

~BETH-SHEAN (195)

(Beth-she'an)[Beth-shan]

- Initially, a major fortified city of the Canaanites, located at a strategic point commanding the entrance to the Valley of Jezreel from the Jordan Valley. The name is continued in that of **Beisan**, **Bet She'an**, while the ancient site is located nearby at **Tell el-Husn**, **Tel Bet She'an**.
- The land in the area of **Beth-shean** is about 120 meters (390 feet) below sea level, and to the East it drops off sharply to a point some 275 meters (900 feet) below sea level by the banks of the Jordan River, about 5 kilometers (3 miles) away.
- Built on a large mound on the rim of this declivity, **Beth-shean** was in an excellent position militarily. To the West of **Beth-shean** the flat valley plain, through which the river **Jalud**, **Nahal Harod**, courses, is well watered and fertile and steadily rises until it reaches Jezreel some 17 kilometers (11 miles) to the East-Southeast.
- Beth-shean** was also a junction town on the favored route leading from the Mediterranean Coast through to the Jordan Valley and on to Damascus and Arabia.
- Archaeological excavations at **Beth-shean** have revealed numerous strata or levels of ancient ruins, the earliest evidently dating back before the time of Abraham. Toward the middle of the **Second Millennium B.C.E**, **Beth-shean** appears to have come under Egyptian domination as a result of Thutmose III's victory at Megiddo.
- Archaeological evidence indicates that it was an Egyptian outpost throughout the reigns of several Pharaohs.
- At the time of the Israelite conquest of Canaan circa **1473 1467 B.C.E**, **Beth-shean** was located within the territory allotted to Issachar but was assigned to the tribe of Manasseh for a possession.
- And there came to belong to Manasseh in Issachar and in Asher **Beth-shean** and its dependent towns and Ibleam and its dependent towns and the inhabitants of Dor and its dependent towns and the inhabitants of En-dor and its dependent towns and the inhabitants of Taanach and its dependent towns and the

inhabitants of Megiddo and its dependent towns, three of the heights. (**Joshua 17:11**)

- And by the side of the sons of Manasseh **Beth-shean** and its dependent towns, Taanach and its dependent towns, Megiddo and its dependent towns, Dor and its dependent towns. In these the sons of Joseph the son of Israel dwelt. (**1 Chronicles 7:29**)
- The men of Manasseh failed to drive out the Canaanites in **Beth-shean** and other towns of the valley, presenting as their reason the military advantage exercised by the Canaanites with their war chariots equipped with iron scythes, which reason, however, did not satisfy their commander Joshua. The Canaanites, though not dispossessed, nevertheless were eventually subjugated to the point of rendering forced labor.
- And the sons of Manasseh did not prove able to take possession of these cities, but the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in this land. (**Joshua 17:12**)
- And it turned out that when the sons of Israel had grown strong, they went putting the Canaanites at forced labor, and they did not dispossess them entirely. (**Joshua 17:13**)
- Then the sons of Joseph said; The mountainous region is not enough for us, and there are war chariots with iron scythes among all the Canaanites dwelling in the land of the low plain, both those who are in **Beth-shean** and its dependent towns and those who are in the low plain of Jezreel. (**Joshua 17:16**)
- So Joshua said this to the house of Joseph, to Ephraim and Manasseh; A numerous people you are, and great power is yours. You ought not to get one lot. (**Joshua 17:17**)
- But the mountainous region should become yours. Because it is a forest, you must cut it down, and it must become the termination point for you. For you should drive away the Canaanites, although they have war chariots with iron scythes and they are strong. (**Joshua 17:18**)
- And Manasseh did not take possession of **Beth-shean** and its dependent towns and Taanach and its dependent towns and the inhabitants of Dor and its dependent towns and the inhabitants of Ibleam and its dependent towns and the inhabitants of

Megiddo and its dependent towns, but the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in this land. (**Judges 1:27**)

- And it came about that Israel grew strong and proceeded to set the Canaanites to forced labor, and they did not drive them out completely. (**Judges 1:28**)
- **Beth-shean** was in the possession of the Philistines at the time of the reign of King Saul, and following Saul's defeat at adjacent Mount Gilboa the Philistine victors placed Saul's armor in the house of the Ashtoreth images and his head on the house of Dagon, and hung the dead bodies of Saul and his sons on the wall of **Beth-shan**, or **Beth-shean**, evidently on the interior side facing the city's public square.
- Courageous and daring Israelites of Jabesh-gilead, about 20 kilometers (12 miles) away on the other side of the Jordan, retrieved the bodies, perhaps penetrating the city at night in order to do so.
- And it came about the next day that, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, they got to find Saul and his three sons fallen upon Mount Gilboa. (**1 Samuel 31:8**)
- And they proceeded to cut off his head and strip off his armor and send into the land of the Philistines all around to inform the houses of their idols and the people. (**1 Samuel 31:9**)
- Finally they put his armor in the house of the Ashtoreth images, and his corpse they fastened on the wall of Beth-shan. (**1 Samuel 31:10**)
- And as regards him, the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead got to hear what the Philistines had done to Saul. (**1 Samuel 31:11**)
- Immediately all the valiant men rose up and went all night long and took the corpse of Saul and the corpses of his sons off the wall of Beth-shan and came to Jabesh and burned them there. (**1 Samuel 31:12**)
- Then they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, and they went fasting for seven days. (**1 Samuel 31:13**)
- So David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the landowners of Jabesh-gilead, who had

- stolen them from the public square of **Beth-shan**, where the Philistines had hanged them on the day that the Philistines struck down Saul on Gilboa. (**2 Samuel 21:12**)
- And it came about the next day that, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, they got to find Saul and his sons fallen upon Mount Gilboa. (**1 Chronicles 10:8**)
 - And they proceeded to strip him and take off his head and his armor and send into the land of the Philistines all around to inform their idols and the people. (**1 Chronicles 10:9**)
 - Finally they put his armor in the house of their god, and his skull they fastened to the house of Dagon. (**1 Chronicles 10:10**)
 - And all those of Jabesh in Gilead got to hear of all that the Philistines had done to Saul. (**1 Chronicles 10:11**)
 - So all the valiant men rose up and carried off the corpse of Saul and the corpses of his sons and brought them to Jabesh and buried their bones under the big tree in Jabesh, and they went fasting for seven days. (**1 Chronicles 10:12**)
 - In harmony with the above account, in the excavations at Tell el-Husn the ruins of two temples were uncovered, one of which is considered to be the temple of Ashtoreth, while the other, farther to the South, is suggested by some to be the temple of Dagon. The temple of Ashtoreth is estimated to have continued in use until about the **Tenth Century B.C.E.** Evidence indicates an earlier worship of a Baal god referred to in one stele as Mekal the master **Baal** of **Beth-shan**.
 - The city was eventually conquered by the Israelites, doubtless during the time of David's reign, and during the reign of Solomon, **Beth-shean** was included in one of the 12 royal supply districts.
 - Baana the son of Ahilud, in Taanach and Megiddo and all **Beth-shean**, which is beside Zarethan below Jezreel, from **Beth-shean** to Abel-meholah to the region of Jokmeam. (**1 Kings 4:12**)
 - Following the division of the kingdom, Pharaoh Shishak, called Sheshonk by the Egyptians, invaded Palestine during King Rehoboam's fifth year **993 B.C.E.**

- **And it came about in the fifth year of King Rehoboam that Shishak the king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem. (1 Kings 14:25)**
- **A relief on a wall at Karnak in Egypt depicts Shishak's victorious campaign and conquest of numerous towns, including Beth-shean.**
- **By the time of the Maccabees the name of Beth-shean had been changed to Scythopolis, and it is referred to by Jewish historian Josephus as one of the largest cities of the Decapolis. It was the only one of these ten cities lying West of the Jordan.**