

# Beit (Beth) Shean



## Description

This amazing site covers an area of about 400 acres and is very extensive.

### Historical Background

Settlement of Bet She'an first began around 5,000 B.C. in the heart of a fertile area where there was an abundance of water and located on a major crossroads.

During the late Canaanite period (16<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.) the city became the seat of Egyptian rule. The Israelite tribes did not succeed in conquering Canaanite Bet She'an. After the battle waged at Mount Gilboa, the Philistine lords of Bet She'an displayed the bodies of Saul and his sons on the city walls. The city was later taken by King David along with Megiddo and Ta'anach, becoming the administrative center of the region during Solomon's reign. The site was destroyed in 732 B.C. with the conquest of the northern part of the country by the Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pilesser III. During the Hellenistic period, the city known as Nysa-Scythopolis was founded on this spot.

At the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. the city fell to the Hasmoneans. Its Gentile residents were exiled, and the city's population became predominantly Jewish. The city was once again dominated by Gentiles following the Roman conquest of 63 B.C. As one of the ten cities of the Decapolis, it became the most important city in northern Israel; in fact, Scythopolis was the capital of the Decapolis and was the only one of the ten cities located on the western side of the Jordan River. Because it was located right in the heart of the major route from Galilee to Jerusalem, there is no doubt that Christ passed in and through this Roman city during His life.

and ministry. During the revolt against the Romans in 66 A.D., the city's Jewish residents were murdered by Gentiles. Under Roman rule, when the population consisted of pagans, Jews, and Samaritans, the city thrived and expanded, with magnificent public buildings going up, engraved with inscriptions and adorned with statues. In the Byzantine period, Bet She'an became largely "Christian," its population reaching 30,000-40,000. A wall was erected around the city, with churches and monasteries near it. Following the Arab conquest, the city steadily declined in prominence and its population diminished. In 749 A.D., a severe earthquake devastated the city (the results can still be seen today as you tour the ruins). Scythopolis was forgotten and the place became known as Beisan. A rural settlement was built at the site during the Abbassid period. During the Medieval period, the settlement was concentrated in the city's southern part, and during the Crusader period, a fortress was put up to the east of the destroyed amphitheater. Under Ottoman rule, Beisan remained a small settlement.

## Scripture

### Bible References in Context

- First mention is of the Israelites not conquering the city (Joshua 17:11-12)
- King Saul's body was displayed on the walls of Beit Shean after his defeat to the Philistines (I Samuel 31:8-13)
- King Solomon made Beit Shean a major administrative city (I Kings 4:7,12)
- The Assyrians captured the Galilee (732 BC), and destroyed Beit Shean (II Kings 15:29)

### **Joshua 17:11-12**

And Manasseh had in Issachar and in Asher Bethshean and her towns, and Ibleam and her towns, and the inhabitants of Dor and her towns, and the inhabitants of Endor and her towns, and the inhabitants of Taanach and her towns, and the inhabitants of Megiddo and her towns, even three countries. Yet the children of Manasseh could not drive out the inhabitants of those cities; but the Canaanites would dwell in that land.

### **I Samuel 31:8-13**

And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa. And they cut off his head, and stripped off his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols, and among the people. And they put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth: and they fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan. And when the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul; All the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Bethshan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

### **II Samuel 21:12-14**

(12) And David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the men of Jabesh-gilead, which had stolen them from **THE STREET OF BETHSHAN**, where the Philistines had hanged them, when the Philistines had slain Saul in Gilboa: (13) And he brought up from thence the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son; and they gathered the bones of them that were hanged. And the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son buried they in the country of Benjamin in Zelah, in the sepulchre of Kish his father: and they performed all that the king commanded. And after that God was intreated for the land.

### **II Samuel 21:12 (NIV)**

he went and took the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from the citizens of Jabesh Gilead. (They had stolen their bodies from the **PUBLIC SQUARE AT BETH SHAN**, where the Philistines had hung them after they struck Saul down on Gilboa.)

### **I Kings 4:7,12**

(7) And Solomon had twelve officers over all Israel, which provided victuals for the king and his household: each man his month in a year made provision. (12) Baana the son of Ahilud; to him pertained Taanach and Megiddo, and all Bethshean, which is by Zartanah beneath Jezreel, from Bethshean to Abelmeholah, even unto the place that is beyond Jokneam:

### **II Kings 15:29**

In the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglathpileser king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abelbethmaachah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria.

### **Matthew 4:25**

And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan.

### **Matthew 5:20**

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

## Points of Interest



### Palladius Street

This 150 meter long colonnaded street crossed the city from the slopes of the Tel to the theater. Originally built during the Roman period, the street was renovated at the beginning of the Byzantine period. On its northwest side is a covered portico which opens onto a row of shops whose façade was faced with marble. An inscription was found from the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. in the portico mosaic which recounts the construction of the portico in the days of Palladius, governor of the province. Thus the road came to be named Palladius Street by excavators.



This main street was decorated with statues. Seen below is a Corinthian capital of a pillar, bearing the head of the Greek god Dionysus (Dionysos, also commonly known by his Roman name Bacchus), the god of wine and the patron of the city. According to Greek mythology the city was founded by the wine God Dionysos who lived in the city. According to the legend, his nursemaid Nysa who breast-fed him was buried in the city, so it was named Nysa-Scythopolis or Nisa.

## Points of Interest



### Bathhouse

The bathhouse was built during the Roman period and renovated during the Byzantine period. A “caldarium” and “hypocaust” were uncovered on its eastern side. Excavators also discovered cold water pools. Apparently it functioned as a “frigidarium” or a cold water bath hall.



### Public Lavatories

Public lavatories were built next to the bathhouse for benefit of theater-goers and bathhouse users.

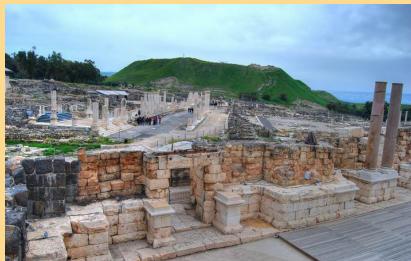
## Points of Interest



### Sigma

This is a semicircular concourse of the Byzantine period referred to as the Sigma in an inscription found at the site, surrounded by rooms opening onto it. Several of the rooms were paved with colored mosaics displaying geometric, plant and animal motifs as well as Greek inscriptions. One mosaic depicts Tyche, guardian goddess of the city, wearing a crown of city walls and holding a cornucopia. This area most likely was used for prostitution, typical of the wickedness of that era.

## Points of Interest



### Theatre

The theater was built in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. It seated approximately 7,000 people. The theater that is seen today is the result of renovations that took place in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. It continued to function throughout the Byzantine period. The theater had three tiers of seating, however, only the 1<sup>st</sup> tier is intact today. But above the first tier can be seen many passage ways which provided easy entrance and exit. The entire theater could be completely emptied within a few minutes. Seats were arranged in numbered rows. Rising behind the stage was an elaborate backdrop wall.



### Roman Temple

This was a semicircular temple that had been built in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. and was destroyed during the Byzantine period. Its façade had four columns which would have supported a gabled roof at a height of almost 50 feet. Two of the columns were found collapsed in the ruins left by the earthquake of 749 A.D.

## Points of Interest



### Tel Bet She'an

From the Roman Temple we ascend Tel Bet She'an. It can be a very hot hike up, but provides a spectacular view of the ruins below. There are around 20 settlement strata uncovered on the Tel, the most ancient of those dating to the Neolithic period in the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium B.C. and the most recent from medieval times. In the ruins they found the remains of a walled Canaanite city where they discovered five temples, one built on top of the other, public and residential buildings, a governor's house and monuments with inscriptions from the period of Egyptian rule. A citadel as well as residential and administrative buildings erected by the kings of Israel were destroyed in the Assyrian conquest. The Tel was resettled during the Hellenistic period. A temple of Zeus, some of whose column drums and Corinthian capitals can be seen, was built in the Roman period. During the Byzantine period a round church was constructed on the summit, and the Medieval period of the Tel was surrounded by a wall. From atop the Tel we can look out over the city and the surrounding area and see how it would have a tremendous advantage when enemies were approaching.

