Bethel (In Judah)

In addition to being the name of a city/settlement in the mountains of Ephraim (see below), Bethel (MT *Bêt-ʾēl* = "house of El/God") was also the name of a place in Judah, mentioned in a list of David's Judean "friends" in 1 Sam 30:27. (For a place with the same name in northern Syria, see KAI 222 A34). This is to be distinguished from Bethel/*Bētīn*. 1 Chr 4:30 calls it Bethuel (*bĕtûʾēl*) and Josh 19:4 has Bethul (*bĕtûl*; cf. Josh 15:30 [Chesil], and B[…]YΛION on the Madaba Map). The exact location is unknown.

Henrik Pfeiffer

See also →Bethuel (Place); →Chesil

Bethel (North of Jerusalem)

    I.   Archaeology
    II.   Hebrew Bible/Old Testament
    III.   Judaism
    IV.   Islam

Bethel (MT *bêt-ʾēl* = "house of El/God") was the name of a city/settlement 17 km north of Jerusalem, being the location of the most important sanctuary of the northern kingdom (for a place with the same name in northern Syria, see KAI 222 A34). Despite several interruptions, Bethel was inhabited continually from the end of the 3rd millennium BCE up to the time of the Arab conquest of Palestine. From the 8th to the 6th century BCE, Bethel belonged to Judah (cf. Ezra 2:28 = Neh 7:32). The Seleucid general Bacchides fortified the city during the 2nd century BCE (1 Macc 9:50). The Roman general Vespasian used the city as a garrison after its conquest in 69 CE and so did Hadrian (Josephus, *J.W.* 4.451).

I. Archaeology

Based on the biblical (e.g., Gen 12:8; Josh 7:2; Judg 21:19) and Byzantine (especially Eusebius' *Onomasticon*) textual descriptions, E. Robinson first identified ancient Bethel in 1838 with the modern village of Beitin, located 16 km north of Jerusalem. Based on this affiliation, W. F. Albright excavated a test pit in 1927, discovering Bronze and Iron Age remains that provided additional support for locating Bethel at modern Beitin. This identification has been endorsed by the majority of scholars based on the similarity of the biblical and Arabic names as well as the archaeological evidence (Rainey 2006; Rainey/Notley 2006: 116–18 for a detailed discussion and analysis).

Extensive excavations were conducted at Beitin by W. F. Albright and J. L. Kelso in 1934, which continued under the direction of J. L. Kelso in 1937, 1954, 1957, and 1960. The earliest occupation levels at the site date to the Chalcolithic (4th millennium BCE) and Early Bronze III–IV (late 3rd mil-

lennium BCE). Although Kelso identified signs of cultic activity, this interpretation has been challenged (see e.g., Dever 1971). During the subsequent Middle Bronze Age, the site developed into a fortified urban center. Late Bronze Age findings include a well-planned domestic quarter. Kelso (1968) describes an "Israelite destruction"; the evidence presented in the final site report, however, is inconclusive.

The Iron I (ca. 1200–1000 BCE) levels represent a new town plan and a material culture assemblage typical of the Early Iron Age central hill country, perhaps indicating the arrival of new inhabitants. Kelso mentions three occupation phases which he dates to the Iron II period; however, he published very little evidence for occupation at the site that would correspond to the period of the biblical united and divided monarchies. Archaeological excavations at the site indicate that Bethel was inhabited during the following Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods (see Kelso 1968; Dever 1971).

Bethel was conquered by Vespasian during the First Jewish Revolt (Josephus, *J.W.* 4.551). Both Vespasian and Hadrian established military garrisons at the site. Eusebius (e.g., *Onomasticon* 4.27–6.3; 28.4–5; 40:20–24; 66.8–10, 11–16; 120.8–10; 144.14–15) describes Bethel in some detail. The Pilgrim of Bordeaux and Theodosius also refer to Bethel in their writings. The site was considered significant enough to be included on the 6th-century CE Madaba Map mosaic pavement.

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II. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

The HB/OT locates Bethel near the border of the territory of Joseph/Ephraim and Benjamin; here, the place can belong either to Ephraim (1 Chr 7:28), Joseph (Josh 16:1–3; 18:12–13; Judg 1:22–26), or Benjamin (Josh 18:22). According to the biblical tradition, Bethel was formerly called Luz, i.e., "almond-tree" (cf. Gen 35:6* [without *hw' byt 'l*], 7 [*byt 'l* instead of *'l byt 'l*]; 28:19; 48:3; Josh 18:13; Judg 1:23, 26). The differentiation between Bethel and Luz in the addition of Josh 16:2a is based on a wrong interpretation of Gen 28:19 (Wüst).

The sanctuary forms the center of the biblical tradition about Bethel. Here, Gen 28:11–12, 16,

19a report its *hieros logos* (contra Köhlmoos: 231–50). Whether the text can be used to argue for a connection between the name Bethel and a Canaanite sanctuary of the god El, however, remains questionable (Pfeiffer: 49–54).

In 1 Kgs 12:26–33, an excerpt from royal annals of the 9th/8th century BCE forms the kernel of the Deuteronomistic report about the cultic and political measures of Jeroboam after the division of the Davidic kingdom (1 Kgs 12:28aβ, bα* [only *wy'mr*], βγ, 29, 33b). According to this text, Jeroboam I placed a statue of a golden bull (representing the presence of the God of the Exodus [YHWH]) in the sanctuaries of Bethel and Dan. This act transformed them into official state sanctuaries (Amos 7:13), both located near the borders of Israel and delimitating the territory of YHWH as the national God of Israel. Like Jerusalem in the south, Bethel served as the place for the cultic inauguration of the king in the north.

The oldest composition of the book of Amos displays a social critique of Bethel (Amos 4:4–5; 5:5). Here, Bethel and Gilgal are portrayed as rural sanctuaries with more than regional significance. Later, this view is transformed (Amos 7:10–17) into a critique of the state cult in general and serves as a point of departure for both the Deuteronomistic *Fortschreibung* in Amos 3:14 and the fifth vision (Amos 9:1–4).

Influenced by Amos 5:5, Hosea (5:8; 10:5; cf. 4:15) calls Bethel "Beth-aven" (i.e., "House of Delusion"; cf. MT of Josh 7:2; 18:12; 1 Sam 13:5; 14:23). Hosea 10:5–6a* and Hos 8:5aα, 6b are directed against the statue of the bull and the state cult. Since YHWH reveals himself through the Assyrian (military) force, the bull no longer represents his powerful presence. In Hos 10:5–6a* (without both *ky*-sentences) the statue is labeled mere "calf-things" (*'eglôt*; cf. Rudolph: 195: *Kalbszeug*) that will be carried away to Assyria. Hosea 8:5aα, 6b announces the destruction of the "calf of Samaria" (i.e., the northern kingdom). The allusion to the Exodus in the prophetic words of Hos 12:10a, 13:4a, 5 and 9:3b–4b (cf. 8:13bβ) should be understood as references to the royal theology of Bethel (cf. 1 Kgs 12:28b).

The cult at Bethel continued after 720 BCE (2 Kgs 17:25–28). After the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 587 BCE, Bethel was used as an interim sanctuary for Judah (Zech 7:2–3). In this situation, Hos 12* (vv. 3–5, 7, 11, 13–14) evokes the Exodus-Moses tradition (vv. 7b, 14) against the Jacob-tradition (5b) rooted in Bethel (de Pury; Pfeiffer: 68–100). The accusation that the bull statue of Bethel represents an illegitimate form of idol veneration and worship of foreign gods is inserted into the book of Hosea only at a late (literary) stage. The polemic of Hos 8:4b focuses on the materials from which the statute is made (silver and gold). The po-

lemics against the bull in Hos 13:1–3 are the literary product of a post-Deuteronomistic (v. 2aα²βb) and another even later (vv. 2aα¹, 3) reworking of previous material. Hosea 4:15 already seems to integrate the view of Amos and cannot be part of a pre-Deuteronomistic redaction (cf. Amos 4:4; 5:5; 8:14). Finally, Hos 8:6a is familiar with the polemics against icons known from Deutero-Isaiah.

The base text of the Deuteronomistic polemic against Bethel is 1 Kgs 11:26–14:19 (the kingship of Jeroboam). This narrative portrays the cultic measures reported in 1 Kgs 12:26–30a as an anti-Jerusalemite act, which is described as sin (*ḥṭ't*; v. 30a; cf. 1 Kgs 16:31; 2 Kgs 15:24, 28). That sin will provoke the fall of the northern kingdom (2 Kgs 17:21–23a). Further *Fortschreibungen* add into 1 Kgs 12:31–32 the aspect of the impurity of the cult (cf. 2 Kgs 10:29; 17:16 [MT]). Exodus 32:1–6 transposes Israel's sin to Mt. Sinai and transfers it to the people of God as a whole.

The Deuteronomistic redactors construct King Josiah as the antitype to Jeroboam who puts an end to the illegitimate cult in Bethel (cf. 2 Kgs 23:15, 21–23, with 1 Kgs 12:32 and the further addition 13:1–10, 11–22; 2 Kgs 23:16–20). 2 Kings 17:24–33, a late Deuteronomistic text, suspects the settlers in Samaria (after the events of 720 BCE) of reactivating the apostasy at Bethel (cf. 1 Kgs 12:31–32 with 2 Kgs 17:29) – an apostasy that infests the whole land and that is removed by Josiah (2 Kgs 23:15, 19).

In contrast to Amos, Hosea, and the Deuteronomistic History, we do not find any polemics against Bethel in the book of Genesis. The narrative of Jacob, Esau, and Laban (written after 720 BCE) mentions Bethel as a place of Jacob's divine encounter and embeds the place firmly in the literary joints of the overall composition (Gen 28:10, 11–13aα*, 16–19a, 20–22; 31:13). The postexilic edition of the patriarchal narrative inserts the divine promise to Jacob into the theophany at Bethel (Gen 28:13–15a, b; cf. Gen 12:3b; 13:14–16). In the notices about the building of an altar at Bethel (Gen 12:7-8; 13:18; 35:6-7*), the place looses its cultic function; the invocation of the divine name (Gen 12:8; cf. 26:25) replaces the sacrifice (cf. Gen 8:20). The same can be said of the naming of the place and of Bethel as a place of remembrance of an initial encounter with God (Gen 35:6–7*). At the same time, Bethel is connected with the memory of Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah (Gen 35:8). Finally, a redaction encompassing the whole literary unit Genesis–2 Kings describes in Gen 35:1–7 the end of the idol worship before Jacob's clan arrives at Bethel. This act precludes the turning point of the divine history described in Josh 24. On the view of Bethel/Luz in P, see Gen 35:9–15 (48:3–6). In the late literary frame of the book of Judges (1:1–2:5 [esp. 1:22–26]; 19–21), Bethel appears as Israel's

Map 5   Location of Bethel

central sanctuary where the ark of the covenant is housed (Judg 20 : 27), which can be seen as a forerunner to the sanctuary in Jerusalem.

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Henrik Pfeiffer

III. Judaism

▪ Second Temple and Hellenistic Judaism ▪ Rabbinic through to Modern Judaism

A. Second Temple and Hellenistic Judaism

The town of Bethel as an actual geographical location does not figure prominently in the Second Temple period. Because of its strategic location north of Jerusalem it was fortified by the Syrian general Bacchides during the Maccabean wars (1 Macc 9 : 50). It was captured by Vespasian in 69 CE during the Jewish revolt against Rome (*J.W.* 4.551).

Bethel is important in Second Temple exegesis as the place where Jacob receives his "ladder" vision when leaving Canaan (Gen 28 : 10-22) and where he sacrifices on his return (Gen 35 : 1-15). The interpretive tradition found particularly in *Jubilees*, the *Aramaic Levi Document* and the *Testament of Levi* greatly expands the second event, making Bethel the place where Levi receives his priesthood in a dream vision and first serves as priest (*Jub.* 32 : 1, *ALD* 5 : 3–5, *T. Levi* 9 : 3), and where Jacob tithes his possessions to God, including his son Levi (*Jub.* 32 : 3–9, *ALD* 5 : 2, *T. Levi* 9 : 3). At Bethel, Jacob's name is changed to Israel (*Jub.* 31 : 18) and he sees the heavenly tablets in a vision (*Jub.* 32 : 21–22). However, according to *Jubilees*, Bethel is not the place chosen for the temple (*Jub.* 32 : 23). That place is Jerusalem, where, according to the *Temple Scroll*, God will build the eschatological temple, "according to the covenant which I have made with Jacob at Bethel" (*11QTemple*[a] XXIX, 10).

The *Ladder of Jacob*, a 1st-century CE (?) Christian (?) text, interprets Jacob's vision at Bethel (Gen 28 : 10–22) as an apocalyptic vision. Other Second Temple texts, such as the *Testament of Jacob*, refer to the events at Bethel but add nothing new. The town of Bethulia in the book of Judith may be a veiled reference to Bethel, since the geographic location of the fictional Bethulia is the same as that of the historic Bethel.

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Sidnie White Crawford

B. Rabbinic through to Modern Judaism

Before Albright's excavations in 1934, Bethel was far from being a real, known place for Jewish Bible readers. Not present in the medieval Jewish itineraries of the land of Israel, it is as though Bethel vanished completely from Jewish consciousness.

By far the most important event associated with Bethel, for most medieval Jewish readers, is Jacob's dream of ladder and angels (Gen 28 : 10–22). In rabbinic midrash, however, the location of that event is transferred to Mount Moriah, which in turn is identified with the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (cf. *PRE* ch. 35; and the other references assembled in Ginzberg: 5.290–92, nn. 132, 141). All three are called "the place" (Gen 22 : 4; 28 : 17; Deut 12 : 5), so "Bethel" thus comes to be understood as an alternative name for Jerusalem.

Many medieval Jewish exegetes, returning to the *peshat*, or "simple sense," of Scripture, reject this midrash. Still it is not clear to medieval Jewish

exegetes whether there was only one Bethel or perhaps two Bethels, as David Qimḥi argued, or even three or four, as Elijah of Vilna suggested (see their respective comments on Josh 16 : 2). Much earlier, Rashi, torn between midrash and *peshat*, offered a different compromise. Perhaps, Rashi suggested (on Gen 28 : 17), a miracle caused Mount Moriah and Bethel to be brought together so that Jacob could be in both places at once.

In the *Zohar*, two centuries after Rashi, geography is quite vague, but it appears that *Zohar*'s author also identifies Bethel with the Temple Mount. He is concerned, however, with the meaning of the name "Beit-El," or "*beit Elohim*" as Jacob calls it in Gen 28 : 22 (*Zohar* 1.151a). The choice of "Elohim" rather than the Tetragrammaton is interpreted, as it is so often in rabbinic and kabbalistic exegesis, as referring to the divine quality of strict judgment. Kabbalistically, the name signifies the Shekhinah but in a severe and negative aspect. In the context of the *Zohar*'s reading of the Jacob story, Jacob's encounter here with the God of strict judgment is a middle stage in his spiritual descent towards the hellish city of Haran.

A very different reading of the name Bethel is offered by Samson Raphael Hirsch in 19th-century Frankfurt (in his commentary on Gen 28 : 10–11, 22). On the night after Jacob left his parents' home, Hirsch argues, Jacob's overnight shelter in Bethel, though perhaps without a roof or walls, was his first "house." The story of the dream is a part of the larger narrative of how Jacob married and formed a household and a home. One's home ought to be the true house of God; Hirsch criticizes those who use the term "house of God" only to mean a church or a synagogue.

The story of the capture of Bethel by the Israelites (Judg 1 : 22–26), along with the discovery of its hidden entrance, also elicits rabbinic elaboration. The entrance to the city, it is said, was by means of a cave – whose mouth was itself hidden by a hollow almond tree (*luz*) – by means of which one entered (*BerR* 69 : 8). The unnamed Bethelite who reveals the secret entrance to the Israelites in the biblical narrative is taken in the Talmud as a role model for directing or accompanying strangers to their destination. The city the Bethelite founds, also called Luz (Judg 1 : 26), has a similarly hidden entranceway, according to the Talmud. Indeed, so very well hidden was it that neither the Assyrians nor the Babylonians ever gained entrance; indeed, the Angel of Death himself is not permitted inside, and the inhabitants are immortal as long as they are within its walls (*bSot* 46b and Maharsha ad loc.).

In 15th-century Spain, in his commentary to the book of Amos, Isaac Abarbanel imagines the city of Bethel during the reign of Jeroboam II. He interprets the discussion in Amos 7 as implying that although the main royal residence was in Samaria,

the king had a second palace in Bethel. According to Abarbanel, Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, was concerned that the prophet Amos would discourage worshippers from coming, which would reduce the revenue of the institution. The commentator is no doubt thinking of the kings and pilgrimage towns of his own day.

About the turn of the 20th century, Amos 7 became a central text for Reform Jews. It is read as a classic expression of the opposition of "prophetic Judaism" to "priestly Judaism" whose spokesman is Amaziah. Reform Judaism identifies strongly with the former against the latter. "Prophetic Judaism" joins a critique of established religion to a powerful social critique: Amos voices Judaism's denunciation of the injustice of the wealthy. Sometimes Amos' hometown of Tekoa is contrasted to Bethel, the former representing the virtuous small town contrasted to the sinful wealth of the larger city (Montefiore).

This socially progressive reading of the story is masterfully expressed in the 1950s in Shalom Spiegel's essay "Amos versus Amaziah." The learned essay was initially delivered as a speech to an audience that included United States Chief Justice Earl Warren. Spiegel sets the conflict of Amos and Amaziah as a court case. In one passage, he imagines the townsfolk of Bethel coming as witnesses to give testimony against Amos. Spiegel uses the biblical passage to parody American small-town life: Spiegel's Bethel includes a Chamber of Commerce, a Bar Association, even a representative of the Consolidated Wholesale Florists of Northern Israel, all bitterly opposed to Amos.

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Joseph Davis

IV. Islam

Bethel (MT *Bêt-ʾēl*, "House of God"), the town mentioned in the Bible more often than any other except Jerusalem, is today known as Khirbet al-Raʾs. However, Bethel was identified by Muslim authors with a famous village (*qarya mashhūra*) in the Ghuṭa of Damascus. In medieval times this town was named by Muslim geographers as Bayt Lihyā, which is undoubtedly a corrupted form of Bayt al-Ilāha, "the house of God," and also documented in other Muslim sources as Bayt al-Āliha, "the house of gods." Some Christian Arab authors offer the transliteration Bayt Īl, which is explained (*tafsīruhu*) as Bayt Allāh, "the house of God."

The town is associated in Muslim and Christian Arabic literature with several biblical figures, such as Abraham, Jacob, Moses, the Judges, Solomon, and Jeroboam. Although Muslim traditionists deny

this connection, in some Islamic legends of Christian origin, Abraham's father Āzar (Tāriḥ among Christian Arabic authors) brought his idols to this town for Abraham to sell them (cf. S 6 : 74).

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                          Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala

See also →Beth-Aven; →Jacob's Ladder

Bethel-Sharezer

→Sharezer

Beth-Emek

Beth-emek (MT *Bêt hāʿēmeq*) is mentioned only once in the Bible, as a town in the tribal territory of Asher (Josh 19 : 27). The name may mean "place of the plain or valley," a decriptive name that may fit any number of sites. Robinson noted the similarity of the name Beth-emek to ʿAmqa, 11 km northeast of Acco (Robinson: 134), and Guerin identified it with this site (Guerin: 23). However, Abel (Abel: 67, 272) and Aharoni (Aharoni: 315, 432) both identified it with Tell Mimas (Heb. *Tel Bet Ha-ʿEmeq*), near ʿAmqa. Kallai challenges this identification, noting that the town is listed after the description of the border in the southeast, with a continuing description of the border going to Cabul. Tell Mimas, on the other hand, is further away to the northwest of Cabul. Thus, one should look for a site between Wadi el-Malik and Cabul (Kallai: 431–32). Gal suggests identifying it with Khirbet Mudawer Tamra, located 5 km south of Cabul (Gal: 125).

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Bether

Bether (LXX Βαίθηρ, Θεθηρ) is one of 11 towns belonging to the district of Bethlehem in the tribal territory of Judah (Josh 15 : 59a LXX). It is likely that this list of towns was omitted in the MT as a result of homoioteleuton. LXX^B reads Θεθηρ, while LXX^A reads Βαιθηρ. The name in Hebrew may be

preserved in Song 2 : 17 as *hārê bāter* "the mountains of Bether." The town served as a significant stronghold buring the revolt led by Bar Kokhba (ca. 132–35 CE). It is mentioned in talmudic (*yTaan* 4 : 68d–69b; *LamR* 2 : 4; *bGit* 57a–58a) as well as Greek and Latin sources (see Stern: nn. 332, 342, 353, 440). Eusebius refers to this place as Βηθθηρα, a strong citadel not far from Jerusalem, from which Bar Kokhba led his revolt (*Hist. eccl.* 4.6). Bether is identified with Khirbet el-Yehudi, near the village of Battir, southwest of Jerusalem (Abel: 271; Kallai: 393).

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Bethesda

→Beth-Zatha

Beth-Ezel

The toponym Beth-ezel (MT *Bêt hā ʾēṣel*) occurs in Mic 1 : 11 in a series of puns on city names: "removed" (*yiqqaḥ*) in the next line plays with the verb "take away" (ʾṣl), so that Beth-ezel may be interpreted to mean "the House of Removal," though the originally probably meant "the Noble House."

     Presumably a Judean city, its precise location is unknown. Septuagint and Vulgata render it as "adjoining house" (Gk. οἶχον ἐχόμενον; Lat. *domus vicina*; cf. Heb. ʾēṣel, "beside"). Targum and Peshitta recognize it as a proper name.

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                          Jackson Blake Couey

Beth-Gader

Beth-gader is a personified toponym appearing along Bethlehem and Kiriath-jearim in the Chronicler's Judahite genealogy (1 Chr 2 : 51). It is yet another place name deriving from West Semitic *gdr* ("wall"; as, e.g., Gadara, Geder, Gederah, Gederothaim), that all likely refer to fortifications (Rainey: 231). Some scholars (e.g., Demsky: 51) suggest that Beth-gader is a variant of Gedor (Josh 15 : 58, see also 1 Chr 4 : 4 and possibly v. 18). The latter has been identified with Ḥirbet Ǧedūr located 13 km southwest of Bethlehem. This site was settled from the Late Bronze Age II throughout the Byzantine periods (Keel/Küchler: 725).

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