

Tel Beth-Shemesh Report, 2012

Number 2

Dale W. Manor, Field Director

The first weekend was shorter than usual. We usually begin on Sunday and work through Thursday with Friday and Saturday off, but the Canadian crew could not arrive until Monday, so we extended the work week one day to include Friday, which left us with only Saturday off. We were all tired and relished the opportunity to sleep in on Saturday. We usually rise at 4:15 a.m. and leave for the tel about 5:00 a.m.—most of you can see why the weekends are so nice. We try to reduce the energy level on the weekend as well as a significant change of venue. Jerusalem is one of our favorite places to visit and last weekend was no exception.

The first weekend we were in Jerusalem, we trekked through the old Canaanite water channel system and the recently discovered drainage system that Josephus noted in his records. This week we visited Jerusalem again (there is always something to see in Jerusalem—and we enjoy it so much!!!).

In 1988 when I was a fellow at the Albright Institute, I traveled extensively, visiting many places that were usually off limits to the majority of people. Since then I had wanted to return to some of them, but they were always closed. One of those sites was the gate way beneath Damascus Gate. This lower gate was exposed a number of years ago and it revealed the easternmost pedestrian gate associated with the gate that Hadrian built in Jerusalem in ca. 135 AD (picture is of Hadrian's pedestrian gate [lower] and the Damascus Gate [upper]). It is built in turn over the earlier gate associated with Herod Agrippa (ca. 41-44 AD), although we did not see evidence of that gate. Hadrian's rebuilt Jerusalem was in part a contemptuous move on his part to expel the Jews from the city and disassociate them from the town by building a temple to Jupiter over the site of the ruins of the Herodian Temple as well as constructing a shrine to Aphrodite on the site of what is now occupied by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. In so doing, he somewhat inadvertently preserved the identity of the locations of those sites. (The second picture shows some of the second century AD pavement from Hadrian's Jerusalem).



Another site we visited was to the so-called Zedekiah's Grotto. This consists of a huge cavernous cave penetrating from beneath the northern wall of the Old City in a roughly southeasterly direction beneath the Old City for some 200 meters (ca. 220 yards). When I visited this in 1988 we examined it with flashlights, but now it is well-lit with walking paths. The cave was in reality a huge quarry for stone and evidence of the quarrying can still be seen. It is likely that some of the stone associated with the Solomonic Temple was quarried here and almost certain that some of the stone of the Herodian Temple came from here. The Masons revere the

cave and have an annual meeting in what is called the “Great Hall” (see picture). The association with Zedekiah, the last king of Judah is because of a myth that his escape from the city toward the Jordan Valley (cf. 2 Kgs 25:4-5; Jer 52:7-8) was via this cave, but it does not provide any such access. There is even a section in the cave where water trickles into the cavern and this has been dubbed “Zedekiah’s tears,” but it probably no more than sewer drainage from the Old City above! The association was perpetuated by an Arab geographer in 985 AD. It is likely, however, that Josephus is referring to this cavern when he notes the “Royal Caverns” in his *Jewish Wars* (5.147).



A really peculiar site we caught on the way back to the car was a sign advertising “Hookah Roasted Chicken!” We wondered how many hookah smokes one would have to smoke to roast a chicken! (a hookah is the traditional Arab water pipe).

Our week’s excavation worked extensively to continue the cleanup and get ready for substantial progress. Week two is often consumed with such activity, but usually there is a square or two that gets through the routine fairly quickly and can penetrate into new levels. Last year we ended with an exceptional building which was yielding some elaborate painted vessels and we were excited to continue this investigation. Almost immediately, we began to find more of the painted vessels (the example shows the nose of a stylized ibex facing to the left and flanking a “tree”). These concentrated around a large flat stone which we thought at first might be a base for a column. The soil around a “matching” large flat stone began to yield high extremely high concentrations of bones. We have tentatively concluded that these flat stones may be offering tables of some kind (see photo on next page—the far large stone is where the bones were with the ceramics concentrated around the middle large stone). The term “temple” has been tossed around to describe this building which is of substantial construction and relatively large. With further work to the east, we have identified yet a third stone in the series which appears also to have been some kind of offering table or platform (the nearest large stone in line with the others, but which is still partially buried).



Determining the date of this building has been difficult in that the ceramics continue a Late Bronze Age look (ca. 1200 BC). Our ceramicist (Shlomo Bunimovitz of Tel Aviv University and who is one of the directors of the project) says that the ceramics style can go into the early Iron Age (which is usually considered to



have begun ca. 1200 BC). Regretfully, we will be unable to pursue investigation of this building this year since we need to divert our attentions to penetrate specifically into the Late Bronze Age structure (ca. 1300 BC) that we began to uncover several years ago. Next week will report on the movement to those levels, but we will be continuing our descent through Iron Age I in the process and will not be reaching the Late Bronze Age levels this year.

