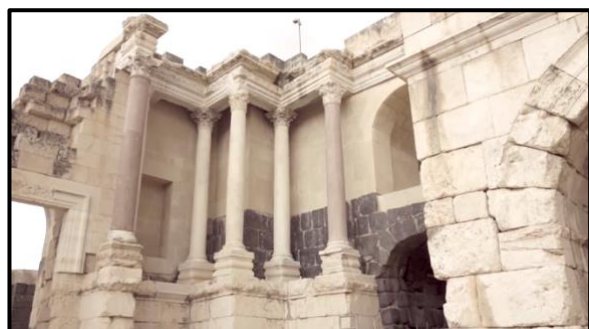


Amir Tsarfati
Israel Unveiled: Beit She'an
<https://youtu.be/xqbwY2gDRK8>

Well, Shalom from the ancient city of Beit She'an and Scythopolis. We've got two different cities right behind me. One is the ancient mound that you see right over there, which is



something that consists of at least 16 different layers of sixteen different cities from the different time periods. Whereas, down below, we see a much larger city that was established starting from the Greek period in the fourth century BC and on, and literally lasted until the Arabs made it to the land in the seventh century, and the place was completely destroyed in the eighth century AD.



Now Beit She'an is mentioned in the Old Testament. It is mentioned as a city that was situated right here along the Jordan Valley. The Jordan Valley extracts from the Sea of Galilee in the north, all the way to the Dead Sea in the south. And it's a valley where the Jordan River runs

through. In fact, it is because of the river that the valley is named Jordan, and it's because of the river that the country on its other side is called Jordan today. So, we've got the country of Jordan over there where we have the mountains of Gilead. We've got the actual valley and we have on our side, the city right here. This is the only city of the Decapolis, those ten Greek-style cities that

we know from the New Testament, that actually existed west of the River Jordan, and not east of the River Jordan.

Now we must remember that in the ancient times civilization actually started all the way in the East. The East was the cradle of civilization. All the things came from the East. We know that the Garden of Eden, itself, was in the eastern part, in the area of Iraq of today. We know that the Euphrates and the Tigris were there. We know that the ancient empires were over there. And we also know that all the goods and the clothing and the fabrics and the silk and the perfumes and the spices all came from the East, which makes us, probably, understand for the first time why we were use the term, “Let’s have an orientation.” Orientation is: “Let’s set ourselves according to where the east [is].” Orient is east. So, if today the maps are all setting according to the north and if it points at the northern part, in ancient times the faces of all people were towards the east. And that explains why in the Hebrew language the word for east is *kedma*. Kedma means in front of us. Kadima, which means you’re standing with your face to the east. That also explains why all the temples and all the shrines used to have their entrance from the east, as people would come from the east. And we know that the sun is rising from the east. So, the sun supplies, of course, the light and the warmth and that, of course, was the source of light inside those buildings. If you wanted to pitch a tent in those days, you would pitch the tent with its entrance to the east because the sunrise will be a wake-up call and once the sun was setting maybe it’s time for bed. And so, all in all, we now understand why the East was so important and any city that will be located as an entrance into the land from the East, by definition, had to do very well because all the goods, all the materials, and even all the secrets and all the gossip would come from the East and if you are here, as the entrance from the east, you did well.

One of the most famous cities that was situated in the eastern entrance into the land of Israel is the first one that was taken by the Israelites, the city of Jericho. And now we are almost 60 miles north of Jericho and we find ourselves, right now, next to the city called Beit She'an. Now we're not exactly sure why it's called Beit She'an, which means the "House of She'an". We're not sure if it has to do with some sort of an ancient deity, She'an, San. We're sure of one thing though, that this city was situated here for two reasons: (1) it had a source of drinking water right behind it, as we know that the Spring of Harod, that same spring that originated from the cave where Gideon tested his soldiers, is coming all the way down here and eventually merges into the Jordan River. So, there is a source of drinking water which is essential for life in those days and (2) an important road coming into the land from the East. These are the two main conditions for a city to exist in the ancient times. Every time you come to an ancient city, ask yourself two questions: what was or where was the source of drinking water? And what was that road that basically justified the establishment or the building of that particular city. And so, we're talking about a road that was important, a very good source of drinking water, and thus the first city was built here nearly 5000 years ago.

And then the city was destroyed and rebuilt, and destroyed, and rebuilt, and destroyed, and rebuilt, and as all the rubble was piling up, you can clearly see an ancient mound eventually, and that is what we call in the Hebrew a "tel". A tel is basically a mound consisting of debris of different civilizations, different cities, from different time periods. We've got a tel almost in every ancient city: Tel Megiddo, Tel Jericho, Tel Dan, and this is, of course, Tel Beit She'an. And for so many years, the archaeologists were interested in finding Beit She'an, the ancient Old Testament Beit She'an because this is the city that is mentioned in the last chapter of the book of 1 Samuel. The book of 1 Samuel introduced to us how the children of Israel, led by the prophet Samuel, demanded

a king, one of flesh and blood. We know that it was against the counsel of God, against the will of God, against the counsel of Samuel himself. But as Samuel grew old and his sons were not the best example and the best role models for the people, the people used that very sensitive point in their history to demand to be just like all the other people. And therefore they wanted the king [of] flesh and blood. And we all know that it is Saul, the son of Kish, the one who was handsome and tall above everyone else that was chosen to be the king by the people, but definitely not by God Himself.

And we know that Saul from day one proved to be someone who is *not* after God's own heart. And Saul had a heart of someone who was what I call a *carnal believer* in a sense. He did pretend to at least acknowledge the existence of God. In those days, I believe there was not even a single person that did not acknowledge the existence of God. In fact, you had to choose which God you follow. You knew God exists or you knew other gods exist. There were no atheists in the ancient times. They were pagans in ancient times. They worshiped, but they worshiped the wrong ones. Or they thought they worshiped the right one, but they actually didn't do it in spirit and in truth. And so Saul was almost helpless without the spiritual backing and the spiritual support of Samuel the prophet. Throughout the years of Saul as a king, more than 20 years, Saul is a king who has no personal relationship with God Himself. Unlike David, who was seeking counsel with God, who was inquiring from God, who talked to God, Saul was not in that mode of talking to God. Saul was not in the mode of even thinking of God as someone who could be right by his side. Saul was having that religious mindset that in order to get to God, you need to go to a godly man, you need to go to a man of God. And that man of God will inquire of God on your behalf. And you know what? When your whole life you are acting like that, then I'm not sure God is going to listen to you when the time comes and suddenly you find yourself in a situation where there is no

man of God around you so, “All right, then I guess I need to talk to you right now.” Well, that is exactly what happened to Saul. Because we know that in chapter 25 of 1 Samuel, Samuel died. But we hear about Samuel’s death and burial already, once again, in chapter 28 of 1 Samuel. And we see that in 1 Samuel, in chapter 28, when Saul heard or got the information that the Philistines are gathering their forces in Shunem which is right there in the Jezreel Valley, next to Mount Tabor. When the Philistines gathered their forces in that area, which means the Philistines are making a good progress all the way from the Mediterranean, all the way from the south, from Gaza, in Ashdod and Ashkelon, more than a hundred miles, marching all the way inland and they were making a great progress; we know that Saul was fearful. You are fearful only when you’re leaning on your own understanding, and when you’re leaning on your own strength. Because when it’s only your strength and your own understanding, then you have to compare your strength with your enemy’s strength. That’s it. And if the enemy has a bigger army, a better army, and much-more-equipped army, then you are fearful. The “God factor” is gone from this equation, and therefore you have all the reasons to be fearful.

You see, think about it, in 1 Samuel 17, in the Valley of Elah, who had the reason and the justification to be fearful? I mean David was a little, ruddy boy that was right there without armor, without fear, without any prejudice, without anything that might hold him off from being there as a servant of God, led by God, on God’s commandment to go and defeat the enemy. And it’s interesting. David had anything *but* fear. Why? Because he was so sure that God was with him. He lived life with the presence of God in him, through him, by him, for him, and, therefore, he did very well. Isn’t it interesting that Saul never had that kind of opportunity? For Saul his baggage was always with him. For Saul he’d always surround himself with thousands of well-equipped people. He was always with his armor, with his armor-bearer, with his helmet, with his own

personal servant who was with him until his last breath. With Saul it's always people around him that serve him, and even his spiritual needs sort of, somehow, were supported by Samuel the prophet: "Samuel, ask God for this. Samuel, tell God this. Samuel, let me know if ...". There was no direct-personal relationship between Saul and God. And one day Samuel died. Guess what? And there's a war! And guess what? Saul is still the king and he's completely panicking. Why? "Because Samuel is dead and there is a war and I have no clue what to do." And it's interesting, suddenly, out of the blue, that king who could care less about God, who never had a relationship with God, who never regarded God as someone whom he can take counsel from, then Samuel, who is dead, is no longer around him. And it's interesting because the Bible says that Saul, understanding that he's all alone, is coming all the way. And the Bible says in **1 Samuel 28:6**, "**And when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him,...**" You see, suddenly, out of the blue, Saul inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him.

You cannot only have God as a jack-in-the-box. You cannot have God as, what I say, some sort of a "magic stick." You cannot have God as a lucky charm. You cannot turn to God only when things go bad. I know so many people, they could care less about God, and God's Word, and God's commandments, and God's guidance, but only when time is terrible, only when they have a problem, then they go and then they pray, and then they fast, and that's it. And then they forget all about God and they think that this is the right way to live. But even then, they come and ask, "Okay, what should I do? What should I do? Okay, I'm going to pray today. Okay, I'm going to fast tomorrow. Okay." It's all about panicking. It's all about being so insecure. It's all about God as a lucky charm, "Okay, so I'm going to fast for two days now. And for sure He's going to answer me. And then what else should I do?" You know, they're always asking all around because they're so helpless. You know, there is nothing there that God can show Himself through. There is nothing

there that God can prove to them that He is the living God. Nothing in their lives is even dedicated to God.

And so, Saul, realizing that God is not answering, what does he do? The Bible says that because of that, in verse seven, **1 Samuel 28:7: “⁷ Then Saul said to his servants, ‘Find me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her.’”** “You see, I inquired of God. I gave Him a chance. I gave Him 45 seconds or 45 minutes. You know, He’s not answering. Well, find me a woman so I can inquire of her.” You see, that’s how it is. People want instant answers. They come to God only when they need Him, and He needs to answer them in 45 seconds or 45 minutes. Then, if He’s not, then they go elsewhere. I had, literally, *Christians* who texted me on Facebook, asking me if going to a medium is okay. *Christians* asking me if they can go to a medium. Can you imagine? Why? Because, you know, they don’t really have a personal relationship with God. And they don’t know God’s will and God’s ways because they don’t run a Christian life. Therefore, when the time comes and they’re in trouble, or they’re in a very interesting intersection in their life, and they want some direction, “Oh, can we go at least and inquire from a medium?” Wow!

Now, ladies and gentlemen, that was the king of Israel. It’s not just one of the people. Remember, a whole nation can be misled and deceived when the king, when the ruler is behaving like that. And guess what? The only person he knows, he doesn’t know God; the only person he knows is whom? Samuel! But Samuel is dead. And Samuel is where the dead people are now. It’s very interesting. In the Hebrew language, the place where the dead people are is called Sheol. Sheol. Saul’s name in Hebrew, Sha·’ul, exactly the same letters, the same letters: shin, aleph, vav, lamed for *Sheol* and *Sha’ull*, [comprised of] the same letters. And it’s interesting because Saul, instead of turning *up* to the Lord, he’s turning *down* to Sheol. The Bible is clearly telling us that,

in Sheol, this is not really the place of God. In fact, when Jesus Himself is praying that prayer that is beautifully depicted in **Psalm 88:3, 11**, that amazing, messianic prophetic prayer says: **“³ For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to the grave.”** In the Hebrew it’s not grave, it’s Sheol. It’s very interesting because later on you can see in verse 11, **“¹¹ Shall Your lovingkindness be declared in the grave? Or Your faithfulness in the place of destruction?”** And you know what the Hebrew word in the psalm for destruction is? Abaddon. Abaddon. Now, if I may, let me take you all the way to the book of Revelation. And in the book of Revelation, we can clearly see an interesting description of that bottomless pit. Remember? And the Bible says in **Revelation 9:7, 1–2, 11: “⁷ The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns...”** But it [chapter 9] started, of course, with **“¹ Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit. ² And he opened the bottomless pit...”** And then you can clearly see in verse 11, speaking of all the creatures there, **“¹¹ And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon.”** Very interesting because that Apollyon, that particular Apollyon, is also the name of a Greek deity of destruction. The reason why I want you to understand this is because all of that, together, tells you that the direction that Saul the king was taking instead of looking upwards, is actually looking downwards. Samuel says, “Why are you harassing me? What do you need from me? Let me rest. I’m dead!” But Saul is so fearful. “What am I going to do? Tell me. I need to know.”

It’s interesting because often times Christians think that if these things are pagan, they may not exist. No, they exist. We have *dark things* that exist, horrible things that exist. In fact, Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. And we know that Satan is going to be able to do unbelievable miracles. In fact, the Bible says that the only thing that holds off Satan from

performing amazing things is the Restrainer: We, 2 Thessalonians chapter 2; we, the Holy Spirit in us, are the [restrainers]. And once we are removed then there is [nothing] that restrains him. Then you're going to see unbelievable things. You're going to see the king of the world getting a fatal wound, and he suddenly, out of the blue, is healed miraculously and the whole world is going to worship him for that. You know, you're going to see unbelievable things that are happening. Not just to one of the simple people, but to the main, the leader of the world. The whole world is going to worship him. But we can clearly see that those things exist, those horrible things exist. And if you go and search for them, you may find them. The Bible says, in **Deuteronomy 29:29**, **“²⁹ The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever,...”** I believe that we need to deal with the things of God that He revealed to us and leave aside the things that He did not reveal to us. I know so many Christians that are into Bible codes, and they are into the signs of the stars and the signs of the moon, and all those things that were probably, probably some of them are amazing, but they're not for us.

So here we are, Saul goes the wrong direction and eventually the war starts. And in 1 Samuel, chapter 31, the last chapter of 1 Samuel, we know the war goes on. And on Mount Gilboa, which is just five miles southwest of where we're standing right now, Saul eventually is surrounded by the Philistine army, and Saul understands, he's about to die. Now, the last thing a king wants is to die by his own enemy. In those days the enemies will just torture you and kill you in front of everyone, actually to humiliate you. It's an act of humiliation and at the same time defiance, and telling the people, "Look, your king is dead. We just killed him." It's very interesting because Saul preferred that his own slave, a servant kill him just so he is not going to be humiliated by the Philistines. And he told his servant, "Kill me!" And the servant, "How can I kill my king? I won't

do it.” And guess what happened? The Bible says, in **1 Samuel 31:4-5, 10-12**: **“⁴ Then Saul said to his armorbearer, ‘Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and thrust me through and abuse me.’”** See, he knew exactly what was awaiting him. And look, and then what happened is, **“⁴ ...But his armorbearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it. ⁵ And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword, and died with him.”** And the Bible it says in verse 11, **“¹¹ Now when the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, ¹² all the valiant men arose and traveled all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth Shan;”** Because the Bible says, in verse 10, **“¹⁰ Then they put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths,”** Ashtaroth, the goddess of fertility, **“and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan.”**

So, we’re looking [Amir: Points behind him] at an ancient mound that had a Philistine city, that had a wall to which the body of Saul was fastened, was attached to. Can you imagine? You know, today is a nice, cool day here. The average temperature in this place is a hundred degrees, actually on a nice cool day. Can you imagine what happens to a corpse of a dead person attached to the wall of a city that is all over there? You can imagine why they did it, and what for: (a) As a display for all to see that he’s dead; and (b) so he will rot, so that it will be such a humiliation for the people of Israel. And it has to be clearly communicated that the Philistines understood that this is the only way to make the children of Israel afraid. Isn’t that amazing that David wasn’t afraid at all of them and right after that, when David became the king, the first thing he did is to put an end to the Philistines. After David, no one knows about the Philistines anymore. They’re gone! When you have God on your side, when you know God, when you operate by God, when you let Him do that, all is okay. But when you act religious, when you just turn to God when you need Him,

but you don't acknowledge Him in *all* of your ways—we're called to acknowledge Him in all of our ways—but when He is only there as a lucky charm, when He's only there when you need Him, when He's only there when the troubles arise, I'm not sure you're going to really have a life of victory.

And this is a tale of one Saul. Let's move to the other Saul that we know, Saul (Sha'ul), who also had a lot of death surrounding him. You know, we were first introduced to Saul the apostle... to Paul the apostle, Saul of Tarsus in **Acts 7:58**, toward the very end of the chapter, when Stephen was actually martyred. The Bible says in verse 58, **“⁵⁸...and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.”** This is the first time we're introduced to Saul the apostle. As a young man, he actually was standing there, was present at the execution of Stephen. Now at this point, we're not sure whether he was for it or against it. And that's why the Bible made it very clear in the first verse of **Acts 8:1**, **“¹ Now Saul was consenting to his death....”** So we have no mistake. Saul of Tarsus, a Jew who came from a Jewish community in Tarsus which is in Syria today. Saul who visited Jerusalem for the holidays, who was a fervent follower of the Jewish religion and traditions, who was a great student of all the great rabbis of those days including Rabbi Gamaliel. Saul who studied and studied and studied and knew by heart mostly the traditions and the interpretations of the law, and mostly the oral law that wasn't even written at that time. It is the same Saul who had such a bad spirit. We are introduced to him in, not only as a witness to the stoning and the martyrdom of Stephen, but it says, in **Acts 8:1–3**, **“¹ ...At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. ³ As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and**

dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.” Amazing. You can clearly see that the man was obsessed with Christians.

And in Acts 9:1–2, **“¹ Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”** He was so proud of himself. He was so arrogant. He was so religious. He was so full of zeal, but it was an ungodly zeal. It was a zeal that is driven from the will of man to prove to God that he is worthy of God’s love. It is the zeal of a man who wants to prove to the world that he’s a godly man. It is a man full of himself, full of pride, full of flesh, and full of an unbelievable desire to make his name famous, and to somehow prove that he’s a good follower of *his way*. Bear in mind, there is THE way, which is the only way, and there are other ways that lead to destruction. And Paul/Saul, was certainly on one of them. And it took an amazing revelation, right there, in the same chapter, chapter nine of the book of Acts. And the reason why



I mentioned Paul is because this particular city behind me, you’re going to see the streets that were beautifully paved with mosaic and marble, when mosaic was “out” and marble was “in,” they



just put slabs of marble on top! And those columns are there to support a roof, which is there to protect the shoppers when it’s too hot or too cold, when it’s rainy or sunny, lest God forbid, shopping will be stopped. I see a lot of smiles over here. I hear the sound of some kind of... guilt? [Audience: Laughter] Well, I can tell you that the city, at the time of the Greek and the

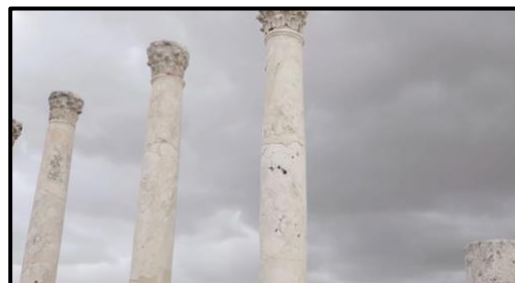
Romans, was so prosperous due to its location. So prosperous that it had to take something of a great magnitude to put an end to it. And you need to understand, wealth was there, strength maybe was there, but the people were completely empty, completely hungry and thirsty.

And it's interesting because right here, in this city, wealthy men and women, every Sunday, would stroll down the street and give honor to non-existent gods. One of them, down at the edge of this main street is the god Dionysus. And we found on top of the tel some more shrines for more



gods that they erected up there. No doubt, the city was filled with idols and shrines and temples, brothels and even, even bath houses, two gigantic bath houses. Bath houses where people not only admire the brains, in the bathhouse people used to

read their poetry or speak of their philosophy. But also, of course, work out and show off their flesh. It is the Greek culture that brought about the gymnasium. It is the Greek culture that brought about the “facade is that all that matters.” The “looks are all that matters.” Every shrine here had a huge facade with gigantic columns, but there was nothing behind [it], there was nothing behind [it]. There is nothing else. There's no substance, almost like Universal Studios. You see all those



big things but really there's nothing behind [them]. And you can imagine how the children, they're not the adults, they don't stand and give glory to something that doesn't exist. The children would always run around

and probably look for “Hey Daddy, hey Mommy, what are you thanking for? And who do you thank?” And really—there's nothing there. It was all just a big facade.

And, therefore, one day a story came to the ears of the people, who, by then, were living in the capital of the Decapolis region, a story of someone who lives about 20 miles northeast of here in a cave—a burial cave—who had nothing, not even clothes on him. He was not even in his right mind. And somebody shows up and casts out of him all the demons and now he's doing great. And now he's praising God. And it's interesting because they saw demons running into a herd of pigs and were running all the way down into the Sea of Galilee and drowning over there. And that man who had nothing, now has everything. And they who have everything, have nothing. And the people of the city that have everything, but nothing, want to have the everything that the man who has nothing has. Think about it. All the wealth, and all the strength, and all the great magnitude of a city did not bring them any satisfaction. But when they heard of that man, whom we know as Legion, because there were many that lived there, all those demons, when they heard of it, they started inquiring of it more and more and more. And the story of Jesus of Nazareth, who came and healed, and who is God in the flesh, who is someone who actually heals, who is someone that actually you can see doing something. You know, the Bible says in the book of Psalms that all those Gentiles have gods that they have eyes, but they cannot see, they have mouths, but they cannot talk, that they have hands, but they cannot do anything. They are just dull and dumb. They can't do anything. And our God, you know, you pray to God and He does. Jesus just cast all those demons out, and there you go. And the man is in his right mind. And the interesting thing is, the first thing that man wanted to do is cling to Jesus because when you understand what you were delivered from, you don't want to leave Him for a second. And then Jesus said, "No, you stay here." "But, Jesus, I don't think I graduated from any seminary." "No, you don't need to graduate from any seminary. You just tell them what God has done for you. That's enough." And then, most likely, he (Legion) did a much better job than any Jew that lived around the Sea of Galilee. Because

the Bible says that the fame of Jesus was now throughout all these towns of the Decapolis and it reached all the way to this very successful and prideful city of Scythopolis. And we know that eventually the gospel hit it so hard here and so vast, like wildfire. And what happened? People who were of the Roman culture and the Roman pagan religion, turned them in. You know that the Roman Empire declared Christianity as a *religia prava*, a perverted religion. Judaism, by the way, was not perverted. Why? You can be a Jew, die a Jew, and you really don't have to share anything with anyone because you're not in the mindset that you should make other people Jews. In fact, we really don't want others to be Jews. [Audience: Laughter] So when people want to become Jews, we make sure to bring them through hell and back. And if that's going to happen, then probably they're okay.

Now somebody said, "I'm not sure if the Jews killed Jesus, but one thing, for sure, they gave Him hell on earth." One thing, for sure, that people who believed in Jesus understood the Great Commission, understood that it's not something you can keep for yourself. I always liken the gospel to "Gos-pills": You were dying, and you received the pills that would save you from death. God gives you a whole box full of them and all you need to do from now on is give those pills to others. Now you're not in charge of them taking it, but you're in charge of them getting it. You're in charge of giving them the pill. They'll take it if they want it, and they'll have to somehow give accountability to God for that particular action. But Ezekiel the prophet says that if we don't share, their blood is on our hands.

The gospel made it to this very city, a city of bath houses and shrines, a city of major shopping streets, of some theaters that could hold eight thousand spectators, [an] amphitheater that you can see where Christians actually were slaughtered, even a horserace stadium—what we call hippodrome—was down below. A city that had all the luxuries, all the facilities for entertainment,

all the facilities for worshipping pagan gods, all the facilities to worship your own self, body and spirit, and intellect. A city that had everything about everything but God, is now receiving a glimpse of God's grace and God's love throughout that message of the gospel. And we know that eventually Scythopolis turned into a Christian city. And we know that when the Roman Empire turned into a "Christian Empire," became what we call the Byzantine Empire, when Constantine moved the capital from Rome to be Byzantium and turned it into Constantinople, which is Istanbul of today. Thus, the Roman Empire had come to an end and the Byzantine Empire started. And we know that, at that time, Beit She'an now had a bishop, and he represented the whole area in the church councils, and it's a major Christian center. Now those big bath houses were a place to baptize people, and the big theaters a place to preach the gospel. Wow! But it didn't take too long, and in 638 A.D. the Muslims came, and the Muslims, in those days, it wasn't ISIS who destroyed everyone. For them it wasn't about preaching and giving the truth to people that they will get saved. No, for them, "Well, let's make money [off] these Gentiles." So they imposed taxes, *jizya*, it's called. If you can, pay; if not, become a Muslim; if not, get out of here.

And then something happened. It is the year 749 AD, it is the month of January, it was an interesting morning, and something felt wrong. The birds were gone. The cats were gone. Hallelujah! The dogs were gone, and the locals didn't see it coming when an almost 9.1 on the Richter scale, an earthquake hits this place with—anyway, that place is located along the Jordan Valley, which is a very active area, tectonically. We're talking about two plates that are moving constantly here. The plate on that side and plate on our side used to be once one. Then they separated and that, which is in between, sunk down and, ever since, they're moving. It goes all the way from Syria to Africa. And that's why we call it, the Syrian African Rift Valley. And that earthquake destroyed almost everything. We found here in the excavations that we started here in

the 1970s and 80s and 90s—it's funny how the excavation started. The people wanted to go to the tel, but as they prepared the things down below, they realized that down below there's much more than up above. And I want you to know, throughout the 80s and 90s, we had two [work] shifts going on here, excavating. It was amazing! And one of the things that we found was somebody who ran to one of those shrines, probably during the earthquake, and we found his hand full of coins. He was just about to steal all those coins from the shrine. His hand was caught in that cookie jar! We found many other things, signs of destruction. Amazing things that happened here. The city came to complete destruction and the poor and pathetic attempt to revive it failed. Eventually, it was abandoned, and the city was covered with sand and dust, and that's it. It waited probably more than a thousand years to be found by excavators. But I want you to know that the message, the gospel, that reached here was in *complete contradiction* to the style and the nature of this city.

And Paul the apostle is the great example of that change. If one Saul *killed* himself, the other Saul [Paul] *died* for himself. If one Saul fell on his sword and killed his body, another one understood the grace of God, the love of God, and eventually wrote almost two-thirds of the New Testament. And in it, in chapters 6, 7, and 8 of the epistle to the Romans, he wrote how to die to self. And it's interesting how Saul [Paul] himself said, in **Romans 8:11**, ¹¹ **But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.**" One killed his mortal body. One understood what gives life to your mortal body. One killed himself, another one died to himself.

You must understand that the whole concept of dying to yourself is something that Jesus Himself preached about. Jesus Himself mentioned in **Matthew 16:24–28**, we can see how Jesus, Himself, telling the disciples: ²⁴ ... **'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself,**

and take up his cross, and follow Me. ²⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. ²⁶ For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. ²⁸ Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” It’s interesting how Jesus Himself injected that into His disciples, the whole concept of dying to yourself, which means exactly what David did. “Who am I?” Exactly what David did. “I’m not worthy. It’s not me. It’s not about me. It’s not my strength. It’s not about who I am. It’s about who You are. It’s not about my life. It’s about Your death.” You see, we must remember, it has to be very, very clear that our faith is based on the death of someone else. We can find life based on His death and resurrection. You can kill yourself until tomorrow. You won’t cause God to love you more than He already did.

I hope I’m very clear about it because Paul understood that when that veil was lifted from his very eyes, and he stopped being so religious in those days. Paul said, in **Romans 5:8**, **“⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.”** We shall be saved from wrath through Him. The wrath of God is not for us. We shall be saved from wrath through Him who is about to come and receive us unto Himself so we will not have to go through the wrath of God because we’re not destined to the wrath of God.

And right here in this place, we see a tale of two Sauls, a Saul who killed himself, religious man, very much a son of the flesh, very much a picture of the world. The world acts religious, but the world will run to God only when there’s a problem. I’ll never forget the days after 9/11. All the churches were packed! And I’m not sure if that was genuine repentance. I sure hope so. But I

know one thing; they're not as packed today. But we must remember, we must remember that the Lord is about to return. And that's why the same Saul who died to himself, the same one who wrote in Romans 6 and 7 and 8, how to die to self, is the one who wrote in **Romans 12:1**, "**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.**" We must offer ourselves, our bodies, as a holy sacrifice and only when we do that, and we live the life that He appointed us, then we can have that great expectation. In **Romans 13:11–14**, "**¹¹ And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. ¹² The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ,**" Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and that means you have to strip off yourself and put on Him, "**... and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.**"

So, my prayer, that all of us, right here in the capital of the Decapolis—where the good news made it to a prideful and arrogant, rich city— my prayer is that the gospel would reach every one of you and meet your heart, and see if there's anything in it that is religious; if we live acknowledging God only when trouble comes, or do we acknowledge Him in *all* of our ways?

And may God give us all the wisdom to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, not making any provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts. In this world this is the biggest, biggest battle. Paul himself, throughout the book of Romans says and testifies of that battle between the flesh and the Spirit. But yet, he says, "It is not that I live. But it is Christ who lives in me." And my prayer is that you made up your mind and you have taken that decision to accept Christ to your heart, that it is no longer you, but it is Christ who lives in you. Amen.

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