

Elizabeth Dixon
Professor Notley
Land of the Bible
24 April 2023

Beth Shan

Rabbi Simeon Ben Lachish once said, “If paradise is situated in the land of Israel, its entrance is Beth Shan.” Beth Shan, which is also known as “Beit Sh’ean, or “Bet Sh’ean” is an ancient city located in the northern part of modern day Israel. Located near the Jordan River Valley, it’s nestled in the very fertile Bet Sh’ean Valley. Being located in a flat fertile plain, the valley is known for its agricultural productivity which has been inhabited and cultivated for many thousands of years. The Jordan River also runs near Beth-shan. Beth-shan is also surrounded by several mountain ranges. Towards the west is Mt. Gilboa, which is known biblically as the location of the battle between the Philistines and Israel, where King Saul and his sons were killed. That story can be found in 1 Samuel: 31 of the Old Testament in the Bible.

Towards the east of Beth Shan lie the mountains of the Gilead region. Beth Shan also had rich and abundant sources of water, which included the Nahal Harod, as well as the various other springs that come from the mountains. Having such good, and plentiful water sources, provided the region of Beth-shan with a good support in agricultural activities, and helped grow the settlements of people in this region for decades to come. Also being near the Mediterranean coast, Beth-shan was a hub for trading, which was a source of cultural and economic exchange.

As mentioned earlier, the battle between the Philistines and Israel, in the first book of Samuel in the Old Testament was just one of the many stories that were taken in the region of Beth-shan. Throughout Beth-shans history, there seems to have been a rise and fall of various civilizations throughout the years. In the late Canaanite period (1600-1400BC) the Egyptians ruled this area. Then, later on, around 1000BC, the Philistines took over. King David also reigned in this region after he had conquered Beth-shan around (1010-970BC). In 732BC, Tiglath-Pileser III, the Assyrian King destroyed Beth-Shan after the defeat of Israels northern kingdom. During the Hellenistic time period, new settlers developed a city-state in the regions of Beth-shan. According to an article by Tom M.Fink, the city was named “Nisa Scythopolis”. Fink, also mentioned how since Nazareth was near to Beth-Shan, it was likely that as a young man, Jesus worked here as a carpenter with His father. In 749AD Beth Shan was destroyed by an enormous earthquake.

The major event in the bible that involves Beth Shan has to do with the life of King Saul. According to an article done by Michael Patella, “Beth-shan, a Biblical city in the Decapolis”, Patella brings up the fact that the biblical site of Beth shan was only mentioned six times in the Old Testament. It is best known as the place where King Saul and his sons were hung by the Philistines.(1Samuel 31:1-12) Beth-Shan is also mentioned in the 2Samuel 21:12, in the context of the burial of the bones of Saul and his sons. In the New Testament, in Mark5:20, Beth Shan is mentioned as the Scythopolis, a city of the Decapolis region, where Jesus performed healing miracles.

In the text by Robert North, “Beth Shan and Megiddo”, North shares how “The most distinctive feature of the Beth-Shan discoveries was that they yielded no evidence whatsoever for

the time period from 1000 to 300BC.” This was during the time period of the well known event of the hanging of Saul. It would have been interesting to find artifacts and excavations from this time period in Beth Shan, but none were to be found. Although nothing was found from this time period, there have been pieces of broken pottery found in Beth Shan which could be dated back to 4000BC. There has also been found artwork, such as that of a lion and dogs from this area. Dogs were seen as both an unclean and sacred animal at the same time to the people in this time period. Excavations have uncovered ancient temples, palaces, fortifications, mosaics, and other artifacts, that all provide valuable insights into the city's history and daily life during different time periods.

In summary, Beth Shan, also known as Beit She'an or Bet She'an, is an ancient city in Israel with a long history of human settlement, beautiful and abundant fertile land, notable archaeological remains, and biblical significance. It is a site of historical and cultural importance, offering valuable insights into the ancient civilizations that once occupied this region.

Works Cited

Patella Michael: Jan.1 2008 Seers Corner (*Beth Shan, A Biblical City in Decapolis*)

North Robert (1950) *Beth Shan and Megiddo*