

61 Beth-Shemesh

Names (also known as)

Identified with Ir-shemesh (Josh. 19:41)

Latin: Bethsames

Etymology

Strong's - H1053 – ‘house of the sun’ or ‘sun-temple’.

Location/Description



Beit Shemesh is a city located approximately 30 kilometres (19 miles) west of Jerusalem in Israel's Jerusalem District, with a population of 80,600 in 2010.

The ancient city covers roughly a 7 acre area.

Scriptural references

Old Testament

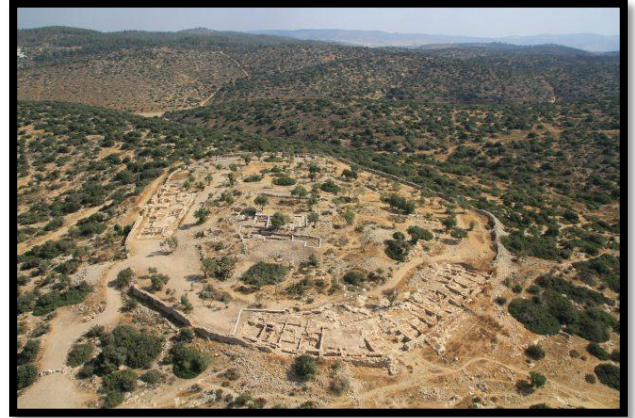
1 Kings 4:9 – provided ‘victuals’ for Solomon.

2 Kings 14:11 – Jehoash (Israel) fought Amaziah (Judah) there, with Israel prevailing and Amaziah being made prisoner.

2 Chron. 28:18 – The Philistines occupied this area in the time of Ahaz.

1 Sam. 6:19 – The ark was returned here, and the men of Beth-shemesh were killed (50,070)

because they had looked into the Ark of Yahweh.



Brief history

The history of Beit Shemesh goes back to pre-biblical times. Archaeological digs occurred in 1911-1912 and 1928-1933.

The city was founded shortly after 2000 BC and fell under Hyksos control from 1700-1550 BC during which time it was securely fortified. It was originally named after the Canaanite sun-goddess Shemesh.

The Egyptians destroyed the city by fire in 1500 BC.

The Israelites controlled the area between 1200-1000 BC (period of the Judges). Beth-Shemesh was a priestly city (Josh. 21:16; 1 Sam. 6:15; 1 Chron. 6:59) located in the tribe of Dan, but described as being on the north boundary of Judah (Josh. 15:10) toward Philistia (1 Sam. 6:9,12).

The expressions ‘went down’ (Josh. 15:9-10) and ‘go up’ (1 Sam. 6:20-21) indicate that the town was lower than Kirjath-jearim.

It was a city with ‘pasture lands’ (ESV – Josh. 21:16; 1 Chron. 6:59).

Excavations show the destruction by Nebuchadnezzar early in the 6th century after which the city was not rebuilt.

The modern city of Beit Shemesh was founded in 1950.

Sources:

The Historical Atlas of the Bible – Ian Barnes
Ungers Bible Dictionary
ESVBible.org
Elihu Grant excavations

(Compiler – Stephen Macfarlane)