

Dr. Jeffrey Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 10, Identifying Biblical Bethel – Case Study Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 10, Identifying Biblical Bethel – Case Study, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Jeffrey Hudon's lecture on Biblical Archaeology focuses on identifying the location of Biblical Bethel. **He presents scholarly arguments** placing Bethel at Beitin, an Arab village, based on its strategic location, historical references, and name similarity. **However, the lack of archaeological evidence** for Jeroboam's shrine at Beitin leads to consideration of alternative sites like Jebel Aratas. **The lecture explores the debate** surrounding Bethel's location and the potential distinction between Bethel and Luz, another name associated with the site. **Ultimately, Hudon suggests Beitin as the most likely location for Bethel**, while acknowledging Jebel Aratas as a possible site for Luz or a related religious structure.

2. 12 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 10 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Introduction & Languages → Archaeology).



**Hudon_BibArch_Ses
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3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided source, "Hudon_BibArch_EN_Ses10.pdf":

Briefing Document: Identifying Biblical Bethel - A Case Study

Introduction:

This document summarizes Dr. Jeffrey Hudon's lecture on the archaeological identification of Biblical Bethel. The lecture uses Bethel as a case study to demonstrate the challenges and methodologies involved in identifying ancient sites mentioned in the Bible. The central question revolves around whether the commonly accepted site of Bethel (Beitin) is the *only* Bethel and whether the site of Luz, often associated with Bethel, represents a separate, distinct location.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- **Site Identification as an Archaeological Process:** Dr. Hudon emphasizes that identifying ancient sites is a crucial part of biblical archaeology. It involves analyzing textual evidence, geographic information, and archaeological findings, as well as considering names, their preservation through time, and possible corruptions of those names in different languages.
- **Bethel's Significance in the Old Testament:** Bethel is one of the most frequently mentioned locations in the Old Testament, appearing over 600 times. It is associated with significant events:
- **Patriarchal Era:** Abraham built an altar east of Bethel, and Jacob had his famous dream of a ladder to heaven, naming the site "Beth El" (House of God). Jacob later returned, building another altar and pillar.
- **Canaanite City:** Bethel (or Luz) was a royal Canaanite city captured by the Israelites.
- **Period of Judges:** Bethel served as a sanctuary and had a prophetic guild, demonstrating its religious importance.
- **Divided Kingdom:** Jeroboam I established Bethel as a major religious center for the northern kingdom of Israel, placing a golden calf there as an alternative to the Temple in Jerusalem.

- **Prophetic Critique:** The prophet Amos spoke his oracles at the Bethel shrine, highlighting its role as a royal sanctuary.
- **Josiah's Reform:** King Josiah later destroyed and desecrated the Bethel sanctuary.
- **The Two Names: Bethel and Luz:** **Luz's Meaning:** "Luz" is associated with an almond tree and may have been the original name.
- **Interchangeability:** In some texts, Bethel and Luz seem interchangeable.
- **Potential for Separation:** Some texts, particularly Joshua 16:2, seem to suggest that Luz was a distinct location near Bethel, possibly "in the direction of" it. As Hudon points out, "Vayatzah Mibet El Luzah and you notice the final word Luzah is Luz with an H at the end or a hey. That is a directional hey in the direction of Luz. If that is how we read that, that clearly indicates two sites."
- **The Traditional Identification: Beitin as Bethel:** Most scholars identify Bethel with the Arab village of Beitin, about 10 miles north of Jerusalem, due to:
- **Name Preservation:** The name "Beitin" is considered a corrupted Arabic form of "Bethel." As the lecture notes, "they recognize when they traveled past Beitin that it was a corruption, Arabic corruption of the name Bethel."
- **Geographic Location:** Beitin lies at a strategic crossroads, as the text points out, "it's a very important site strategically because it's at a major crossroads."
- **Historical Sources:** Ancient sources like the *Onomastikon* of Eusebius and the *Survey of Western Palestine* support this identification.
- **Archaeological Excavations at Beitin:**
- **Early Excavations:** Melvin Grove Kyle and later James Kelso conducted excavations in the 1920s-50s, but their methods lacked modern standards (poor record keeping, poor stratigraphic control) and found no evidence of Jeroboam's shrine, as he was trying to find.
- **Lack of Evidence:** Despite ongoing excavations (including recent Japanese-Palestinian expeditions focusing on later remains), no clear evidence of the Jeroboam shrine has been discovered.
- **Alternative Theories and the Question of Ai:**

- **David Livingston's Challenge:** David Livingston challenged the identification of Et-Tel as Ai (east of Bethel) due to the lack of remains from the time of Joshua, which led him to question the identification of Beitin as Bethel.
- **Livingston's Alternative:** Livingston proposed that Khirbet Nisa is Ai and Al-Bira is Bethel, a proposal that was largely rejected by the scholarly community.
- **Anson Rainey's Rebuttal:** Israeli scholar Anson Rainey strongly defended the traditional identification of Beitin as Bethel. As the lecture mentions, "nearly all scholars sided with Rainey that Beitin has to be biblical Bethel."
- **The Dan Shrine and Implications for Bethel:****Excavation at Dan:** Excavations at Dan (another site where Jeroboam placed a golden calf) uncovered a well-preserved shrine, which provides insight into what the shrine at Bethel might have looked like. The lecture indicates that, "the excavations at Dan starting in 1967 or 66 rather...did uncover a beautifully ruined...shrine and high place that clearly was the one that is described in the Bible as built by Jeroboam."
- **Bethel's Larger Scale:** The lecture posits that the Bethel shrine, being a main royal sanctuary, would likely have been larger and more elaborate than the one at Dan.
- **Jebel Aratas as a Potential Site of Luz/Bethel High Place****Zev Vilnay's Observations:** Israeli geographer Zev Vilnay suggested that Jebel Aratas, a mountain adjacent to Beitin, may have been the site of Jeroboam's shrine and possibly even the earlier religious site associated with Jacob. "it was him that went to and studied the area around Bethel or Beth-een and he saw that there was a site just adjacent to Bethel or Beitin called Jebel Aratas and it had features that he thought might have been related to Jeroboam's shrine and altar that was built in the late 10th century."
- **Religious Features:** Jebel Aratas features potential remains of a shrine, Jewish rock-cut tombs, and a religious association through the ages (including a crusader castle and Muslim shrine), suggesting its religious significance over time.
- **Strategic Location:** Its high elevation and commanding views make it an ideal spot for a religious site.
- **Potential Interpretation:****Beitin as the Town:** Beitin is most likely the site of the ancient town of Bethel.
- **Jebel Aratas as the High Place:** Jebel Aratas could be the site of the *high place* of Bethel, and possibly the separate site of Luz, functioning as a religious center

situated next to the city of Bethel, similar to the high place of Gibeon and the city of Gibeon.

Conclusion:

The case of Bethel demonstrates the complex nature of biblical site identification. While Beitin is widely accepted as the location of the biblical town of Bethel, the potential existence of a separate high place or site of Luz at Jebel Aratas introduces an element of uncertainty and underscores the ongoing nature of archaeological research. Dr. Hudon emphasizes that while the biblical narrative should be considered, it is important not to force evidence to fit preconceived interpretations. The lecturer concludes that, "Betin, from every possible reason, should be biblical Bethel. There's no reason not to accept that. And then Luz could be the high place of Bethel or the religious site of Bethel located slightly to the north."

Key Quote: "The danger here is to try to fit the evidence to what you think fits the biblical narrative. And Betin, from every possible reason, should be biblical Bethel. There's no reason not to accept that. And then Luz could be the high place of Bethel or the religious site of Bethel located slightly to the north."

This summarizes Dr. Hudon's lecture, highlighting the complexities and considerations in identifying the location of biblical sites. The case of Bethel is a good example of the ongoing debate and evolving understanding in biblical archaeology.

4. Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 10, Identifying Biblical Bethel – Case Study

Biblical Archaeology: Identifying Bethel - A Case Study

Quiz

1. What is the significance of Bethel in the Old Testament, and approximately how many times is it mentioned?
2. According to most scholars, where is Bethel located and why is this location considered strategically important?
3. Describe the religious activities associated with Bethel in the early periods of the patriarchs.
4. What significant changes to Bethel happened during the reign of Jeroboam, the first king of Israel, after the split of the kingdoms?
5. What did King Josiah do in his reforms that affected Bethel?
6. What are the different interpretations regarding the names Bethel and Luz, and what textual evidence supports these interpretations?
7. Why did Jeroboam establish alternative religious sites, and what was their purpose in relation to Jerusalem?
8. What did the excavations at Dan reveal about Jeroboam's religious practices? How does that relate to the situation at Bethel?
9. What led to the questioning of the identification of Beitin as Bethel, and what alternative site was proposed?
10. What are the main arguments that support the alternative location of Jebel Aratas as a significant religious site associated with Bethel?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Bethel is the most frequently mentioned place in the Old Testament, with nearly 600 references, and is a site of significant religious and historical importance.
2. Most scholars identify Bethel with the Arab village of Beitin, about 10 miles north of Jerusalem. This location is important because it is at a major crossroads of trade routes.

3. In the early period of the patriarchs, Bethel was a site where Abram built an altar and where Jacob had his famous dream of a ladder to heaven. Jacob named the site Beth El, meaning house of God, and constructed an altar and pillar there.
4. Jeroboam established Bethel as a major religious center for the northern kingdom, placing one of his two golden calves there to create an alternative worship site to Jerusalem.
5. King Josiah's reforms included the destruction of Bethel's sanctuary and the slaying of its priests, signifying an attempt to erase religious practices outside of Jerusalem.
6. Bethel and Luz are sometimes interpreted as a single site that was renamed (Luz becoming Bethel), while other interpretations view them as two separate locations due to some texts in Joshua suggesting a border going "from Bethel to Luz."
7. Jeroboam established alternative sites at Dan and Bethel to break the religious connection between his kingdom and the temple in Jerusalem, thus preventing his people from making pilgrimages to the south.
8. The excavations at Dan uncovered a beautifully preserved shrine and high place that was likely built by Jeroboam. This makes the lack of a similar finding at Beitin (the traditional site of Bethel) even more perplexing.
9. The questioning of the identification of Et-Tel as Ai (which is nearby) raised doubts about Beitin as Bethel. David Livingston proposed moving the site of Ai and, thus, also moved Bethel to Al-Bira.
10. Jebel Aratas has remains of a possible shrine, is a high place with commanding views, and has religious significance evidenced by crusader castle, Muslim shrine, Jewish rock-cut tombs and an ancient oak tree.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the role of Bethel as a religious and political center throughout the Old Testament, discussing its significance from the patriarchal period through the divided kingdom period.
2. Evaluate the different perspectives and arguments in favor of and against Beitin being the site of biblical Bethel, taking into account archaeological, textual, and geographical evidence.
3. Compare and contrast the religious practices at Bethel under the patriarchs, during the period of the judges, and under Jeroboam's reign, explaining the transformations in worship.
4. Discuss the historical significance of site identification in biblical archaeology and illustrate the difficulties by comparing the interpretations of Beitin versus Jebel Aratas for the location of Bethel.
5. Explore the relationship between biblical text and archaeological interpretation, using the case study of Bethel, and address the challenges of integrating textual narrative with material evidence.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Bethel:** A significant city in the Old Testament, also known as Luz, located north of Jerusalem; meaning "House of God."
- **Beitin:** The Arab village about 10 miles north of Jerusalem that most scholars identify as the site of the biblical city of Bethel.
- **Luz:** An alternate name for Bethel, sometimes considered a separate site, possibly the "high place" of Bethel.
- **Jeroboam:** The first king of the northern kingdom of Israel who established alternative religious sites at Dan and Bethel, complete with golden calves.
- **High Place:** A term used to describe an elevated location that was used for religious sacrifices and ceremonies, often considered pagan or illicit by the biblical writers.
- **Jebel Aratas:** A mountain just north of Beitin that may be the actual high place of Bethel and perhaps, the original site of Luz.
- **Syncretism:** The blending of different religious beliefs or practices; in this context, a mix of Yahwistic worship with Canaanite religion.
- **Stratigraphic Control:** A process used in archaeology to properly record and interpret the layers (or strata) of a site during an excavation.
- **Toponomic:** Related to the study of place names; in this context, the preservation of ancient place names in later Arabic language.
- **PEF (Palestine Exploration Fund):** A British organization that conducted surveys of Palestine, including the region of Bethel.
- **Onomastikon:** A geographical dictionary compiled by Eusebius in the 4th century A.D. that describes biblical sites and distances between them.

5. FAQs on Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 10, Identifying Biblical Bethel – Case Study, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about Biblical Bethel

1. **What makes Bethel such a significant location in the Old Testament?** Bethel is one of the most frequently mentioned places in the Old Testament, with hundreds of references. It holds religious importance due to its association with the patriarchs, such as Abraham building an altar there, and most famously, Jacob's dream of a ladder to heaven and his subsequent naming of the site "Beth El" (house of God). It also served as a significant religious center during the period of the Judges and became a major religious site for the northern kingdom of Israel after the kingdom split. Strategically, it sits at a major crossroads, adding to its prominence.
2. **Where is the site of biblical Bethel generally located by scholars today?** The vast majority of scholars place biblical Bethel at the site of modern-day Beitin, an Arab village located about 10 miles north of Jerusalem in the Central Benjamin Plateau. This identification is supported by the preservation of the name (Beitin being an Arabic corruption of Bethel), ancient sources describing the location and distances, and archaeological surveys recognizing the importance of Beitin.
3. **Why did Jeroboam I establish a religious site at Bethel?** After the division of Israel into two kingdoms, Jeroboam I, the first king of the northern kingdom, recognized the unifying influence of the temple in Jerusalem, which was located in the southern kingdom of Judah. To break this connection and solidify his rule, Jeroboam established two alternative religious sites, one at Dan in the north and another at Bethel in the south. Bethel was a good choice because of its existing religious history and established cultic activity.
4. **What were the religious practices and structures set up at Bethel by Jeroboam I?** Jeroboam I set up golden calves at Bethel and Dan. These calves were not necessarily worshiped as idols themselves; rather, they were seen as pedestals or vehicles for the invisible God of Israel, Yahweh. This was a syncretistic approach, blending elements of the biblical faith with Canaanite religious practices. He also appointed priests and established feasts and altar sacrifices at Bethel, creating an alternative temple that competed with the temple in Jerusalem.

5. **What is the historical significance of Luz in relation to Bethel?** Luz was the original name of the site that was later renamed Bethel by Jacob. Some scholars have proposed that these are the same place. Other sources indicate that Luz was a distinct site near Bethel. Joshua 16:2, for example, suggests that Luz was a separate location that defined the southern boundary between the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. Some theorize that Luz may have referred to the high place or religious sanctuary of Bethel.
6. **Why have recent scholars questioned the location of Bethel at Beitin?** The primary reason for questioning the identification of Beitin as Bethel stemmed from the lack of evidence for the high place and shrine built by Jeroboam I during excavations at Beitin. Also, when the site of Ai (Et-Tel) was questioned as the site of Ai from the period of Joshua, the site of Beitin was also placed under reevaluation, as the two are often associated together in the biblical text.
7. **What alternative location for Bethel or the high place of Bethel has been proposed, and what evidence supports it?** Zev Vilnay, a geographer and guide, suggested that Jebel Aratas, a mountain located one mile north of Beitin, might be the actual site of the high place and shrine of Bethel, as well as perhaps where Jacob originally had his dream. This was based on the mountain having remains on top that might correspond to the remains of a shrine and altar. Additionally, its strategic position and views, coupled with the discovery of New Testament Jewish tombs in the surrounding area, suggested its religious significance.
8. **What is the current scholarly position on the identification of Bethel and its high place?** The overwhelming consensus among scholars is that Beitin is indeed the site of the ancient city of Bethel. However, it is possible that the high place or religious sanctuary of Bethel was located at Jebel Aratas, nearby. The theory is that Jebel Aratas may have been the separate site mentioned as Luz in the Bible. This theory remains less supported, as the identification of Beitin as Bethel is much more firmly supported from historical evidence, linguistic continuity, and ancient writings.