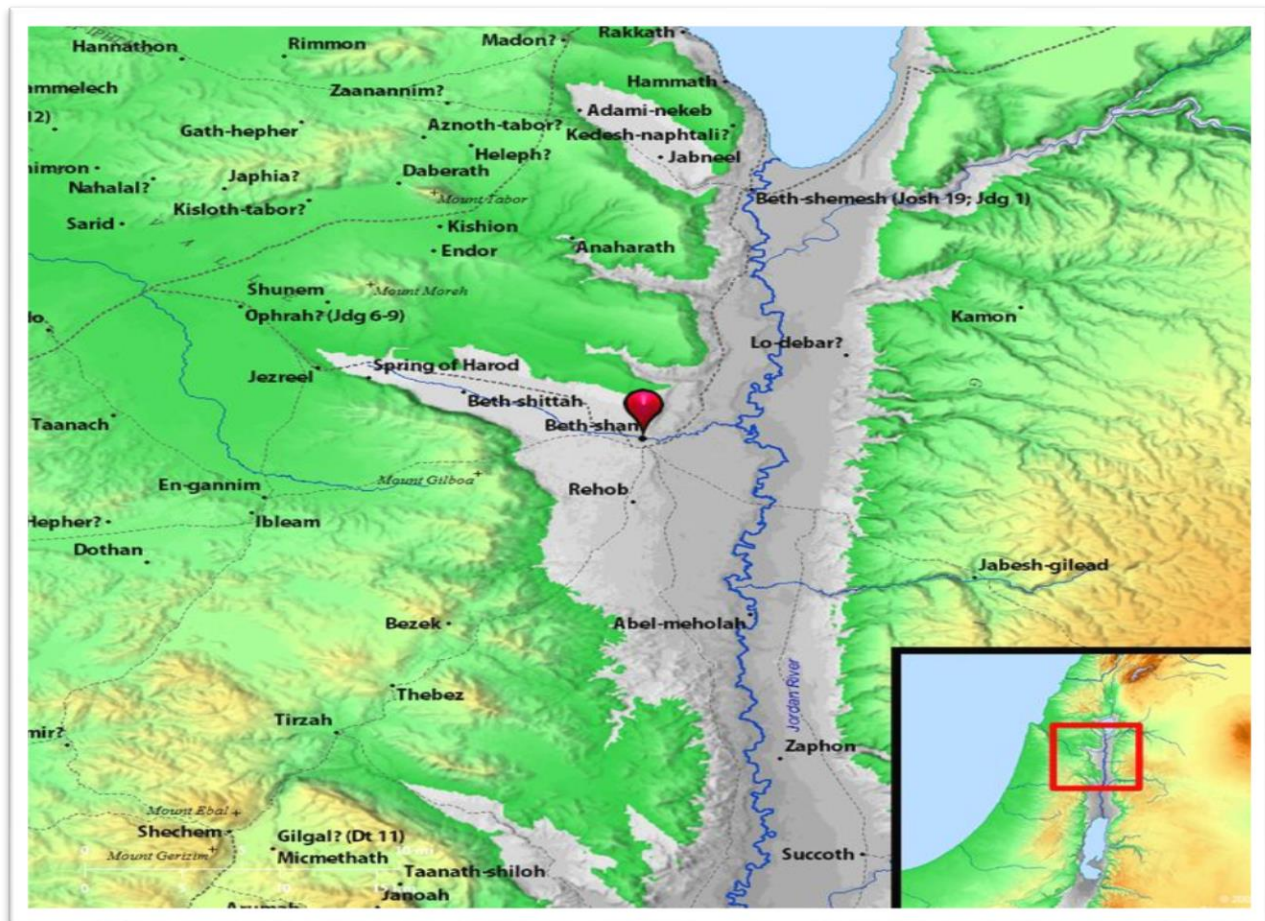




Bethshean Fact Sheet

Location: In lower Galilee at junction of Harod and Jordan valleys, 17 mi south of the Sea of Galilee.



Meaning of Name: spelled “Bethshean” and “Bethshan” in scripture; “house of ease/sleep”

Bible References: 9x

- *Josh 17:11-16* – Bethshean one of cities given to tribe of Manasseh
- *Judges 1:27* – Manasseh never drives Canaanites out of Bethshean completely
- *1 Sam 31:10-12* – Bodies of Saul & his sons taken to Bethshan after falling at Mt Gilboa

History: Bethshean is mentioned as one of the cities given to Manasseh in the book of Joshua. However, they feared the iron chariots of the Canaanites, and never completely removed them from the city. At some point, this fear and disobedience resulted in Bethshean being controlled by the



Philistines during the reign of Saul. After Saul and his sons were slain in nearby Mt Gibloa, their bodies were brought to Bethshean by the Philistines and “fastened to a wall” (*1 Sam 31:10*). Men of Jabeshgilead came by night to retrieve the bodies and bring them across the Jordan river into the eastern hills of the valley and back to the Israelites.

After being ruled by the Philistines, the city was re-captured by David, and became an important regional center under Solomon. It fell into the hands of the Assyrians, led by Tiglathpileser around 732 BC. It came under Greek control during the Hellenistic period, with its name changed to Scythopolis (city of the Scythians). It reached its peak during the Roman period, but also enjoyed success during the Byzantine period until a major earthquake destroyed the city in 749 AD during the Arab period.

Archaeological Significance: Its location in fertile land of the Jordan River Valley, with natural borders for defense and along a major route from Jerusalem to the Syria virtually ensured that Bethshean would be well-inhabited. Today it is considered one the richest archaeological sites in all of Israel, which is no small distinction. Most of the remains of the city present today come from the Roman and Byzantine period, dating from approximately 60 BC to 600 AD.

Highlights include:

Amphitheater: This hippodrome was likely used for gladiators, horse and chariot competitions.

Tel: A magnificent view of the ancient city is possible from the top of the tel, with the Gilboa Mountain range in the distance beyond the city.





Columns from streets: Many columns line the main thoroughfare from the amphitheater to the tel. Some are amazingly upright and in good condition, while others have toppled over, victims of earthquakes and time.

Theater: Seated 5,000-7,000 people.



Consider This:

- Manasseh told to “utterly” drive out inhabitants of Bethshean (*Josh 17:13*), but didn’t due to fear (*Josh 17:16*); Saul told to “utterly” destroy Amalek (*1 Sam 15:3*), but didn’t due to fear (*1 Sam 15:24*)...guess where Saul’s lifeless body ended up? Bethshean!