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B0832 – September 7, 2008 – Holy Land Tour - Part 11 –
Bethshean

BETHSHEAN/TEL EL-HUSAN/BEISAN/SCYTHOPOLIS/TEL
IZTABBA/NYSA

What I like to do with each of these sites is distill one truth if we can. It can be a greater or lesser difficulty, this one was particularly difficult but the more Bible reading you do the more you see the theme at Bethshean arise. That theme is Kingship; characteristics of a good king and an evil king. Bethshean sort of encapsulates the end result of an evil king and his dynasty. It wasn't just nasty for him, everybody under this man's reign had to suffer for his rejection of the word of God and idiot policies. So we want to go into this. I didn't really plan for this to be the theme at a time like this with our nation at a critical juncture. It's just that after you've studied a place for 3 or 4 hours and this is the theme that shakes out you really don't have time to change and do something else so this is what you get. The period we're interested in is the decline of King Saul. He's the evil king. The good king who is exalted is King David. I wouldn't really say that the candidates this election are anywhere near the contrast of good King David and evil King Saul. What we're facing is far worse, we're forced into the question of which is the lesser of two weevils.

Let me start just by showing a few slides of Bethshean. We'll take a walk through town.

I. Names

- A. Bethshan/Bethshean – “house of rest” and the kingdom of Saul is going to come to rest at this city. (Josh 17:11, 16; Judg 1:27; 1 Sam 31:10, 12; 2 Sam 21:12; 1 Kgs 4:12; 1 Chron 7:29)

The Jewish sages used to say: “If the Garden of Eden is in the land of Israel, then its gate is at Beth-Shean.” (Rabbi Simeon Ben Lachish; Talmud: Eruvim, 19a).

- B. Scythopolis – “city of Scythians” (Col 3:11) named so after a Scythian cavalry unit of Ptolemy II

- C. Decapolis – “ten cities” – Founded by Pompey in 64/62BC. Bethshean was one of the ten and the only one on the west side of the Jordan (Matt 4:25; Mark 5:20; 7:31). It became the capital of the Decapolis in 63BC.

II. Location

- A. 14 mi south of Sea of Galilee
- B. West of the Jordan River
- C. Connected Jezreel Valley to Jordan Valley (show map)
- D. Important trade routes passed in all four directions of the compass
- E. Near Mt Gilboa
- F. 13 mi WNW of Jabesh Gilead

III. The Tel

- A. 150 feet above ground but 340 feet below sea level
- B. Over 20 destruction levels and five temples built on the tel

- C. Saul and his sons Jonathan, Abinidab and Malchi-shua bodies (1 Sam 31:2) were fastened to the wall (1 Sam 31:10, 12)

IV. Tribal Allotment

- A. Allotted to Manasseh (Josh 17:11; 1 Chron 7:29)
- B. Not taken by Manasseh (Josh 17:12-18; Judg 1:27-28).
- C. Remained under Canaanite control until they were subdued and put into forced labor.

Now, the historic narrative that captures the principle of good king/evil king is at the end of 1 Sam and the beginning of 2 Sam. So we want to start by turning to 1 Sam 28. Israel was a political entity under God. And her law came from God, it was not conjured up by human reason, it was given by divine revelation. There are only two sources of law: human reason or divine revelation.

V. The End of an Administration

- A. Saul and the Witch of Endor (1 Sam 28:1-19) – show map
 1. Saul had rejected the word of God so much that the Lord stopped talking to him
 2. Jews were not supposed to consult mediums (Deut 18:9-14; Isa 8:19). They were supposed to listen to His prophets (Deut 18:15-22)
 3. Saul did not obey the word of God through Samuel but went up anyway to battle, thinking he could thwart the word of God.
- B. The Excellent Character of David (1 Sam 29)
 1. He was with Achish for 1 year and 4 months

2. He found no evil in David

C. David Defeats Amalekites (1 Sam 30:1-20)

1. Here's a man who listens to the word of God

2. Here's a man who obeys the word of God

D. The Spoils Divided (1 Sam 30:21-31)

1. Grace orientation

2. The kindness of David

E. Saul and Sons Defeated by Philistines (1 Sam 31:1-7; show map)

1. His armor bearer would not kill him (because he was the Lord's anointed)

2. Saul died because he disobeyed the Lord's command to destroy the Amalekites and because he consulted a medium (1 Chron 10:13)

3. His whole cabinet was killed that day. The end of an administration

4. All Israel was defeated. Poor administration hurts everyone.

5. Show pictures of Mt Gilboa from Kibbutz Nir David

F. The Valiant Men of Jabesh-Gilead

1. The Philistines fastened his body to the wall. This was a disgrace. Evil ruler, evil death.

2. Walked 13 miles all night to take Saul's body

3. Why did they come and take Saul's body? Because he had delivered them from the Ammonites in his first military campaign as king of Israel (1 Sam 11:1-11)
4. Buried under a tamarisk tree (symbol of life – evergreen)

G. David Learns of Saul and Jonathan's Death (2 Sam 1:1-16)

1. This is manifestly a lie
2. Perhaps the man thought he would be rewarded
3. David had him executed for killing the Lord's anointed

H. David's Dirge for Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1:17-27)

1. This song reveals the heart of David
2. "How the mighty have fallen..."
3. David's love for Jonathan was political and covenant loyalty unmatched

I. David Exalted to King over Judah (2 Sam 2:1-7)

VI. Theme: Doctrine of Kingship. If you are not going to listen to God's word you are going to be an evil king. If you listen to God's word you are going to be a good king. An evil king will hurt not only himself but the whole nation. A good king will bring blessing not only to himself but the whole nation. If a nation has enough evil kings then God will stop talking to that nation. The bottom line is that if a king makes policies that are contrary to God's word then he is making evil policies. It's that simple. This is not rocket science. Proper leadership distills from God's word godly principles and makes policies based on them. That will always produce the most freedom. Opposing policies will always produce slavery. Every issue on the table whether it be the environment, abortion, economy, foreign policy, judicial philosophy, science and technology, civil rights, crime, drugs, education, family,

children, guns/weapons, health care, immigration, you name it the Bible speaks to it.

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