

2016 TEL BETH-SHEMESH, ISRAEL EXCAVATIONS - Report #4 (and other events)

by Dale W. Manor
Field Director of the Excavations
and Professor of Bible at Harding University

[This report combines the travel before (July 1-2) the final week of excavation as well as the post-excavation travel (July 7-11); it also reports on developments during the final week of our work (e.g., July 3-7)].

Gezer is one of our neighbor sites that undergoes excavation every other year. It is the flagship excavation that was the focus of my major professor's work in the 1960s/70s,¹ and served to train essentially a generation of American archaeologists. The site is mentioned in ancient Egyptian sources of Thutmose III who listed captives from the site (ca. 1450 BC); later Merneptah (ca. 1207 BC) refers to a military campaign against Gezer. The site stands as sentinel over the intersection of the north-south coastal trade route with the east-west interior road of the Aijalon Valley leading to Jerusalem and Jericho. Gezer appears in the Bible several times and was among those that resisted Israel's conquest (Jdg 1:29). The Bible indicates that Israel finally accommodated Gezer when *Pharaoh* conquered it and gave it to Solomon as a wedding gift (1 Kgs 9:16). The text indicates that Solomon gave particular attention to fortifying the cities of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer (1 Kgs 9:15).



One of Gezer's notable features is the so-called "high place," consisting of a series of standing stones (photo left). These date from the Middle Bronze Age and likely were a setting where neighboring cities gathered from time to time to commit to an alliance (although, admittedly, this function is not much more than a guess). The nature of the finds are impressive, implying some special emphasis of meaning and energy to construct.

We visited a site associated with David and Goliath as well. Khirbet Qeiyafa is a fairly newly excavated site that the excavator

¹ William G. Dever, professor of Archaeology at the University of Arizona, was the lead excavator at Gezer from 1966-1971; it came then under the direction of other excavators. The current project is directed by Professor Steven Ortiz of Southwestern Baptist Seminary (one of Dever's students and a classmate of mine at Arizona) and Samuel Wolff of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

has dated it to the reign of David and postulates that it served as a defensive outpost against the threats of the Philistines from further west. The site has been identified with Shaaraim (1 Sam 17:52) mentioned in the narrative of the battle between David and Goliath. The word *shaarayim* can be translated to mean “two gates” and the excavation at the site indeed has two gates—one facing toward Azekah and the other toward Socoh (the photo



right is taken through the southern gate toward Socoh, which is the brown hill immediately over the left pier). Another theory postulates that the “two gates” refer not to the architectural structure of the town, but to the fact that the site guards the passage to two of the valley arteries leading into the interior Judaeen hills in which case the fact that the site has two gates is more coincidental than the basis of the name. The brook of Elah runs along the foot of the hill on which Qeiyafa rests and the site certainly rests in the vicinity of major events of the biblical narrative.



A site of a different character was Beit Guvrin, a sprawling site at the base of the Old Testament site of the home of the prophet Micah—Moresheth-gath (cf. Micah 1:1, 14; photo above). It has a fantastic view from which you can see the Mediterranean in the distant west and

the central hills of Judah to the east). Moreseth was excavated in 1900, which yielded extensive evidence of Hellenistic occupation. The bulk of the remains that may be seen are Hellenistic, but they are impressive. An unusual find are dovecotes carved into subterranean chambers (see photo right). These were to raise pigeons for food and/or ritual and to use their waste as fertilizer. The cave preserves about two thousand niches in which the birds nested.



Our visit to Lachish proved less than ideal since the gate area was blocked and the excavation area was covered with tarps (we usually excavate under tarps, lowering them when we vacate the site overnight and on weekends). Restoration work was being conducted in the gate area, hence the blockage. We were redirected around the tel to access it from the back side. The tarps covered the work and we respected that coverage, but we saw a segment of the fortification wall that the renewed work has uncovered on the north side of the

tel (photo above left). To think of a 2.5-3 meter thick wall surmounting the top of the tel with its steep slope impresses you with the determination not only of attackers to capture their prey, but also of the resolve of the defenders to try to curtail those attacks. The wall probably dates from 586 BC and the Babylonian attack. The Bible alludes to Babylonia's devastation of when Jeremiah prophesies in Jerusalem "when the army of the king of Babylon [i.e., Nebuchadnezzar] was fighting against Jerusalem and against all the cities of Judah that were left, Lachish and Azekah, for these were the only fortified cities of Judah that remained" (Jer 34:7).

Corroborating this biblical report was the discovery of an ostracum at Lachish itself when someone wrote expressing concern of its well-being: "...we are watching the (fire) signals of Lachish according to the code which my lord gave us, for we cannot see Azeqah" (e.g., Azekah;

see Pardee, *COS* 3.42C [80]). Apparently the writer was at a third site from which he had been able to see the signals from both Lachish and Azekah, but the signals from Azekah had ended with its capture.



Our final trip after the excavation ended was to the Galilee. We stopped at the site of Jezreel, where Ahab sought to secure Naboth's vineyard (1 Kgs 21:1-24) and where eventually Jezebel met her "downfall" (pardon the pun; cf. 2 Kgs 9:30-37). Just down the hill is the spring of Harod where Gideon gathered his troops to thin their number (Jdg 7:1) as he prepared to confront the Midianites in the Valley of Jezreel (photo left; the

water emerges from the cave in the background and flows in the foreground into the valley). The other photo shows Philip Thompson "drinking" water as if he were part of the test to thin the troops—it is not clear if Thompson would have passed muster!



The narrative of Gideon entailed the site of Mt. Tabor (the dark mound in the photo below), which had been the scene of the deaths of some of Gideon's brothers (Jdg 8:18-19). Tabor had also been part of the narrative of the battle of Deborah and Barak against the



Canaanites (Jdg 4:14). Tradition has often argued that Mt. Tabor was the scene of Jesus' transfiguration (Matt 17); the evidence for this identification dates back to Eusebius in ca. 340 AD. On the basis of the sequence of the narratives of Jesus' travels in

Matthew 17 (=Mk 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36), the last identifiable location in the narrative of each account is Caesarea Philippi where Peter's confession occurred. Many believe that somewhere on Mt. Hermon is more likely where the Transfiguration occurred.



The typically defined northern extremity of Israel's territory is Dan (i.e., "from Dan to Beersheba"). A major site on the way to Dan is the biblical site of Hazor. Pictured (left) are the remains of the Iron Age gate at Hazor which probably was one that Solomon sponsored in his fortification of the country as indicated in 1 Kings 9:15 (see above).² The Bible earlier indicated the might of Hazor as "formerly...the head of all those kingdoms" (Josh 11:10). With the demise of Hazor as the head of the

northern coalition, the Israelites began to be able to settle in their land. The Joshua account notes that Israel destroyed Hazor with fire (Josh 11:11, 13). The excavation at Hazor in the palace/temple area uncovered a burned destruction layer over a meter deep; the fire was so intense that the basalt wainscoting of the structure cracked from the heat of the inferno (see photo right). Archaeologically, the character of the remains changed with the destruction of the Late Bronze Age site, probably reflecting the change in occupation from Canaanite to Israelite.



Further north from Hazor is the site of Dan. Dan reflects a similar change in occupation character from Canaanite to a more egalitarian nature.³ The Bible does not indicate to what tribe the site of Dan originally was assigned. It was earlier known as Leshem (Josh 19:47) and Laish (Jdg 18:29), and became Dan after some of the Danites migrated there when they were unable to

² In fairness to the scholarship, a significant number of scholars deny the gates's construction to Solomon, but instead argue that they were constructed in the time of Ahab (cf. D. Ussishkin, "Megiddo," in *ABD* 4: 676-77).

³ I am not necessarily equating "pots with people," but observations and explanations of change in ethnic identity and/or ideological subscription are *usually* the best explanations of such changes.



accommodate their tribal area (cf. Jdg 18). One particularly impressive feature of Dan is the bountiful water supply. Numerous springs erupt from the soil to become the major component of the Jordan River. Verdant vegetation surrounds you. It is small wonder that the people living there were “lacking nothing that is in the earth” (Jdg 18:7). The photo shows the four of us (l-r: Frank Wheeler of York College; D. Manor; Karl McLarty of Searcy AR; and Philip Thompson of Harding) just a meter from the major source of the Jordan (behind us).

With the demise of the United Monarchy, Jeroboam son of Nebat transformed Dan into a national shrine where he put one of the two golden calves that served as spiritual stumbling blocks to Israel’s relationship with the Lord (cf. 1 Kgs 12:28). The photo (right) shows the platform that served as the focal point of the high place at Dan (depicted from a period a bit later than Jeroboam, probably that of Jeroboam son of Joash in the mid-8th century BC). The space-frame altar outline is based upon the footprint of the altar’s location as well as the size of one of the “horns” that was discovered during the excavations. As a town, the site ended with the Assyrian conquest, probably by Tiglath-pileser III in 732 BC (cf. 2 Kgs 15:29), but continued to be a focal point of worship through the Hellenistic and into the Roman periods and even into the reign of Constantine II.



An earlier reference to Dan appears in connection with Abraham (Gen 14). When Lot was captured along with others from the Dead Sea region and taken captive by the Mesopotamian kings, Abraham along with his allies, pursued them to Damascus, but Dan is a reference point in that flight. Depending on the date of Abraham, it is possible that he may have seen the mud brick city gate that the archaeologists uncovered (photo left). We do not know why the gate was buried—it is





assumed that there were some structural faults that could not be adequately rectified, necessitating abandoning the use of the gate. It is still tantalizing to think that Abraham may have been aware of this gate.

On Sunday, we made it a point to worship with the folks at the Nazareth Church of Christ. Maurice Jadon is the preacher (see left). The work is hard with opposition from Islamic, Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic sources, but they persist. It was a joy to visit with them and to share the Lord's

communion with them. I have a recording of us all singing the same songs—they in Arabic and we in English. May God grant them encouragement and success. We were particularly impressed with a young lady who is a caregiver in Haifa who spends two hours each way riding and changing busses to worship with them—surely this is an encouragement and should be a sobering note to those of us who occasionally become lazy about our commitment.

After worship we headed to Sepphoris—a site about five (5) miles from Nazareth. I have heard it suggested that Jesus, as a carpenter, may have worked at Sepphoris. Sepphoris had been a Jewish town and capital of the Galilee, but with occasional rebellions against Rome. Herod the Great subjugated the town and it served him until his death at which point the inhabitants rebelled against Rome again only to find themselves defeated by the Romans again. When Herod the Great died, his son Antipas took over the rule of the Galilee and maintained Sepphoris



as the capital. By the time of the first major Jewish rebellion (i.e, 70 AD), the Jews of Sepphoris made a treaty with the Romans and escaped destruction. From that point on, there seems to have been better relations between the Romans and Jews of Sepphoris, although not without occasional tensions. Most of the town reflects the strong Roman influence that characterized Herod and the subsequent rulers. In later Jewish history, the Sanhedrin found refuge here after the destruction of Jerusalem and before moving to Tiberias. In addition, Sepphoris was the town in which Rabbi Judah Hanasi lived and redacted the Mishnah in ca. 200 AD.

Sepphoris is laid out in typical Roman fashion with well built streets (see the wagon/chariot ruts in the stone street in the photo above). Water, however, had to be channeled in over a

long distance. One tunnel carrying the water was some 235 meters long with a decline of only half a meter! That amounts to decline of about two-tenths of a millimeter per meter! It was thrilling to go through part of the tunnel system, which had no lights whatsoever except an occasional shaft of light from above (photo right inside the tunnel).

Most of the highlighted features of Sepphoris reflect the town after about 200 AD. Among them is a so-

called “Dionysus House” which preserves scenes from the story of Dionysus, the

god of wine. Most notable is a mosaic, often dubbed “the Mona Lisa of Zippori,” which is exquisite indeed (photo left). The larger mosaic floor in which this depiction rested consists of over 1.5 million pieces of stone (known as tesserae) in twenty-three (23) colors—talk about a jig-saw puzzle!!!

Our last stop was Caesarea Maritima which was a town that Herod the Great basically built from scratch! He wanted it to be the premier port of the eastern

Mediterranean (which he accomplished), even to rival those of Rome and Alexandria. This was also the setting of one of his palaces (in which Paul was resident for some two-plus years [cf. Acts 23:23; 24:27]). The photo (right) shows part of the Herodian palace with mosaic floors and the swimming pool. The palace was in two parts—the lower, nearer the sea was his personal quarters and the upper was the public and administrative palace with an “audience hall” which some have suggested is where Paul had his hearing before Agrippa (cf. Acts 25:23).



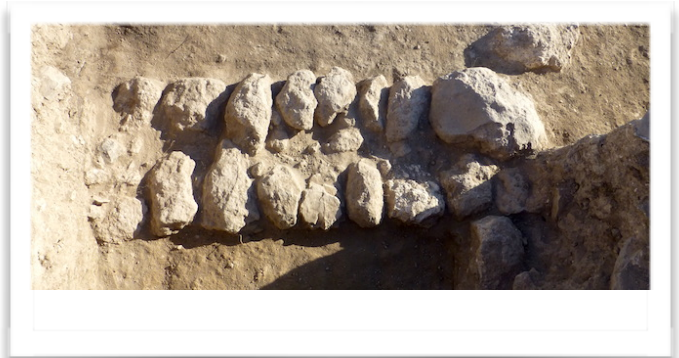
This new town, of course, needed an adequate and constant supply of water. To provide such, Herod's planners engineered an aqueduct system that brought water from ca. 7 km northeast of the town. The aqueduct supplied water at the rate of 300 cubic meters of water per hour, which is considered adequate to supply water to a town of ca. 50,000 inhabitants. Almost every visit to Caesarea must involve this aqueduct—not only is it impressive, but it is FREE.



The last week of the excavation ended with mixed results. One of the goals of the season had been to reach the floor of the Late Bronze Age palace that we had exposed in 2008, but we did not fully accomplish that. We “tasted” the goal with the discovery of the gold jewelry the previous week and the discovery of a mystery feature the last week. Sadly, I am not at liberty to divulge the nature of the find, but its potential implication remains tantalizing and inspires us for next year.

Several positive things have occurred, however: 1) we have refined our work with the olive press and are planning an article on it; 2) the work with the stone pavement in the stable/storage building will require some focus to try to determine the usage of the structure and maybe we can contribute some positive insights to the larger discussion (photo right, showing the cobbles and the pillared stone partition wall to the right); 3) we discovered what may be the southern “closing” wall of the Iron Age temple that we uncovered a few years ago (the photo on the left [next page] shows the wall in the lower foreground as it was uncovered decades ago; the one on the right [next page] shows the top of the wall as it was exposed this





season). We suspected the wall that had been exposed decades ago might be that wall, but we were very encouraged when it continued into the adjacent square and we discovered the top of the preserved wall the last couple of days of digging.



We received two additional blessings: the Dean of the College of Bible and Ministry from Harding and his wife came by to visit. Monte and Beth Cox are great people and it was an honor to have them take time out of their schedule to come spend about an hour at the site. I could not resist having our president, Dr. Bruce McLarty, join us, but I insisted that he wear a hat. Philip Thompson teaches at Harding and Karl McLarty (far right) is Dr. McLarty's brother, a preacher in Searcy and an adjunct teacher at Harding as well.

Lastly, it was a real treat to have the blessing of Zvi Lederman over the site. He and Shlomo Bunimovitz are great colleagues with whom to work and I look forward to additional years in league with them on this important project.



The excavation for 2016 is complete except the processing and writing. The excavators have left and resumed their regular routines. I have responsibilities to write up the results of the dig—usually to the tune of ca. 70 single-space pages, so I have a huge project yet ahead of me. Regardless, please accept my sincerest thanks for your interest in our work and the support that you provide in whatever form that might be.

To adapt a common phrase from Israel—“Next year in Beth-Shemesh!”

Dale W. Manor
Box 12280
Harding University
Searcy, AR 72149
dmanor@harding.edu