

## Tel Beth-Shemesh Report, 2010

Number 1

My departure from Little Rock was delayed 1.5 hours because of storms in Atlanta where I was to change planes headed for Tel Aviv. Fortunately, there was enough of a cushion of time between my scheduled arrival and the departure—I arrived just as they began boarding the plane. Frank Wheeler of York College and I were on the same plane and I wondered if his plane had arrived on time; it had and we arrived in Tel Aviv together. One surprising and happy development on my flight (approximately 12 hours) was that in the three seat row on which I was, there were only two of us—almost as good as business class!

We spent the first couple of nights in Jerusalem since we could not get into the kibbutz ahead of time. We arrived on Thursday evening and on Friday, we headed out for some of our travels.

The first site we visited was one that has been excavated only the last two summers. Frank, Garry Hill, and I had located the site last summer with binoculars from the top of Azekah to the west of the site. We could not determine how to get to the site and it was blistering hot that day, so we postponed our visit. This year was the year to visit.

The discovery has created quite a stir in the archaeological and biblical studies communities. It is a site known as Tel Qeiyafa on the northern hill ridge skirting the Elah Valley. The remains date from the late 11<sup>th</sup> and early 10<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. The major features that have been uncovered are two large gate ways, which serve as part of the fortifications for the site. While the site is not large, the lurking questions are: “why is this site here and why is it built with such impressive fortifications?” The archaeologist (Dr. Yosef Garfinkel of Hebrew University) has connected the site’s construction with king David of the Bible—the time is right for that, but there are no inscriptions at the site to identify with what people it should be associated (e.g., the Israelites, the Philistines, the Canaanites, etc.), and it is this lack of specific material that creates the debate. Part of the disturbance among the scholars is the tendency to interpret the finds directly from the Bible rather than letting the finds point on to the Bible for insight.



One real surprise with our visit at the site was the arrival of Ray Vanderlan of the *That You May Believe* video series that is so popular in a lot of conservative Bible groups. I met him and invited him to visit Beth-shemesh, which he indicated he would do on Sunday (and he did). He asked me to give the group a brief explanation of some of our finds at Beth-shemesh.

Saturday, I was anxiously waiting for the Harding University

Greece group to arrive from Eilat after their tour of Egypt. Our first stop and initial rendezvous was at the biblical site of Lachish—the site of one of the great battles of the Bible in 701 BC between Hezekiah of Judah, and Sennacherib of Assyria. Sennacherib so destroyed the town that he commemorated it in his palace back in Nineveh (the reliefs are in the British Museum).

After a brief visit at Lachish we stopped at the brook of Elah which was where David collected his sling stones in his battle with Goliath. We do not know exactly where the battle line engaged but we were certainly in the vicinity of that confrontation. Even though they were tired from their long journey up from Eilat, they were excited to connect with something so directly biblical.

After a late dinner, we settled into our kibbutz arrangements for the night and where the HUG group would be living for the week. All of the students and faculty of the HUG program came and were working in the excavation at Beth-Shemesh. I was thrilled to have them here and they did an outstanding job—especially since none of them had ever excavated before. The Israeli directors were quite pleased with their performances. The Israeli assistant commented that the problem he had with our group was that they all worked—there was no one to laugh at or complain about to serve as an object of frustration!!!



In our excavation, we began to remove a part of the site where we had never dug before. The strip of soil is adjacent on the south and north to areas that had been excavated a long time ago. A major reason to remove this area was to get to levels 8 and 9 (from the topsoil which preserved material from level 3), but we soon began to identify remains of level 3 and then of level 4 and these remains (especially those of level 4) have added greatly to our data for those levels—much more than

we had anticipated. One of the squares has preserved a very nice paved area which looks like it surrounded a pillared house of classic Israelite design. Sadly not enough of the area is preserved to know for sure. We are digging along the northern slope and much of the remains from the ancient Israelite and Canaanite towns have eroded away downslope.



One day, Mohammed, our site guard and shepherd who lives in his tent at the foot of the site with one of his wives came to serve us bedouin tea. —a refreshing break in the day!

The HUG group left yesterday and a new crew arrives today and tomorrow. Most of them will be with us through the remainder of the season—three more weeks. I'll fill you in with additional discussion later.

Shalom from Israel.

Dale