

Beth Shemesh

Beth Shemesh (“house of the sun”) is a city assigned to the Levites that sets on the east edge of the Sorek Valley on the volatile Israel/Philistia border. It was a buffer between the Philistine Plain and the Hill Country of Judah. Beth Shemesh sets 12 miles west of Jerusalem. There is a seven acre tel that has been excavated by several archaeologists.



Excavations have revealed “squares” on the north side of Tel Beth Shemesh and several cisterns. Early excavations in 1911-1912 were done by D. Mackenzie for the Palestine Exploration Fund and E. Grant in 1928-1933. They exposed several cities from the Bronze and Iron Ages. From 1990-2000 Shlomo Bunimovitz and Zvi Lederman of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University found remains from the Iron Age, or the time of the Judges and the Kings of Israel from 1100-600 BC. They uncovered a large two-storied house of a wealthy individual in the northern part of the tel. The house had one room floor paved with river pebbles. Other houses supported by wooden columns on stone bases were found. Also found were grindstones, clay ovens. The pottery and building was Canaanite style, but the diet was clearly Jewish showing that culture on this border town was mixed.

In the Bible: **Joshua 15:10**, on Philistine border; **Joshua 19:40-48**, allotted to the tribe of Dan; **Joshua 21:16**, one of the forty-eight cities of the Levites; **Judges 13-16**, Samson lived in the Sorek Valley by Beth Shemesh in Zorah, Eshtaol and Timnah; **1 Samuel 6:7-21**, The cart with the Ark from the Philistines went up the Sorek Valley to Beth Shemesh; **2 Kings 14:11-14**, King Jehoash (Israel) defeated King Amaziah (Judah) at Beth Shemesh and then went on to tear down sections of Jerusalem’s walls; **2 Chronicles 28:16-18**, Philistines capture Beth Shemesh from King Ahaz (Isaiah’s Day). Ahaz then goes to Assyria for help.



Toni holds a card on Tel Beth Shemesh that identifies the Sorek Valley that runs directly into Philistia.



Galyn sits on an arch in Beth Shemesh from the time of Judah’s king 800 BC.