



VIEW NORTHEAST: LOOKING OUT BETHSAIDA'S INNER-CITY GATE WITH FOUR CHAMBERS, TWO ON EACH SIDE. THREE OF THE CHAMBERS SERVED AS GRANARIES. THE ASSYRIAN KING TIGLATH-PILESER III DESTROYED THE CITY IN 732 BC.

BELOW (VIEW WEST): LOOKING IN THE INNER CITY GATE (ABOVE) ACROSS THE COURTYARD, WHICH WAS THE HEART OF THE ANCIENT TOWN.





VIEW SOUTHWEST: THE GATE OF BETHSAIDA (ET-TELL; TOP CENTER BELOW THE SUN STREAK). THE PHOTO SHOWS THE CITY IN RELATION TO THE PLAIN AND THE SEA OF GALILEE (TOP). THE JORDAN PARK IS IN THE TREES (TOP RIGHT).

BETHSAIDA

(SEE MAP ON PAGE 204)

Archaeologists have identified two sites thought to be the Bethsaida of the New Testament. The photo *Above* and the photos on page 256 show the traditional site of Bethsaida at et-Tell, which is about 1.5 miles (2.4 kilometers) north of the Sea of Galilee. The bottom photo on page 262 shows the excavations at the other suggested site for Bethsaida, el-Araj.¹ The main objections to et-Tell are its distance from the lake and its lack of remains from the Roman period. I provide articles that support el-Araj² and others that support et-Tell.³

Along with Chorazin and Capernaum, Bethsaida was the other city cursed by Jesus for choosing not to believe Him and for not accepting the miracles He performed as evidence of His divine Sonship:

Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. (Luke 10:13)

Bethsaida was the home of Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Philip (John 1:44, 12:21). One of Herod the Great's sons, Philip the Tetrarch of Galilee, built a city called Bethsaida-Julias as his capital, naming it after the daughter of Caesar Augustus. Could Philip's pagan city be et-Tell, the one Jesus referred to when He denounced it for its unbelief? And could the fisherman's village be el-Araj on the shore of the lake? Without more evidence, we can't know for sure. But it makes sense that Peter, Andrew, and Philip would come from a town of humble fishermen closer to the lake.



VIEW SOUTH: THE OUTER CITY GATE, LOOKING TOWARD THE COURTYARD AND INNER-CITY GATE, WHICH DATES TO THE BIBLICAL PERIOD (TENTH–EIGHTH CENTURIES BC).

BELOW (VIEW EAST): THE SACRIFICIAL HIGH PLACE. "IN THE PIT NEAR THE HIGH PLACE WERE BONES FROM SACRIFICIAL ANIMALS OF TYPES THAT COMPLY WITH LEVITICUS 11" (QUOTE IS FROM THE SIGN).





VIEW SOUTH: THIS WAS A STREET IN BETHSAIDA, REMINDING US THAT “WHITHERSOEVER [JESUS] ENTERED, INTO VILLAGES, OR CITIES, OR COUNTRY, THEY LAID THE SICK IN THE STREETS” TO BE MADE WHOLE (MARK 6:56).

Jesus fed five thousand men, besides women and children, near Bethsaida (Luke 9:10; see “Plains of Bethsaida and Gennesaret” on page 203). He also healed a blind man in Bethsaida (Mark 8:22). The blind man’s story is interesting. First, the manner of the miracle was different in that it required two steps to complete. And second, the man’s house is mentioned as being in a different location from the town:

And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him.

And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought.

And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking.

After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.

And he sent him away to his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town. (Mark 8:22–26)

Elder McConkie helps us understand why some miracles may have required two stages:

Frequently in opening the eyes of the blind, Jesus, as here [Matt. 9:27–31], coupled his spoken command with some physical act. On this and other occasions he touched the sightless eyes (Matthew 20:30–34). In healing the man in Jerusalem who was blind from birth, he anointed the man’s eyes with clay made

with spittle and then had the man wash in the Pool of Siloam (John 9:6–7). The blind man of Bethsaida was healed by application of saliva to his eyes (Mark 8:22–26). Similarly, in healing a deaf man with a speech impediment, Jesus both touched the man’s tongue and put his own fingers into the man’s ears (Mark 7:32-37).

None of these unusual and dissimilar acts are essential to the exercise of healing power. Healing miracles are performed by the power of faith and in the authority of the priesthood. By doing these physical acts, however, the Master’s apparent purpose was to strengthen the faith of the blind or deaf person, persons who were denied the ability to gain increased assurance and resultant faith by seeing his countenance or hearing his words.⁴

Elder Talmage, on the other hand, chose to point out a less-mentioned fact about the unusual healing: “This miracle presents the unique feature of Jesus healing a person by stages; the result of the first ministration was but a partial recovery. *No explanation of the exceptional circumstance is given*” (emphasis added).⁵ The miracle and its witness of Christ are the important things. Why Jesus performed it the way He did is of secondary importance. Seeing this as a principle may help with other questions that go unanswered: God doesn’t reveal everything we want to know, but asks that we “put [our] trust in the Lord” (see Mosiah 4:6–10).

The story above might remind you of the man who brought his son to Jesus after His disciples failed in their attempt to heal the boy. The father pleaded with Jesus, “Have compassion on us, and help us.” Jesus said to the man, “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, *and said with tears*, Lord, I believe; *help thou mine unbelief*” (Mark 9:17–24, emphasis added). Recognizing weakness but turning to Jesus for help with an increase in faith will achieve what belief cannot do on its own.

BELOW (VIEW EAST): THE PLAIN OF BETHSAIDA. THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN BETWEEN EL-ARAJ AND ET-TELL, WALKING NORTH TO ET-TELL (BETHSAIDA) FROM THE SEA OF GALILEE.





VIEW SOUTHWEST: THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN ON THE HIKE TO BETHSAIDA (ET-TELL) FROM THE SEA OF GALILEE. IT IS ONLY A QUARTER MILE (500 METERS) FROM THE PLAIN OF BETHSAIDA (SEE THE BOTTOM PHOTO ON PAGE 260).

BELOW (VIEW SOUTHEAST): THE NORTHEASTERN SHORE OF THE SEA OF GALILEE AT EL-ARAJ, ONE OF THE CANDIDATES FOR BIBLICAL BETHSAIDA (SEE THE BOTTOM PHOTO ON PAGE 262).





VIEW WEST: THE PLAIN OF BETHSAIDA WITH THE FISHING VILLAGE OF EL-ARAJ ON THE NORTHEAST SHORE OF THE SEA OF GALILEE (TOP CENTER IN THE TREES BY THE SHORE). ABOVE THE TREES ACROSS THE LAKE ARE TIBERIAS AND MT. ARBEL.

BELOW (VIEW NORTHWEST): THE EXCAVATIONS OF THE OTHER BETHSAIDA (EL-ARAJ) ON THE NORTHEAST SHORE OF THE SEA OF GALILEE.





VIEW WEST: THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN ON THE PLAIN OF BETHSAIDA A SHORT DISTANCE WEST OF EL-ARAJ (BETHSAIDA) ON A HIKE TO CAPERNAUM. I GOT LUCKY AND CAUGHT THIS PICTURE OF A RED FOX CROSSING THE PATH.

ENDNOTES

1 El Araj Excavation Project, <https://www.elarajexcavations.com>. The website has many interesting photos and includes a lecture by Steven Notley entitled “Has Bethsaida-Julias Finally Been Found?” He also discusses the methods by which ancient sites are identified. The lecture is available on YouTube here: https://youtu.be/wcNvLFDI7R0?si=c_vpSMo0gGvRd0qM.

2 R. Steven Notley, “Et-Tell Is Not Bethsaida,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 70, no. 4 (Dec. 2007): 220–30, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20361336>; Notley, “Reply to Arav,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 74, no. 2 (June 2011): 101–3; R. Steven Notley and Mordechai Aviam, “Searching for Bethsaida: The Case for El-Araj,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 46, no. 2 (Spring 2020), <https://library.biblicalarchaeology.org/article/searching-for-bethsaida-the-case-for-el-araj>.

3 Rami Arav, Richard A. Freund, and John F. Shroder Jr., “Bethsaida Rediscovered,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 26, no. 1 (Jan./Feb. 2000), <https://library.biblicalarchaeology.org/article/bethsaida-rediscovered>; Rami Arav, “Bethsaida—A Response to Steven Notley,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 74, no. 2 (June 2011): 92–100; Rami Arav, “A Response to Notley’s Reply,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 74, no. 2 (June 2011): 103–4; Rami Arav, “Searching for Bethsaida: The Case for Et-Tell,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 46, no. 2 (Spring 2020), <https://library.biblicalarchaeology.org/article/searching-for-bethsaida-the-case-for-et-tell>.

4 Bruce R. McConkie, “Blind See, Dumb Speak, Devils Cast Out,” in *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965), 1:283–84.

5 James E. Talmage, “The Leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees,” in *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve Inc., 2006), chap. 22, Gospel Library.