

# IRON AGE HOUSES IN SYRIA-PALESTINE

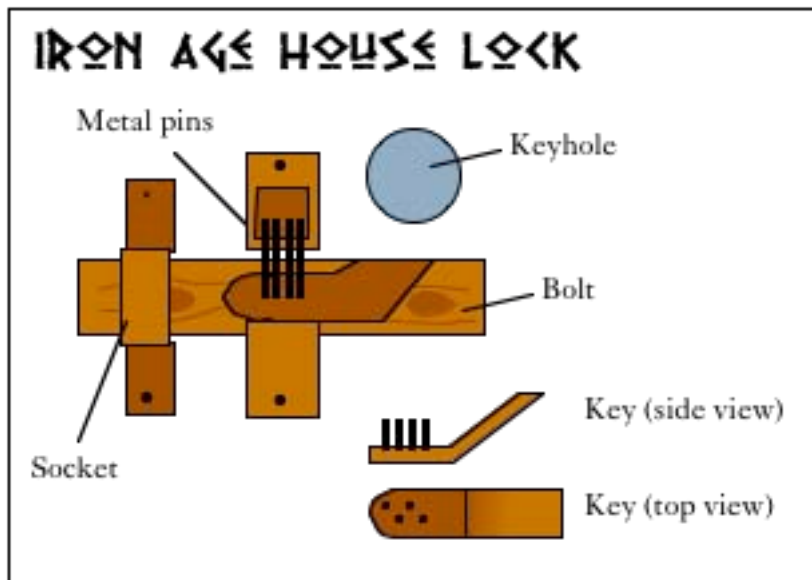
*Biblical world site plans for Testament campaigns, provided by [www.Codicil.info](http://www.Codicil.info)*

Domestic life is potentially much more important in *Testament* campaigns than in some other types of RPGs. PCs' and NPCs' homes may prove to be important adventure sites. The *Testament* rulebook mentions the typical Israelite "four-room" pillared house, but does not provide a diagram. This resource is designed to help *Testament* GMs and players get a better feel for domestic architecture in the Iron Age (1200–586 BCE).

## BUILDING MATERIALS AND PRACTICES

Most buildings in Iron Age Syria-Palestine were constructed from mud brick, stone, wood, and reeds (the latter as a bonding agent in mud brick). Houses were typically made from mud bricks or stone (preferred, when available) and covered with plaster. Monumental constructions, large public buildings, and the houses of aristocrats were constructed from dressed (precision-cut) stone, while commoners' houses and public buildings in less affluent settlements would use undressed (rough-hewn) stone. The most common building stones were limestone, sandstone, and basalt.

Wooden timbers were used as horizontal beams and sometimes as vertical pillars (though stone was often used for pillars) to support upper stories and roofs. Window frames, lintels, doors, and door jambs were also made of wood. The most commonly used lumber was tamarisk, acacia, cedar, juniper, terebinth, oak, and pine.



Iron Age houses were typically one- or two-story. The "typical Israelite pillared house" diagrammed on p. \_\_\_ reflects the most common layout. Houses had wooden doors that could be locked with bolts and unlocked with keys. Metal pegs dropped into slots cut into a wooden bolt. A large space was carved out of the bolt to accommodate a wooden key with pegs that could be used to push the metal pegs up out of the slot. The keys were 20–25 cm (about 9–10 inches) long and were inserted through a hole in the door (the bolt was on the inside of the door). See Judges 3:25; Isaiah

22:22; 1 Chronicles 9:27; Song of Songs 5:4–6 for biblical references to such locking systems.

## HOUSING CLUSTERS

A biblical-era household could easily consist of more than a single house. Married sons often built houses adjacent to their fathers' houses. An extended family dwelling might consist of several individual houses, often sharing walls in common (somewhat like modern-day apartments or duplexes). In unwalled villages, the extended family's property might very well be surrounded by a low stone wall creating a kind of courtyard. The courtyard would most likely have a wooden gate. In walled cities, the courtyards might be smaller or even nonexistent. Clusters of houses sharing common walls within walled cities are called *insulae* (singular, *insula*) and were more or less the Iron Age equivalents of "city blocks." Some villages might be arranged in rings, with the back walls of adjacent houses forming the outer city wall.

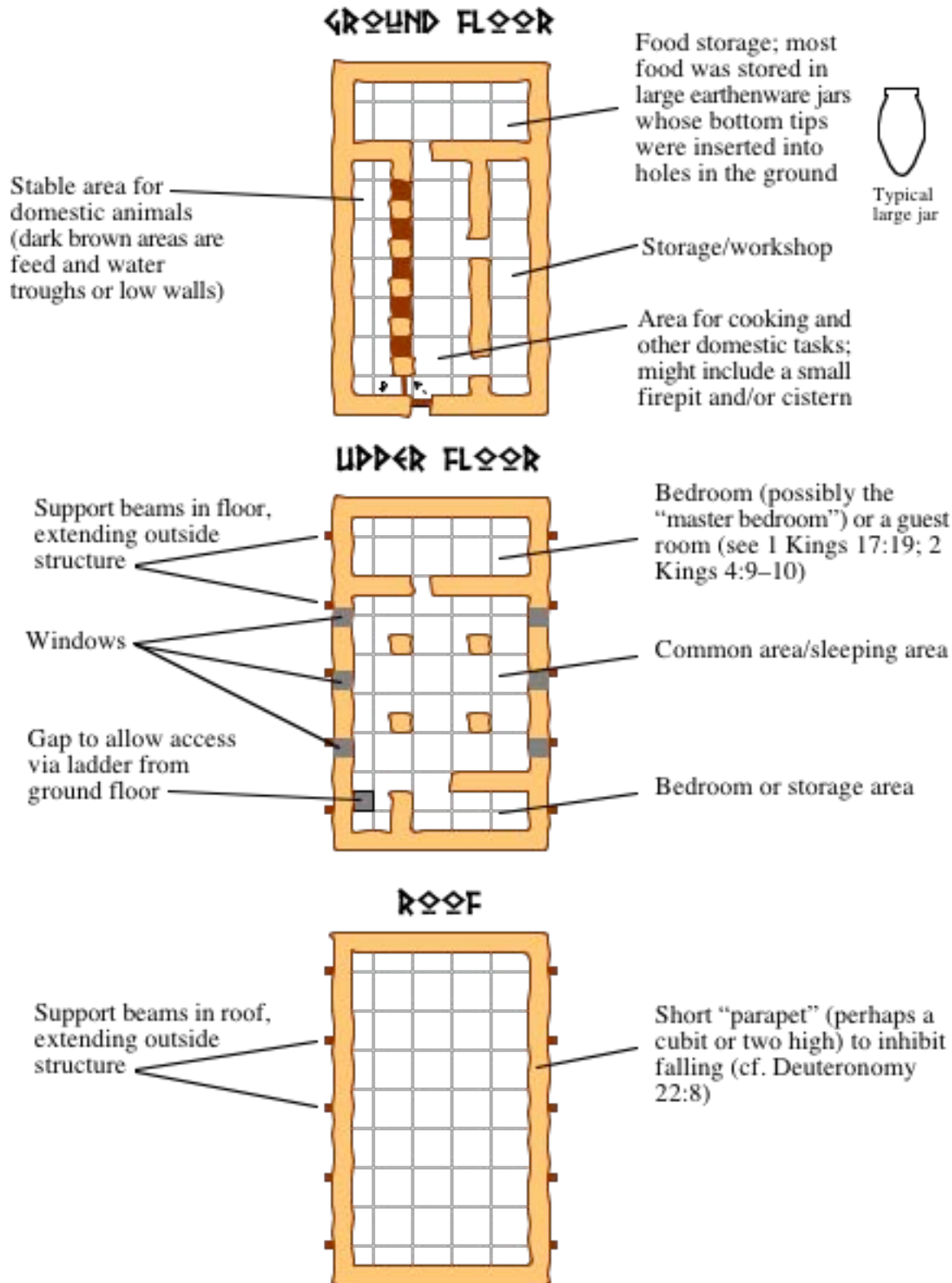
## HOUSE PLANS

Pages 3–4 of this document diagram floorplans for actual Iron Age houses excavated in Syria-Palestine. The typical Israelite pillared house shown on p. 3 is the most common floorplan discovered in Iron Age Israel. As the "default value" for Israelite housing, details of the usage of various rooms are given, along with a speculative reconstruction of the second floor.

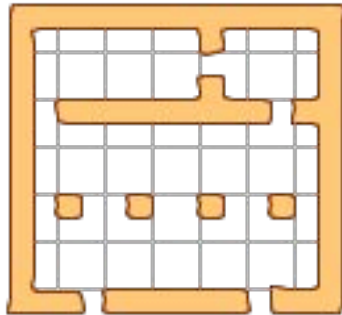
The floorplans on p. 4 are all ground-level plans just showing the mud-brick or stone walls. You will need to supply additional details, such as wooden elements (doors, pillars, joists) and the use of each room, when using these floorplans in scenarios.

In all floorplans, squares are 5 ft. x 5 ft.

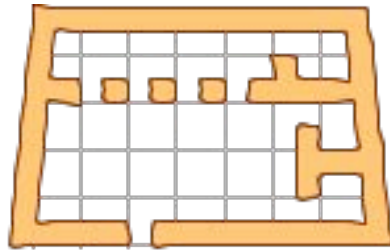
# TYPICAL ISRAELITE PILLARED HOUSE



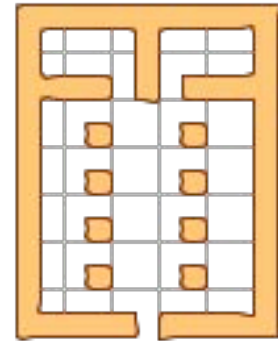
# OTHER IRON AGE HOUSE PLANS



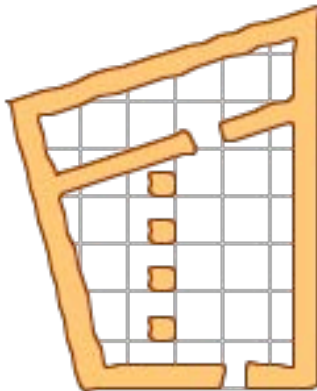
Iron I house  
Khirbet el-Mashah



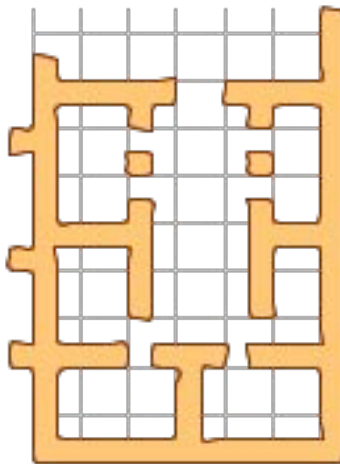
Iron I house  
Tel Isdar



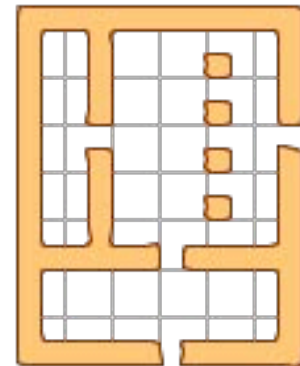
Iron II house  
Hazor



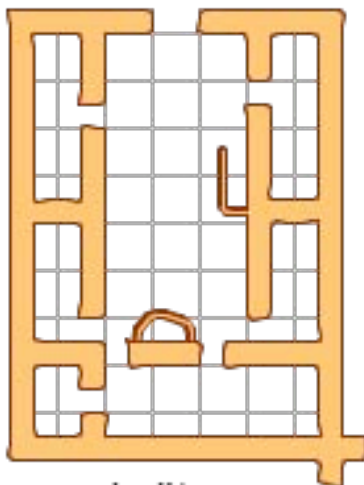
Iron I house  
Khirbet el-Mashah



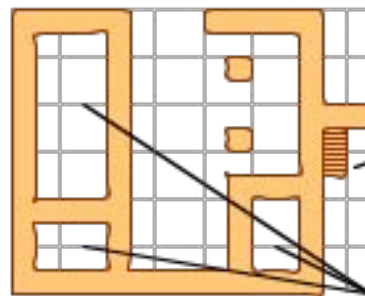
Iron II house  
Tel el-Farah



Iron I house  
Tel Qasile



Iron II house  
Tel el-Farah



Iron II house  
Tel Beit Mirsim

Stairs to second floor

These rooms had no obvious means of access from the first floor. They may have been accessible only through the second floor. The smaller ones might have been used like silos for grain storage.