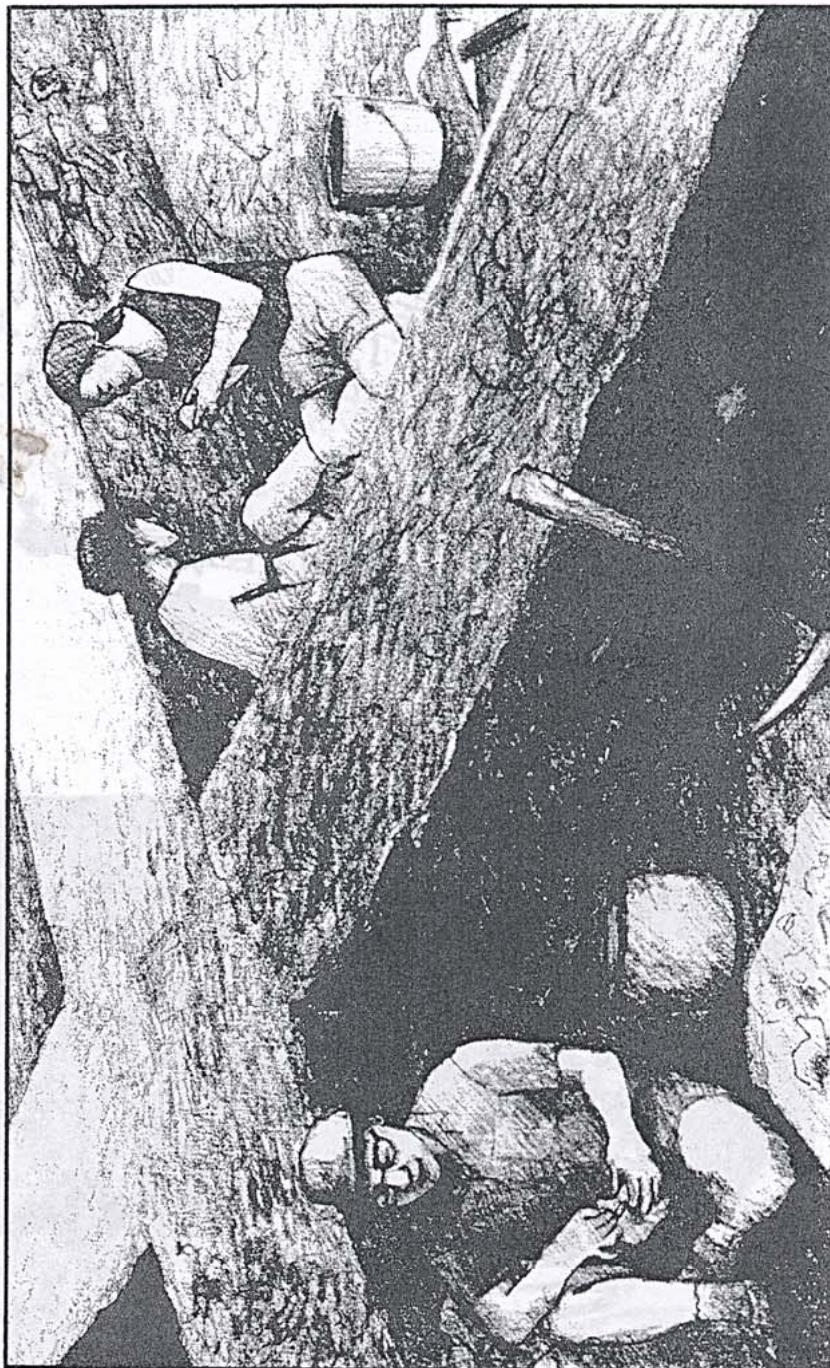
In the 20th century C.E. a group of archaeologists is interested in studying whether a town on the border of Judah is similar in plan to one in the center of the country. They examine a map and notice a tell very close to that border. Was it occupied during the time Judah was a kingdom? They visit the site and examine its surface. They find no buildings, but they do find pottery from the time of the Judean kingdom. They decide that his tell probably can provide the answer to their question. The director of the excavation makes arrangements for housing, drawing equipment, tools, cameras, computers, workers, and money.



Roman Period 63 B.C.E	
Hellenistic Period 330 B.C.E	
Persian Period 586 B.C.E	
Iron Age II 930 B.C.E	
Middle Bronze Age 1850 B.C.E	
Early Bronze Age 3100 B.C.E	

The archaeologists rise before dawn so they can work during the morning coolness. They decide to dig in two areas. They believe a low spot of the outer edge of the tell may be the town gate. They will also dig in the center of the town to see what kind of houses the people lived in.

Next the archaeologists lay out a series of squares on the ground. As they dig down they leave walls of dirt between the squares; these walls are called balks. In the balks they can see all the layers in the tell. A thick band of ash marks the town's last destruction. Remains of walls, ovens, pottery, and tools are discovered as the work goes on. The archaeologists record everything they find very carefully so that years later they, or anyone else, can look at their notes and understand what was found.



Atomb is uncovered nearby. The bones can tell the archaeologist the person's sex, age, health, and perhaps what that person died of. The kind and amount of material left in the tomb shows how important the person was.

Part of the town wall and the gate are uncovered, along with the commander's house and those of the people around him. The archaeologists prepare a map of the town. Now they can compare their discoveries with what archaeologists have discovered in other parts of the country.

The archaeologists dig for several years and publish temporary reports on their work at the end of each season. When the excavation is done they prepare a final report to explain what they found to others interested in their results. Finally, they put some of their finds into a museum so that everyone can see how people lived 3000 years ago.

