

Tel-Jezreel/ Nabothen's Vineyard



Description

Yizreel (Jezreel) was a major Biblical city, and at the 9th C BC it was the northern capital of the Israel Kingdom. The Bible tells about many events associated with the city: the King's palace in the city; the battle of the Gilboa when King Saul was killed; the Nabothen vineyard and the plot of Jezebel to possess it; the fate of Jezebel and her son.

Excavations in the 90s found some of the Israelite structures, as well as other periods, but they were not yet fully published. The ancient city is located on a hill on the western edge of the Gilboa mountain. It is adjacent to the major ancient road from the Galilee to Jerusalem - via Ganim (Jenin). The city was a gateway to the road and hence its importance.

The Tell is located east to the modern Kibbutz by the same name - Yizreel - on the road from the Yizreel valley to the west (Ta'anach/Megiddo/Afula). A parking lot is located on the south side of the Tell, and can be accessed from a service road that starts at the entrance to the Kibbutz. On the south-east side of the Tell are picnic tables and walking trails. One of the trails leads down to the Yizreel spring, which is also reachable by car from a road closer to the junction of Afula / Beth-Shean.

The Tell is roughly a rectangle 170M (north-south) x 350M (east-west).

Etymology

Yizreel (Jezreel) - from Hebrew; Izra-El, God (=El) will plant seed (=Izra).

Zar'in - the name of the ruined Arab village in Yizreel, which preserved the ancient name.

Ahab - In Hebrew: Ach is brother and Av is father. The name means: "my father (God) is my brother". Ahab was one of the great Kings of Israel.

Jezebel - the daughter of the king of Sidon, and Ahab's wife. In Hebrew: I'zevel. The source of the name is Phoenician, meaning "I-" is brother or father, and "Zevel" is leader. In Hebrew "Zevel" is also garbage, filth - and there may have been a reason for using this form, since the Bible treats her as a wicked queen.

History

Biblical times

According to the excavations, the city was inhabited in the Canaanite/Late Bronze period (starting from the 15th C BC) and Israelite/Iron period. The city belonged to the region of the tribe of Issachar. Its important location on the entrance to the north-south trade route - made the city a gate keeper, just like Megiddo and Yokneam which are located west to here on the other routes to the south.

The archaeological findings from the Iron age include a large enclosure surrounded by a moat, gate with six chambers and large towers. They date to the 10th and 9th C BC, the same time the Biblical events happened.

The city was the center of a great battle: The Philistines, based in the southern Sharon area, planned to expand their territory to the Galilee. King Saul tried to block this move and prepared the Israelite armies near the city. He camped in the Yizreel spring on the foothills of the city.

The Philistines, assisted by Saul's arch enemy (later King) David, set their camp in Shunem (at the foothills of Hamoreh hill, across the valley).

(1 Samuel 29:1): "Now the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek: and the Israelites pitched by a fountain which is in Jezreel" .

The battle was fought in the valley and the Israelites fled to mount Gilboa, where King Saul died together with his 3 sons in this battle. The victorious Philistines held Yizreel and the cities of the valley of Yizreel.

Yizreel became a regional capital city during Saul's son, and reached to a higher status after the split of the Kingdoms. It was the northern capital of the Kingdom of Israel, while their other capital city was Samaria (1 Kings 21:1): "in Jezreel... by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria". The city was protected by high walls and its topographic location gave it a natural defense. The Israeli Kings held a palace here, and it may have been their winter dwelling.

Assyrians

The Assyrians captured the Galilee (732 BC), and destroyed the city. As per the Bible (2 Kings 15:29): "In the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglathpileser king of Assyria, and took ... Galilee... and carried them captive to Assyria".

Hellenistic/Roman/Byzantine

The city returned to its glory at the Hellenistic period, and was part of the Hasmonaim Kingdom.

In Jesus times this was probably the route he took several times, from Galilee to Jerusalem and back via Samaria.

The city prospered during the Roman/Byzantine periods, and was called Izrella or Stradella.

Scripture

Bible References in Context

- Center of Battle between Saul and Philistines
- regional capital city during Saul's son, and reached to a higher status after the split of the Kingdoms
- Center of the story of Naboth's Vineyard
- The Assyrians captured the Galilee (732 BC), and destroyed the city. (2 Kings 15:29)

Joshua 19: 17,18

This text describes the region of the Tribe of Issachar:

“And the fourth lot came out to Issachar, for the children of Issachar according to their families. And their border was toward Jezreel, and Chesulloth, and Shunem,”

1 Samuel 29:1

This is a description of the preparation of the Israelites, headed by King Saul, on the eve of the fatal battle with the Philistines and their ally, the future King David. The Israelites pitched their camp near the spring of Jezreel, north to the foothills of the city. Their tactic was to gain the higher grounds due to their inferior weapons, and set their armies on the hills. The battle was fought in the plains and on mount Gilboa on the next day. King Saul died fighting this battle together with his 3 sons.

“Now the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek: and the Israelites pitched by a fountain which is in Jezreel”.

2 Samuel 2:9

After Saul's death, his son made the city a regional capitol.

“And made him king over Gilead, and over the Ashurites, and over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and over all Israel. Ishbosheth Saul's son was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David”.

1 Kings 18: 45-46

This is the text on Elijah the prophet and the slaughter of the Baal prophets. King Ahab contested the prophet against his false prophets, and Elijah -with the help of the true God - prevailed. At the end of the contest Ahab returns back to the city, which became the winter capital of the Kings of Israel.

“And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel. And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel”.

1 Kings 21: 1; 1 Kings 22: 35-38;

The texts tells the story of the vineyard of Naboth, and how Ahab and Jezebel wanted to buy or exchange it, but Naboth refused.

“And it came to pass after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria”.

The wicked queen forged a libel about Naboth, who was then stoned to death, and Ahab possessed the vineyard. This angered God, and Elijah the prophet delivered God's punishment on this cruel plot:

“And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine”.

Points of Interest



Spring



Walls



Wine Press



Ski Resort

Points of Interest



The Palace of the Canaanite Kings of Hazor

The ceremonial palace that served the kings of Hazor during the 14th and 13th centuries B.C. are now protected by a roof. This area was definitely destroyed by a huge fire. This is where we find evidence of burning.

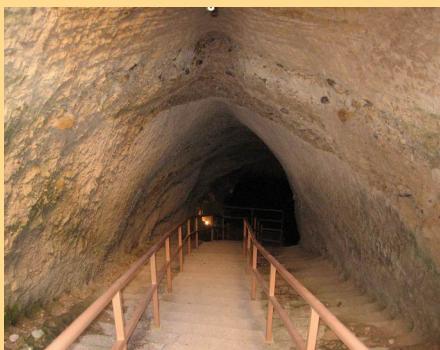
Points of Interest



Hebrew Water System

A huge system to supply fresh water is located in the south west side of the upper city. This system was built in the 9th C BC, during the time of King Ahab. It was designed after similar inner-city water systems, such as in Tell Megiddo, Gezer, Lachish, and possibly the «conduit» («gutter») the King David captured in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:8).

The builders dug into the ground, going through earlier Iron age levels, and supporting the dig with large walls. They dug down 46M deep in a square vertical shaft - until reaching bedrock.



Points of Interest



Citadel

In the western side of the upper city are the ruins of an Israeliite Citadel from the 9th C BC, destroyed in 734-732BC by the Assyrians. A monumental gate protected the citadel.

It was built over several layers of previous periods: A 11th C BC high-place is seen on the foreground. On the right are the remains of the double wall «casemate» type from Solomon's city, the western section of the gate and walls seen above.

The following is a view of the western side of the upper city. Notice the height difference of 40M above the ground, making the city a defendable site. The highway bypasses the Tell from the south, while a new highway is constructed to bypass on the west side. In the background is Mount Canaan, and the sea of Galilee is hidden beyond the left horizon.



Points of Interest



Northern Wall

The excavations of the North walls, overlooking the lower city, reveal a mix of 3 periods. Solomon's wall (10th C) is seen on the left side, and was the north-east corner of the fortifications. The later period structures (9th C) are located at the center and right side, and beneath it is a Canaanite period staircase (14-13C) that connected the lower and upper cities. A paved area contains a podium.