

# Tel Beth-Shemesh Report, 2011

Number 3

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For me, probably the most irritating feature of an excavation is dealing with pits! It is unbelievable how many pits that we encounter have nothing in them! They obscure the stratification and overwhelmingly complicate the interpretation of the site. I facetiously believe when the children of antiquity did something to displease their parents, the parents would send them out to dig a pit! Anyway, you can probably infer that we've dealt with a lot of pits lately.

We typically arrive at the site before dark and are able to see the sun come up. In a way this is fascinating since the site where we are digging—Beth-shemesh—means “house of the sun.” Somehow the song of similar title tends to ring in our heads, although we've found no evidence of the character of the song at the site. An additional point of the name Beth-shemesh is that we always are at the site on the summer solstice, which for the people of antiquity was probably an even more significant point than for most of us today. I try to remember which day is the solstice and to encourage the volunteers to take note of the occasion and realize that the solstice was such an important point in the cycle of ancient civilizations. The photo shows a particularly peculiar sunrise with the central hills which rise up to Jerusalem glowing so red as if on fire.



The second photograph shows Devin-Lynn of Lethbridge University in Canada excavating in an olive crushing basin that we found protruding from the section. The basin apparently is not in its original location but was probably thrown into a PIT. Its odd stance and the fact that the right side of the basin is missing prompted us to infer that it was in a secondary location. We eventually saw the outline of two pits, one of which followed the contour of the soil in such a way that it appears that the people who dug the pit broke away the side of the basin to make way for the pit (those rebellious children!)



Another interesting, but sobering find, is in the picture where the young woman is so agilely contorted to take the picture. She is Rachel Lindemann who has been with us



for several years. She is a bright, vivacious young woman who graduated from Lethbridge and then earned a Masters Degree in nautical archaeology in England. She is photographing a lamination of soil, ash, and debris material that usually reflects the presence of penned sheep and goats and their deposits; the people would occasionally burn this to clear out the debris and rid the area of the pests (and odor). Fortunately, enough time has lapsed so that no odor remains and it only serves to highlight that we are dealing with people who lived long ago and we are inferring how they lived.

Another everyday life feature that we have identified numerous times are tabuns; these are essentially ovens, but we do not know for sure how they were used or even really what they looked like. All we ever find is the bottom parts of them and rarely, if ever, complete in their circumference. The photograph shows one from this year. Last year we discovered a series of several that had been built over each other over a fairly long span of time. The square in which this tabun was found has yielded at least five tabuns over the span of our two years of excavating.



Our weekend trip involved a trip to the Galilee area. Frank and I were looking for an alternative location for Bethsaida than the one that traditionally has been offered. A number of scholars have raised serious concerns about the legitimacy of the site now excavated as Bethsaida. We spent a couple of hours tromping along the northern shore of the Galilee, but we unsuccessful. We plan to return next year hopefully armed with more specific data. We did, however, find a nice view of the Jordan River just before it empties into the Sea of Galilee.



We went to visit the site of the excavations at Capernaum, but not the traditional ones where the synagogue is now situated along with the “house of Peter.” Instead we wanted to see the remains that were preserved on the site of the Orthodox Catholic church. Regretfully there was not much to see; the field was badly overgrown and the ruins obscured and fenced off. However, I was able to get a good photograph from Capernaum (where Jesus focused much of his teaching) and the cliffs of Arbel in the distance. There is a gap between the Arbel cliff on the left and its opposing face on the right. The reason this gap is probably significant is that it is likely the route that Jesus would have followed in his trips from Nazareth to Capernaum (cf. Luke 4). The flat plateau looking feature just to the right of the Arbel Cliffs is the “Horns of Hattin” where the Crusaders made a major stand against Saladin and his forces on July 4, 1187. However, they were





overwhelmingly outnumbered and lost the battle.

Another site on our target list was Yodefath. Josephus mentions it as a site that was a focus of the Romans during the First Jewish Revolt of ca. 66-70 AD. I was not aware of the site until Frank told me. It was quite a trek to get there, but well worth the effort. It is situated on a steep hill surrounded on all sides by deep valleys. The photo shows me standing on the path that now remains along the slope. For all practical purposes, there were no slopes significantly less inclined than this one. Yodefath, along with Masada and Gamla, all show the determination of the Romans to address insurrection in the empire. Jesus, of course, spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem which was part of the same period of revolt.



We traveled then to another proposed site for Cana, where Jesus changed the water into wine at the wedding feast (Jn 2). There are three sites that are candidates for the one where Jesus performed this first miracle. Most scholars are inclined now to identify this one as the location. We wanted to visit it at least “just because.” The view that I show is from the site with some ruins of buildings in the foreground with the modern city of Nazareth in the distant horizon. The distance here is about 8 miles. In addition we saw what looks like the remains of a synagogue (or at least a monumental building of some kind) on the summit of the hill.



The last major trip of the weekend was to go to Tel es-Safi, now identified as the location of Philistine Gath, the home of Goliath. The view shows it from the west. It is a huge site and quite imposing in height. It overlooks the coastal plain from its inner edge and would have controlled much of the trade and travel along the coast. Due east of the site is the site of Azekah which was one of the locations noted in the face-off of the Philistines and Israelites when David fought against Goliath (cf. 1 Sam 17). Excavations at the site have identified Philistine levels and strong fortification systems.

