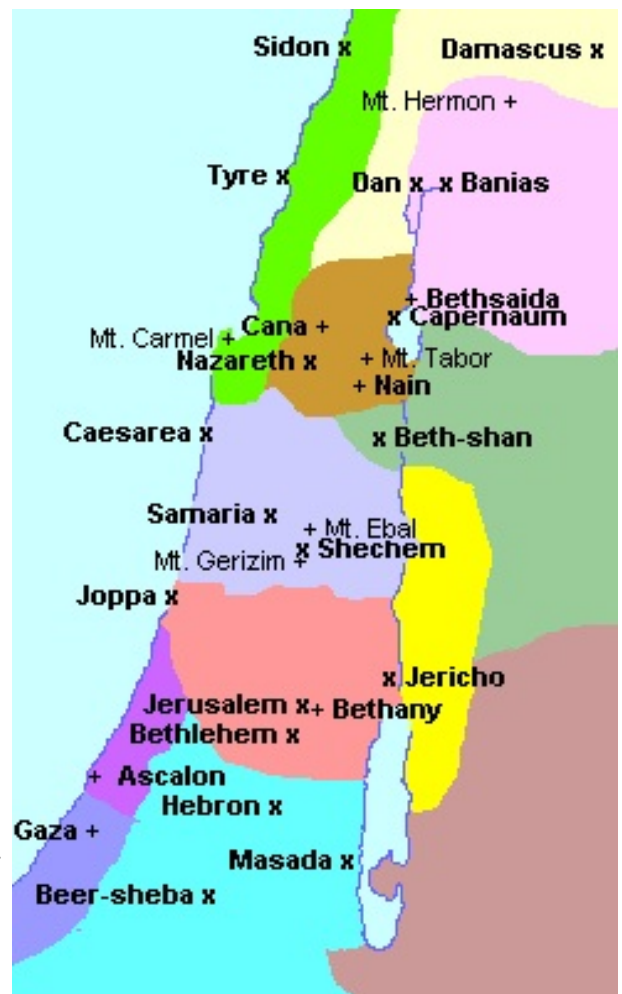


# The Doctrine of Beth-Shan

Topics	
Hebrew	Location
Old Testament References	Ancient secular history and excavations
A Summary of the Doctrine of Beth-Shan	
Charts, Maps and Doctrines	
Map of Israel Showing Beth-shan	Photos of Excavation of Beth-shan

**Preface:** Beth-Shan is a key city where the valleys of Jezreel and Jordan intersect. That the Philistines take this city at the end of 1Sam. 31 cuts Israel in half.

1. The Hebrew: Bêyth Sh<sup>ə</sup>ân (בֵּית שָׁן) [pronounced *bayth-SHAWN*] means *house of quiet, place of quiet*; and is transliterated *Bethshan, Beth Shan, Beth-shan* or *Beth Shean*. There are alternative spellings: We have the spelling above with an inserted maqaf (which is like a high hyphen) in Joshua 17:11, 16 Judges 1:27 1Chron. 7:29. We have the slightly abbreviated form Bêyth Shân (בֵּית שָׁן) in 1Sam. 31:10, 12; as well as the abbreviated form Bêyth Shan (בֵּית שָׁן) [pronounced *bayth-SHAHN*] in 2Sam. 21:12. The two abbreviated forms differ from one another only in one vowel point, which vowel point was added perhaps a millennium later. The two spellings which are actually different account for the different transliteration found in the KJV and in other older English versions. These two different spellings may point to authors from a different region (one from Judah and another from Israel) or to spellings from different eras. Strong's #1052 BDB #112.
2. The Biblical references: Beth shean: Joshua 17:11 Joshua 17:16 Judges 1:27 1Kings 4:12 1Chron. 7:29. Beth shan: 1Sam. 31:10 1Sam. 31:12 2Sam. 21:12.
3. Location:
  - 1) According to the maps: Beth-shan is a city located in west Manasseh, almost 10 miles west the River Jordan, about a fourth of the distance from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea (or 14 miles south of the Sea of Galilee).
  - 2) There is an east-west road and a north-south road which intersects at Beth-shan principally to connect Beth-shan to other nearby cities. Traveling west on this road takes you to Megiddo; the east road takes you across the Jordan to Beth-arbel (in Gad). Going north from Beth-shan, you will arrive in Yanoom; and the south road forks, one fork leading to Tirzah and the east fork leading to Adam.<sup>1</sup>



Taken from the web site:

<http://www.drshirley.org/geog/geog20.html>

<sup>1</sup> This information is taken from the map in *The MacMillan Bible Atlas*; 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition; Aharoni, Avi-Yonah, Rainey, and Safrai; MacMillan; ©1993 by Carta; p. 17.

- 3) Bethshan is located at the intersection of the Valley of Jezreel and the Jordan valley. It is near one of the few tributaries of the Jordan river. There are also fresh water springs in Mt. Gilboa which provide an excellent supply of fresh water.
  - 4) The ancient name has been preserved by the modern village, Beisân, which is adjacent to the ancient site of Beth-shan, which is known today as Tel el-Hosn.
4. Old Testament references:
- 1) The reading of Joshua 17:11 is rather difficult. However, the gist is, there were several cities, that, if a straight line were drawn as a border between Asher, Issachar and Manasseh, at least four cities would belong to Asher and Issachar instead of Manasseh. So, what is being done is, the border cities of these territories are clearly being given over to Manasseh. Beth-shan is a city on the border of Issachar and Manasseh, and this passage tells us that Beth-shan belongs to Manasseh. That these cities belong to Manasseh is reiterated in 1Chron. 7:29.
  - 2) Later on in the same chapter (Joshua 17:14–18), the sons of Joseph (Manasseh and Ephraim) complain that their land is not large enough to match their populations and that the Canaanites are too close. The biggest problems, as they see it, are Beth-shan and its villages and the valley of Jezreel (which appears to be the site where King Saul dies battling against the Philistines). As we have seen on previous occasions, the Philistines seemed to push their point through Manasseh, through the center of Israel, in order to get a foothold. This is exactly what is occurring in our present study in 1Sam. 31—the Philistines have struck the heartland of Israel, defeating Saul and the armies of Israel in the center of Israel. By the way, Joshua’s suggestion to these people is rather humorous. “Okay, since you are a large people, you can easily clear out the forests with all of these people and deal with the Canaanites yourselves” (Joshua 17:17–18).
  - 3) In the book of the Judges, we find out that Manasseh did not drive the Canaanites out from the cities which were given over to her; and one of these cities was Beth-shan (also Taanach, Dor, Ibleam and Megiddo, along with their villages). The problem was that they were intimidated by the iron chariots of the Canaanites who lived there. Judges 1:27
  - 4) In our passage, 1Sam. 31, the Philistines have struck the heartland of Israel once again, and successfully defeated Saul’s army, killing Saul and his sons. They apparently took over the city of Beth-shan (or Beth-shan had been in their possession all along), as they tacked the bodies of Saul and his sons on the walls of Beth-shan. These bodies were later retrieved by Israelites and burned in Jabesh, where the bones were apparently buried. 1Sam. 31:10–13
  - 5) David retrieved these bones sometime later and gave them a proper burial in Zela in the country of Benjamin, in the grave of Kish, Saul’s father. 2Sam. 21:13–14
  - 6) One of Solomon’s deputies had authority over the area around Beth-shan (1Kings 4:12).
5. Ancient secular history and excavations:<sup>2</sup>
- 1) The tel of Beth-shan is actually the highest tell (300 ft.) in all of Israel.<sup>3</sup>
  - 2) *Archaeologists have identified eighteen different levels of occupation in the tell, indicating that this was one of the oldest cities in Palestine.*<sup>4</sup>
  - 3) In the 15<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Tuthmosis III mentions Beth-shan as under his control. In one of the excavations of this site, scarabs which bear his name were found there.
  - 4) A century later, the Amarna letters speak of reinforcements being sent to bit-sa-a-ni from Egypt.
  - 5) There was a temple uncovered in level VII, circa 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C., and in that temple was found a stele engraved on which was a goddess wearing a two-horned head-dress (probably Ashtaroth?).
  - 6) The excavation of level VI (circa 12<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) revealed another temple, in which was found a statue of Rameses III of Egypt. Also, a city cemetery of this time period was discovered there, with Philistine characteristics. T. C. Mitchell suggests that the Rameses III enforced some sort of control over the city via a Philistine garrison.
  - 7) Recall that the Jews of Manasseh were unable to take this city around this time period (Judges 1:27).

<sup>2</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*; ed. J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p. 145. Unless otherwise referenced, all sub points come from here.

<sup>3</sup> Taken from <http://www.ancientsandals.com/overviews/beth-shan.htm>

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- 8) Even though Beth-shan is in the middle of Israel, Mitchell suggests that it was under Philistine control until the time of David, citing 1Sam. 31:10 as evidence. We do not know for certain, but the geological evidence seems to suggest that Beth-shan was under foreign control as well.
  - 9) In level V, circa 11<sup>th</sup> century B.C., there were two temples discovered, the southern temple dedicated to the god Resheph and the other dedicated to the goddess Antit. Rowe suggests that these were temples dedicated to Dagon and Ashteroth, and the very temples where Saul's armor, sword and head were placed on display (1Sam. 31:10 1Chron. 10:10).
  - 10) In the next two levels (IV and III), there is apparently very little found. This would have been the time of Israel's control over Beth-shan. Around the end of this time period, Shishak claimed Beth-shan as one of his conquests.
  - 11) During the Hellenistic period, this city was refounded as Scythopolis and later became one of the *ten cities* of Greece (the Decapolis).
  - 12) ISBE lists an astonishing array of finds at Beth-shan: *nearly fifty Hittite cylinder seals, gold rosettes, variegated Egyptian glass vases, scarabs, gold pendants, and beads and amulets; a bronze Syrian dagger, a magnificent bronze Hittite ax, a mass of silver ingots, and a gold armband 3½ in. in diameter.*<sup>5</sup>
6. Modern-day Excavation: there has been a great deal of excavation which has been done on Beth-shan in modern times, and I have included some pictures below:



A view of Tel Bet She'an. In the foreground are some ruins from post-Biblical times (Byzantine and Roman). Behind these are the tell itself, the site of Old Testament Bethshan. At the corner of the Jezreel and Jordan valleys, Bethshan was the city upon whose walls the Philistines hung the dead bodies of (decapitated) King Saul, and his sons, after defeating them on nearby Mount Gilboa (I Samuel 31:7-13).



In the background are some columns that have been excavated and stood upright. These in the foreground were left to show how they had fallen over, perhaps during an earthquake.

<sup>5</sup> *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. I; p. 453. This list was actually taken from *Mus Jour*, University of Pennsylvania, 1922.



Ruins of the city of Bethshan itself, on top of the tell, looking across the Jordan valley into Gilead.



A view of the massive excavation at the base of Tel Bet She'an, from the top of the tell

These were taken from: <http://www.davidwilliams.com/israel/timeline/march09>



Bethshean (ancient Scythopolis); taken from the site: <http://www.swan.ac.uk/classics/staff/dg/israel200/bethshean.htm>



Beth-shan (aerial) showing tell Beth-Shan upper right and the Roman city lower left. Photo by Hanan Isachar. Taken from: <http://www.ancientsandals.com/pictures/beth-shan.htm>

Just in case you did not go to check out the entire doctrine, I have provided a summary below:

### A Summary of the Doctrine of Beth-Shan

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The actual doctrine is replete with pictures and maps.

\* Taken from <http://www.ancientsandals.com/overviews/beth-shan.htm>

\*\* Taken from <http://www.ancientsandals.com/overviews/beth-shan.htm>

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