

# Our Purpose

Relational Concepts has been organized to provide motivational instruction for men and women interested in being used by God.

We believe that Christian doctors, mechanics, housewives, realtors, lawyers, plumbers, secretaries, businessmen, businesswomen, students, etc. are the most effective spokes persons the church has.

These people are generally not in a position where they can take the time to go to a Bible college. Our purpose is to bring quality instruction to them, where they are, to be applied in their families, churches, businesses, and schools—the communities in which they live. We believe that *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work* (2 Timothy 3:16-17).



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## Why Study the Land of Israel?

Biblical Christianity has its roots established deeply in world history. It's not just another religion started by some guru or self-promoter who claimed to have a sudden flash from heaven. Christianity is the fulfillment of centuries, and even millennia, of progressive historical unfolding of a single ingenious program to redeem mankind. Its unfolding is recorded in Scriptures by more than 40 writers in three languages from three different continents over a period of 1500 years. This record documents some 2,930 historical men and women, most of whom lived at different times and so never knew or contacted each other. Yet each of their lives was a stepping stone toward the Person and work of Jesus Christ as recorded in Scripture.

This long consistent historical thread gives us weighty evidence about the truth surrounding the Person and work of Jesus Christ. This historical perspective may well be one of the most compelling apologetic in support of the Gospel of Christ as recorded in the pages of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, and embedded in the history of mankind.

Like all true history, the biblical theme was (and is being) played out in a real geographical place on this earth. It's a place that you can visit and see the sites recorded in Scripture. In many passages, the geography of the account is key to understanding the account. Most of the Old Testament centers on the people of Israel, in the land of Canaan. In the New Testament, every event is described in its geographical setting. Often the event hinges on that geography.

Furthermore, the pages of Scripture tell us that this land is highly unique to God. He has chosen to place His reputation here. He has chosen to make His contact of redemption with mankind in this tiny land. When He came to earth in the Person of Jesus Christ, it was here that He chose to appear. It was here that Christ was born, grew to manhood, ministered, suffered, died, arose, and ascended into heaven. Looking into the future, Scripture also claims that this same land will be the center of major coming world events. It is here that God is gathering the Jews from all parts of the world. It is here that Christ will physically return to earth, wage war, and reign for a millennium. As in the past, the land of Israel will be the center-piece for God's earthly program.

As a prerequisite to this study, I strongly recommend that you have a comfortable working knowledge of the Bible's panoramic history. It is difficult to appreciate geographical sites where biblical events took place without being acquainted with those events. I recommend a study of Relational Concepts *An Overview of the Bible* or equivalent as a suitable prerequisite.

And even more profitable is to couple this study with an actual trip to the land of Israel. Having experienced it personally, I can heartily recommend it. It adds a whole new and marvelous dimension of warmth, understanding, and realism to the study of Scripture and to knowing God better.

We live in a period of history that is unique in many wonderful ways. Gutenberg's invention of the printing press has made it possible for each of us to own a copy of the Scripture in our own language. The Wright brothers' invention of the airplane has made it possible for us to go to Israel, see the sites and return, well within a couple of weeks and all for a tenth of the price of a new car. Think bigger than you have been.

Clark E. Blanchard

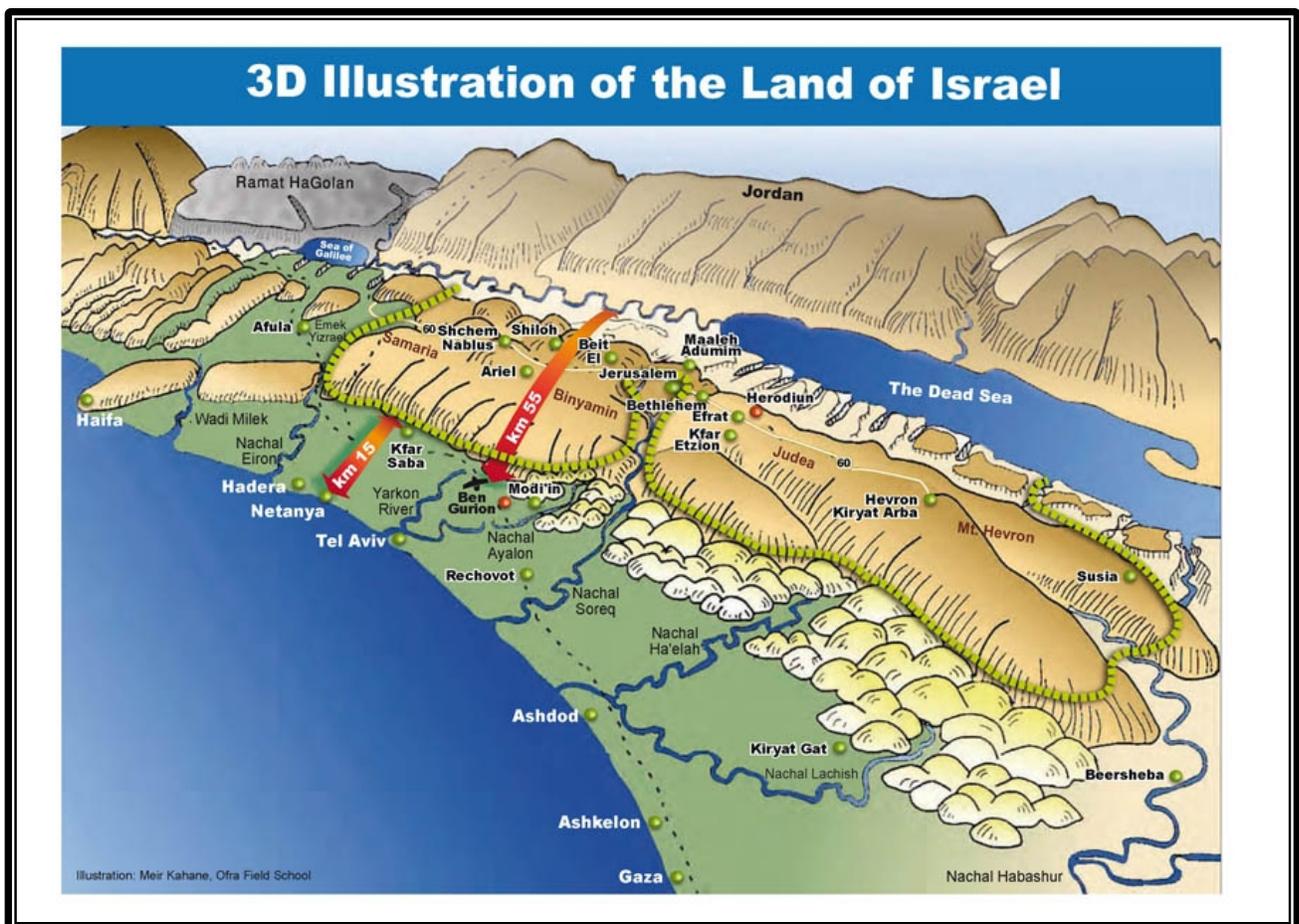


# Key Things God Said about the Land

The first step in our study of the land of Israel is to know God's viewpoint regarding the land. We need to understand several key things He said about the land as recorded in various passages of Scripture. We want to shape our perspective of the land to be in agreement with His.

Use your Bible to look up and read the supporting bolded verses below. Additional references are also given for further study.

1. **God selected the land (Genesis 12:1-7).** In God's great plan of redemption, He called Abram, as recorded in Genesis 12. A central element in that plan was God's selection of the land of Canaan. It was God's choice, no one else's. So Abram had to pack up his family and move from Ur (Iraq near Kuwait) to Canaan. Never again did he or his descendants return to Ur.
2. **God gave this land to Abram and his descendants forever through Isaac and Jacob (Hebrews 11:8-10; see also Genesis 12:7; 13:15; 15:7, 18; 17:8).**
3. **God defined the extent of the land (Genesis 15:18-21; see also Numbers 32:33-42 and 34:1-12).**
4. **God uniquely and continually watches over it and cares for it (Deuteronomy 11:11-12).**



5. **Initially, it was a very rich and prosperous land (Numbers 13:17-27)**, “flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8, 17; 13:5; Leviticus 20:24; Deuteronomy 6:3; 26:9, 15). Most of it was forest (Joshua 17:15, 18; 1 Samuel 22:5; 2 Chronicles 27:4; Deuteronomy 20:19-20; Ezekiel 20:45-49).
6. **He chose the land to make Israel dependent upon Him (Deuteronomy 11:8-17)**. It was a land unlike Egypt. It was nearly impossible to irrigate because of the terrain. Therefore, Israel was dependent upon God for rain, which was conditioned upon their obedience.
7. **God uniquely “placed His name” in Jerusalem, like a man placing his name and his reputation on his business** (e.g. J.C. Penny, Sam’s Club, Ford Motor Co.) (2 Chronicles 6:1-6; see also 1 Kings 11:36; 14:21; 2 Kings 21:4; 33:4, 7).
8. **The current desolation of the land testifies to the Jews’ disobedience (Deuteronomy 29:22-27)**.
9. **The spread of the Gospel during the church age began in Jerusalem (Acts 1:8)**.
10. **God has not permanently abandoned the Jews nor the land. He will not only restore the Jews but will convert the land to a “garden of Eden” (Ezekiel 36:22-36)**. He will bring them back to the land and restore them to obedience and blessing. And God will be recognized and honored by all nations because of it (1 Samuel 12:20-22; Hosea 3:4-5; Romans 10:21–11:5; 11:11-12, 25-29).



# An Overview of the Seven Major Geographic Areas

The land of Israel is located at the southeastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea. It is at approximately the same latitude as the cities of Dallas, Casablanca, and Nagasaki, and it sits almost directly south of Moscow. It is a relatively narrow strip of land averaging roughly 40 to 80 miles (60 to 120 km) east/west, and 180 miles (285 km), north/south. The land is located between the Mediterranean Sea to the west and the Arabian Desert to the east.



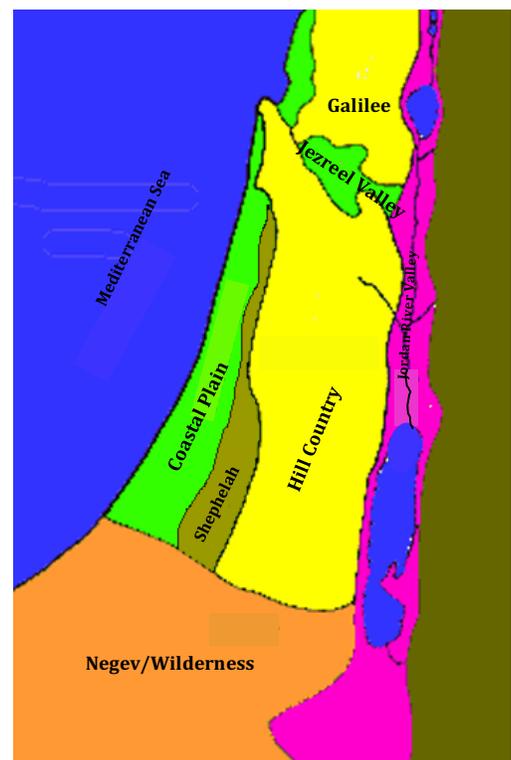
One of our first observations of the land is its strategic location in the Middle East. From the very earliest times, it was at the crossroads of trade between the major world powers of Egypt to the southwest, Mesopotamia to the northeast, and Greece, Rome, and what is now Europe, to the northwest. Traffic passing between these major world empires was funneled directly through the land. As a result, several major trade routes passed through it.

Most prominent was the Via Maris, the world's original major highway. It ran from Egypt up through the land, staying close to the Mediterranean as it passed north, then cut across to the Sea of Galilee and continued northeast. Camel caravans traveled this route from the most ancient times, enabling trade between the major world powers.

Of course, such a strategic location had significant military value, too. Control of trade resulted in great political power, so the region has been the scene of wars from its earliest history to the very present. God selected a land that put His people Israel in the center of ancient world history. It is once again having that same central focus.

The climate conditions vary according to the specific location within the land. Generally, the further north, west, and higher, the wetter and cooler the conditions. Conversely, the further south, east, and lower, the dryer and hotter the conditions. This generalization is modified somewhat by the terrain of the immediate location but serves as a good overall way of thinking of it.

In the next section, we'll divide the land into seven major geographic areas with brief descriptions: (1) the Coastal (Mediterranean) Plain, (2) the rolling hills of the Shephelah, (3) the Central Hill Country, (4) the Jordan River Valley and Region, (5) the Sea of Galilee, (6) the Jezreel Valley, and (7) the Negev/Wilderness. In the following section, we will look at cities, hills, and valleys in each of those regions.



## 1. The Coastal Plain

The Coastal Plain is covered with fertile alluvial soil. This Plain is relatively wide in the south and gradually narrows toward the north. Its coastline in the middle and south includes short sand dunes and a gently-sloping sandy sea bottom. No natural deep water harbors exist along this entire region. As a result of its relatively flat terrain, it became a natural north/south travel route.



## 2. The Shephelah



The Shephelah (meaning “foothills”) consists of rolling hills between the flat Coastal Plain and the Central Hill Country. The hills are low compared with the mountains to the east, but much higher than the Coastal Plain that runs to the shore. Orchards grow well on their gentler slopes and crops in the valley floors. The Shephelah is crossed by wide valleys which furnish easy access from the Coastal Plain to the Central Hill Country.

## 3. The Central Hill Country

The Central Hill Country is composed of limestone hills rising to an elevation of 3,000 feet (915 m) in places and is intermixed with steep, deep valleys, some with dry river beds, called *wadis*. These hills constitute a sort of north/south spine for the land.

As the easterly moving weather systems come in from the Mediterranean and move up the slopes, relatively good amounts of rain are produced in the winter season. This is typically 20 to 40 inches (0.5 to 1.0 meters) annually. In addition, much of the mountainsides contain rocky but fertile soil. As a result, the western slopes of the Central Hill Country are characterized by extensive terraced farming.



Much of the rain seeps down through the porous limestone until it reaches an impermeable layer, where it begins to flow laterally. Eventually, it exits the mountain side where it flows out as natural springs. Very little moisture makes it to the eastern side of the Central Hill Country.

For most of biblical Israel’s history, the Jews lived primarily in the Central Hill Country and defended it vigorously. They could be called “hill folk.”

## 4. The Jordan River Valley



The Jordan Valley is a portion of the Rift Valley that continues for 3,700 miles (5,900 km) from southern Turkey into Africa. Within Israel, the Rift Valley extends from the melting snows of Mount Hermon at 9,232 feet (2814 m), on the northern border, to Eilat, on the southern border, a distance of approximately 260 miles (412 km). In Hebrew, “Jordan” (Yarden) means “the descender,” an appropriate name, as along its whole course, from Hermon to the Dead Sea, it descends. From the Sea of Galilee, 682 feet (207 m) below sea level, the river flows in a rapid, rugged course



down to the Dead Sea. The distance from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea is about 65 miles (104 km) in a straight line, but the windings of the river makes the actual river about 200 miles (322 km)



long, dropping 618 feet (188 m). The total length from Hermon to the Dead Sea is about 104 miles (168 km) in a straight line, during which the river falls 2,380 feet (725 m). Its frequent rapids prevent any navigation of its waters. However, its water is valuable for irrigation in the Jordan River Valley.

The region beyond the Jordan, located immediately to the east of the Jordan Valley, extends from Mount Hermon in the north to the Gulf of Aqaba (Eilat) at the Red Sea in the south. The western edge of this region rises abruptly from the Jordan Valley, then gradually slopes eastward toward the Arabian Desert.

## 5. The Sea of Galilee

It is common to divide this region into Upper and Lower Galilee. Generally, Upper Galilee is a mountainous plateau with an average elevation of 3,000 feet (900 m) above sea level. These wind-swept mountains were densely forested in ancient times. Lower Galilee is less uniformly mountainous with an average elevation of 2,000 feet (600 m) above sea level.



Because of its elevation and proximity to the Mediterranean Sea, Galilee has the coldest and wettest winter of any region in Israel. Afternoon winds are known to come off the Mediterranean, sweep through the valleys of Lower Galilee and descend down to the Sea of Galilee, causing violent storms (Matthew 8:24-25). Winds of 30-60 mph (50-100 km/hr.) have been recorded in the hills of Galilee.

## 6. The Jezreel Valley



The Jezreel Valley is located in the northern third of the land, beginning near the Mediterranean, where the irregular outcropping occurs in the coastline, running east/west, and widening as it extends eastward to join the Jordan Valley, forming a triangular wedge. It is approximately 30 miles (48 km) from east to west, and 20 miles (32 km) north/south, at its widest, where it joins the Jordan Valley.

Abrupt hills or small mountains run along both north and south edges, with a broad flat fertile plain stretching out spectacularly between these edges. The Carmel Ridge and the Gilboa Ridge form the southern boundary and the Nazareth Ridge is the northern boundary.

The Jezreel Valley and its accompanying boundary hills and ridges interrupt the north-south flow of the Coastal Plain and the Central Hill Country. Significant biblical history occurred in the Jezreel Valley. As a boy growing up in Nazareth, it was the backyard of Jesus. Today, it is called Israel's Bread Basket.

## 7. The Negev/Wilderness

The Negev is the desert and semi-desert region of southern Israel. The region's largest city and administrative capital is Beersheba on the northern end, and at its southern end is the Gulf of Aqaba (Red Sea) and the resort city of Eilat.



# Drawing the Land

We will begin by drawing the coastline. It is a long slanted letter “J” that extends the full height of our map. Make the lower curved part of the “J” gently trail off to the left (west) near the bottom of the map. Now simply add the little peninsula in the north that sticks out into the Mediterranean. That completes the Mediterranean coastline, Israel’s western boundary.

Next, inland from the peninsula draw a small circle for the Sea of Galilee. This is the Galilee area. Then draw a squiggly line of the Jordan River down to a circle about 4 times as big as the Sea of Galilee. This is the Dead Sea.

From the peninsula, draw a straight dotted line to the bottom of the Sea of Galilee. This is the northern boundary of the Jezreel Valley. Also from the peninsula, draw a dotted line to intersect the Jordan River about 1/2 of the way down. This is the southern border of the Jezreel Valley.

To the left of the Jordan River draw a bunch of small bumps. This is the Hill Country.

Next, draw a dotted line straight down from the peninsula.

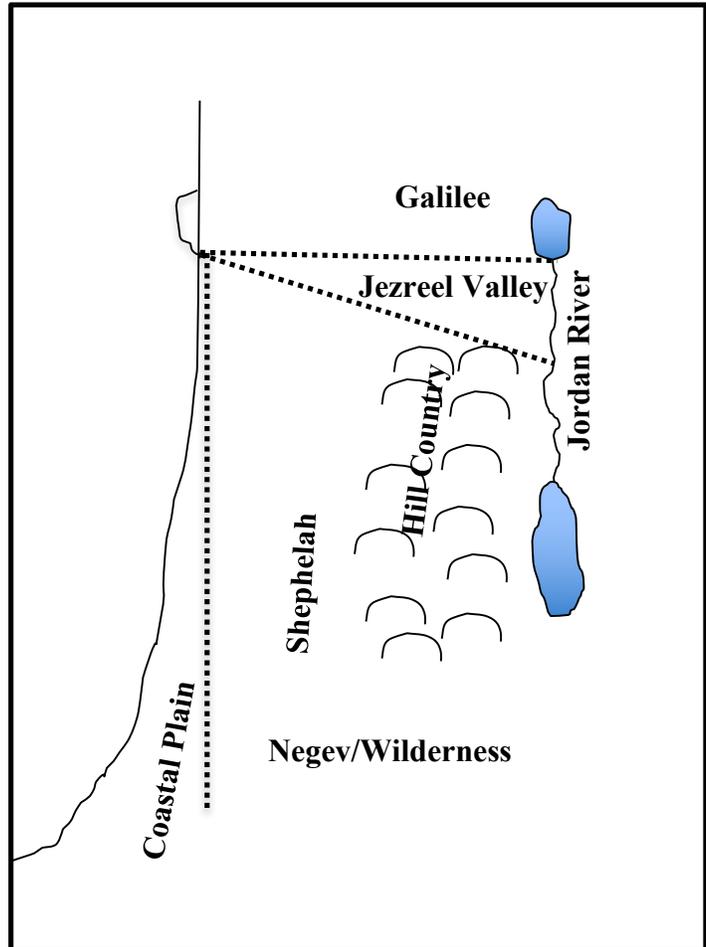
Now we can label the seven geographical areas of the land:

## West to East:

1. The Coastal Plain
2. The Shephelah
3. The Hill Country
4. The Jordan River Valley

## North to South:

5. The Sea of Galilee
6. The Jezreel Valley
7. The Negev/Wilderness



Next, we will look at each of these major geographic areas and learn the key hills, valleys, and cities in each of these regions.

# 1. The Coastal Plain

We should first understand that the Israelite people were primarily hill people, not coastal dwellers. The center of their population was always the Central Hill Country, especially in the Old Testament.

The primary dwellers along the coast in the Old Testament period were the enemies of Israel, the Philistines. They were not part of the Canaanites, from whom the land originally got its name. The best evidence is that the Philistines migrated by sea, perhaps from today's Greek Islands. In the New Testament period, the primary coastal influence was the Romans.



The entire coast along the land of Israel consists of low dunes and sandy beaches. Currents that originate as far away as the Nile River outlet sculpt the gently sloping sea floor and beaches. As a result, there are few rocky areas and no islands along the entire coast. The exception is the small outcropping in the north created by an extension of the western end of the Mount Carmel Ridge.

## Two Key Cities

### Caesarea

Caesarea is located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea 23 miles (36.5 km) south of the Mt. Carmel peninsula. [It should not be confused with Caesarea Philippi, which is located in the far north near Mount Hermon.] Because of the lack of a natural harbor, Herod built a harbor and city, which he named Caesarea in honor of Augustus Caesar. The harbor was a magnificently engineered project. Josephus described the construction of the harbor and accompanying city in grandiose detail.



A spectacular 17-mile (27 km) long aqueduct was built to bring fresh water to the city from Mount Carmel in the north. Gravity moved the water through the precisely engineered slope of approximately one foot per mile (20 cm/km) along its entire length.



The city appears in the book of Acts as a place of witness, travel, and seat of government.

- Philip, having witnessed to the Ethiopian eunuch, is mentioned as arriving at Caesarea after a preaching mission (Acts 8:40).
- Peter led a centurion named Cornelius, who was stationed there, to become a Christian (Acts 10).
- Paul had several reported contacts with the city as a port (Acts 9:30; 18:22; 21:8) and a place of imprisonment and trial (Acts 23:23; 25:1-7).
- Herod Agrippa I had a residence there, and it's where he died (Acts 12:19-23). Pontius Pilate also lived there.

## Joppa/Tel Aviv

Joppa (Jaffa) and Tel Aviv are sister cities located midway down the coast. Joppa is the ancient city and Tel Aviv is the modern city, having been founded in 1909 as a suburb of Joppa. Tel Aviv was the first city founded in Israel in modern times and is now the second largest behind Jerusalem. It is, in every sense, a sprawling modern city of western standards. Interestingly, nearly all the countries of the world consider Tel Aviv the capital of modern Israel and have their embassies there. But officially, the State of Israel holds Jerusalem, 35 miles (55.5 km) to the southeast, to be their capital, and so it is the site of the Knesset, Israel's parliament building.



When Canaan was conquered, the tribe of Dan received Joppa, but it never came firmly into their hands. The Philistines took the city, but David recaptured it. Joppa was the only natural (shallow) harbor on the Mediterranean, so Solomon developed it into a port serving Jerusalem, by floating rafts of cedar logs from Lebanon to Joppa, then transporting them to Jerusalem for Solomon's splendid Temple (2 Chronicles 2:16).

Phoenicia (area north of Mt. Carmel) gained control of Joppa by the time of Jonah. As the prophet fled from God's call, he caught a ship at Joppa for his well-remembered voyage toward Tarshish (Jonah 1:3). In 701 B.C., the Assyrians occupied the city, then the Babylonians, then the Persians. As it had been in Solomon's day, Joppa once again became the port that received cedar logs floated from Lebanon for the rebuilding of the Temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel, after the Babylonian Captivity (Ezra 3:7).



The New Testament records:

- Joppa was the home of Dorcas (Tabitha), a Christian woman known for her gracious and generous deeds. At her death, the Christians of Joppa called for Simon Peter, who was staying in Lydda (site of the Ben Gurion Airport today). He came to Joppa, and with the command, "Tabitha, arise," restored her to life (Acts 9:36-41).
- Simon Peter remained in Joppa, at the home of Simon the Tanner, where he saw *a certain object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners*, and he learned that the Gentile world was a fit audience for the Gospel (Acts 10:9-16).

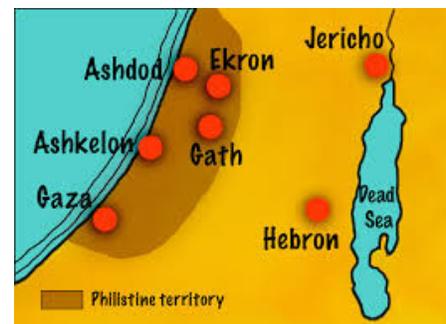
## Five Philistine Cities

Following their arrival in the land of Canaan, the Philistines occupied five key cities along the southern Coastal Plain. These were Ashdod, Gath, Ekron, Ashkelon, and Gaza.

### Ashdod

In the Old Testament:

- Ashdod was a place where some of the Anakim (giants) remained during the time of Joshua (Joshua 11:22).



- When the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant, after a battle with the Israelites at Aphek near Shiloh, they took the *Ark of God and brought it to the house of Dagon [idol], and set it by Dagon*. The next morning, they found Dagon had fallen on its face to the ground before the Ark. The Philistines set it back up, and the next morning, it had fallen on its face again, and *the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off*. Then *the hand of the Lord was heavy on the Ashdodites, and He ravaged them and smote them with tumors*. So they sent the Ark to Gath (1 Samuel 4–6). [See the map of the journey of the Ark on page 14.]

## **Gath**

Gath was located near the western end of the Elah Valley. It was in a position to protect Philistine territory from raids by the Israelites. At the same time, it was convenient for the Philistines to initiate raids on Israelite communities from the city of Gath.

- For a short time, Gath was one of the locations to which the Philistines took the Ark of the Covenant (1 Samuel 5:8-9), but God caused tumors to break out on those men, too. So they sent the Ark on to Ekron (1 Samuel 5:10).
- Gath was also the hometown of the giant Goliath (1 Samuel 17:4).
- At one point, while being pursued by Saul, David actually found sanctuary with Achish, the king of Gath (1 Samuel 27:1-7).
- Eventually, David defeated the Philistines and made Gath an Israelite town (1 Chronicles 18:1).

## **Ekron**

Ekron was located about 14 miles (22 km) inland from the Mediterranean Sea and near the western end of the Sorek Valley. The site was one of the largest in Philistia, covering some 50 acres.

- Ekron lies on the road leading from Ashdod into the Judean hill country and up to Jerusalem through the Sorek Valley, which was Samson’s neighborhood.
- The Philistines sent the Ark from Gath to Ekron (1 Samuel 5:10). God also caused these men to get tumors. The Philistines agreed to make 5 golden tumors (one from each of their five cities) and put them and the Ark on a cart pulled by 2 cows from which they had taken their calves. If the cows turned to find their calves, they would know their tumors were by chance. But instead, the cows went right up through the Sorek Valley to Beth-shemesh on the east end, returning the Ark to the Israelites. So they knew that God had made them have the tumors because they took His Ark away from the people of God.
- Ekron was also the place to which the Philistines retreated after David slew Goliath (1 Samuel 17:52).

## **Ashkelon**

Ashkelon is located on the coast about 12 miles (19 km) north of Gaza and 10 miles (16 km) south of Ashdod. It is the only Philistine city directly on the seacoast. This location put Ashkelon under considerable Egyptian influence.

The Old Testament record concerns the city after it had come under Philistine control:

- Samson (from Zora on the east end of the Sorek Valley) told the men of Timnah (on the west end of the Sorek Valley) if they could guess his riddle, he would give them 30 changes of clothes. Then Samson’s wife, from Timnah, enticed Samson to tell her the solution to his riddle, at the urging of the men from Timnah. So Samson went to the neighboring Ashkelon and killed 30 Philistine men to get the 30 changes of clothes to give the men of Timnah (Judges 14:19).



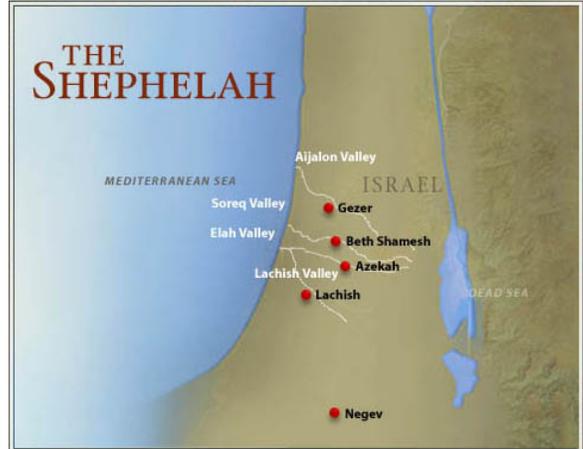
## 2. The Shephelah

### Three Key Valleys

#### Aijalon Valley

Starting in the north, the Aijalon Valley is located about 15 miles northwest of Jerusalem. Gibeon is on the east end, and the valley curves to the north, actually ending about at the Ben Gurion Airport near Tel Aviv.

- The Valley of Aijalon was first mentioned in the book of Joshua as where Joshua defeated five Amorite kings. Following his midnight march to rescue the city of Gibeon from the coalition led by the King of Jebus (Jerusalem), Joshua pursued the coalition eastward and then southward across the Valley of Aijalon. To allow the Israelites to complete the route before nightfall, Joshua asked the Lord to lengthen the day by uttering the command: *“O sun, stand still at Gibeon, and O moon in the valley of Aijalon.”* Joshua 10:11-14 tells that *the sun stopped in the middle of the sky... for about a whole day. There was no day like that before it or after it, when the Lord listened to the voice of a man.*
- This was also the place where Saul and Jonathan won a great victory over the Philistines (1 Samuel 14:31).



#### Sorek Valley

South of the Aijalon Valley is the Sorek Valley. It was one of several strategic valleys that the Philistines used for military approaches into the Israelite heartland. The Sorek Valley was especially important because it eventually led up to Jerusalem.

The Israelite city of Beth-shemesh guarded the eastern end, while the Philistines controlled the western portion, especially during the era of the judges.

- Samson was from Zorah, near Beth-shemesh. His wife was from Timnah, on the west end of the valley. Delilah, Samson’s mistress, was also from the Sorek Valley (Judges 16:4), so it was a major area of Samson’s conflict with the Philistines.
- On a cart pulled by two milk cows, the Ark of the Covenant journeyed up the Sorek Valley to Beth-shemesh when it was returned from the Philistines who had captured it at Aphek.

#### Elah Valley



The Elah Valley lies south of the Sorek Valley and generally parallel to it. It had the same military importance as the Sorek except that it eventually led up to Bethlehem. The western end of the valley was guarded by the Philistine city of Gath. [Notice in this picture the Elah Valley and the near hills of the Shephelah and the mountains of the Hill Country in the distance.]

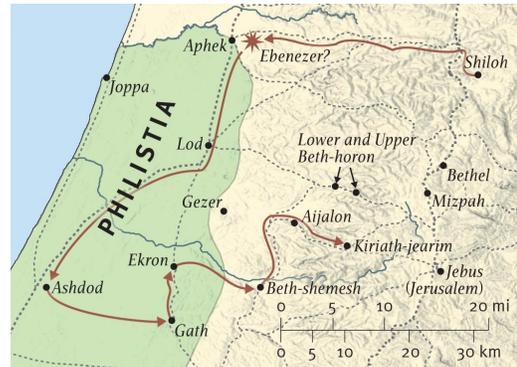
- It was in this valley that King Saul and the Israelite army set up battle lines against the Philistines (1 Samuel 17:2), and where David slew Goliath. This geography gives more understanding about the resulting conflict between David, from Bethlehem, and Goliath, from Gath (1 Samuel 21:9).

## Two Key Cities

### Kiriath-jearim

This city was located 9.3 miles (15 km) west of Jerusalem. It was a Hivite city connected with the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:17). It was a key landmark in identifying the border between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (Joshua 15:9; 18:14, 15).

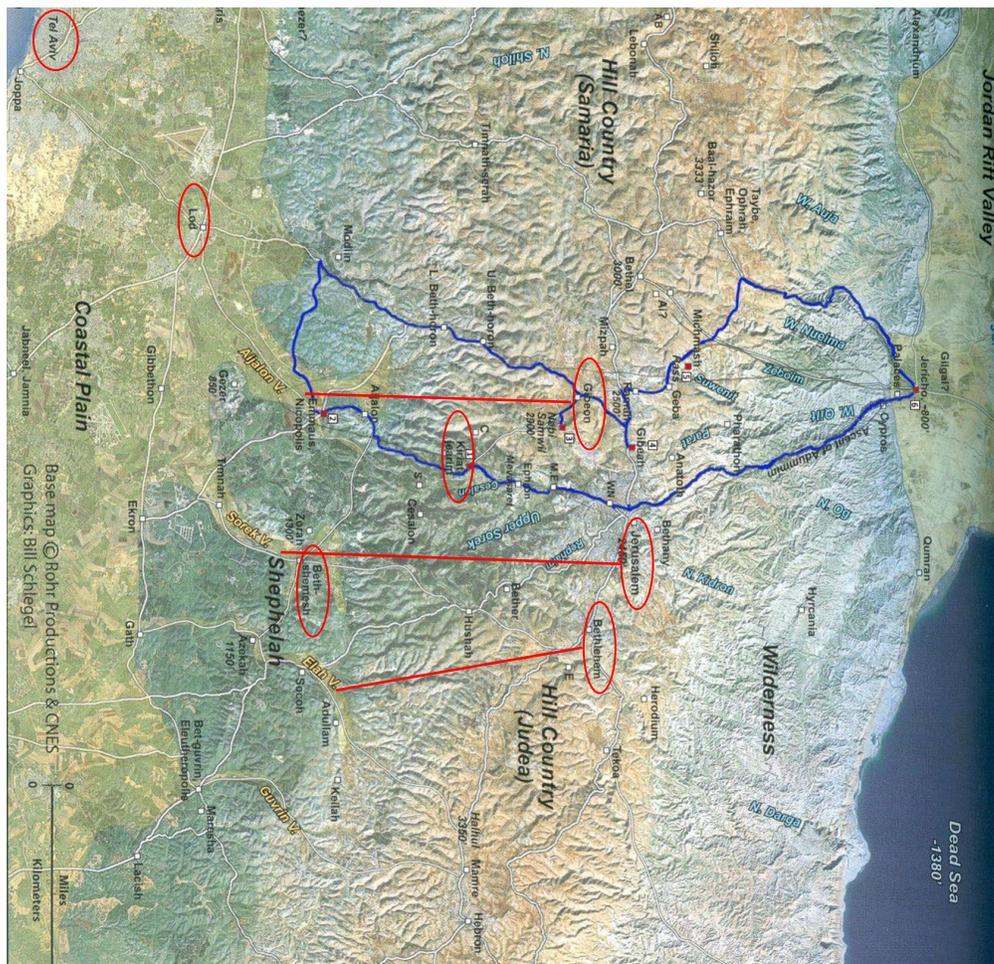
- It is the place to which the Ark of the Covenant was moved after being in Beth-shemesh. The Ark stayed there for 92 years before David moved it to Jerusalem.



### Beth-shemesh

Beth-shemesh was the most important Israelite city on the eastern end of the Sorek Valley. The main highway of that time went through Beth-shemesh.

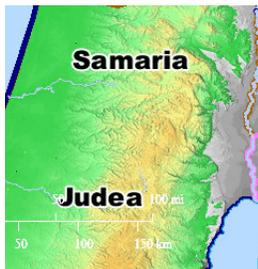
- The Philistines, after capturing the Ark of the Covenant, put the Ark on a cart hitched to two cows and sent it out. The cows led the cart through the Sorek Valley to Beth-shemesh (1 Samuel 6).



# 3. The Central Hill Country

The core biblical land of Israel is the Central Hill Country. It extends from the Jezreel Valley in the north to the south end of the Dead Sea.

- In the Old Testament, this region was divided among four tribes and so was referred to as the Hill Country of Manasseh, Ephraim, Benjamin, and Judah. It was here that ancient Israel centered its national life, and it was here that Israel defended itself against its enemies.
- In New Testament times, this region was divided into two sections: Samaria and Judea. Samaria extended from the Jezreel Valley southward to just north of Jerusalem, and Judea extended along the Hill Country southward, west of and even with the Dead Sea.



The full-blooded Jews inhabited Galilee, in the north, and Judea, in the south. Those considered half-breeds (part Jewish from the Northern Kingdom and part Assyrian) lived in between, in the region of Samaria. Hence, they were called Samaritans. Jews from Galilee, en route to or from Jerusalem, had to either pass through Samaria or go around. Most preferred to go around, passing along the eastern side of the Jordan River Valley. This geographical situation further complicated the strained relationship between the Jews and Samaritans.

## Samaria in the North

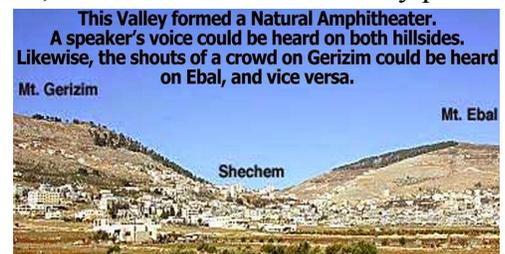
### Two Mountains

#### Mount Ebal

Moses had instructed the Israelites, when they entered the land, to build an altar and make stones, covered with white lime, on which *you shall write on the stones all the words of this law very distinctly*. Then six tribes were to *stand on Mount Ebal*, on the north, and shout the curses for any person who disobeyed the Law (Deuteronomy 11:29; 27:4, 12-13; Joshua 8:30-35). The Ark of the Covenant was placed between the two mountains.

#### Mount Gerizim

Meanwhile, the other six tribes were to stand on Mt. Gerizim, on the south, and shout out the blessings God would give to the Israelites if they obeyed God's Law (Deuteronomy 28). This is called the Mosaic Covenant or the Palestinian Covenant. This mountain was, and still is, sacred to the Samaritans who regard it, rather than Jerusalem's Temple Mount, as having been the location chosen by God for the holy temple (John 4:20).



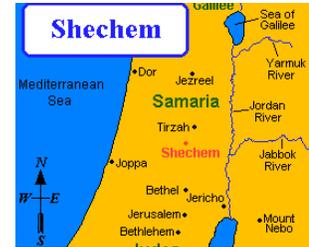
### Two Key Cities

This region is hilly and rugged, thereby restricting travel throughout its long history. In ancient times, it was largely covered by forests. Today, it supports scrub undergrowth and some farming, especially on the western slopes. Within this region, two places are especially noteworthy: Shechem and Shiloh.

## Shechem

Shechem is an ancient city located in central Samaria between Mount Gerizim to the south and Mount Ebal to the north.

- The city made its earliest appearance in biblical history in connection with Abram's arrival in the land (Genesis 12:6-7).
- When Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, he settled near Shechem and purchased land from the sons of Hamor (Genesis 33:18-19).
- When Joseph was on his deathbed, he instructed the children of Israel to *carry my bones up from here* (Genesis 50:25). *And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him* when the Israelites left Egypt (Exodus 13:19). *And then, when Joshua led them into the land, they buried the bones of Joseph...at Shechem, in the piece of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor...* (Joshua 24:32).
- Rehoboam, successor to King Solomon, went to Shechem to be crowned king over all Israel (1 Kings 12:1).
- In 930 B.C., when the nation divided into Northern and Southern Kingdoms, Shechem became the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 12:25).
- It was at Shechem (sometimes identified with Sychar, currently called Nablus), where Jesus visited with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well (John 4:4-30). She said, "*Our fathers worshipped in this mountain...*" (John 4:20), meaning Mount Gerizim. The Samaritans had built their temple on Mount Gerizim, where they practiced their religion. A small remnant of Samaritans still performs an annual animal sacrifice in the open air on Mount Gerizim.



## Shiloh

About 12 miles (19 km) south of Shechem and 30 miles (48 km) north of Jerusalem sat Shiloh, which would be Israel's religious center after the conquest.

- It became the home of Israel's tabernacle for about 400 years (Joshua 18:1).
- At the tabernacle, a woman named Hannah vowed to the Lord that, if He would give her a son, she would give him back to God. After the birth of her son Samuel, Hannah brought him to Shiloh in gratitude to God (1 Samuel 1:24-28). Thus, Shiloh became home for Samuel, as he lived and grew up under the care of the high priest Eli, *and the*



- *Lord appeared again at Shiloh* (1 Samuel 3:20).
- Some years later, following a defeat by the Philistines at Aphek, the Israelite army sent for the Ark of the Covenant from Shiloh. They then lost the Ark to the Philistines, who took it to their city Ashdod on the Mediterranean coast (1 Samuel 4). It never returned to Shiloh. [For the details of the journey of the Ark while in Philistine control, see the map on page 14.]



By the time of David (1000 B.C.), *the tabernacle of the Lord, which Moses had made in the wilderness, and the altar of burnt offering were...in Gibeon* (1 Chronicles 21:29), with no Ark of the Covenant in it. Gibeon was one of the Levites' cities in Benjamin (Joshua 21:17). The Bible does not say when or why this happened, but perhaps it was to remove the tabernacle from northern Israel's Ephraim territory into Benjamin's territory. It's interesting to note that, at this point, the Ark of the

Covenant, which represented God's presence among His people, went in one direction, and the tabernacle went in another direction, and they were never together again.

No biblical reference was made to Shiloh's final fate. But Jeremiah warned Jerusalem, *go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I made My name dwell at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel* (Jeremiah 7:12). If Jerusalem persisted in their wickedness, God would destroy the Temple and city, and it would become a ruins, as Shiloh was.

## Benjamin in the Middle



The tribe of Benjamin, being small, inherited a small part of the land (Numbers 26:54; Joshua 18:11-28). As tensions between the northern part of Israel and the southern part continued to grow, even years before they split, Benjamin became a kind of neutral area in the middle (Joshua 18:11). At the time of Samuel, his circuit as judge was primarily in Benjamin (see page 20). King Saul was from Benjamin. Although from the tribe of Judah, after having made Hebron in Judah his capital for seven years, King David moved the capital to Jerusalem, on the southern border of Benjamin.

## The Key Cities

### Bethel

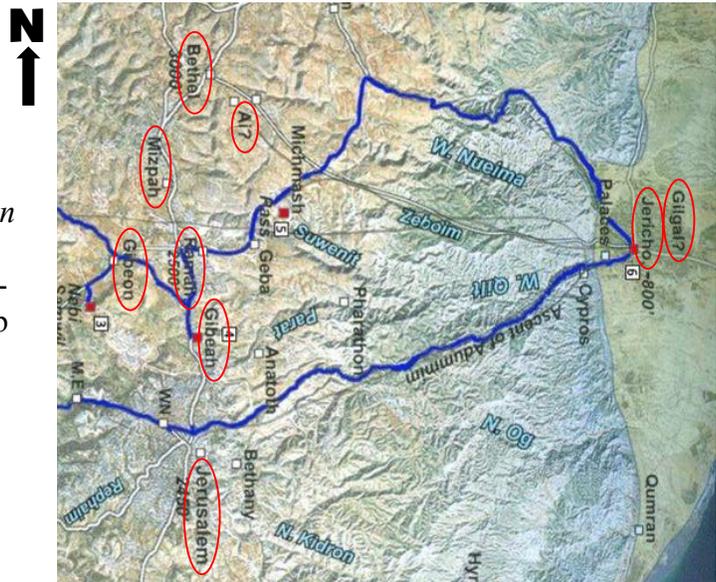
- Both Abraham and Jacob built altars to God at Bethel (Genesis 12:8; 28:19).
- It is also where Jacob saw *a ladder set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven...the Lord stood above it*, and God repeated the Abrahamic Covenant to Jacob (Genesis 28:10-17).

### Gilgal

- The exact location is not known, but it was near Jericho and was the first place the Israelites set foot in their promised land. Camping here after their miraculous crossing of the Jordan River, they: circumcised the children who were born in the wilderness wandering, observed the Passover, ate the first fruits of the land, the manna stopped, and Jesus appeared to Joshua. Then they marched around Jericho (Joshua 1-5).
- Gilgal was the base of operations when Joshua conquered the land (Joshua 10:6-15, 40-43).
- It was on the circuit of the prophet Samuel as he judged the land, and it's where Samuel informed Saul that the Lord had rejected him as king (1 Samuel 13:1-15; 15:1-35).
- Many years later, Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind from Gilgal, as the prophet Elisha looked on (2 Kings 2:1-14; 4:38-41).

### Jericho

Although Jericho is in the territory of Benjamin, we will cover that material in the Jordan River Valley section, on page 29.

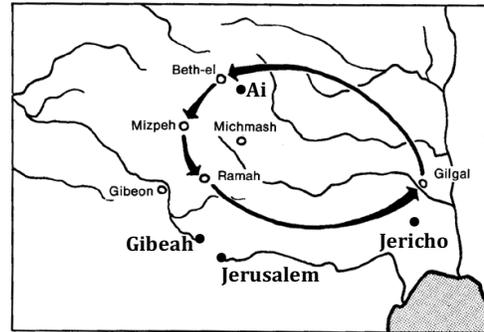


## Ai

This Canaanite city in the hills behind Jericho was the second city the Israelites conquered when they entered the land (Joshua 8).

## Ramah

- Samuel was born and lived the first years of his life in Ramah (1 Samuel 1:19).
- When he became a judge and prophet, Samuel *used to go annually on circuit to Bethel and Gilgal and Mizpah...then his return was to Ramah, for his house was there, and there he judged Israel; and he built there an altar to the Lord* (1 Samuel 7:15-17).
- When King Herod killed the boy babies in Bethlehem after Jesus was born, Matthew wrote, *that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning...”* (Matthew 2:17-18).



## Mizpah

Samuel gathered the people of Israel in Mizpah for the Lord to identify their first king, and Saul was chosen by lot from all the tribes and families of Israel (1 Samuel 10:17-24).

## Gibeah

The hometown of Saul, Israel's first king (1 Samuel 10:26; 15:34).

## Gibeon

- *Joshua spoke to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the sons of Israel, and he said..., “O sun, stand still at Gibeon, and O moon in the valley of Aijalon”...and the sun stopped in the middle of the sky, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it* (Joshua 10:12-14).
- Gibeon was the location of the tabernacle for 58 years when it was moved from Shiloh (1 Chronicles 21:28-29).
- Zadok, the high priest of the Aaronic line of Eleazar (1 Chronicles 6:4-8), was in charge of the Gibeon sanctuary, while Abiathar, the high priest of the Aaronic line of Ithamar (1 Chronicles 24:6), was at the tent-shrine David made for the Ark in Jerusalem when it left Kiriath-jearim.
- When King Solomon went there to pray and offer sacrifices, *in Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon...and God said, “Ask what you wish Me to give you.”* And Solomon replied, *“So give Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people to discern between good and evil.” ...And it was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon asked this thing* (1 Kings 3:3-10).

## Judea in the South

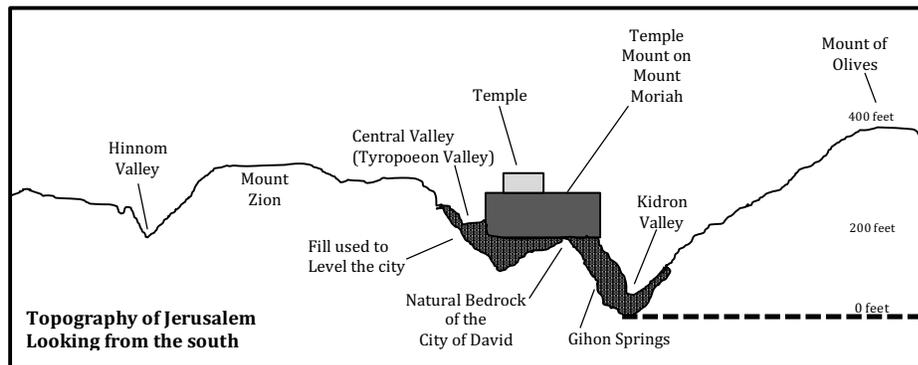


A “Jew” is a person from Judea. In Ezra 5:8, it had the designation of a province that varied in size with changing political circumstances. Generally, the area formerly called Judah included the region immediately south of Samaria, it extended from the Jordan Valley on the east to the Coastal Plain on the west and southward to the south end of the Dead Sea.



## Three Key Cities of Judea

### Jerusalem

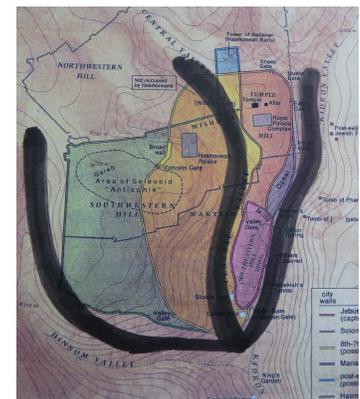


Perched astride the Central Hill Country at 2500 feet (750 m) above sea level and 18 miles (28.5 km) directly west of the north end of the Dead Sea is the most unique place on earth—Jerusalem. The thing that makes it so unique is that God has elected to place His name

there and hence His reputation before the nations of the world (2 Chronicles 6:1-6).

No other city in the world comes close to Jerusalem's importance for the future. It is where the Jews' Messiah and the Christians' Lord will intervene in history once again. It is also a major place of confrontation between God and Satan. Its name "Jerusalem" means "city of peace" (Hebrews 7:1-2). Yet more wars have been fought at its gates than any other city in the world. It has been besieged more than 50 times, conquered at least 36 times, and destroyed 10 times. References to it occur 810 times in the Bible.

The topography of Jerusalem is a mixture of very rugged hills and deep valleys. In fact, the ancient city of Jerusalem sits where three valleys join like the tongs on a three-tong pitchfork. The fork generally points northwest with the handle trailing off to the southeast, eventually finding its way down to the Dead Sea. The valley across the bottom is the Hinnom, the one in the middle is the Tyropoeon, and the best-known one on the east, the Kidron. To the east of the Kidron Valley rises the Mount of Olives which slopes to the east and downward, past Bethany, toward Jericho and beyond to the north end of the Dead Sea.



From a defensive standpoint, the topography of the land made it an excellent place for a city in ancient times. Its only possible direction of attack would be from the north, where the hills slope gently upward and away with no natural defensive valley. In addition, the large natural Gihon Spring provided ample water for the city's inhabitants. It is located just north of where the valleys join and along the Kidron Valley.

The Bible first introduces us to this place in Genesis 14:18-24 when Abraham was returning from north of Damascus where he had rescued Lot who was taken captive. It was here that Abraham met Melchizedek, who was the King of Salem (ancient Jerusalem), "priest of God Most High." Hebrews 7:2 tells us further that "King of Salem" means "king of peace." So we have an early biblical reference to this place—Melchizedek who is the mysterious type of Christ and the name of "Salem" meaning "peace." Thus, Jeru-salem is the "city of peace."

Some time later, in Genesis 22, we again hear of this place when God tests Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac. God instructs Abraham to go to Mount Moriah and there offer his son. Second Chroni-

cles 3:1 identifies this place as where Solomon built his temple a millennium later. That place, Mount Moriah, is in Jerusalem at the current site of the Muslim Dome of the Rock.

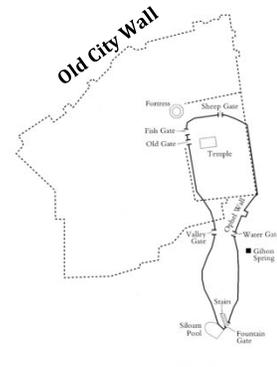
The next major biblical connection with this area occurred about 100 years later, as recorded in 2 Samuel 5:1-10. David was King of Israel but reigning in the city of Hebron to the south. Some 19 miles (30 km) up the ridge to the north of Hebron lay the city of the Jebusites (Jebus/Jerusalem), who bragged that it was such an impenetrable stronghold, even the blind and lame could keep David’s army out. But through cleverness, David took the city through the water tunnel.

David then made it his capital and called it “the City of David.” It was also called “Zion,” the name of the original Jebusite fortress. This moved his new capital closer to the tribes in the north and was



more centrally located. David built a defensive mound along the northern exposure. He also built an extensive cedar house for himself and eventually moved the Ark of the Covenant into the city (2 Samuel 6). Thus, it became both the political and religious capital for all Israel. David reigned there for 33 years.

This original “City of David” was located on the southern most brink of the ridge between the Kidron and Tyropoeon Valleys and was surprisingly small. Best estimates place it at a modest 11-12 acres, with a population inside its wall that could scarcely have exceeded 2,500. This original “City of David” actually lays outside the current city wall, south of the “old city” of Jerusalem today.



However, David’s influence stretched northward as he bought the hill immediately up the ridge to the north. He wanted to erect an altar there and paid 50 silver shekels for it and oxen to sacrifice (1 Samuel 24:18-25). It was on this very site (Mt. Moriah of Abraham’s time) that Solomon eventually built his magnificent temple (2 Chronicles 3). Although, of course, we don’t know exactly what this temple looked like, we do have measurements, and every description speaks of its splendor.

During the reign of Solomon, the city of Jerusalem expanded greatly, both in beauty and size. Its walls were extended both northward up the ridge and westward. In addition to the temple, Solomon built an elaborate palace for himself just south of the temple site and well north of his father David’s palace. Solomon’s era was indeed Jerusalem’s high water mark. The time period from Solomon’s building of the temple until it was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. is known as the First Temple Period.



When the kingdom of Israel split after the death of Solomon, Jerusalem continued to be the capital of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. But it was repeatedly threatened during the period of the divided kingdom. King Hezekiah (715-686 B.C.) had a 1750 foot (526 m) tunnel dug out of solid rock to provide water into the city from the Gihon Springs in time of siege (2 Kings 20:20). This water ended in the Pool of Siloam.

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Eventually, the Babylonians (modern-day Iraq) conquered Jerusalem in 598 B.C. taking 10,000 of the leading people into captivity. A further uprising led to the destruction of the city in 586 B.C. This ended the First Temple Period.

When Cyrus the Persian (modern-day Iran) overran the Babylonians (539 B.C.), he encouraged the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-4). The temple rebuilding was completed in 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:15), although its glory was less than Solomon's original. This began the Second Temple Period that lasted until the Romans destroyed that temple in 70 A.D. Under the influence of Ezra and Nehemiah, Jerusalem again became the living center of Judaism.

In the time right before Christ, Herod the Great was appointed by the Romans as king of the Jews. He built elaborate fortresses and cities in Israel such as Caesarea, Masada, and the Herodium, and he remodeled Jerusalem. The various conquests of Jerusalem had caused much damage. Herod constructed a theater, amphitheater, hippodrome, a new palace, fortified towers, and an aqueduct to bring water from the Bethlehem area.



Herod's most outstanding building project was the temple site. Doubling the temple area, Herod constructed a magnificent building of huge white stones, richly ornamented. Today, the "Wailing (Western) Wall" is a small segment of a far longer ancient retaining wall surrounding a huge flat platform, which created more space for the temple itself and its auxiliary buildings. This "Wailing Wall" is holy because of its connection to the temple mount.



The wall itself is not sacred,

but it's the nearest the Jews can get to the spot where the temple once stood.



It was this "Herod's Jerusalem" to which Jesus came, and the descriptions we have in the Gospels are of this Jerusalem era. The temple narratives of Jesus' teaching and cleansing were from this Second Temple Period. The temple mount played a central role in the Gospels and Acts. It is referred to 65 times in the Gospels and 24 times in Acts. When the New Testament refers to the temple, in most cases, it is referring to this entire mount on which the temple sanctuary was situated. For example, it considered the Portico of Solomon to be part of the temple as we read in John 10:22-23, *At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon.* Further, there are many references to Jesus, who was not a priest or Levite, being "in the temple." Of course, neither He, nor any other non-priest or non-Levite would be allowed in the temple sanctuary proper.

The exact places of the trial, crucifixion, and burial are disputed. However, the place of the temple, **Garden of Gethsemane**, and **Mount of Olives** are well-known and agreed to by all. It was from atop the Mount of Olives, to the east of Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley, that Jesus, after His resurrection,

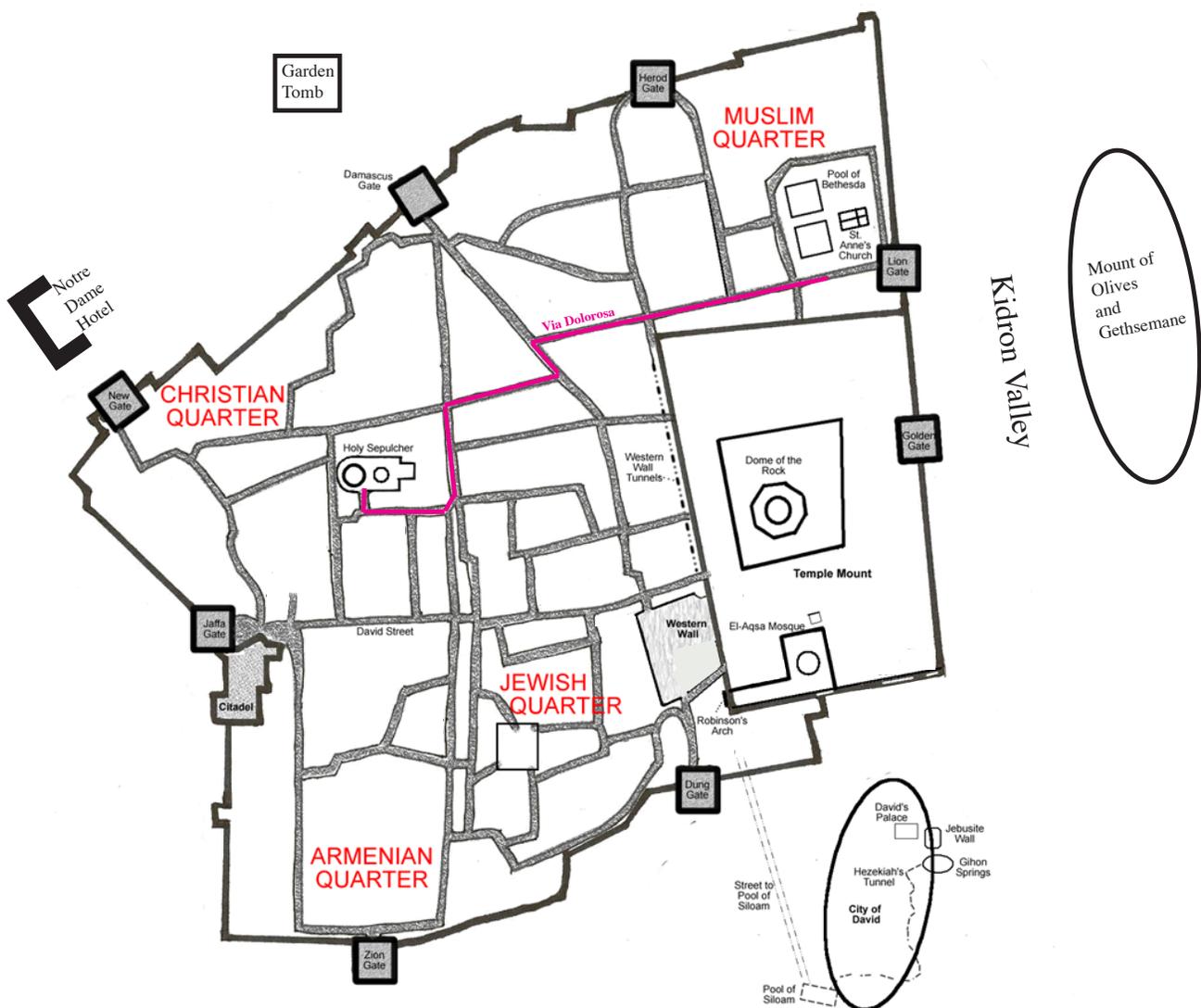


gave the Apostles their worldwide marching orders (Acts 1:8). And it was from there that Jesus ascended bodily (Acts 1:9-11) and to which He will return (Zechariah 14:1-4).

This Jerusalem, in which Jesus and all the Apostles walked, was destroyed by the Roman general Titus in 70 A.D. after zealous Jews revolted against Rome. Jesus predicted that not one stone of the temple building would remain standing on another (Matthew 24:1-2), and widespread destruction engulfed the city. This ended the Second Temple Period. A second revolt in 135 A.D. resulted in Jews being completely excluded from the city.

From that time until the founding of the modern state of Israel in 1948, the major role of Jerusalem in the Hebrew-Christian religion has been one of symbol, hope, and prophecy. “Next year in Jerusalem” has been a byword of hope to Jews for centuries. The current temple mount is in the same location and the same size of approximately 36 acres, although no where near as glorious. It is Islam’s third most sacred site with the Dome of the Rock located where the first and second temples once stood. Although within Israeli jurisdiction, the current day mount is controlled by the Muslims.

### Key Places in the City Today



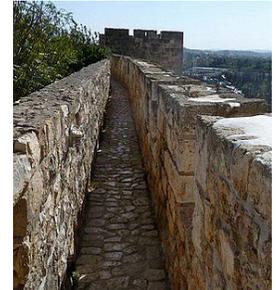
## The "Old City"



The Old City is a .35 square mile (.9 sq km) walled area within the modern city of Jerusalem. Until 1860, this



area was the entire city of Jerusalem. The Old City is roughly divided into four sections called Quarters: the Muslim Quarter, the Christian Quarter, the Armenian Quarter, and the Jewish Quarter. It is one of the most densely populated areas in Israel, with an approximate total of 35,000 residents, of which 25,000 are Muslims, 2,500 are Jews, 5,000 are "Christians," and 2,500 are Armenians. The Old City's monumental defensive walls and city gates were built in the years 1535-42 by the Turkish sultan Suleiman the Magnificent. The walls stretch for approximately 2.8 miles (4.5 km) and rise to a height of between 16-49 feet (5-15 m), with a thickness of 10 feet (3 m) at the base of the wall. The walls contain 35 towers. It's possible to walk the top of the walls (Ramparts Walk), beginning at the Jaffa Gate. The main gates are the Jaffa (Joppa) Gate, the Damascus Gate, the Dung Gate, and the sealed Golden Gate (facing the Mt. of Olives). Following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, the Old City was captured by Jordan and all its Jewish residents were evicted. During the Six-Day War in 1967, Israeli forces captured the Old City along with the rest of East Jerusalem, annexing them as Israeli territory and reuniting them with the western modern part of Jerusalem. Today, the entire area is within Israeli jurisdiction.



## Bethlehem

Bethlehem, like Jerusalem, is situated atop the Central Hill Country, approximately five miles to the southwest of Jerusalem. Its name means "house of bread." But it is the relationship of Bethlehem to



Christ that has insured its place in world history. Micah 5:2 was understood to indicate that the Messiah, like King David, would be born in Bethlehem, not Jerusalem. Matthew 2:1-12, Luke 2:4-20, and John 7:42 report that Jesus was born in that humble village. Of course, we do not know the exact location of the manger or on which hill the angels appeared to the shepherds.

## Hebron

Hebron, like Jerusalem and Bethlehem, is situated along the Central Hill Country. It is about 19 miles (30 km) south of Jerusalem and 15 miles (24 km) west of the Dead Sea. The city is at 3,050 feet (930 m) above sea level, making it the highest city in Israel. The surrounding area has an abundant water supply, and its rich soil is excellent for agriculture.

- After his separation from Lot, Abraham moved to Hebron. At that time, the area was known as Mamre and was associated with the Amorites (Genesis 13:18; 14:13; 23:19). When Sarah died, Abraham purchased a field with a burial plot inside a nearby cave. It is the only land Abraham owned. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Leah were buried there (Genesis 23:19; 25:9; 35:29; 49:31; 50:13).
- After the Israelite conquest of Canaan, Hebron was given to Caleb (Joshua 14:9-13). It also became a city of refuge (Joshua 20:7).
- Later, Samson carried the gates of Philistine Gaza to a hill facing Hebron (Judges 16:3).

- Following the death of Saul, David settled in the city (2 Samuel 2:1-3) and made it his capital. This was during the seven years he ruled only Judah (1 Kings 2:11), before moving the capital to Jerusalem for the last 33 years of his reign.
- Although Herod the Great erected pretentious structures there, no mention of the city is made in the New Testament.
- Hebron is still an important city today. It is venerated by the Jews, Arabs, and Christians alike because of the tombs of the patriarchs and matriarchs, enclosed by a wall built by Herod the Great.



## The Judean Wilderness

The Judean Wilderness is usually considered to be that portion of Judea located on the eastern slope of the Hill Country adjacent to the Dead Sea, in the rain shadow of the hills. During the Old Testament, the southern half of this wilderness was divided into the Wilderness of Ziph [upper] and the Wilderness of Maon [lower] (1 Samuel 23:14; 24; 26:2).

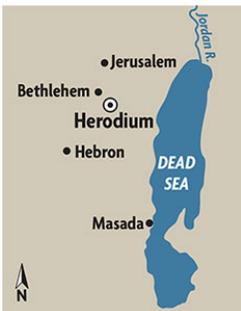


Overall, the Judean Wilderness receives an average of only a few inches of rainfall per year. As a result, very little grows in its hot arid environment, and the only inhabitants are a few scattered Bedouins. The terrain consists of continuous small hills or mounds. It slopes from the ridge downward toward the Dead Sea where abrupt cliffs descend down to the shore.

- *In those days, John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea...* (Matthew 3:1).
- *Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil* (Matthew 4:1; Mark 1; and Luke 4).
- Along the steep cliffs near the Dead Sea are caves and fortresses. We will cover that material in the Jordan River Valley section of this book, on pages 29-31.

## Herodium

Located 7.5 miles (12 km) south of Jerusalem and 3.1 miles (5 km) southeast of Bethlehem, in the Judean Wilderness, is the Herodium, which was constructed over an existing hill. It is 2,487 feet (758 m) above sea level, making it the highest peak in the Judean Wilderness. It is the only site



named after Herod the Great. Between 23-14 B.C., he commissioned a lavish 7-story palace to be built on top, for all to see. The palace had a bathhouse, courtyards, theatre, banquet rooms, and extravagant living quarters for himself. Herod died in 4 B.C. and was buried in the Herodium. His tomb was found in 2007 and the exhibition displaying the reconstructed burial chamber, etc. was opened in 2013. The Herodium allows a spectacular view of the Judean Wilderness and Dead Sea to the east, Hebron to the southwest, and Bethlehem and Jerusalem to the north.



## 4. The Jordan River Valley

The Jordan River is possibly the most famous river known to the Western world. Surprisingly, however, it is generally small and muddy. Like much in the land of Israel, its fame is related to the fame and history of the people and events, rather than its natural features.

### North of the Sea of Galilee



The upper portion of the Jordan River serves as the primary inlet to the Sea of Galilee, bringing fresh water down from the melting snow of 9,232 foot (2,814 m) Mount Hermon. Mt. Hermon is a range, divided between Lebanon in the west and Syria in the east. Only about 10% of the bottom end is in Israel.



### Three Key Cities

#### Dan



The abundant whitewater, from the nearby melting snow of Mt. Hermon, makes the area around Dan highly fertile. The lush vegetation, almost like a tropical jungle, makes Dan seem somewhat out of place in an otherwise arid country. Biblically, this town is often referred to as the northern border of Israel, *from Dan to Beersheba* (2 Samuel 24:2). It is best known for two events:

- When the Israelites entered the land, the tribe of Dan was allotted territory settled by the Philistines in the Coastal Plain, but they found battling the Philistines to be very difficult. So they sent spies to search out the land and find them an easier place to live. In the far north, the spies found the town of Laish, *a people quiet and secure*, and the Danites migrated there *and struck them [Laish] with the edge of the sword* and renamed the town Dan (Judges 18).
- In 930 B.C., after Israel divided into two nations (Israel in the north and Judah in the south), the north appointed a king who was not a descendant of King David. His name was Jeroboam. In order to keep the people from going south to Judah to worship at the temple in Jerusalem, he *made two golden calves...he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan...and he made priests...who were not of the sons of Levi* (1 Kings 12:25-31).



#### Caesarea Philippi

About 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, one of the headwater springs from Mt. Hermon emerges from a large cave. Sacrifices were made here to the Greek god Pan, a half-man, half-goat idol god of fright (thus the English word “panic”). In ancient times, it was known as Paneas, now called by the Arabic form Banias. In 3 B.C., Philip the Tetrarch founded the city, named after Caesar and himself.



- ...when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, ...Jesus said to them [His disciples], “Who do you say that I am?” And Simon Peter answered and said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matthew 16:13-16).
- Six days later, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John...and brought them to a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them (Matthew 17:1-8). It would seem that nearby Mt. Hermon would be the Mount of Transfiguration.

## Hazor

About 9 miles (14 km) north of the Sea of Galilee, 200-acre Hazor is the largest tel in Israel. It is divided by a road going through the middle.



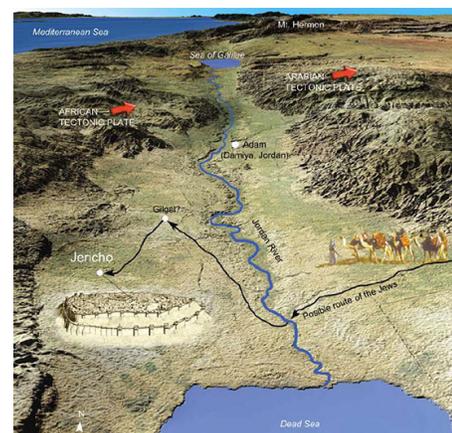
- Joshua marched his army northward and defeated the forces of Jabin, king of Hazor, and they burned Hazor to the ground (Joshua 11:1-14).
- About 200 years later, Deborah and Barak battled the armies of Hazor, under the leadership of Sisera, at the Kishon River in the Jezreel Valley (Judges 4–5).
- Hazor was re-built by King Solomon (1 Kings 9:15). The Israelites dug a water system which was a massive shaft 130 feet (40 m) deep into the tel, to reach the water table below. There is a 62 foot (19 m) vertical shaft that ends in a sloping tunnel for another 82 feet (25 m). This system is similar to the one in Megiddo.
- Jeremiah prophesied that *Hazor will become a haunt of jackals, a desolation forever; no one will live there, nor will a son of man reside in it* (Jeremiah 49:33).

## South of the Sea of Galilee

The southern portion of the Jordan River is the primary outlet for the Sea of Galilee. Currently, the river is just inside the border of Israel, between the nations of Israel and Jordan.

The Jordan River Valley played an important role in a number of memorable events from both the Old and New Testaments.

- The first mention of the Jordan in the Bible occurs in the story of Abraham and Lot. Lot, upon his separation from Abraham, chose for himself *all the plain of Jordan* (Genesis 13:11).
- Under the leadership of Joshua, Israel crossed the Jordan *on dry ground* just north of the Dead Sea (Joshua 3:15-17).
- The Jordan served as a dividing line between the land given to several of the tribes.
- The Jordan was a strong line of defense, not to be easily forded in many places.
- The Jordan River is also featured in the miracles of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17:3; 2 Kings 2:6, 13; 5:10).



The essential story of the Gospels begins at the Jordan River.

- It was there that John the Baptist came preaching and baptizing.
- The most important New Testament event relating to the Jordan is the baptism of Jesus, which was performed by John the Baptizer, although we don't know the exact spot (Mark 1:9).

## Two Key Cities

### Gilgal

The events in Gilgal are covered in the “Benjamin in the Middle” of the “Hill Country” section, on page 19.

### Jericho

Jericho has the distinction of being called the oldest city in the world and the first city Israel conquered under Joshua. Jericho is situated 8 miles (12.7 km) north of the Dead Sea, 6 miles (9 km) west of the Jordan, and at an elevation of 740 feet (222 m) below sea level.



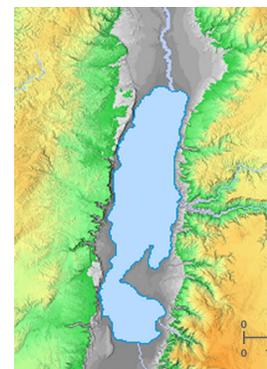
Jericho was known as the “city of palms” (Deuteronomy 34:3; Judges 1:16; 3:13) and still has many palm trees today. It was an oasis situated on a hot plain, with no major settlement in sight.

- Its most familiar biblical account is its destruction by Joshua as recorded in Joshua chapters 2 and 6. It was here that Rahab deceived the king of Jericho, hid the two Israelite spies, and saved her family. She directed the Jericho pursuers (logically) eastward toward the Jordan where Israel was encamped (Joshua 2:5-7). But cleverly, she sent the spies westward into the hills (Joshua 2:15-16). Rahab’s house was located on the city wall and was not destroyed along with the wall (Joshua 2:14-21; 6:22-25). She ended up joining Israel, marrying a man named Salmon, having a son named Boaz, who married Ruth, who became the great-grandparents of King David. Because of her faith in saving the spies, she is named in the “hall of faith” of Hebrews 11:31 and in Christ’s genealogy in Matthew 1:5.
- After the destruction of Jericho, God placed a curse on anyone who would rebuild it. The result would be the loss of the builder’s eldest son with the laying of the foundations and the loss of his youngest son with the setting of the gates. This was fulfilled over 400 years later during the reign of King Ahab, when Hiel the Bethelite rebuilt Jericho (1 Kings 16:34).
- Southeast of Old Testament Jericho is New Testament Jericho, famous for its balm (an aromatic gum known for its medicinal qualities). It was here that the short publican Zacchaeus climbed the sycamore tree to see Jesus. He ended up getting saved, and having Jesus as a surprise houseguest (Luke 19:1-10).
- Also, it was the road from Jerusalem eastward and downward to Jericho, along the **Wadi Qilt**, that Jesus chose as the setting for the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).



### The Dead Sea

The Bible often refers to the Dead Sea as the Salt Sea because of its extremely high mineral content. Its hot desert climate causes continuous evaporation in a kind of solar-driven distillery. As a result, it supports no life whatsoever and has large salt chunks that accumulate along its shore. At 34.2% salinity, it is 9.6 times saltier than the ocean. It has a density which makes swimming similar to floating. It averages 1.65 inches (.04 m) of rain a year, with an average summer temperature of 110 F (43.3 C).





The Dead Sea is about 50 miles (80 km) long and 10 miles (16 km) wide at its widest point. The sea is divided into two parts. A strange flat land peninsula, called the Lisan, divides the two parts. The extent of this land bridge varies with the water level. The surface of the sea is approximately 1300 feet (390 m) below the level of the Mediterranean Sea, only 50 miles (80 km) to the west. At its deepest point, the sea is 1300 feet (390 m) deep. At

its most shallow southern end, it is only 10 to 15 feet (3 to 4.5 m) deep. The sea is bordered on the north by the Jordan Valley, on the east by the abrupt cliffs of the country of Jordan, on the west by the Judean Wilderness, and on the south by the Rift Valley, which continues south for 112 miles to the Red Sea at Eilat. The region around the Dead Sea and south is extremely dry and hot.

## Key Places Along the Dead Sea

### Qumran

Qumran is the site associated with the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Its ruins are located 8 miles (12.7 km) south of Jericho and 1 mile (1.6 km) west of the northwestern edge of the Dead Sea.

In 1947, a young Bedouin shepherd boy accidentally found an ancient scroll in a cave on the face of one of the sandstone cliffs in the Qumran area.

This became the focus of an archaeological investigation and was thoroughly excavated between 1953 and 1956. This yielded 40,000 fragments of ancient manuscripts, of which 170 are fragments of Old Testament books (including manuscripts of each Old Testament book except Esther). The most important may be the nearly complete text of Isaiah.



While the content of many of the scrolls extends to a much earlier date, the scrolls themselves have been dated to about 200 B.C.



The Qumran site was inhabited from about 130 B.C. to 70 A.D. by a sect very similar in nature, theology, and practice to a Jewish movement known as the Essenes. Their main concern in life was complete and strict devotion to God. They expressed this through their scribal activity, and the copying and studying of Scripture. In 70 A.D., with the Roman army posing a major threat to their existence, the Essenes of Qumran vacated the site, hiding their manuscripts in the surrounding caves.

An exhibition and explanation of the Qumran discoveries can be seen at the Shrine of the Book Complex in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.



### En Gedi

En Gedi is a major oasis along the western side of the Dead Sea about 35 miles (55.5 km) southeast of Jerusalem. It consists of a major spring, gushing from the sides of a steep gorge adjacent to the Dead Sea. The springs of En Gedi are full year-round, and the vegetation is semitropical. Both biblical and extra-biblical sources describe En Gedi as a source of fine dates and aromatic plants used in perfumes and medicinal plants (Song of Solomon 1:14).

- In the tribal allotments, it was given to Judah and was in the district of Judah known as the wilderness district (Joshua 15:62).
- When David was fleeing from Saul, he hid in a cave at En Gedi. Saul went into the cave to relieve himself, and David secretly cut off a piece of his robe but spared his life (1 Samuel 23:29–24:7).
- The name “En Gedi” means, “place of the young or wild goat.” In 1 Samuel 24:1-2, we read, *Now it came about when Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, saying, ‘Behold, David is in the wilderness of En Gedi,’ Then Saul...went to seek David and his men in front of the Rocks of the wild Goats.* It is interesting to note the association of this place with goats, as a modern visitor is likely to see wild goats at historic En Gedi even today.



## Masada



Masada means “stronghold.” It is a large spectacular flat-topped mesa rising abruptly to more than 800 feet (240 m) above the surrounding terrain along the shore of the Dead Sea, northwest of the Lisan. Its steep walls and large size make it a unique natural fortress. It is 2100 feet long by 975 feet wide (631 m by 293 m) at the top. Some scholars believe that David fled here when hiding from the Philistines (2 Samuel 5:17). Herod the Great made it a monument to his building activity by constructing fortifications, storerooms, an intricate cistern water system, and splendid palaces for himself and his entourage.



After Herod’s death, the Romans took it over until 66 A.D., when a band of Jewish Zealots captured it as part of the Great Rebellion against Rome. It then became a refuge for Jewish rebels. Following the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem by the Roman General Titus in 70 A.D., the last rebellious Jews reached Masada. The Roman army then turned its attention to these remaining holdouts. After a long struggle to recapture the fortress, the Tenth Roman Legion eventually raised an enormous earthen siege ramp that remains to this day. They finally broke through the walls on Passover in 73 A.D. But to their great surprise, all that remained were the bodies of 960 men, women, and children. The Jewish holdouts had instigated a suicide pact to keep the Romans from taking them as prisoners.

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## Sodom and Gomorrah

Genesis 19:24-29 gives us the account of the supernatural destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which were among the five “cities of the valley” (Genesis 13:12; 19:29) of Abraham’s time. The exact locations are unknown.



## Ein Bokek

This resort has no biblical significance, but it is a good place to stop and float in the Dead Sea. There are about 14 hotels operating here because so many people visit this place. The Sea is rich in sulphur, and the water is believed to be particularly beneficial in the treatment of muscular ailments, diseases of the joints, allergies, and skin conditions.



## Eilat (Eloth)

South of the Dead Sea, the Jordan Rift Valley, sometimes called the Arabah (meaning “plain” or “desert”), is a deep cleft 112 miles (180 km) long, divided into two parts by a watershed 797 feet (243 m) high. Tributary water (when there is some) flows north to 1300 feet below sea level at the Dead Sea. To the south, water flows to Eilat, Israel’s southernmost city, at the northern tip of the Red Sea (at sea level), on the Gulf of Aqaba. It is a unique city in that Israeli Eilat is adjacent to an Egyptian village to the south, a Jordanian city to the east, and within sight of Saudi Arabia to the southeast, across the Gulf. It is believed that King Solomon mined copper in this area.



- *And King Solomon made a navy of ships in Eziongeber, which is beside Eloth, on the shore of the Red Sea... (1 Kings 9:26).*

## Gilead

In the Old Testament, the land on the eastern side of the Jordan River was called Gilead (Numbers 32:1). It means “rugged.” These rugged highlands extended approximately from the southern end of the Sea of Galilee to the northern end of the Dead Sea. In the New Testament, it was simply called the “beyond the Jordan” (John 10:40).



There are three tributary rivers that cut across this area. The Yarmuk River, just south of the Sea of Galilee, the Jabbok River, roughly marking the mid-point, and the Arnon River, halfway down the eastern side of the Dead Sea.



*Yarmuk River*



*Jabbok River*



*Arnon River*

- When Jacob, with his family and his belongings, fled from his father-in-law Laban, Jacob *set his face toward the hill country of Gilead* (Genesis 31:21). Laban chased Jacob, caught up with him, they made peace, and Laban returned to Haran, in the far north, and Jacob continued on his journey to the Promised Land.
- Jacob and his family reached the Jabbok River. His wives and children *crossed the ford of the Jabbok*, and Jacob was alone when he wrestled with the preincarnate Christ. He said, *“I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved.”* Christ then re-named him “Israel,” meaning “wrestle with God” (Genesis 32:22-32).
- When the Israelites came out of Egypt, before they entered the Promised Land, they defeated the people of Gilead, and *the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad...when they saw...the land of Gilead, that it was indeed a place suitable for livestock...and they have livestock, they asked Moses if they could just settle there. Moses agreed, if they would send their men of war into the Promised Land and help the other tribes get their inheritances. They said they would* (Numbers 32). So Gilead was divided among half the tribe of Manasseh (with the other half of the tribe in Israel), the tribe of Gad, and the tribe of Reuben (Deuteronomy 3:1-16).



- There is an important mountain in Gilead, and that is Mount Nebo. It is an elevated ridge in today's country of Jordan, 2,680 feet (817 m) above sea level. However, with the neighboring Dead Sea at 1300 feet below sea level, the mountain is almost 4,000 feet (1,219 m) high. Moses was granted a view of the Promised Land from Mount Nebo. ...*the Lord showed him [Moses] all*



*the land, Gilead as far as Dan...and all the land of Judah as far as the western sea. ... "I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there." So Moses... died... and God buried him...but no man knows his burial place to this day (Deuteronomy 34).*

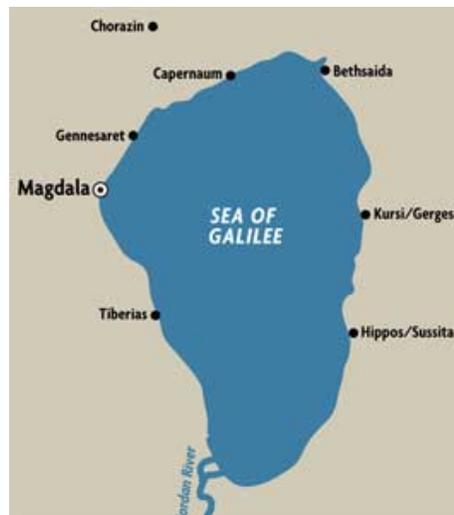


- Before the Israelites crossed the Jordan River to Gilgal and Jericho, they camped in the Plains of Moab. It is a bit confusing because these Plains are not in Moab, which was the area further south along the Dead Sea. The Plains of Moab was the flat area, between Mt. Nebo and the Jordan River, across the river from Jericho (Numbers 26:3; 33:49; Joshua 13:32).
- A significant town in northern Gilead was Jabesh-Gilead. Saul's first victory was to free this city from Nahash the Ammonite, who had threatened to *gouge out the right eye of every one of you* (1 Samuel 11). When King Saul and his son Jonathan were killed, and the Philistines *fastened their bodies to the wall of Beth-sean, ...the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men...took the body of Saul and his sons from the wall...* (1 Samuel 31:7-13). Later, King David transferred their remains to the royal sepulcher (2 Samuel 21:14).
- During the time of wicked King Ahab of the northern kingdom, who lived in Jezreel in the Jezreel Valley, the prophet *Elijah...who was...of Gilead* (1 Kings 17:1), challenged the Baal idols of Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel. Later, God told him to go to the Damascus area (in far northeast Gilead), where he anointed *Elisha...as prophet in your place* (1 Kings 19:16).
- Elijah and Elisha came to Gilgal, near Jericho. *Elijah took his mantle and folded it together and struck the waters [of the Jordan River], and they were divided...so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground. ...[to go east of the Jordan River], there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire...and Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven* (2 Kings 2:1-14).
- When the Israelites traveled through this area after the Exodus, on their way to the Promised Land, northern Gilead, east of the Sea of Galilee, was known as Bashan (Deuteronomy 3). South Gilead was settled by the Ammonites, descendants of Abraham's nephew Lot (Deuteronomy 2:19), basically from the Yarmuk to the Arnon; the Moabites, also descendants of Lot, along the east side of the Dead Sea, south of the Arnon; and the Edomites, descendants of Jacob's brother Esau, south of the Dead Sea. South of Edom and the Negev/Wilderness area was Sinai. A memory aid is the acronym JAMES in the shape of a question mark [?] (Judah—Ammon—Moab—Edom—Sinai).
- During the time of Jesus, the area east of the Sea of Galilee was known as the Decapolis [lit. "ten cities"] (Mark 7:31). Today, this area is known as the Golan, and the territory east of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea is the country of Jordan.



## 5. The Sea of Galilee

The Sea of Galilee is the lowest freshwater lake on the Earth and the second-lowest lake overall (after the Dead Sea, a salt-water lake). Its waters are fed from the north by the Jordan River, with the Lower Jordan exiting from its south end. It is located 686 feet (209 m) below sea level, and it is 13 miles (21 km) long, 8 miles (13 km) wide at its widest point, and 141 feet (43 m) deep. In the Old Testament, it was known as “Chinnereth,” meaning harp, apparently because of its harp shape (Numbers 34:11; Joshua 13:27). In the New Testament, it is also known as the Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1) or Tiberias (John 6:1; 21:1), after two cities on its western shore.



Galilee played only a minor role in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, we read that Jesus devoted most of His earthly ministry to Galilee, being known as “the Galilean” (Matthew 26:69). This was where He performed numerous miracles: He



walked on the water, calmed the storm, produced the large catch of fish, and received a coin from a fish’s mouth. In addition, numerous other miracles and teaching occurred in the nearby vicinity, such as the feeding of the 5,000. The original disciples were from Galilee. Peter and Andrew, James and John were

fishermen on this lake. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples on the shores of this lake (John 21).

### Key Cities Around the Sea of Galilee

#### Tiberias

Located on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, Tiberias, named in honor of the Roman emperor Tiberius, was built about 20 B.C. by Herod the Great’s son Herod Antipas. It was a Roman city constructed as a spa around 17 natural mineral hot springs. There is no biblical evidence that Jesus ever went there. In fact, the Roman city was spurned by the most religious Jews at that time. In the New Testament, it is only mentioned in John 6:23, where *there came other small boats from Tiberias...*



Today, Tiberias is the largest city on the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee.

#### Magdala

This village was on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee and center of a prosperous fishing operation. The town was located on a main highway (the Via Maris) going north from Tiberias.

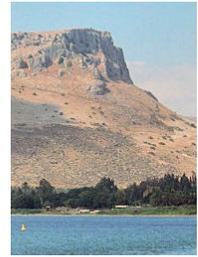
- Its significance in the New Testament was that Magdala was the hometown of Mary, who had been healed of demon possession by Jesus, thus the name, “Mary Magdalene” (Luke 8:1-2). She witnessed the crucifixion (Matthew 27:55). She *came early to the tomb* and in the tomb garden,

she was the first one to see and talk to the risen Christ, and she came, *announcing to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"* (John 20:1-18).

## Mt. Arbel



High above Magdala is Mt. Arbel. It is not a biblical site, but it is a great overlook of the Sea of Galilee area. It is 593 feet (181 m) above sea level, but is 1,247 feet (380 m) above the Sea of Galilee.



## Gennesaret

Just north of Magdala is the village of Gennesaret. Even today, replica fishing boats that go out onto the Sea of Galilee are anchored in Gennesaret.

- After Jesus walked on the water, *they came to land at Gennesaret* (Mark 6:53).
- *They came to land at Gennesaret...and brought to Him all who were sick, and they began to entreat Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were cured* (Matthew 14:34-36).



## Capernaum

A small city, meaning “town of Nahum,” it was located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee and became a center of operation for Jesus during His Galilean ministry. Capernaum appears in the biblical record only in the gospels, where it is mentioned 16 times.



Teaching in the Capernaum synagogue (Mark 1:21) and private homes (Mark 2:1) was basic to the work of Jesus, but the miracles performed there appear to have precipitated controversy and opposition. Mark 2:1 refers to Capernaum as the home of Jesus, and Matthew 9:1 describes it as “His own city.” It appears that several of the disciples also lived in that town, including Peter, Andrew, Matthew, and perhaps John and James. The populace, apparently,

did not accept Christ’s messianic role because they fell under the same condemnation as Chorazin and Bethsaida, for failing to repent (Matthew 11:20-24).

The original synagogue in which Jesus taught (John 6:59; Mark 1:21; Luke 4:31-38) was built by a Roman centurion who was in charge of the military garrison stationed there (Luke 7:1-10). The garrison was most likely there to enforce tolls taken along the Via Maris, which passes near Capernaum (Matthew 17:24-27). Toll taking at Capernaum was Levi’s (Matthew 15) job when Jesus called him to discipleship (Matthew 9:9; Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27-32). The footings and other ruins of that first-century synagogue, as well as numerous other excavated building sites, can be seen there today.



## Bethsaida



Bethsaida means “house of fishing,” and was located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Phillip, Andrew, and Peter were originally from here. But why would a fishing village be so far from the water? There are several possible answers. It could be the site has been uplifted now due to Rift fault activity. Also, the water level in the Sea has dropped dramatically from increased population usage, land irrigation, etc., and the Jordan River delta has been extended by sedimentation. Biblically, this seems to be near the hills where Jesus fed the 5,000 men, plus women and children, with five loaves and two fish (Luke 9:10-17).

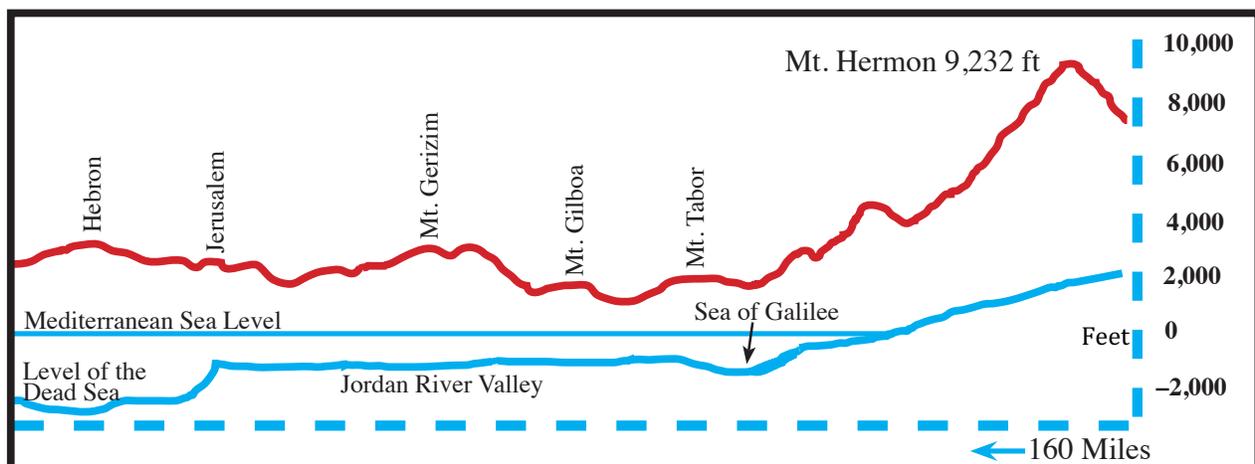
## Gadarenes/Garasenes

These two names appear to refer to the same place in the New Testament. It is the region on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, generally midway down its shore and opposite Tiberias. It was a region containing cave/tombs in which a demon-possessed man was healed by Jesus. The demons were transferred into 2,000 swine that subsequently ran down a steep hill and drowned in the sea (Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1; Luke 8:26-37). Let’s look at the enormity of what happened here. An average adult pig can weigh over 200 pounds, but let’s just take 150 pounds times 2,000 pigs, which is 300,000 pounds, divided by 2,000 pounds in a ton—that’s 150 tons of splash. How big of a wave did that cause across the Sea when those pigs hit the water? As one surveys the eastern coastline, there is essentially only one place that corresponds to the “steep bank” description given in Matthew 8:32; Mark 5:13; and Luke 8:33.



## Jordan River Baptismal Site

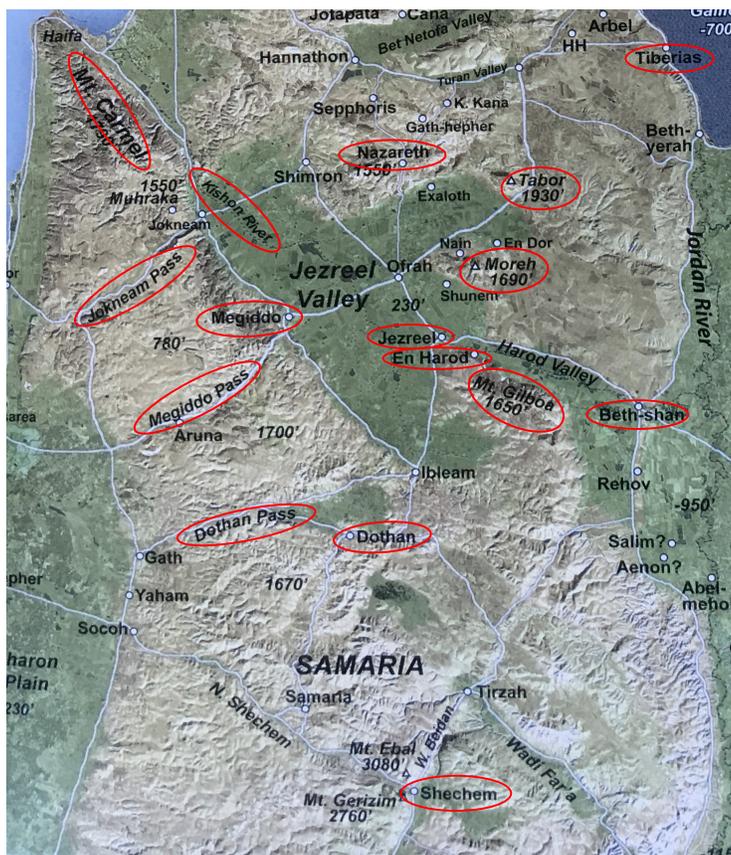
At the southern end of the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan River leaves the Sea and continues its flow southward toward the Dead Sea. It’s here that there is a site made for baptisms. They have a changing room. You would wear your swimming suit under robes they provide, and you would walk down the ramp into the Jordan River for baptism by the male leaders of our group.



## 6. The Jezreel Valley

As the land of Israel narrows in the north, cutting across the Coastal Plain and the Hill Country is the Jezreel Valley. This valley is located in the northern third of the land, beginning near the Mediterranean, running east-west, and widening as it extends eastward to join the Jordan River Valley. It separates Galilee from Samaria.

Specifically, it begins a few miles from the coast, where the irregular outcropping occurs in the coastline, by today's Haifa. Its southern edge angles off to the south as it extends eastward, forming a triangular wedge. It is approximately 30 miles (48 km) long, east-west, and 20 miles (32 km) wide, north-south, where it joins the Jordan River Valley. Most of the western part of the valley floor is approximately 150 feet (45 m) above sea level and drains west to the Mediterranean via the Kishon River. It drains to the east via the Harod River that descends much more rapidly reaching the Jordan at 750 feet (225 m) below sea level in just 13 miles (20.6 km).



The Carmel Ridge forms the primary southern boundary and the Nazareth Ridge is the major northern boundary, with a broadening flat fertile plain stretching out spectacularly between these edges. The name Jezreel means, “God sows,” indicative of its rich agricultural value throughout biblical history, as it is yet today. Currently, it is called “The Breadbasket of Israel.”

Significant biblical history occurred in this region. It is named Jezreel after the town of Jezreel, the capital of wicked Ahab, king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Because of its strategic location and unique terrain, it was a major battleground throughout much of the Old Testament (Judges 5; 2 Chronicles 35; 2 Kings 9 & 10). It was in this valley that the dead were miraculously raised, both in the Old Testament (1 Kings 17:10-24) and New (Luke 7:11-15). King Saul and Jonathan died on Mt. Gilboa, on the southern edge of this valley (1 Samuel 31:1-13), as well as Queen Jezebel (2 Kings 9:10-37). As a boy growing up in Nazareth, it was the backyard of Jesus.

### Five Mountains Mount Carmel Ridge

Mount Carmel is actually the ridge that forms the major southwestern boundary for the Jezreel Valley. It runs from the Mediterranean Sea southeasterly for approximately 20 miles (32 km),



gently trailing off as it extends eastward. Its highest peak is 1750 feet (526 m) above sea level, and it is noted repeatedly in Scripture for its fertility and beauty (Song of Solomon 7:5; Isaiah 35:2).

- At the base of Mt. Carmel is a small river called the **Kishon**. In Judges 4–5, we read that Barak and the Israelites fought the army of Jabin, king of Hazor, in the Jezreel Valley. But God sent rain, causing the river to overflow and become the *torrent Kishon*, creating a muck which the enemy’s horses and chariots could not cross. The alluvial soil of the Jezreel is the only place in Israel this could happen.
- It was on Mount Carmel that Elijah confronted and defeated the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18. He then led the Israelites in taking the false prophets down into the Jezreel Valley, where he slew them at the Kishon River.



### Three Passes

The Carmel Ridge has three passes which enabled north-south traffic from the Mediterranean Coast to pass through it into the Jezreel Valley and north on the Via Maris to Europe and Asia.

- 1) The **Jokneam Pass** is in the west. There was a village named Jokneam located there, and it is only mentioned in the Bible with respect to the dividing of the land by Joshua (Joshua 12:22).
- 2) The **Megiddo Pass** in the middle was named for the small city of Megiddo at that location.

### Megiddo

Megiddo was one of the most strategic cities of Canaan, since it guarded the main pass through the Carmel Ridge. It had 26 different eras of occupation (layers of the tel) during its life.



One of the common characteristics of the walled cities was the gate structure. The “gate” consisted of a large hallway with rooms off each side, typically three per side. The literal wooden gate was only part of what the Bible usually called “the gate.” The purpose of the rooms was for conducting the business of the city, usually done by the elders. The Bible often refers to the elders meeting at the city gate (Genesis 19:1; 34:20; Deuteronomy 22:15; 25:7; Joshua 20:4; Ruth 4:1). This type of gate structure is well-preserved in the excavated ruins at the Megiddo Tel.



In the New Testament, the Hill of Megiddo (har-Megiddo, thus “Armageddon”) will be where the kings of the world gather their armies to march to Jerusalem, most likely out the east end of the Jezreel Valley and south down the Jordan Valley, for the final battle against the Lord Jesus at His Second Coming (Revelation 16:16).

- 3) The **Dothan Pass** was on the east. Biblically, two events happened near the village of Dothan. — It’s here that the young boy *Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan* (Genesis 37). The jealous brothers put him in a pit, and when a caravan came through from Gilead on its way to Egypt, they sold Joseph to them for 20 shekels of silver. They then reported to their father Jacob that Joseph had been killed.

- Another famous event happened here. The Syrians were about to attack Israel, and the king of Syria sent a great army to Dothan, where Elisha was. Elisha's attendant said, *"Alas, my master! What shall we do?"* Elisha answered, *"Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."* Then Elisha prayed... *"O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see."* ...and the Lord opened the servant's eyes, ...and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:8-19). And God delivered the Israelites that day.

## Mount Gilboa Ridge

Further east is Mt. Gilboa, which is actually a small range of hills approximately 8 miles (12.7 km) long and 3-5 miles (5.75-8 km) wide. Its elevation rises to 1,696 feet (510 m) and exhibits an abundance of springs. Geologically, Mt. Gilboa is the northernmost continuation of the Central Hill Country, or we could say it's the dividing line between the Central Hill Country and the Jezreel Valley. On the northern slope of Mt. Gilboa, King Saul and his three sons were slain by the Philistines (1 Samuel 31).



## Jezreel

The city of Jezreel is near the west end of Mt. Gilboa. It was the royal city where King Ahab and his wife Jezebel had their summer palace. Elijah ran to Jezreel after slaying the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:46). And it was here that Queen Jezebel was thrown from the upper window to her death and the dogs ate most of her body (1 Kings 21:23-24; 2 Kings 9:29-37).

## Harod Springs

The most famous spring, located along the northwest edge of Mt. Gilboa, is Harod Springs, where Gideon separated his men down to 300 for battle, by testing how they drank from this spring (Judges 7:1-8).



## Nazareth Ridge

The Nazareth cliffs, forming the northern boundary of the Jezreel Valley, are about 1,600 feet (488 m) high. It's from these cliffs, overlooking the valley, that the Jews *were filled with rage* [at Jesus] *...and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff* (Luke 4:28-29).



From these cliffs, you look southeast into the Jezreel Valley.

- To the left is Mt. Tabor. If you could see beyond it, you would see the lower end of the Sea of Galilee.
- Straight in front of you is the Hill of Moreh. If you could see beyond it, you would see Mt. Gilboa straight in front of you in the distance.

## Nazareth

The name “Nazareth” means “branch.” It is located halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea. It lays north of the Plain of Jezreel and overlooks it. Today, it has a population of 74,400 made up of approximately 69% Muslims and 31% Christians.



It does not appear in the Old Testament. It did not enjoy a place of prominence until its association with Jesus. He became known as “Jesus of Nazareth” (Matthew 26:71; Luke 18:37; 24:19; John 1:45; Acts 2:22; 3:6; 10:38), and Nazareth became fixed in Christian memory.

- The angel went to Nazareth and announced to Mary and Joseph the coming birth of Jesus (Luke 1:26-28).
- Following Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem and the sojourn in Egypt, Joseph and Mary returned with Jesus to Nazareth (Matthew 2:19-23).
- There Jesus grew from boyhood to manhood (Luke 2:39-40; 4:16), being stamped as a Nazarene (Matthew 2:23). Nazareth did not possess a good reputation, as reflected in the question of Nathanael, himself a Galilean, *Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?* (John 1:46).
- Jesus was rejected by His town people near the beginning of His ministry, being cast out of the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30; Matthew 13:54-58).

## Cana

The name means “the nest.” Its exact location is uncertain, though it was in Galilee and thought to be approximately five miles northeast of Nazareth.



- In John 2:1-11, it was the town in which Jesus changed water into wine at a wedding.
- In Cana, an unnamed nobleman sought out Jesus to ask Him to heal his son in Capernaum (John 4:46).
- Cana was also the home of Nathanael, one of the apostles (John 21:2).

## Mount Tabor

Near the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley, Mount Tabor is 5 miles (8 k) east of Nazareth. It is a single abrupt cone-shaped mount, 1,843 feet (554 m) high, which almost appears man-made. Deborah instructed Barak to gather his army on Tabor in preparation for the defeat of Sisera at the Kishon River, across the Jezreel Valley (Judges 4-5). Some believe it was here that the Transfiguration occurred, although there is little supporting biblical evidence.



## Hill of Moreh

Moreh is in the middle of the valley, located approximately 5 miles (8 km) south of Tabor and rises abruptly from the floor of the plain to an elevation of 1,815 feet (545 m). It is somewhat broader than Tabor and consists of two slight humps, shaped as an “M.”

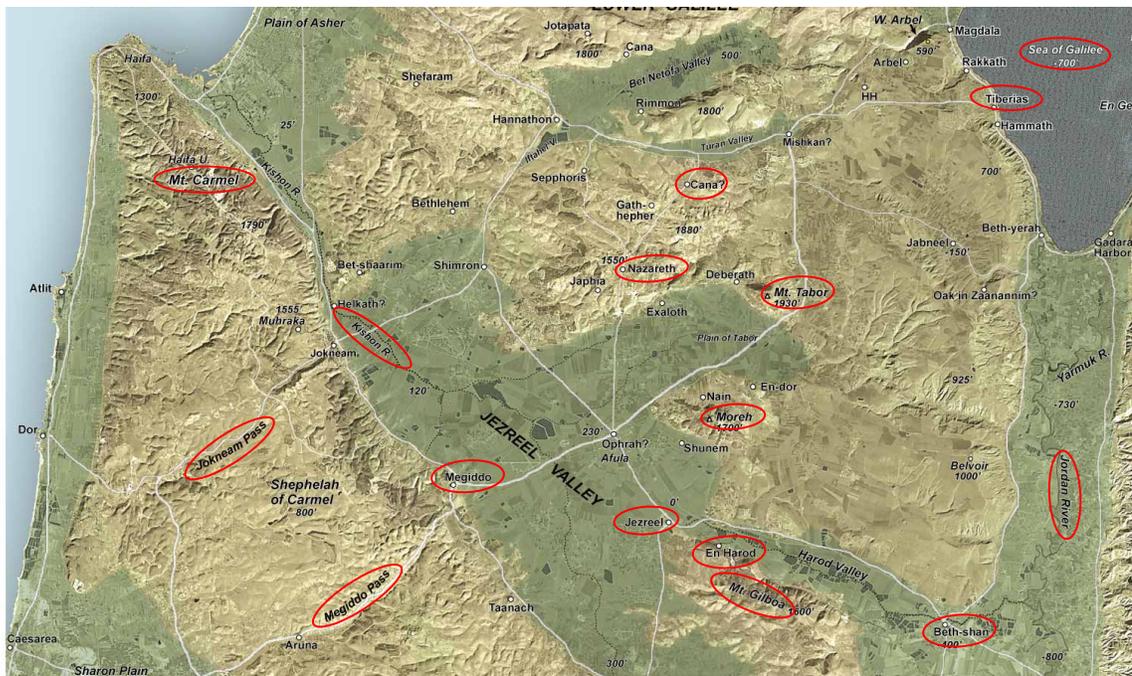


- It was near this mount that the Midianite army camped against Gideon (Judges 7:1).

- Four significant biblical events happened in the towns on Moreh. They can be remembered by the acronym “ONES.”
  - **Ophrah**, on the west end of the Moreh, was the hometown of Gideon (Judges 6:11).
  - **Nain**, on the North side of Moreh, was where Jesus was passing by the funeral procession of a young lad. When *the Lord saw her* [the mother], *He felt compassion for her* and raised the lad from the dead (Luke 7:11-17).
  - **Endor**, on the East side of Moreh, was the location of the witch King Saul visited to call up the prophet Samuel from the dead (1 Samuel 28).
  - **Shunam**, on the South side of Moreh, was the home of the Shunammite woman, whose young son died, and Elisha raised him from the dead (2 Kings 4). This was also where the Philistines camped, and King Saul and the Israelites camped at Mt. Gilboa, where they died. Later, when *King David was old...Abishag the Shunammite* was brought to David, *and she became the king’s nurse and served him* (1 Kings 1:1-4).

## Beth-Shean (Bet Shean)

- Beth-Shean is located at the far eastern end of the Jezreel Valley where it joins the Jordan River Valley. Situated 15 miles (24 km) south-southeast of the Sea of Galilee, Beth-Shean stood at the crossroads, commanding the routes north-south along the Jordan River Valley and east-west from Gilead to the Mediterranean Sea. At the base of Beth-Shean lies Roman ruins. The tel, in the background of this picture, is Beth-Shean, and climbing it gives a panoramic view of the intersection of the Jezreel Valley and the Jordan River Valley.
- The Philistines conquered Beth-Shean and used it as a base of operations for further penetrations into Israel’s territory. After the defeat of Saul by the Philistines (1006 B.C.) at Mt. Gilboa, the bodies of Saul and his sons were fastened to the walls of Beth-Shean. Men from Jabesh-Gilead rescued the bodies (1 Samuel 31). King David later captured the city and pushed the Philistines back to their coastal territories.



# 7. The Negev/Wilderness

The word “Negev” means “dry.” It is a rocky desert, covered in brown dusty mountains interrupted by wadis, which are dry riverbeds, and deep craters that bloom briefly after a rain. This area reaches very high temperatures in both the summer and winter.

This desert region covers more than half of Israel, over 4700 square miles (13,000 km) or at least 55% of the country’s land area.

- Abraham lived for awhile in the Negev (Genesis 20:1).
- After receiving the Law and building the tabernacle, the children of Israel *set out from Horeb, and went through all that great and terrible wilderness...* (Deuteronomy 1:19).
- During their *wanderings through this great wilderness, these forty years the Lord your God has been with you; you have not lacked a thing* (Deuteronomy 2:7). God fed them manna each day (Exodus 16:35) and water from rocks (Numbers 20:11). Their *clothing did not wear out...nor did their foot swell these forty years* (Deuteronomy 8:4).
- Later, the northern part of the Negev was inhabited by the tribe of Judah and the southern part by the tribe of Simeon. It was later part of the Kingdom of Solomon.



## Kadesh-barnea

As many as 18 sites have been proposed as biblical Kadesh, and although there is an oasis by that name today, just west of Israel’s border, in Egypt, the exact location of this place is not known.

- From here, Moses sent 12 scouts, one man from each tribe, into the Negev and Hill Country to assess the Land. Ten said the people in the Land were too dangerous and the Israelites should not go into it. But two men, Joshua and Caleb, said God would give them the victory (Numbers 14:30).
- Kadesh-barnea was the place of decision. The Israelites refused to go into the Land, as God had commanded them to do. As a result, God said, *your sons shall be shepherds for forty years in the wilderness, and they shall suffer for your unfaithfulness...according to the number of days which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day you shall bear your guilt a year, even forty years* (Numbers 14:33-34) ...*until all the generation of the men of war* [from 20 years old and upward—Numbers 14:29] *perished from within the camp, as the Lord had sworn to them* (Deuteronomy 2:14), except for Joshua and Caleb, who lived and inherited some of the Land.



**Mitzpe Ramon** is about in the center of the wilderness. It’s elevation is 2,800 feet (860 m), overlooking a sizable erosion known as the Ramon Crater, which is 25 miles (40 km) long, 4 miles (6 km) wide, and 1,640 feet (500 m) deep. In 2009, the population of Ramon was 4,789. It is Israel’s largest National Reserve.



## Beersheba

Often referred to as the “Capitol of the Negev,” it has about 200,000 people, with urban plans for a population of 1 million by 2020. It is located on the northern edge of the Negev desert, 71 miles (115 km) southeast of Tel Aviv and 75 miles (120 km) southwest of Jerusalem. It has the second largest area, after Jerusalem. Israel Defense Forces conquered the city from the Egyptian army in 1948. It has been mostly settled by Jews who immigrated from Arab countries after 1948. Since 1990, Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union have made the game of chess a major sport in Beersheba. The city is now Israel’s national chess center, with more chess grandmasters per capita than any other city in the world.

The origin of the name comes from Genesis 21:31, “well of the oath.” The Hebrew word for “well” is “Be’er” and the word “sheva” means “oath.”



- It’s the place where Abraham and Abimelech settled their differences over a well of water and made a covenant oath (Genesis 21:31).
- Isaac built an altar in Beersheba (Genesis 26:23-33).
- Jacob left Beersheba on his way to Haran to find a wife (Genesis 28:10-15). He stopped at Bethel where he saw the ladder to heaven (Genesis 28:12-20).
- When Joseph’s brothers came to tell Jacob that Joseph was alive and to bring Jacob to Joseph in Egypt, Jacob went, but stopped in Beersheba. There he *offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. And God spoke to Israel...and said, “I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, ... (Genesis 46:1-7). [Remember—at the Dothan Pass (the eastern end of the Carmel Ridge, in the Jezreel Valley), the brothers sold Joseph to men going to Egypt and had told their father Jacob that Joseph was dead.]*
- The sons of the prophet Samuel were judges in Beersheba (1 Samuel 8:2).
- The prophet Elijah took refuge in Beersheba when the wicked Queen Jezebel (from Jezreel) ordered him killed (1 Kings 19:3).
- According to the Hebrew Old Testament, Beersheba was the southernmost city of the territories settled by the Israelites, therefore, the expression *from Dan to Beersheba* was used to describe the whole kingdom.

At the Beersheba tel, we will see “Abraham’s well.” It is 9.9 feet (3 m) in diameter and 85 feet (26 m) deep. The top part of the well is lined with stones, probably from the Byzantine period, and the bottom part is cut into the bedrock.



# Appendix A

## Jerusalem After the Time of Jesus

As a modern day visitor to Israel stands on the Mount of Olives looking westward across the Kidron Valley, the wide panoramic view of the city of Jerusalem is breathtaking. Its eastern wall perched above the Kidron Valley conveys the true impression of an ancient fortress—a walled city of biblical times. The golden Dome of the Rock, gleaming in the intense Middle Eastern sun, captures the attention like no other sight in the world. It's truly a Kodak moment. The visitor's thoughts race back two millennia, where Scripture tells us that it was Jesus' custom to come here (Luke 22:39).



But our visitor is seeing very little of what Jesus saw. The massive city wall of Jesus' day is long gone and the existing wall doesn't even enclose the Old City of David to the south. The wall our visitor sees was built in 1542 A.D. by Muslim Turks. The Second Temple is gone and replaced by the Dome of the Rock, also built by the Muslims but in 691 A.D. Jesus Himself accurately predicted the Temple's destruction (Matthew 24:1-3).

So in one sense, our biblical interest in Jerusalem ended with the ascension of Christ or maybe with the destruction of the city by the Romans in 70 A.D. But because God is far from finished with either the Jews or the land of Palestine or the city of Jerusalem, we need to be aware of its overall history from 70 until now. We also need to be aware of that period of its history to help us understand Jerusalem as we can observe it today.

Therefore, we will take a summary overview of its history since the time of Jesus, especially as it has effected its geography and appearance. We will organize this overview into political time periods.

### **70 to 324 A.D. – The A.D. Roman Period**

As the events described in the book of Acts drew to a close, a major military rebellion by the Jews was crushed by Rome (66-70). The last to fall was Jerusalem itself, and on the 9<sup>th</sup> of the Hebrew month Ab in 70, the Second Temple itself was destroyed under the command of General Titus. This initiated the world-wide dispersion of the Jews, commonly referred to as "The Diaspora." Three years later, the last remaining resistance was ended when the Romans overran Masada (page 31) in 73. The Romans remained in firm control of Jerusalem and all Judea. In the early 100s, the Roman Emperor Hadrian Latinized the word "Philistines" (Israel's enemies) into "Palestine," in an attempt to erase the name "Israel" off the map.

In 313, the Roman Emperor Constantine claimed to have seen a vision from heaven and professed conversion to Christianity. At the Council of Nicaea in 325, Constantine commissioned his mother, Queen (Empress) Helena, to go to Palestine and discover the sacred sites of Christianity. Obedient to her son's wishes, she went to Palestine and professed to find:

- The site of the crucifixion and entombment. She subsequently had a church built on the site. This is the site currently occupied by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and is still believed by many pilgrims to be the correct site.

- The original crosses of Jesus and the thieves.
- The place of the nativity in Bethlehem upon which the Church of the Nativity now stands.
- The tomb of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Modern Biblical and archeological scholarship might seriously question much that Queen Helena professed to achieve. Nevertheless, her influence can be seen in the land of Israel yet today, as thousands of professing Christian pilgrims visit these places every year.

The adoption of Christianity as the dominant religion of the Roman Empire greatly changed the way in which Palestine, in general, and Jerusalem, in particular, were viewed. It was officially considered to be “The Holy Land.” It resulted in a great influx of capital, population, and pilgrimages.

### **330 to 634 A.D. – The Byzantine Period**

The Byzantine Empire was the continuation of the Roman Empire in the eastern Mediterranean area. The Byzantine Empire lasted from approximately 324 until 1453. In 476, the Western Roman Empire ceased to exist. In some sense, Constantine founded the Byzantine Empire by moving the Roman capital from Rome to Byzantium. The empire was named after the city of that name, but the city was later changed to Constantinople, after Emperor Constantine. Still later, the Turks changed its name to Istanbul, as it is known today.

The Christian religion, Roman traditions, and Greek (Hellenistic) culture characterized the Byzantine Empire. The Byzantine government became intertwined with the church, and its missionaries reached into Eastern Europe and Russia.

It was during the latter part of this period that Islam had its beginnings. Mohammed was born in 570 in Mecca on the Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia). In 622, he migrated from Mecca to Medina, marking the beginning of the Islamic calendar. During the period of 610 to 632, he claimed to receive the revelation of the Koran. He died in 632.

### **638 to 1099 A.D. – The First Muslim Period**

Assaults on Palestine next came from a new and different quarter. Arab tribes, recently converted to Islam, began invading the land, and in 638, after a two-year siege, Jerusalem fell to their control. At its surrender, the Khalif Omar entered the city and, on seeing the Temple Mount, began to clear it and ordered that the mosque of Omar be built there. He identified the site as where Mohammed ascended to heaven on his winged steed, making Jerusalem the third most holy city to Muslims, behind Mecca and Medina.

In 691, a new shrine was completed, called the Dome of the Rock because of its exquisite golden dome which towers above the rock. Muslims believe that it was from this rock that Mohammed ascended to heaven. It is clearly the most spectacular landmark in all of Jerusalem today. In 709-715, the Muslims also built the El-Aksa Mosque, with its silver-gray dome, at the southern end of the Temple Mount. During this entire period, the Muslim empire was characterized by internal fighting and power struggles. Jerusalem was ruled by Muslims, but from the remote sites of Damascus, Baghdad, and Egypt.

### **1099 to 1291 A.D. – The Crusader Period**

On November 27, 1095, at the Council of Clermont, France, Pope Urban II gave a speech that launched the era of the Crusades (Latin “cruz” for cross). The primary motive was to go to the Holy

Land as a warrior and take back the sacred sites from the “Muslim infidels.” The pope offered the incentives of indulgences and eternal merit. Thousands responded, for many and varying reasons. By 1096, the first crusaders had reached Constantinople, by 1098, they captured Antioch, and on July 15, 1099, they took Jerusalem itself. Their bloody campaign not only killed Muslims along the way but Jews as well. Numerous other crusades followed with varying degrees of failure. It became one of the most shameful periods in the history of the institutional church. As a result of the Crusaders’ conquest of much of Palestine, including Jerusalem, the Latin Empire, as it was called, was established in the Holy Land. Numerous Crusader castles were built throughout the land, and some of their ruins can be seen yet today.

The impact of the Crusades served to awaken the Muslim world against Christianity and provide a motive for unity against the common enemy from Europe. In 1187, the Muslim army, under the command of Saladin, seized Tiberias, and on July 3-4 scored a major defeat of the Crusaders at the Horns of Hattin. On October 2, 1187, Jerusalem fell back into the hands of the Muslims.

### **1260 to 1516 A.D. – The Mameluke Period**

The struggles between the Crusaders from Europe and the Muslims from the east resulted in a weakened resolve on both sides. This, in turn, gave rise to the emergence of the Mamelukes of Egypt. The Mamelukes were originally Turkish and Circassian prisoners of the Mongols, who had been sold as slaves into Egypt and converted to Islam. There they were trained as soldiers and eventually rose to power in 1250, ruling Egypt for 250 years. This time period also saw the rise to power of the Mongols, especially under Genghis Khan. In 1260, as the Mongols advanced into Palestine, the Mamelukes met them at En Harod and drove them from Palestine and Syria back across the Euphrates River. The Mamelukes subsequently expelled the remnants of the Crusaders, held off the Mongols, and firmly established Palestine, including Jerusalem, in Muslim hands. During the period of Mameluke rule, there was a small easing of restrictions on both Jews and Christians in Palestine. But life was difficult, and the Mameluke rule decayed with time. As internal security decreased, Bedouin tribes raided towns and villages and once even Jerusalem itself.

### **1516 to 1917 A.D. – The Ottoman Period**

Ottoman Turks were descendants of Turkish nomadic warriors who migrated from Turkestan, the region north of present day Iran and Pakistan. They came as mercenary soldiers of the Seljuks. The beginning of the Ottoman Empire is often given as 1326. In 1453, they conquered Constantinople, ending the Byzantine Empire, and by 1481, they had gained control of both peninsulas that now constitute Greece and Turkey. In 1516, they gained control of Syria and Palestine and became the supreme Islamic world power and the foremost threat to Christian Europe. Although the Ottoman Empire was thoroughly Islamic, it was Turkish, not Arab, and so it was viewed by the inhabitants of Syria and Palestine as foreigners.

Numerous building projects were accomplished during the Ottoman Period. Most notable was the building of decorative fountains and the wall around the city of Jerusalem, including rebuilding its gates in 1538-42 by Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-66). In 1852, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was divided between six Christian sects to administer. Western powers began an increased interest in the Holy Land, especially in Jerusalem, with Germany foremost among them.

The events of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries constituted the twilight of the long 401-year Ottoman rule over Palestine. While the Western world was swiftly entering the modern era, the Ottoman Empire was lagging far behind in most fields. Meanwhile, Zionism was born in 1897 in Europe under the leadership Theodor Herzl, the ideological founder of the Jewish State. The first Jew-

ish immigrants moved to Palestine from Russia and Romania as early as 1881. When World War I broke out in 1914, the Ottoman Turks sided with Germany and tried to attack the British-held Suez Canal but were repelled. In June of 1917, General Allenby was appointed commander of the British Army in the Middle East and on December 9, 1917, defeated the combined German-Turk armies outside Jerusalem. He subsequently dismounted from his horse and entered Jerusalem on foot. By September of 1918, all of Palestine was firmly under British control.

### **1917 to 1947 A.D. – The British Period**

It has been said that the First World War prepared the land for the Jewish people, and the Second World War prepared the Jewish people for the land. World War Two created at least three pivotal conditions with regard to the Jews and Palestine. First, the unprecedented persecution of the Jews by the Axis powers, especially the German holocaust, motivated Jews to migrate to Palestine and establish their own homeland. Second, many Jews serving with the Allies gained valuable military experience. Finally, in the face of the UN partitioning the land between Jews and Arabs, England abandoned the Mandate over Palestine in May of 1948.

### **1948 to Present – Modern Israel**

Israel's War of Independence was 1947-49. On November 29, 1947, the UN partitioned Palestine into separate Arab and Jewish states. This resulted in the Jewish War of Independence against the Arabs, and on May 15, 1948, the State of Israel was proclaimed. When the armistice was concluded in 1949, Israel was in control of major sections of the land. But the Old City of Jerusalem had to be abandoned. This was followed by establishment of the Israel Parliament (Knesset), and in 1949, Israel was admitted to the United Nations. Large scale immigration of Jews into the land followed. Unabated hostility of Israel's Arab neighbors continued.

On October 29, 1956, Israel's Operation Kedesh, commanded by Moshe Dayan, seized the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula. The UN halted the war, calling for cease fire and withdrawal of occupying forces.

On June 5, 1967, believing that war was unavoidable, Israel initiated preemptive strikes on Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Iraqi airfields. On June 10, the UN negotiated a cease fire on all fronts. In just six days (the Six-Day War), the Israeli military had destroyed most of the combat effectiveness of the Arab forces. Israel had seized most of the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, Gaza, and the Old City of Jerusalem. However, this placed more than 1.5 million Palestinian Arabs within the new borders of Israel.

On Yom Kippur (October 6) in 1973, the combined rearmed forces of Syria and Egypt launched surprise attacks against Israel. After 18 days, the UN halted the war, and Israel ended up losing a small area of the Golan Heights.

On May 26, 1979, President Jimmy Carter negotiated a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. As part of the agreement, Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt. Disengagement of Israel from Gaza was proposed by Ariel Sharon in 2003 and carried out in August of 2005. But there continues to be constant conflict between the Jews and the Muslim Palestinians.

# Appendix B

## Visiting the Land

### A Personal Note from Clark Blanchard

I had never seriously thought about visiting the land of Israel. I had been a Christian for over 40 years and just never considered it. I knew a few people who had gone, but there didn't seem to be enough excitement or enthusiasm to spill over on me. The real motivation finally came from my wife and kids after I'd had some health problems. "You'd better visit the earthly Jerusalem before you end up in the heavenly Jerusalem," was their prodding. So I began investigating the possibilities and ended up seeing the ad with the Relational Concepts' group in May of 1996. It was during the 3,000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jerusalem, and it was simply fabulous.

Like most people, I had created a mental image of the people and places of the Bible. Some of it was of my own making and some was the influence of Christian art. Of course, I knew that most of the images I held were probably not correct, they were just enough to make the biblical accounts live in my mind. Somehow, I always believed that after I died, God would probably correct all those wrong ideas with the real facts, and He probably will.

But when I visited the land of Israel and saw so many of the actual places where the biblical events took place...well, it was sort of like having God correct a lot of my false notions, then and there. It was a huge shot of fuel in my Bible study engine, a big move closer to the Lord, and a whole lot in addition. And I'd sure like to spill over on you.

So once you have decided before the Lord to go, the next steps are making the necessary and numerous preparations. But it was my experience that even the preparations were exciting and very profitable learning experiences. Here are my recommendations to get you started.

### Preparations – Spiritual

1. You need to consider and thank God that you live at a time and in a place where you can be transported to the land of Israel comfortably and safely in just a few hours. (What would the prophets or apostles have thought about the notion of *flying* to the land of Israel and back from the uttermost part of the world?) You also need to thank Him that you will be able to see and talk with Jews back in the land as the nation of Israel.
2. You need to ask Him to help you to prepare thoroughly for this experience as suggested below. Ask Him to help you shut out the tyranny of the every-day urgent and set aside regular study time before you go. A partner or small group can help.
3. Resolve before the Lord that your primary objective will be spiritual growth through knowing Him and His Word more thoroughly. As one result, you will share with others what you have learned and gained by visiting the land of Israel.

### Preparation – Mental

I'm convinced that the single most important mental aspect of preparing to visit the land of Israel is to *thoroughly study* before you go. I was very fortunate because study sessions prior to the trip were one of Relational Concepts' requirements. The immediate benefit was that I learned a lot of new material about the land and the Bible even if I hadn't taken the trip. The benefit while on the trip was always knowing where I was, what had happened there biblically, and what else of significance was nearby. This made the most efficient use of our time in the land and has resulted in excellent reten-

tion of what I saw and learned. More specifically, the study needs to consist of at least four major aspects:

### **1. The Panorama of the Bible**

You need a good working knowledge of the Bible's panorama. You need to be especially familiar with the historical narratives and where they fit in the overall rollout of biblical history. As a prerequisite, I would recommend that you be very comfortable with the Relational Concepts' study book *An Overview of the Bible*. If you have been a student of Scripture for some time and are already familiar with its panoramic history, I suggest you reread as much of Israel's historical narrative as possible. This would especially include the section from Joshua through Nehemiah.

### **2. The Historical Geography**

You need a good overview of Israel's historical geography, and you should be able to draw a map of the land from memory. The historical geography should extend into modern times, including the period from the apostles until now. This, of course, is the purpose of the current study book, so you're already headed down the right road. I would also recommend that you study Relational Concepts' *Church History* study book or equal.

### **3. Judaism and Islam**

It is very helpful when visiting the land of Israel to have a fundamental understanding of Judaism and Islam. You will see and hear both religions everywhere. Understanding their perspective will answer many of the "whys" and add greatly to what you will learn.

### **4. Current Events in the Middle East**

You also need to be familiar with current events and culture in the land of Israel. You can do this by being alert to television and printed news and special television programs about Israel and the Middle East. There are also special Christian TV programs such as Zola Levitt, Jewels, and Day of Discovery that do an excellent job of addressing the subject.

## **Preparation - Physical**

Aggressively seeing the significant sights in Israel is no stroll through Disneyland. You will need to walk on the tels, up tall hills and through rugged rocky terrain in very hot weather, sometimes for extended periods. You will keep up this pace every day for more than a week. Without some measure of physical preparation, fatigue will easily detract from an otherwise once-in-a-lifetime experience. You also don't want to become the group caboose. Probably the best single conditioning program is regular accelerated walking. This is especially true of you're no spring chicken. Just do it.

## **Preparation - Legal**

A **passport** is a document in the form of a small booklet issued by a government that authenticates the identity of one of its citizens and authorizes that citizen to leave the county to visit another country and return. You *will need a passport* from your government to visit and return from Israel. If you don't already have a passport that will be valid during the time of your trip, start now to get one.

## **Preparation - Selecting a Group**

Selecting a group should be determined based upon your purpose and priorities as discussed above. I would recommend you consider at least the following:

1. Does the primary purpose of the group correspond to your objectives for going? For example, I went with Relational Concepts because their purpose and my primary object were the same – enhance Bible knowledge and study.

2. Does the group hold a similar theological view as yours? For example, if you hold a pre-millennial end-time view and your leader is an amillennialist, you will experience conflict and disappointment regarding teaching about the future of Israel and the land.
3. What is the itinerary of the group? Will you be visiting biblically significant sites primarily or mostly the traditional sites and tourist traps? Does the pace of the schedule match well with your desires and capabilities?
4. Who is the group leader?
5. What is the group size of the group? Remember, it is generally true that the smaller the learning group, the more we learn. It's student – teacher ratio.
6. Does the trip schedule fit with your schedule?
7. Is it a “turn-key” trip? By this I mean, are the arrangements for all transportation, lodging, meals, and site tickets or are you expected to arrange part of it yourself? Are the accommodations suitable for you?
8. Does the group come well-recommended by a source that you trust?
9. Is the cost of the trip within your financial expectations and capability? Find out what will be the schedule for payment.

### **Preparation - Logistical**

1. Make a photo copy (Xerox) of the face page of your passport and keep it in your suitcase. If you lose your passport, things go much smoother at the embassy if you have this copy.
2. Small Bible, notebook, pen, highlighter.
3. Small knapsack or lightweight backpack.
4. Hair dryer and/or electric razor with 220 volt adapter.
5. Get identification tags for all your luggage.
6. Get one airline carry-on piece of luggage which contains: trip information, airline tickets, passport, one change of clothes, toiletries, small Bible, notebook, reading material, camera, hat, sunglasses, medications, snacks, and cell phone.
7. Luggage appropriate for clothes and stuff plus space for souvenirs
8. Camera or smart phone memory card for 75-100 pictures per day. Also, have extra battery.
9. Give your itinerary and hotel phone numbers to appropriate contacts at home.
10. Compact binoculars, if desired.
11. Sun hat, sun glasses, sun blocker/lotion.
12. Sweater or light jacket for cool evenings.
13. Toiletries.
14. Medications: prescription for the entire trip, no-prescription such as for sinus, pain, blisters, or sunburn.
15. Clothes: take casual clothes. Skirt and long sleeves for women and long pants for men to wear in monasteries, synagogues, churches and mosques (they will require it), good thick soled walking shoes that fit well and are broken-in, swimsuit if you plan to swim in the Mediterranean Sea or the Dead Sea, minimize clothes with a “message” (words and pictures).
16. Plastic zip-lock bags for souvenirs such as pieces of pottery, stones, etc.

### **Some Practical Suggestions / Comments**

1. Be especially considerate of your fellow travelers in the group. You will live together in close proximity under a number of unusual situations over an extended period. People have allergies to many things; ask and be considerate. Help make their time spiritually rich and rewarding.

2. Always carry your passport on your person. Never surrender it to anyone other than Israeli police, military, or customs official.
3. Travel as lightly as you can; Americans tend to bring the kitchen sink. You will be required to handle your luggage often. Keep the logistics of your stuff as simple as possible.
4. When exploring the sites, drink water at regular intervals, even though you may not feel thirsty. Encourage members in your group to do likewise. Dehydration is very subtle.
5. Drink bottled water or beverages. Avoid questionable Palestinian food or beverage sources. Reputable restaurants are usually safe and enjoyable.
6. Israel is seven time zones ahead of U.S. EST during daylight saving time.
7. Keep a good map in your possession at all times and always know where you are. This is not so much a case of security as it is for learning what you saw and where.
8. Security: The security record for tourists visiting Israel has been excellent. Just use common sense, keep together and remember that the Israeli police and military are your friends. On your way to Israel, the primary security check of you and your luggage will be in the feeder country where you have connections for Tel Aviv. While in the land, you will commonly see small groups of armed Israeli military mingled with the general population. Occasionally, you will also see Israeli school groups on field trips with armed civilian guards. On leaving Israel, the customs agent's primary concern is to know why you were in the country and that no one else placed anything in your luggage. They seem to have little concern for what you personally are taking from Israel as long as it is consistent with why you were there.
9. ENJOY & GROW

# Appendix C

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