

The Doctrine of the City of Bethel

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Preface: Bethel began as a city with great spiritual import. It was ideally situated in central Israel, 9 miles south of Shiloh and 12 miles north of Jerusalem. However, as time went on, it became simply another city, infested with religion. According to ZPEB, Bethel is found more times in Scripture than any other city besides Jerusalem. It is possible that there is a second city named *Bethel* (or *Bethul* or *Bethuel*); and that there may be a separate mountain area called Bethel.

1. The Hebrew reads: Bêyth-`èl (בֵּית־אֵל) [pronounced *bayth-AYHL*], which means *house of God*. In general, *El* refers to the name of a pagan God, not to the God of Israel. Throughout most of Canaan, Baal supplanted El in the Canaanite pantheon of gods; however, Bethel was an exception to this. Between the two syllables, we find a maqqêph (־) (מֻקְפֵּה) [pronounced *mahk-KAYF*], which looks like an exalted hyphen and is not pronounced. The maqqêph unites two words for the purpose of pronunciation. The accent is moved to the last syllable of the next word. Strong's #1008 BDB #110.
2. Bethel is located in central Palestine, on the border between Ephraim and Benjamin, *on the great north-south watershed road of Palestine*,¹ about 12 miles north of Jerusalem, 9 miles south of Shiloh, and just west of Ai. Eusebius, in his work *Onomasticon*, places it 12 Roman miles from Jerusalem, on the road to Neapolis. It is represented by the modern



Taken from *New American Standard Bible, Study Edition*; A. J. Holman Company, ©1975 by The Lockman Foundation, maps in back of the Bible.

¹ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 1, p. 531.

Beitīn, a village of some 400 inhabitants, which stands on a knoll East of the road to *Na^ˉblus*.²

- a. ZPEB points out that there were excellent springs of water near the top of a ridge of hills there which made Bethel an idea place for inhabitation from the beginning.
- b. Bethel was also on a key west-east route between the Mediterranean Sea and Eastern Jordan (Trans-jordania) through Jericho. From Bethel, one would travel either through the valley of Avalon or by Gophna through the Plain of Sharon to the sea.
- c. Bethel is probably located mostly under the modern city of Beitin.

The Livingston's do not agree with this opinion.

David Livingston on the Correct Location of Bethel

If one assumes Beitin is Bethel, proofs given may seem convincing. However, these proofs leave many unanswered questions.

For instance:

- How did Beitin first get its name and why was it known (in the 1830's) only by locals?
- Where is the "mountain" east of Beitin spoken of in Genesis 12:8?
- Why is there no trace of Jeroboam's temple at Beitin, even though Albright and Kelso's first objective in every campaign was to find it?
- Can a burn level be used as evidence that Beitin is Bethel when there is no biblical statement that Joshua (or anyone else) burned Bethel?
- Why has no trace of Ai, mentioned in Joshua 7-8, been found east of Bertin?
- Why continue to excavate east of Beitin looking for "Ai"?
- Since Roman milestones take one to el-Bireh, instead of Beitin, why look elsewhere for Bethel?
- Should we not rather suspect Beitin itself?

Therefore, we propose that Bethel is at el-Bireh, and not at Bertin.

Summary of the Geographical Evidence:

1. Roads.
 - a. Beitin is not on the main north-south ridge road.
 - b. Beitin is on only one of two Roman roads going from Bireh to Nablus.
 - c. Beitin was not on the main northerly Roman road, from Jerusalem to the Roman capital at Caesarea through Gophna, at the time when Eusebius/Jerome would have made the Onomasticon.
 - d. Beitin is a "dead town" today because it is not on a main road junction.
2. Borders.
 - a. There is an abnormal northerly bend if Beitin is on the border between Benjamin and Ephraim, Judah and Israel.
 - b. There is no natural topographical feature enabling it to become a border town.
 - c. Ai has not been discovered east of Bertin.
 - d. The distance from Jerusalem given by Eusebius-Jerome does not bring one to Bertin.
 - e. Town names move. (Nor can certain proof be advanced that Beitin=Bethel etymologically.)
3. On this same web page, David Livingston goes into great detail about the topology problems, and the lack of mountains in Beitin, which can be found near el-Bireh.

This was taken from <http://www.ancientdays.net/bethel14.htm> . David Livingston goes into great detail about this on this particular web page. Since I really don't know el-Bireh from Beitin, it does not make a lot of difference to me. However, this would change all of the archeological evidence, which is presented at the end of this study.

² Taken from *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; from E-Sword; Topic: Bethel.

This may seem like a whole lot of hoo-hah about nothing; however, when the traditional locations for ancient sites are accepted, then we find that there is a disparity between the archeological evidence and the Biblical record. You must be careful not to put too much faith in archeological evidence; if that is the basis of your faith, you will find that there are problems from decade to decade; if not with this city, then with that.

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Let me include one additional source on this same topic:

BGA Summarizes Livingston's Evidence

1. Abraham built an altar on the mountain east of Bethel (Gen. 12:8). East of Beitin there are no mountains. East of el-Bireh, a town at ca. 3 km south of Beitin, there is Jebel et-Tawil, a mountain that is 907 m high.
2. Bethel was on the borderline between the territories of Benjamin and Ephraim (Joshua 16:1-2 and 18:11-13). The natural borderline runs south of Beitin. If Bethel had been in present-day Beitin, precisely there the borderline between both tribes would have shown a considerable bulge northward. El-Bireh, mentioned already, lies exactly at this natural borderline between the territories of Benjamin and Ephraim; so el-Bireh is a much likelier candidate for the site of the border-town Bethel.
3. Jeroboam had a temple built in Bethel (1 Kings 12:29). It is not likely that this temple was built in what is now Beitin, because Beitin is not located on the main road to the north, but on a side-road. Remains of a temple have not been found in Beitin. El-Bireh, on the other hand, is located at a crossroads on the main route to the north and as a result is a busy town even today. In the past it was a suitable place for a temple.

Taken from: <http://www.bga.nl/en/articles/ai.html> who took it from Livingston. BGA stands for Bijbel, Geschiedenis en Archeologic (in English, that is Bible, History and Archaeology).

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4. Scripture: Gen. 12:8 13:3 28:19 31:13 35:1, 3, 6–8, 15–16; Joshua 7:2 8:9, 12, 17 12:9, 16 16:1–2 18:13, 22 Judges 1:22–23 4:5 21:19 1Sam. 7:16 10:3 13:2 30:27 1Kings 12:29, 12:32–33 13:1, 4, 10–11, 32 16:34 2Kings 2:2–3, 23 10:29 17:28 23:4, 15, 17, 19 1Chron. 7:28 2Chron. 13:19 Ezra 2:28 Neh. 7:32 11:31 Jer. 48:13 Hos. 10:15 12:4 Amos 3:14 4:4 5:5–6 7:10, 13. After going through these passages individually, I found that there were several times when the MKJV translators rendered Beth-el as *House of God*, when it clearly refers to the city of Bethel.³ Therefore, the next point:
5. Scriptural references for *House of God* [*El* or *Elohim*]: Gen. 28:17, 19 Judges 18:31 20:18, 26, 31 21:2 1Chron. 6:48 9:11, 9:13, 9:26–27 22:2 23:28 24:5 25:6 26:20 28:12, 21 29:7 2Chron. 3:3 4:11,



A picture of modern Beitin, taken from

<http://www.ourfatherlutheran.net/biblehomelands/palestine/bethel.htm>

³ I have a computer concordance for certain Bibles; unfortunately, the I don't have one for the much more accurate translation, the NKJV.

4:19 5:1, 14 7:5 15:18 22:12 23:3, 9 24:7, 13, 27 25:24 28:24 31:13, 21 33:7 34:9 35:8 36:18–19 Ezra 1:4 2:68 3:8–9 4:24 5:2, 13–17 6:3, 5, 7–8, 12, 16–17, 22 7:20, 24 8:36 10:1, 6, 10:9 Neh. 6:10 8:16 11:11, 16, 22 12:40 13:7, 9, 11 Psalm 42:4 52:8 55:14 Eccl. 5:1 Dan. 1:2 5:3 Zec. 7:2 Matt. 12:4 Mark 2:26 Luke 6:4 1Tim. 3:15 Heb. 10:21 1Peter 4:17 Obviously, these passages will not all be pertinent to our study (for instance, Judges 18:31 says **The House of God** was at Shiloh; so this is obviously not a reference to Bethel). I should mention that this is according to the MKJV; another version may have *Bethel* in places where the MKJV has *House of God*. Although, at first I assumed that the context would have to guide us as to whether we are speaking of the Tabernacle of God or of the city of Bethel, it became clear that where we find Beth^{el}, we are clearly speaking of the city of Bethel; and where we find Beth Elohim, we are generally speaking of the Tabernacle of God (a glaring exception to this would be Gen. 28:17, 19—which took place prior to the establishment of the Tabernacle of God). No idea why this did not occur to the translators of the MKJV. And since I had to go through this list essentially two times to make up for the inconsistencies of the MKJV, I will not be using them again for any similar study.

6. I must admit to being rather unhappy with the inconsistency of the MKJV; so I went to the KJV concordance (also found in e-sword) and got the following references:
- Rendered Bethel in Gen. 12:8 13:3 28:19 31:13 35:1, 3, 6, 8, 15–16 Joshua 7:2 8:9, 12, 17 12:9, 16 16:1–2 18:13 Judges 1:22–23 4:5 21:19 1Sam. 7:16 10:3 13:2 30:27 1Kings 12:29, 32–33 13:1, 4, 10–11, 32 2Kings 2:2–3, 23 10:29 17:28 23:4, 15, 17, 19 1Chron. 7:28 2Chron. 13:19 Ezra 2:28 Neh. 7:32 11:31 Jer. 48:13 Hos. 10:15 12:4 Amos 3:14 4:4 5:5–6 7:10, 13
 - Rendered House of God in the KJV: Judges 20:18, 26, 31 Zech. 7:2
 - You may observe that this concordance is also rather imperfect (e.g., they missed Joshua 18:22 1Kings 16:34; they mistakenly listed Amos 4:4 as 5:4, which I corrected).
 - Where the KJV renders Beth^{el} as *House of God* in Judges 20, it is probably a reaction to Shiloh being mentioned as a place for a religious feast and the place of the Tabernacle of God in two nearby passages (which we will discuss when we get there).

The History of Bethel from the Time of the Patriarchs

- God appears to Abram and has him leave his country and his father's house; so Abram, Sarai and Lot go to the land of Canaan, which we know as Palestine today. God then tells Abram that He would give him and his descendants all of this land around him. From there, Abram goes down to Bethel and Ai, cities which are side-by-side, and he builds an altar to God there. This is the first that we hear of the city Bethel. Twice, it is said that Abram pitched his tent here in Bethel, which indicates that he remained there for a short time. Gen. 12:8
- Abram journeys as far south as Egypt, lies to the pharaoh there, and then comes back up to Bethel. He and Lot remain here for some time until it becomes clear that they could not both have their cattle and flocks together. This is when Lot moves to Sodom and then God promises Abram the land in all directions as far as he could see. God then tells Abram to walk through the land which He had given him. Gen. 13
- Jacob, Abraham's grandson, has a dream about the ladder or staircase which extends from earth to heaven; and God promises that the land in all directions would be his and that by his descendants will all the earth be blessed. Jacob builds a pillar here and he calls this place Bethel, although it had been named Luz previously. Jacob says, "**This is the House of Elohim and this is the gate of heaven.**" Gen. 28:10–22
- Jacob moves eastward, where his relatives are, and marries Rachel and her sister Leah, and works for her father Laban. When God appears to Jacob again in a dream, He says, "I am the God of Bethel." And God tells Jacob to return to the land of Canaan. Gen. 31:13
- Jacob spends time in the land and goes southward toward Edom to meet up with his twin brother, which relationship had not been left on good terms. He later moves to Shechem and raises his children to adulthood. However, his daughter is raped; his two sons do not properly deal with the incident, and they all move northward to Bethel again. Gen. 32–34.
- It is God Who tells Jacob to move back to Bethel. Jacob moves there and calls the place El-bethel (it is still known as Luz to the locals). God again speaks to Jacob in Bethel and renames him *Israel* and God confirms His promises which He had made to Abraham. Jacob and his family leave Bethel for Ephrath, where Rachel gives birth to a son and dies while in labor. Gen. 35

13. For the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob, the city of Bethel is most closely associated with their spiritual birth, their spiritual growth and God's promises to them. No other city in the land of Canaan is as closely associated with God and these men.

The History of Bethel from Joshua to Solomon

14. We should not be surprised that Bethel is not mentioned again until the book of Joshua. Eventually, Jacob and his family are moved to Egypt, where the Jews remain and grow as a people; and are placed into slavery by the Egyptians. From Exodus to Deuteronomy, we have the slow return of the Jews to the land of Canaan where their fathers Abraham and Jacob had lived 400 years previously.
15. When Joshua leads Israel against Ai, the city of Bethel is mentioned, as it is just west of Ai (Joshua 7:2). Because the Israelites are at first defeated at Ai, some hide to ambush the men of Ai in an area between Bethel and Ai (Joshua 8:9). Interestingly enough, even though all we hear about in Joshua 7–8 is Israel's battle against Ai, we read in Joshua 8:17: **Not a man was left in Ai or Bethel, who had not gone out after Israel, and they left the city unguarded to pursue Israel.** Although it is logical for Israel to attack Ai and then to attack Bethel, no attack on Bethel is spoken of, and the remainder of Joshua 8 deals with the defeat of Ai. Many scholars do not believe that Bethel should be found in Joshua 8:17, and there are some ancient manuscripts which agree with them (it is not found in the Greek Septuagint).
16. When the kings are enumerated that Joshua defeated, we have **the king of Ai, which is besides Bethel** (Joshua 12:9b). Later, the king of Bethel is added to this list (v. 16). What we would expect would be for the kings of Ai and Bethel to be named in the same verse, as these cities as side-by-side. Again, many scholars do not believe that *Bethel* belongs in Joshua 12:16, and, furthermore, it is not found in the Septuagint.
- Smith⁴ offers a different solution. He suggests that the *Bethel* found here is actually *Chesil*, *Bethuel* and *Bethul*, which is a southern city in Judah given over to Simeon (Joshua 15:30 19:4 1Chron. 4:29–30). You may wonder, *how does Chesil figure in here?* In the Greek Septuagint, instead of *Chesil*, we have *Baithel*. ISBE tells us that it is to this city that David sent the spoils from the Amalekites (1Sam. 30:27).⁵
 - Smith also suggests that there is a Mount Bethel, found in Joshua 16:1 and 1Sam. 13:2. Easton concurs with this, referring to it as a hilly district near Bethel.⁶
17. Bethel is one of the border cities for Ephraim and Benjamin which properly belongs to Benjamin (Joshua 16:1–2 18:13, 22). Apparently, this city is eventually taken by Ephraim (1Chron. 7:20, 28–29).
18. The house of Joseph (probably Ephraim and west Manasseh) went up against Bethel and defeated them, with the help of a resident there. Judges 1:22–26
19. Deborah, a prophetess in Israel, sat under a palm tree between Ramah and Benjamin. Judges 4:5
20. Judges 20:18 reads: **Now the sons of Israel arose, went up to the House of God (Beth-el) and inquired of God, saying, "Who will go up first for us to battle against the sons of Benjamin?"** This appears to actually be Bethel (as many translations concur), as we are later told **the Ark of the Covenant of God was there in those days** (Judges 20:27b). Therefore, for a period of time, the Tabernacle of God was set up in Bethel and soon after moved to Shiloh (Judges 18:31; these chapters are not all in chronological order).⁷ When the battle does not go well for the sons of Israel, they go to Bethel and cry and ask God through Phinehas guidance (Judges 20:25–28). Later, after they are successful in battle, the sons of Israel return to Bethel again to cry, as they had almost wiped out the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 21:2). At this point, the people build an altar and offer up burnt offerings and peace offerings (Judges 21:4).
- This causes us some confusion. About a week ago, they went to Phinehas in Bethel and they fasted and offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings. The obvious question is, when they go back to Bethel (compare Judges 20:26 and 21:2), why are they *building an altar* in the second passage? We can

⁴ Dr. William Smith, *Smith's Bible Dictionary*; 1894; from e-Sword, topic: Bethel. Easton concurs in M.G. Easton M.A., D.D., *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*; 1897; from e-Sword, topic: Bethel.

⁵ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; from E-Sword; Topic: Bethel.

⁶ M.G. Easton M.A., D.D., *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*; 1897; from e-Sword, topic: Bethel.

⁷ Another option is, the Tabernacle of God was in Shiloh; then it was moved to Bethel; and then back to Shiloh.

understand that maybe Phinehas is not mentioned in both passages (we don't find him in Judges 21); but what is the deal with building another altar?

- b. We have two basic options: either the Tabernacle of God and the Ark of the Covenant were in Bethel or they were not. They are apparently there in Judges 20:27 and sacrifices are offered there. So what happened by Judges 21:4? This is anywhere from a week to a few weeks later. No mention of Phinehas, no mention of the Ark, no mention of the brazen altar (which is one of the pieces of furniture for the Tabernacle of God).
 - c. One possibility is, Phinehas would not meet with them, for whatever reason.
 - d. Another option is, Phinehas has moved everything to Shiloh, where the yearly feast is (Judges 21:19; compare Judges 18:31). It is even possible that Phinehas was in the process of moving things to Shiloh, in order to consolidate the yearly festival with the Tabernacle of God. The Tabernacle is moved on several occasions; however, we are never specifically told of this or that move. That is, there is never a verse which states, *And Phinehas and the Levites moved the Tabernacle and all of its furniture from Bethel to Shiloh, because Shiloh is a more secure location.* There is nothing like this verse anywhere in Scripture. We only come across verses which tell us *where* the Tabernacle is from time to time (e.g., Judges 18:31).
 - e. I need to comment here that, there is no contradiction—we simply just do not know what has taken place. Since these are adjacent chapters, if someone was careful to make sure that everything fit together in one nice, neat package, then this would have been dealt with. It is likely that everyone involved—the soldiers of Israel and Phinehas—knew exactly what was going on; however, this was not carefully explained to us, who observe this thousands of years later. The simple fact is, there has never been some organization who had the final say on Scripture and fixed every detail. Throughout the Bible, there are situations like this where we do not know exactly what occurred and we can only speculate.
21. Bethel is mentioned incidentally to describe where a battle between Israel and the sons of Benjamin took place in Judges 20:31.
 22. Bethel is again mentioned incidentally in Judges 21:19, which simply helps to explain where Shiloh is. However, this mention is significant, as we find much of what is associated with Jehovah worship in Bethel in Judges 20:27, and yet there is a feast each year held in Shiloh (Judges 21:19). Either, this is a matter of disobedience on the part of Israel (which is what we would expect in the book of Judges); or we are actually seeing the short period of time when the Tabernacle was moved from Bethel to Shiloh (something which may have taken several years). It does not seem unreasonable that a city close to Bethel, should decide to have a festival itself dedicated to God. Even though this is not in accordance with the Law, recall that this is the period of the Judges, where [every man did what was right in his own eyes](#).
 23. Samuel had a circuit which he traveled when he judged Israel, which included Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah. 1Sam. 7:16
 24. In order to indicate to Saul that he knows what he is talking about, Samuel tells Saul what would happen to him in the near future, which included running into three men going up to God in Bethel. 1Sam. 10:3
 25. Saul stationed himself and 2000 soldiers in Mishmash and in the hill country of Bethel. 1Sam. 13:2
 26. When David takes out a group of Amalekite raiders, he sends the excess spoil to a number of different cities, including Bethel. 1Sam. 30:27
 27. Bethel is not mentioned during the reigns of David or Solomon. It is a city with distinct spiritual importance during the time of the patriarchs, representing, if you will, contact with God in the Land of Promise. However, in the monarchy, Bethel appears to be nothing but a city.

The History of Bethel from the Time of King Jeroboam

28. In order to counteract the religious influence of Jerusalem over all Israel (both northern and southern kingdoms), King Jeroboam makes two golden calves and sets one up in Dan and another in Bethel. He was the first king of the northern kingdom (called Israel or Samaria), and this appears to set the northern and southern boundaries of Israel. He set up apostate feasts as well which he essentially just makes up. He is king because Israel is divided into two nations; if Israel reunited, he would lose this position and probably be executed for treason. Therefore, it was not to his interest for his people to go down to the southern kingdom for feasts and to associate with those in the southern kingdom. 1Kings 12:28–32. As David Livingstone tells

us, Bethel was so strategically located on the border between Israel and Judah that it was there Jeroboam built his southern temple to the golden calf (1 Kings 12: 25-33). He did this to intercept worshipers traveling to the Temple in Jerusalem. Bethel is also the geographical key to locating other cities in Benjamin and Ephraim. Jacob dreamed of (temple) steps going into heaven while at Bethel. It may be no coincidence that step-like ledges appear on the west slope of Jebel et-Tawil.⁸

29. A prophet of God goes up to Bethel to talk to Jeroboam about this evil, and Jeroboam tries to bribe him. The prophet tells him that he will not eat food or drink water and the prophet then leaves (1Kings 13:1–10). This prophet is tricked by an older, apostate prophet who lived in Bethel, and he eats with this older prophet. He is struck dead by God (1Kings 13:11–26). The older prophet then asks for his bones to be buried next to the bones of the prophet he deceived; and then he says that the word of the Lord against the altar in Bethel and against houses in the high places will come to pass (1Kings 13:32). Abijah becomes king over Judah and warns him, unite or die. A civil war breaks out and King Abijah captures several cities of Samaria, including Bethel (2Chron. 13:1–19). This city eventually goes back to Samaria; however, we are not given any details as to how or when.
30. A man of Bethel rebuilds Jericho and sets up the front gates, and his youngest son dies, as per the words of Joshua. 1Kings 16:34
31. Elijah and Elisha are associated with Bethel at the time that God would take Elijah. 2Kings 2:2–3
32. When Elisha is going up toward Bethel, the young men who mocked him were killed by two female bears after Elisha cursed them (2Kings 2:23–24). We would expect this in an area where idolatry is predominant.

Bethel is Warned of Impending Doom/Samaria and Judah are Defeated and Deported

33. Amos mentions Bethel more than any other prophet—to be more precise, more of what Amos said concerning Bethel is recorded than with any other prophet. Amos first warns that northern Israel would be snatched away and they would be punished for Israel's transgressions and for the altars in Bethel (Amos 3:12–14). Amos functioned as a prophet between 780–755 B.C. and the northern kingdom was defeated and deported in 721 B.C. He speaks of Israel going into Bethel (where the golden calf altar was) and transgressing (Amos 4:4). However, he further warns that they can no longer go into Bethel for any reason (Amos 5:5). The people of the northern kingdom are warned to seek God that they may live, otherwise He would break forth like a fire and consume the house of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) and none in Bethel will be able to quench this fire (Amos 5:6).
34. The reason that Amos mentioned Bethel so often is it had become [a sanctuary of the king; a royal residence](#) (Amos 7:13). Amaziah, a priest in Bethel, tells Jeroboam II, and then warns Amos to no longer prophesy against the king or against the northern kingdom (Amos 7:10–13); Amos then tells them that they would be taken into exile and die on unclean soil (Amos 7:17).
35. Hosea calls *Bethel Beth-aven* in mockery. *Beth-aven* means *House of Idols* or *House of Nothingness*. We first find this in Hosea 4:15–16: "[Though you, Israel, play the prostitute, Yet don't let Judah offend; And don't come to Gilgal, Neither go up to Beth Aven, Nor swear, 'As Yahweh lives.'](#) For Israel has behaved extremely stubbornly, like a stubborn heifer. Then how will Yahweh feed them like a lamb in a meadow." *Don't go up to Beth-aven* means, do not fall into the idolatrous practices at Bethel.
36. Hosea 5:8–9: "[Blow the cornet in Gibeah, And the trumpet in Ramah! Sound a battle cry at Beth Aven, behind you, Benjamin! Ephraim will become a desolation in the day of rebuke. Among the tribes of Israel, I have made known that which will surely be.](#)" Here, Hosea warns of impending military disaster to come to the northern kingdom.
37. Hosea 10:5–6: [The inhabitants of Samaria will be in terror for the calves of Beth Aven; For its people will mourn over it, Along with its priests who rejoiced over it, For its glory, because it has departed from it. It also will be carried to Assyria for a present to a great king. Ephraim will receive shame, And Israel will be ashamed of his own counsel.](#) Again, this is a warning of impending disaster.
 - a. I should mention that there was an actual city named Bethaven, which is found in Joshua 7:2 18:12 1Sam. 13:5 14:23.

⁸ Taken from: <http://www.ancientdays.net/bethel14.htm>

38. Hosea 10:8: [The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, will be destroyed. The thorn and the thistle will come up on their altars. They will tell the mountains, "Cover us!" and the hills, "Fall on us!"](#)
39. Hosea warns the northern kingdom of impending disaster, and says that they would receive the just rewards for their evil in Bethel (Hosea 10:1–15). Hosea functioned as a prophet between 760–710 B.C. and the northern kingdom was destroyed in 721 B.C. Throughout this passage, we have references to both Bethel and Beth-aven, which are to be taken as equivalent.
40. Hosea prophesies against Ephraim and draws an analogy to Jacob, who continued to contend with God until maturity, and finally found God in Bethel. The analogy is, just as God forgave Jacob, so God would forgive Ephraim, if Ephraim would only seek Him. Hosea 12:1–11
41. ISBE summarizes the prophesies of Amos and Hosea against the northern kingdom: *According to the prophets Amos and Hosea the splendid idolatries of Bethel were accompanied by terrible moral and religious degradation. Against the place they launched the most scathing denunciations, declaring the vengeance such things must entail.*⁹
42. Although King Jehu, a hundred years after Jeroboam, destroyed the prophets and worshipers of Baal, he allowed the calves that Jeroboam set up to remain in Bethel and Dan. 2Kings 10:18–29
43. After the northern kingdom is defeated in war, and the people of Samaria deported, the king of Assyria sent back some priests to Bethel to teach the people about the god of that land, as lions were killing much of the population that had been moved to there. 2Kings 17:23–29
44. When delivering a prophecy against Moab, Jeremiah warns that Moab would be as ashamed of Chemosh (the god of the Moabites 1Kings 11:33) as Israel was ashamed of Bethel (Jer. 48:13). The idea is, Bethel was originally associated with the patriarchs and fellowship with God; but it became a place of idolatry when the northern and southern kingdoms split.
45. King Josiah, of the southern kingdom instituted many reforms. The temple and vessels involved in Baal worship were burned in Jerusalem and their ashes carried up to Bethel (2Kings 23:4). Josiah also destroyed the heathen altar which was in Bethel (2Kings 23:15). Apparently, the golden calf was long gone, which we would have expected, since Samaria had been defeated and deported. No army is just going to leave a golden calf behind. There was apparently still a monument by the grave of the prophet who had gone to Bethel, and Josiah said to leave it alone (2Kings 23:17–18). Then Josiah goes throughout Samaria and destroys the idolatrous worship and kills and burns the priests involved in this worship, just as he had done in Bethel (2Kings 23:19–20).

The People of Bethel Return to the Land

46. A handful of men originally return to the Land of Promise and to Bethel (Ezra 2:1, 28 Neh. 7:6, 32).¹⁰
47. There is only one difficult passage: Zech. 7:1–3, which reads: [It happened in the fourth year of king Darius that the word of Yahweh came to Zechariah in the fourth day of the ninth month, the month of Chislev. The people of Bethel sent Sharezer and Regem Melech, and their men, to entreat Yahweh's favor, and to speak to the priests of the house of Yahweh of Hosts, and to the prophets, saying, "Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?"](#) (WEB). The time frame for Zechariah is 520–518 B.C., which is after both the northern and southern kingdom had been defeated and disseminated, but after some of the people had been allowed to return to Israel (the decree of Cyrus, who lived between 555–529 B.C.).¹¹ Given the time frame here, this would indicate that there probably were some people living in Bethel, and that a small delegation from Bethel is reasonable (as opposed to this delegation coming from the House of God and going to the House of Jehovah of the Armies.

⁹ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; from E-Sword; Topic: Bethel.

¹⁰ The numbers in these two passages do not agree, neither in the Greek or the Hebrew. There are 3 different numbers altogether.

¹¹ I should mention that I am mixing dates here—the time of Cyrus I took from *The Story of Civilization; 1. Our Oriental Heritage*, by Will Durant; MJF Books, ©1963; p. 1011; and the dates for Zechariah from *The New Scofield Reference Bible*; Dr. C.I. Scofield; ©1967 New York-Oxford University Press; p. 964. However, even if either must be adjusted to match the other, the end result would still be that Zechariah spoke and wrote after the first wave of Jews were allowed to return to their homeland.

48. Archeological¹² finds (and, I am assuming that these archeological finds are near or at the modern city Beiten):
- a. We have found a Chalcolithic water jar from 3500 B.C. in the high place of Bethel, at a time when there were no buildings in the area, indicating that this was an open-air sanctuary at that time.
 - b. There is ceramic evidence of Bethel being occupied circa 3200 B.C.
 - c. A second occupation of Bethel occurred around 2400–2200 B.C.
 - d. It was later abandoned and not preoccupied until the 19th century B.C., at which time there was almost a continual occupation of Bethel. There was a temple constructed above the high place and a town constructed south of it. There was a strong defensive wall system probably built in the 18th or 17th centuries B.C. Another source indicates that Bethel was re-founded about 2000 B.C.¹³
 - e. Early in the middle Bronze era, we find a good fit between the accounts of the patriarchs and archeological finds. Abraham and Jacob probably came upon a well-developed town when they came to Bethel, judging by the quality of the architectural evidence. According to www.ourfatherlutheran.net, *Excavations have uncovered an eleven-foot thick city wall, dating between 1750-1650 BC, made of well-fitted stones and faced with a wide layer of clay (revetment) to protect it against battering rams.*¹⁴ Jacob saw this as a good place of refuge from his brother, whom he had swindled on several occasions. This may have been before these walls were constructed.
 - f. There is no Late Bronze I material, which suggests that Bethel had been destroyed around 1550 B.C. by the Egyptians who forced the Hyksos out of Egypt and out of Palestine.
 - g. In the Late Bronze II period (14th and 13th centuries B.C.), we see that the city was rebuilt and extended and that the architecture had noticeably improved. There was even a sewer system build in this time period, the only one that this town had. The local industry was an olive press.
 - h. As per www.ourfatherlutheran.net, *13th-11th centuries BC - Excavators found that Bethel was destroyed several times during the period of the Judges. Apparently Bethel was recaptured by the Canaanites early in the period, but it was later recaptured by the tribe of Ephraim who retained it from then on. Originally the road from Bethel to Jericho marked the border between the territories of Benjamin and Ephraim but afterward it was the border between the northern and southern kingdoms. The Bible (Judges 4:5) tells us that the prophetess Deborah held court "between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided." Furthermore, for a time during the period the Ark of the Covenant was kept in Bethel; later it was moved north to Shiloh.*¹⁵

¹² Unless otherwise noted, all of the archeological evidence comes from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 1, pp. 531–532.

¹³ According to <http://www.ourfatherlutheran.net/biblehomelands/palestine/bethel.htm>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

- i. There are apparently some problems with matching archeology to Israel's conquest of the land for Jericho and Ai¹⁶; however, it was clear that Bethel was destroyed circa 1240–1235 B.C., as we see breached walls and about 5 feet of ash and brick debris as well as destroyed houses. Some believe this to be the invasion of the Israelites; others believe that this took place some time during the time of the Judges in some unrecorded incident.



- j. Although we find no mention of Bethel during the reigns of David and Solomon, the archeological evidence indicates that it was a very prosperous city during that time period. ZPEB: *Building arts improved, pottery art took on new techniques and forms, and the Israelite control of iron created new opportunities in agriculture.*¹⁷

I took just a portion of a map (a more modern one from the time of Rome):

<http://www.bible-history.com/geography/ancient-israel/israel-first-century.html>

- k. Archeologists have not found the temple constructed by Jeroboam II; however, that is probably sitting under the modern city of Beitin.
- l. There are indications that Bethel was destroyed by a great fire in 553 or 521 B.C., which may have been done by Nabonidus of Babylon or by the Persians before Darius came on the scene.
- m. *Rebuilt in the late Persian Period it prospered until destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. The earlier city walls were among the best found in Palestine of that period and there was a remarkably well constructed system of stone lined drains.*¹⁸
- n. As per www.ourfatherlutheran.net, *4th-1st centuries BC - This period showed rapid and solid growth and the city was refortified. In the time of the Maccabees, it was fortified by Bacchides.*¹⁹ During this time period, there were good houses, quality pottery and a thriving trade. Under the Maccabees, there were outside walls built.
- o. As per www.ourfatherlutheran.net, *1st century AD (time of Jesus) - There is no mention of Bethel in the New Testament, however, the city was larger than at any time in Old Testament days. Josephus records that it was the last city captured by Vespasian before he became emperor of Rome. Both he and Hadrian placed a Roman garrison there and it continued to grow.*²⁰ Apparently, only the northeast gate and part of the north wall were leveled by Pompey or Vespasian; and a house was built over where the north wall was. Vespasian established a Roman garrison there (as per Josephus, Wars. IV. ix. 9). At this time, large community cisterns were built, probably for the increased population.

¹⁶ However, Dr. Livingston would disagree with this; see <http://www.ancientdays.net/>

¹⁷ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 1, p. 532.

¹⁸ Taken from <http://ancientneareast.tripod.com/Bethel.html>

¹⁹ Taken from <http://www.ourfatherlutheran.net/biblehomelands/palestine/bethel.htm>

²⁰ Taken from <http://www.ourfatherlutheran.net/biblehomelands/palestine/bethel.htm>

- p. Given its central location, we would have expected our Lord to have gone to this city; however there is no Scripture to back this up.
- q. As per www.ourfatherlutheran.net, *4th-7th centuries AD - Eusebius mentions the place as a village. Several churches were built to commemorate the experiences of Abraham and Jacob. But, at about the transition from the Byzantine period until it was reoccupied by Arabs, the city suddenly died, but signs of destruction have yet to be found.*²¹
- r. As per www.ourfatherlutheran.net, *Today - The site of ancient Bethel is occupied by the modern village of Beitin. Less than a mile away, on the outskirts of Ramallah, is the Jewish settlement of Beit El, both preserving the ancient name. The archaeological site is located in the center of Beitin, in a small valley. A few hundred yards southeast is the site of the biblical cult center with some excavated remains of temple foundations. Pilgrims can climb the steps of a crumbling watchtower (right) built in the 2nd or 3rd century BC when Bethel was a bustling city. Today, wild bushes grow from cracks in the stone. Nearby are the foundation stones of a Byzantine monastery from the 5th or 6th century AD, apparently built to commemorate the biblical story of Jacob's dream of a stairway reaching up into the heavens. In Muslim tradition, Bethel is known as the "Assembly of the Prophets," the place where the prophet Mohammed stopped on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem and led the biblical patriarchs Abraham, Jacob and Isaac in prayer.*²²
- s. Again, all of this archeological background I believe is based upon finds at Beitin, which may not be the site for Bethel.



Taken from:

<http://www.ourfatherlutheran.net/biblehomelands/palestine/bethel.htm>

Fausset gives us a good summary of this doctrine:

Fausset on Bethel

Bethel means "house of God".

Abram pitched his tent on a mountain E. of Bethel, abounding in pasture (Gen. 12:8; Gen. 13:3). The city, near the place, then bore the Canaanite name Luz. Bethel is the name given by anticipation to the place; appropriately so, as Abram virtually made it the "house of God." It was expressly so named by Jacob, when he had the vision of the heavenly ladder, on his way from his father at Beersheba to Harsh (Gen. 28:19 31:13). He set up a pillar, and anointed it with oil, to mark the place where God spoke with him. Bethel, the place, is expressly distinguished from Luz, the old Canaanite city. "Jacob called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of that city was called Luz at the first" (Joshua 16:1-2). The naming of Bethel Jacob repeated more publicly on his return home, 20 years later, with his family purified of idols, when God again appeared to him, and confirmed his change of name to Israel (Gen. 35:1-15 32:28).

Bethel belonged by lot to Benjamin, but was fallen by Ephraim (Bethel being on his southern border) through the treachery of an inhabitant (Judges 1:22-26). It was about 12 miles N. of Jerusalem. In Judges 20:26 translate for "the house of God" Bethel. During the civil war with Benjamin the tribes took the ark thither to consult God (compare 1Sam. 10:3). It was one of Samuel's towns of circuit for judging (1Sam. 7:16). One of Jeroboam's two sanctuaries for the calf worship, selected doubtless because of its religious associations (1

²¹ Taken from <http://www.ourfatherlutheran.net/biblehomelands/palestine/bethel.htm>

²² Taken from <http://www.ourfatherlutheran.net/biblehomelands/palestine/bethel.htm>

Fausset on Bethel

Kings 12–13). There the prophet from Judah foretold the overthrow of the calf altar by Josiah. Abijah, king of Judah, took Bethel from Jeroboam (2Chron. 13:19), but it was soon recovered by Israel. Under Ahab the Baal worship at Samaria and Jezreel drew off attention from the calf worship at Bethel. This accounts for a school of prophets of Jehovah being there in Elijah's time (2Kings 2:2–3).

The existence of "bears," two, near the town, implies that Bethel was then less frequented (2Kings 2:23–25). Under Jehu, who restored the calf worship, and Jeroboam II his great grandson, Bethel comes again into prominence (2Kings 10:29). Bethel became the king's chapel" (sanctuary) "the king's court" ("house of the kingdom") (Amos 7:13 3:14–15). More altars, besides the original one were erected. "Summer and winter houses" too, and "great houses" and "houses of ivory." After the overthrow of Israel, the king of Assyria sent one of the Israelite priests to settle at Bethel, and teach the new settlers from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, "the manner of the god of the land," and "how they should fear Jehovah" (2Kings 17:27–28). Josiah, as foretold, defiled the altar with dead men's bones, but disturbed not the sepulchre of the prophet of Judah when he discerned its title. It was ordered by God that the votaries of the calf worship at Bethel never dared to violate the sepulcher and title of the prophet who denounced their idol. The worship of Jehovah and of the calves had been all along strangely blended. (See BETHAVEN.)

Among those returning from captivity were men of Bethel (Ezr. 2:28; Neh. 7:32; Neh. 11:31.) The ruins, covering three or four acres, still bear a like name, Beitin, on a low bill, between two wadies, which unite in the main valley of es-Suweinit, toward the S.E. Bethel still abounds in stones such as Jacob used for his pillow and afterward for a sanctuary. On the round mount southeast of Bethel. Abram doubtless built the altar, and afterwards stood with Lot when giving him his choice of the land (Gen. 12:7; Gen. 13:10). E. of this mount stands the ruin Tel er Rijmah, "the mound of the heap," answering to Ai or Hai. Ritter makes Medinet Gai answer to Ai.

The second Bethel is a town in southern Judah (Joshua 12:16; 1Sam. 30:27). Bethel in Joshua 19:4 answers to Chesil in Joshua 15:30. Bethuel, 1Chron. 4:30. Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho under the curse (1Kings 16:34).

This was taken from Andrew Robert Fausset, *Fausset's Bible Dictionary*; from e-Sword, topic: Bethel. I did some minor editing.

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Let's see if I can summarize this:

A Summary of the City of Bethel

1. Bethel is a city located in central Israel, on the border of Benjamin and Ephraim. The name, *Bethel*, means *City of God*. Only the city of Jerusalem is mentioned more often in Scripture than Bethel. One might even see Bethel is being representative of all Israel.
2. Bethel, known as Luz around the time of the patriarchs, began as a city of great spiritual import. This appears to be the first city in the land of Canaan where Abraham stopped after separating from his family in Haran. He moved westward with his nephew Lot and wife Sarai, and Jehovah appeared to Abram in this general vicinity. Abram built an altar to Jehovah with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. Gen. 12:4–8
3. After traveling down to Egypt, Abram returned to the land of Canaan and Bethel, where he and Lot separated. Jehovah again appears to Abram and promises him and his descendants all the land that he could see in all directions. Gen. 13
4. Jacob, Abraham's grandson, has a dream about the ladder or staircase which extends from earth to heaven; and God promises that the land in all directions would be his and that by his descendants will all the earth be blessed. Jacob builds a pillar here and he calls this place Bethel, although it had been named Luz previously. Jacob says, "[This is the House of Elohim and this is the gate of heaven.](#)" Gen. 28:10–22
5. Jacob moves eastward, where his relatives are, and marries Rachel and her sister Leah, and works for her father Laban. When God appears to Jacob again in a dream, He says, "I am the God of Bethel." And God

A Summary of the City of Bethel

- tells Jacob to return to the land of Canaan. Gen. 31:13
6. Jacob leaves this area but he returns on at least two occasions. It is God Who tells Jacob to return to Bethel. Jacob moves there and calls the place El-bethel (it is still known as Luz to the locals). God again speaks to Jacob in Bethel and renames him *Israel* and God confirms His promises which He had made to Abraham. Gen. 35
 7. For the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob, the city of Bethel is most closely associated with their spiritual birth, their spiritual growth and God's promises to them. No other city in the land of Canaan is as closely associated with God and these men.
 8. It is unclear whether Joshua conquered Bethel when he went into the land of Canaan, Joshua 8:17 and 12:9 notwithstanding (there are textual problems with those passages). However, Bethel was clearly conquered by Ephraim and probably the half tribe of Manasseh (Judges 1:22–26).
 9. For awhile, the spiritual center of Israel appears to be in Bethel. Although the Tabernacle is not specifically named, the Ark of the Covenant and the High Priest Phinehas are both said to be in Bethel. Judges 20:18, 26–28
 10. Even though the House of God is later located in Shiloh (from early on in the period of the Judges through to the time of Samuel), Bethel continues to be a city of some spiritual import (Judges 18:31 1Sam. 1:3 10:3).
 11. Bethel is not mentioned during the reigns of David or Solomon. However, the first king of the northern kingdom, Jeroboam, sets up a golden calf in Bethel, in the southern tip of his country, primarily to keep his own people from going to Jerusalem (in the southern kingdom) to worship. 1Kings 12:28–32
 12. Elijah and Elisha both minister to the northern kingdom, and are therefore occasionally associated with Bethel, which continued to be a city of idolatry. 2Kings 2:2–3 23–24
 13. Because Bethel is representative of all that is wrong with the northern kingdom (primarily, their worship of another god), both Amos and Hosea prophesy against Bethel and foretell its ruin. Hosea occasionally refers to Bethel as *Beth-aven*, which means *House of Idols*, *House of Nothing*. Hosea 4:15–16 5:8–9 10:5–6, 15 12:4 Amos 3:14 4:4 5:5–6 7:10, 13
 14. Although King Jehu, a hundred years after Jeroboam, destroyed the prophets and worshipers of Baal, he allowed the calves that Jeroboam set up to remain in Bethel and Dan. 2Kings 10:18–29
 15. After the northern kingdom is defeated in war, and the people of Samaria deported, the king of Assyria sent back some priests to Bethel to teach the people about the god of that land, as lions were killing much of the population that had been moved to there. 2Kings 17:23–29
 16. Jeremiah warned that Bethel would be the shame of Israel (Jer. 48:13).
 17. King Josiah, of the southern kingdom instituted many reforms. The temple and vessels involved in Baal worship were burned in Jerusalem and their ashes carried up to Bethel (2Kings 23:4). Josiah also destroyed the heathen altar which was in Bethel (2Kings 23:15). Apparently, the golden calf was long gone, which we would have expected, as Samaria had been defeated and deported. No army is just going to leave a golden calf behind. There was apparently still a monument by the grave of the prophet who had gone to Bethel, and Josiah said to leave it alone (2Kings 23:17–18). Then Josiah goes throughout Samaria and destroys the idolatrous worship and kills and burns the priests involved in this worship, just as he had done in Bethel (2Kings 23:19–20).
 18. Bethel is not mentioned in the gospels or anywhere else in the New Testament, even though it would seem the Jesus Christ must have been there, as Bethel is so centrally located.
 19. For centuries, it has been assumed that the modern Beitin marked the spot of the ancient Bethel. However, Dr. David Livingston has presented a great deal of evidence to the contrary, suggesting that el-Bireh is the proper site. See <http://www.ancientdays.net/bethel14.htm> to support this view.
 20. General archeological information spanning several millenniums for the traditional site of Beitin may be found at <http://www.ourfatherlutheran.net/biblehomelands/palestine/bethel.htm>.

Even though this may appear to be a very long summary, the actual doctrine is in excess of 10 pages.

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