

Keilany Santos

BIB336: Parables

Week 2: Museum of the Bible Lectures

February 3, 2023

Steve Notley Lecture on “Finding the lost city of the Apostles”:

In this lecture, I learned about the historical journey of finding the lost city of the apostles and the archaeological evidence that suggests its existence. For the past 150 years, archaeologists have been rediscovering lost cities of the Bible, such as Megiddo, Ekron, Capernaum, and Chorazin. In the mid-19th century, Edward Robinson identified Et-Tell as the site of the New Testament city of Bethsaida, while Gottlieb Schumacher suggested El-Araj as the location. Both sites were examined, but it was determined that Et-Tell was too far from the Sea of Galilee to be a fishing village. Archaeological evidence is needed to indicate a large urban center. In 2014, the Bethsaida Excavation Project began at the site of El-Araj. The site had the potential to match locations described in the historical sources, and a shovel survey was conducted to look for evidence.

In 2016, the team found glass tesserae gilded in gold, which indicated an ornate church. In 2019, part of the church's aisle was uncovered, and it was identified as the church visited by Wilibad, Bishop of Einstatt, Bavaria. In 2020, archaeologists uncovered mosaics from the Church of the Apostles, potentially built on Peter and Andrew's house, as Eusebius mentioned. Finally, in 2021, the team uncovered further evidence of a monumental church at El-Araj, including the eastern part of the Basilica, which matched the description of the Piacenza Pilgrim. This, alongside other archaeological and historical evidence, has led to the conclusion that El-Araj is the site of the lost city of Bethsaida.

Dr. Mordechai Aviam Lecture on Finding Bethsaida from a Biblical Jewish village to the church of the Apostles :

Dr. Mordechai Aviam is a professor of Archaeology at the Kinneret College in Israel, who has devoted his career to researching and lecturing on the Biblical Jewish village of Bethsaida. He has conducted extensive research into the village's history, which is thought to have been located near the Sea of Galilee known as El'Araj. Dr. Aviam has uncovered evidence suggesting that the village was transformed into a Roman city called Julius in 30/31 CE. He has also found a coin minted by Herod, the "Founder," which is thought to have been issued for this transformation. This coin was found at Et'Tell and is dated 30/31 CE. In addition to coins and other artifacts, Dr. Aviam's research has uncovered architectural fragments from the El-Araj site, including a heart-shaped pillar made of limestone, a typical two-engine synagogue, and a marble chancel screen. He has also discovered a sugar industry facility from the 12th century and a Byzantine church, identified by a medallion with the word "apostles."

Dr. Aviam's research has also revealed a Roman layer beneath the Byzantine church floor, containing pottery, coins, glass, marble, and mosaic. He discovered two coins from the 1st century CE, a silver Denarius of Nero from 63 CE and Galba, Agrippa II, and Diocletian coins. He has also found a decorated lead fishing weight and an electromagnetic survey suggested the presence of structures in the area. Finally, Dr. Aviam conducted a geological survey that revealed no lagoon in the area in the 1st century CE, suggesting that people were living in the area. He has also uncovered a lioness sculpture made of basalt, which he believes may have come from a nearby Byzantine synagogue. Dr. Aviam is continuing his research at El'Araj and plans to uncover more evidence to identify the houses of the 1st century and hopefully even get into the 1st-century bath house. He hopes his research will help unlock the mystery of Bethsaida and allow us to understand the village's history better.