

97 Bethel

Names (also known as)

Luz (Judges 1:23), Beitin (modern)

Etymology

Strong's H1008 - the house of God.

Location/Description

Bethel is located west of Hai or Ai (Gen. 12:8). It is named as being on the northern border of Benjamin (the southern part of Ephraim - Josh. 16:2), at the top of the ascent from the Jordan Valley by way of Ai (Josh. 18:13). It lay south of Shiloh (Jud. 21:19). It is located approximately 20 kms north of Jerusalem.



Bethel was strategically located on the border between Israel and Judah. This is why Jeroboam chose Bethel as a location for the golden calf. He did this to intercept true worshippers traveling to the Temple in Jerusalem.



Present day it is associated with the modern town of Beitin, a village of some 400 inhabitants, which stands on a knoll east of the road to Nablus.

Key Scriptural references

Old Testament

Gen. 12:8 – Abram's Altar

Gen. 28:19 – Jacob's Vision

1 Sam. 7:16 – Station of Samuel's School of the Prophets

1 Kings 12:29-33 – Site of Jeroboam's golden calf

Famous characters

Abram, Jacob, Samuel, Jeroboam

Pillar and Ground of the Truth

The city of Bethel is a cameo of the ecclesia or God's family. In 1 Timothy 3:15 Paul writes "that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the ecclesia of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth".

The key references to Bethel in Scripture illustrate some important principles of the ecclesia of God. It was in Bethel that Abram built an altar and called on the name of Yahweh having turned his back on Hai ("ruin"). In Jacob's dream at Bethel (Gen. 28), the Abrahamic Covenant was repeated to him personally with the promise of 'a multitude' (Gk. ecclesia) of people coming from him. It was at Bethel that God also promised Jacob that he would not forsake him till he had fulfilled 'that which I have spoken to thee of.'

Bethel was one location where Samuel judged Israel in a yearly circuit (1 Sam. 7:16). In the days of Jeroboam, Bethel became a site of apostate worship. A golden calf and a false priesthood was set up to deter those that would go down to worship in Jerusalem in the appointed manner.

Our ecclesias should exhibit the Godly principles of Bethel. As the pillar and ground of the truth, the ecclesia should be separate from the world, a place of rededication to the things of the Spirit. It should be a source of encouragement in the Word of God, and a place, as it was in the days of Samuel, where the Word of God is rightly divided.

If we fail in establishing the ecclesia on these principles, then the house of God can be corrupted, and its true purpose ruined.

Sources:

Easton's Bible Dictionary

Jacob Study Series – Brother Jim Cowie

(Compiler – Jeff Cooper)