

## Tel Beth-Shemesh Report, 2012

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Our weekend trips continued to be educational and exciting. Frank and I made a trip to the northern Israel one day, visiting a place called “Peace Island” on the way. This is a place along the Jordan River where occasionally Israeli and Jordanian citizens will cross the border and visit each other with minimal political interference. It is at the junction of the Jordan and Yarmuk Rivers. The area was overrun in 1948 by the Jordanians and the power plant was destroyed. In 1994, the area became a symbol of efforts by Jordan and Israel to cooperate and was transformed into a place to represent peace.”

The main goal of the day was to visit the excavations at Hazor, hoping to arrive there before the excavation for the week ended. We did not make it in time, but the visit to the site was rewarding, nonetheless. The photo shows part of the destruction of a Late Bronze Age temple/palace. The ragged looking bricks beneath the better looking bricks reflect an intense destruction that burned the mudbrick into hard stone-like consistency (the upper bricks are reconstructed parts of the wall). The date of the destruction is placed in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and many have suggested that the destruction occurred at the hands of the Israelites. The Bible notes that the Israelites destroyed and burned Hazor (Josh 11:10-13) which had been a powerful and influential town in the vicinity. The destroyed building was indeed palatial indicating a powerful entity. While there is no explicit evidence that the destruction occurred at the hands of the Israelites, the connection remains tantalizing.



The next photo is of the water system which was part of the renovation of the town during the reign of Ahab. The system consists of a shaft about 40 meters deep to the water table. The shaft is generally rectangular with steps descending around the perimeter eventually leading to a stepped shaft to the water. Ahab’s work would have been in the early to mid 9<sup>th</sup> century. The system is a bit later than the monumental water system constructed at Beth-shemesh.



Further north from Hazor, we climbed the mountain range to the west of the Huleh Valley which yields a magnificent view of the valley across to the Golan Heights. It is easy to see why people would have migrated to the region. The area is quite lush with greenery—even in the summer—compared with the relatively barren scenes further south. Our goal, however, was to

visit the site of Kedesh. Kedesh was one of the Cities of Refuge (cf. Josh 20:7). It was later captured during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III ca. 733/732 BC (cf. 2 Kgs 15:29). Our visit to the site, however, noted mainly the remains of a 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD classical temple thought to be dedicated to Baal-shamin—“Holy God of the Sky.” The temple is thought to have been destroyed by an earthquake in 363 AD. The photo shows the remnants of the eastern face of the temple with the hill of Kedesh in the background. Jerome Murphy-O’Connor notes that the temple is the best preserved pagan temple in the land of Israel, but it is not very well preserved and much restoration work could be done to clarify it.



Another site we visited again was Qeiyafa, a site on the ridge above the Elah Valley. The Elah Valley is where the Israelites and Philistines faced off in the encounter when David killed Goliath. It is clear that the tensions between the Israelites and Philistines were high—a reality that we have seen depicted in the archaeological remains of Beth-shemesh as well. The site of Qeiyafa has attracted a lot of attention because 1) of its limited range of occupation in two periods—the 11<sup>th</sup> century BC and the Hellenistic period permitting a relatively easy chronological



identification; 2) the connections that the site appears to have with the emergence of ancient Israel; 3) the fact that the site has yielded an inscription which is among the earliest for ancient Israel (although there is some debate about the language involved—I have read a report that a second inscription was found this year, which should prove tantalizing and controversial); and 4) a number of religiously oriented artifacts that may shed some light on Israelite practices. The Bible notes that the Philistines mustered their troops between Socoh and Azekah (1 Sam 17:1). The photo shows a view through the well-built gate of Qeiyafa toward Azekah—the hill in the distance through the gate. The date of the material at Qeiyafa is almost exactly contemporary with our Level 4 material at Beth-shemesh—also a time of conflict with the Philistines.

The Bible notes that David went down from Bethlehem to the battle area to check on the welfare of his brothers (1 Sam 17:17-18). The descent from Bethlehem went through a narrow valley and led to the battlefield near Socoh. The Romans later improved the road by leveling part of the road into the bedrock. The photo shows part of that road. This is likely part of the route that the Ethiopian followed as he sojourned from Jerusalem to Gaza when Philip met him and helped him understand that Jesus was the subject of the prophecy in Isaiah 53 (Acts 8:26-35).



During the last weekend, we visited the site of the Temple in Jerusalem. Our travel and work schedule often make it difficult to visit the Temple area since our work does not coordinate well with the awkward times that the site is open to non-Muslims, but we made it this year. The golden domed building stands over the site of the Israelite temple and is the third most-holy site for the Islamic people (after Mecca and Medina). This was probably the site of the “sacrifice of Isaac” (Gen 22:2), the scene of David’s sacrifice after his illegitimate census of the Israelites (cf. 2 Sam 24:18-25 with 2 Chr 3:1) and where Solomon built the temple. It was therefore the scene of the temple episodes in the New Testament associated with Jesus. When the temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD, they eventually built a temple to Jupiter on the site of the Israelite temple. That then was eventually destroyed and replaced by the current building which was originally built in 691 AD (it has been refurbished a number of times in the interim to now). The building is technically not a mosque, but a shrine commemorating Mohammed’s “night journey” to heaven.



A few years ago part of the ramp leading to the entrance to the platform began to erode away in the midst of a particularly heavy rainy/snowy season. The Israelis therefore shut the entrance to build a safer entrance. This move created all kinds of political turmoil, but one of the benefits has been the opportunity to excavate the ruins that otherwise were hidden. This has also permitted people to see a little more clearly the lintel of one of the entrance gates into the Herodian Temple area. It is now blocked up, but is known as Barclay’s Gate after the American missionary who identified its connection with the New Testament period temple. In 1851, James Turner Barclay was sent by the American Missionary Society as the first missionary to Israel; he was a part of the early Restoration Movement of which the Churches of Christ are a segment.



Our last major trip was north to Akko which was an ancient port for the central Levantine coast and particularly for northern Palestine. It is on the northern edge of the inlet/bay opposite modern Haifa. It is referred to in ancient Egyptian literature and was attributed to the tribe of Asher (Jdg 1:31), but the Asherites were unable to expel them. It eventually



came into Israelite custody, but generally remained culturally aligned with Phoenicia. In the New Testament, it appears under the name of Ptolemais and was one of Paul's stops in his journeys (Acts 21:7). The photograph is a courtyard area associated with the Ottoman occupation. During the Ottoman period, the city was known as Acre and came under siege by Napoleon Bonaparte who failed to capture the city.

At the end of the day, we traveled to Caesarea Maritima to visit the aquaducts and be there for sunset. The aquaduct was built by Herod the Great to provide fresh water for his newly designed and constructed city of Caesarea which plays such important roles in the New Testament history. The covered aqueduct dates from the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century AD and brought water from an artificial lake about 3 miles north of Caesarea. The final photo of sunset at Caesarea, while not representing the final trip of the season, serves as suitable end to this survey.



Thank you for your patience and continued interest in our project.

As always, we could use any and all financial assistance should you be able to help.

