



Conference Bible Study Guide

Want to go to Israel?

A trip to Israel is often called the “trip of a lifetime.” More accurately, it’s the trip of two millennium!

Think of it this way. Jesus died somewhere around 30 AD. That’s nearly 2,000 years ago. Only 40 years after the crucifixion, Jerusalem was destroyed. Jewish people did not regain control of Jerusalem until 1967! Tourism started in earnest in the 1970’s. *Most* of the archaeological work that has been done in Israel has happened since 1990!

Bottom line? There’s never been a better time to go to Israel.

It’s safe. Statistically, Israel is a safer place to live than the United States!

It’s amazing. Archaeologists are digging the past out of the ground so fast, it is said that only 15 percent of the artifacts that have been found have been fully analyzed. The land of the Bible is the cutting edge of Christian education. If you want to know your Bible in the best way possible, get to Israel.

It’s waiting. As the COVID-19 pandemic wanes, tourism in Israel is bound to recover quickly. More than 4.4 million people visited Israel in 2019, marking the third straight year of record-setting tourism numbers.

Pastor Andy Cook leads two trips a year to Israel.



Visit experienceisraelnow.com/trips for more information, dates, applications and video clips of travelers talking about their experience while touring the land of the Bible.

Come with us ... Israel is waiting!





Modern-Day Israel

Established by United Nations on May 14, 1948. Regained control of Jerusalem in 1967 ... for the first time since CE 70.

How big is Israel?

Israel land mass: 8,019 square miles
 South Carolina: 32,020 square miles
 New Jersey: 8,279 square miles
 Texas: 268,597 square miles

Population of Israel: 9.3 million (not including the Gaza Strip)

Population of Georgia: 10.5 million
 Population of New Jersey: 8.9 million
 Population of Texas: 27.8 million

Anderson County: 757 square miles, population 202,558 (268 people per sq. mile)

The Gaza Strip: 141 square miles, population estimated at 2 million (14,184 people/sq. mile).
 The rest of Israel: 1160 people per square mile.

The 17 Arab countries surrounding Israel have a population estimated at 46 times that of Israel.



A Friday afternoon miracle: A Jewish family waits on Shabbat to begin at the Western Wall. Until 1967, Jews weren't allowed to even see the Western Wall.

The "West Bank" is a section of partitioned land within Israel on the western side, or "bank" of the Jordan River. Thus, the "West Bank."

Religious beliefs Israel is 75% Jewish, 18% Muslim, 2% Christian, 1% Druze, 4% other. The number of evangelical Christians and Messianic Jews is very small, perhaps a few thousand of each group. In reality, most Jewish people in Israel are not religious at all.



When a winter storm cut away a section of the beach at Caesarea Maritime, it left a rare snapshot of the layers of civilization that are under most communities in Israel. Since past civilizations built on top of the previous ones, archaeologists must dig down in order to discover the past. Each of these layers is packed with broken pottery and other remnants of ancient civilizations.

Tels

“Tel” means “tall,” “city” and “artificial hill.” You’ll see a lot of excavated tels in Israel and other parts of the world where ancient civilizations have lived.

Think of a tel like a layered cake. One group of people lives in a location for a season of time, but then another group takes the location by force, destroying the old community in the process. Since it’s safer to live in a high location than on the ground level, the new community builds on top of the old one. Sometimes the newcomers use some of the old building materials for their new construction. In time, as new enemies appeared and conquered the community, it would grow taller and taller, with each community becoming like another layer to the cake.

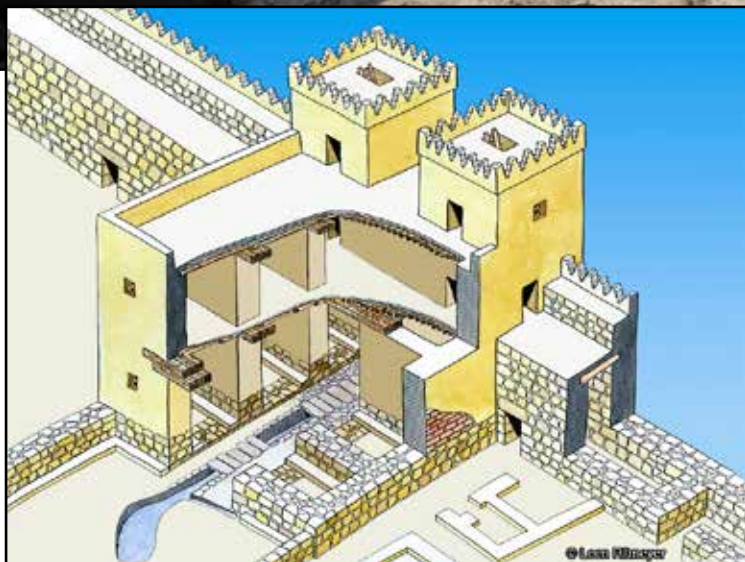


Bet She'an offers two ancient civilizations for us. On the ground is the city left behind by the Greeks and Romans. The green mound in the background is “Tel Bet She'an,” which holds layers of civilization in its grasp.

Today archaeologists practice their science by carefully digging down through the layers of civilizations, identifying each era as they pass through it.



An illustration of a typical city gate helps us comprehend the ruins of Megiddo's city gates (above).



City Gates

Every ancient city was protected by its high walls. The weakest point of the city's defense system, therefore, was the city gate. The gates were heavily fortified for times of war. On most days, of course, peace prevailed. In peaceful times, the chambers of a city gate were used for governing and other municipal functions.

- When Boaz wanted to arrange for both the purchase of land and his marriage to Ruth, he went to the city gate of Bethlehem. Not surprisingly, he found the elders of the city there as he conducted important legal business (Ruth 4:1-12).
- Lot was sitting in the city gate of Sodom (Genesis 19:1, 9). Was he a city elder?
- Parents of rebellious sons could hold them accountable (permanently!) at the city gate (Deut. 21:18-21).
- Eli was sitting in the city gate when word came that the battle had been lost and the Ark of the Covenant had been captured. He fell off his seat and broke his neck (1 Samuel 4:10-18).
- As a young man, David acted like a crazy person at the city gate of Gath (1 Samuel 21:10-15).
- King David stood by the city gate as his soldiers went out to fight Absalom. After Absalom's death, David went to the gate so people could console him there (2 Samuel 18:1-5; 19:1-8).



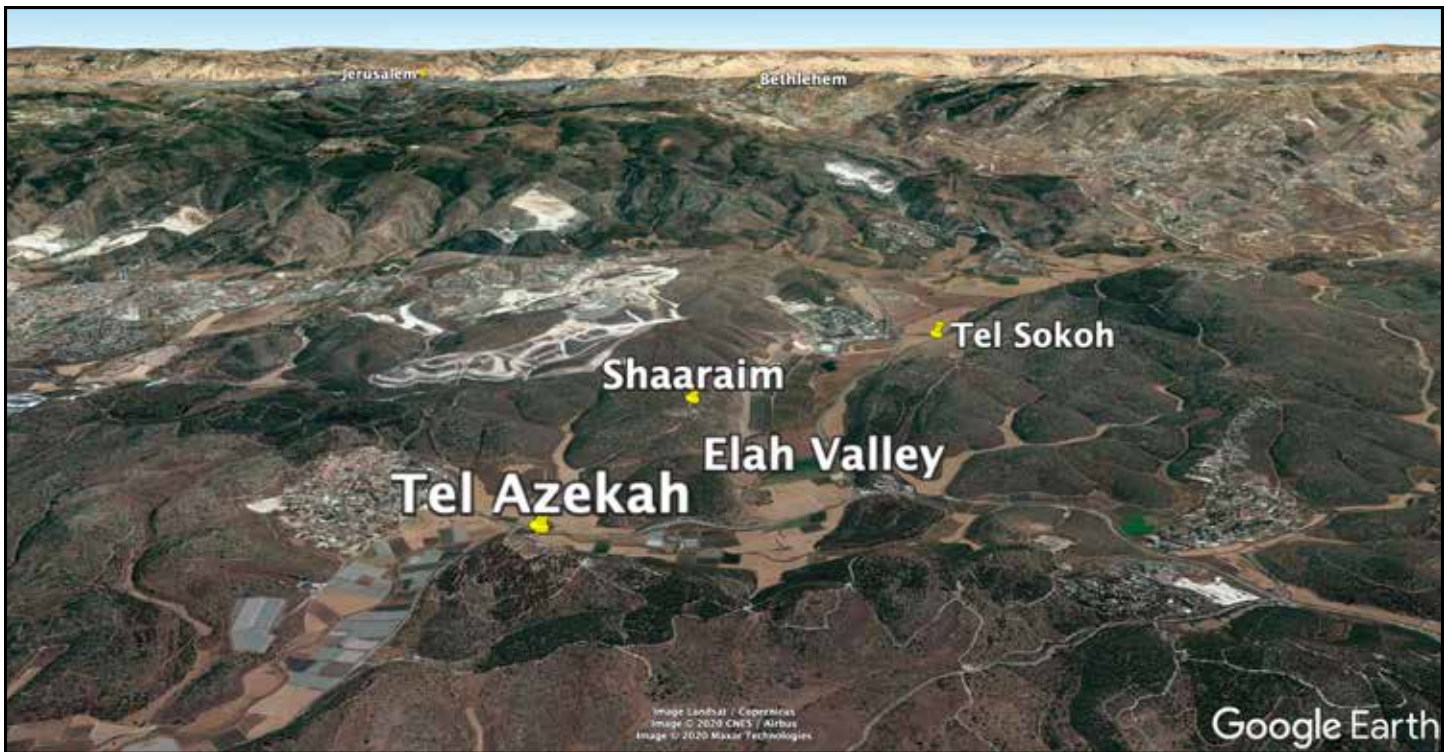
Shephelah

The foothills of Judea are known as the Shephelah (“Sheph-fail-ah”). God’s people had their safest cities in the Judean Mountains. The Philistines and other enemies lived along the Coastal Plain. Not surprisingly, many battles between these enemies took place in the valleys of the Shephelah.



One of two city gates at the Elah Fortress, almost certainly the “Shaaraim” mentioned in 1 Samuel 17. The word means “two gates.” This city may have been where Saul and his troops were hiding from Goliath before young David arrived.

- There are four major valleys cutting through the Shephelah. Even today, road builders prefer building in the valleys rather than cutting through the hills.
- From north to south, the valleys are: Aijalon, Sorek, Elah and Lachish. Israel’s Highway 1 travels in the Aijalon Valley, connecting Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.
- The walled fortresses of the Shephelah changed hands often, depending on who had the most powerful army.
- The story of David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17) has been called “biblical geography at its very finest.” Why would biblical geography be important to us?
- As you read your Bible, pay attention to the geographical details in nearly every passage. Those details often hold incredible insight to the story!



A stone bench atop Tel Azekah (left) is engraved with the words of 1 Samuel 17:51. Four other benches are nearby with other verses from the story of David's battle with Goliath. The Valley of Elah lies below this hill. This photo faces east.

The scene from the peak of Tel Gath (below) shows how close this Philistine stronghold was to the Shephelah. The first row of hills marks the beginning of Shephelah. In the far distance, you'll see the Judean Mountains, home to Bethlehem.

In the Google Earth map (top), you can follow the Elah Valley all the way to Bethlehem. David would have traveled about 18 miles from his home to the battlefield. Gath was only 7 miles away.





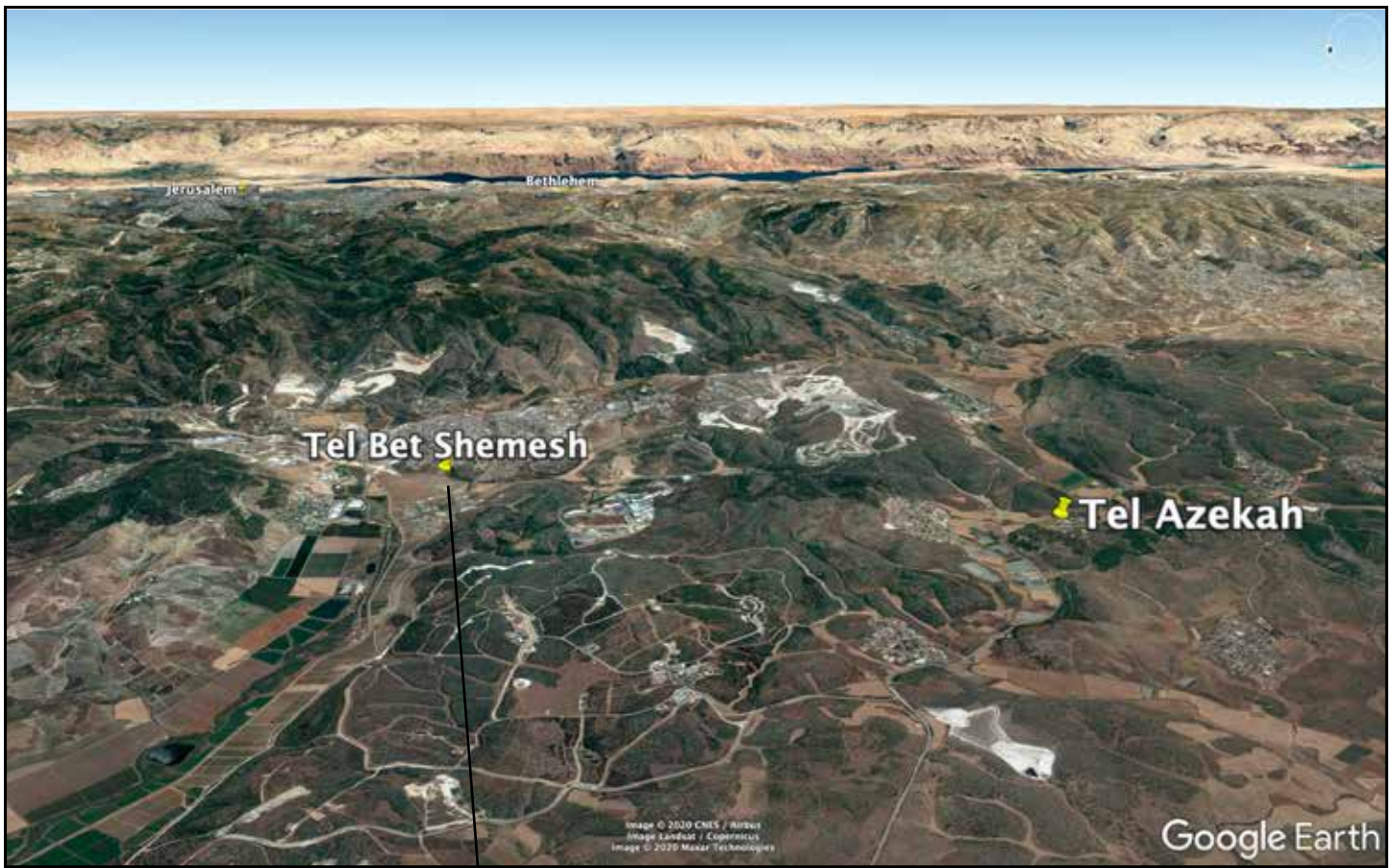
Guardian cities

Several cities in the Shephelah served as guardian cities for Jerusalem. One of the most important was Lachish, which would have been the first major fortress defending against any invasion from Egypt.

Ironically, it was an enemy from the north (Assyria) that crushed Lachish before moving up to Jerusalem. See 2 Kings 18:13-15 for the story. Only a miracle from God saved Jerusalem and King Hezekiah from total destruction.



Tel Lachish, along with Azekah and Bet Shemesh, were guardian cities for Jerusalem. An intercontinental highway connecting Egypt and Assyria (later the Babylonian and Persian empires) ran through the coastal plain. The coastal plain was also home to the Philistines, making the role of the guardian cities important for every king that ruled Judah.



Close proximity

Everything in Israel is far closer than a first-time visitor will expect. Bet Shemesh is only 15 miles from the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Azekah was only 15 miles from David's hometown of Bethlehem. An enemy army could cover the distance to Jerusalem from a conquered city in the Shephelah in a single day!



The ruins of ancient Bet Shemesh are still being excavated, all within site of the modern community of the same name, seen in the background of this photo. Many modern-day communities, valleys, bodies of water and mountains carry the same names today as they did in Bible times.



Tour guide Boaz Shalgi (back turned, blue shirt), describes the First-Century synagogue that once stood at Arbel.

You'll have to see what's not there ...

It takes practice to see what's not there. Imagine if your home was destroyed by fire and another home was built on top of the old foundation. In time, people would need to use photographs and your stories to visualize what was once standing on the same property. Most of the



locations we'll see on this trip (like Jerusalem, above) have had *multiple* layers of homes, businesses and places of worship built on top of the ruins of previous homes, businesses and places of worship. This can create a confusing matrix of new cities built on top of ancient ruins.

Very often, churches have been built over the location of places that are held to be sacred. If that's the case, it's even more difficult to envision the biblical event. We'll be working hard to show you how to see what's not there. When we're at the Sea of Galilee, on the other hand, it'll be easy to envision events that happened around the lake. But in cities like Jerusalem and Bethlehem, you'll have to see past the present in order to find the Bible.



Bethlehem

- Burial place of Rachel
- Home of Boaz and Ruth
- Home of Jesse and his sons, the youngest being David
- Birthplace of Jesus
- Means “House of Bread” (“Bet Lechem”)
- Population during Bible times: Perhaps 1,000
- Population today: 25,000 inside the city limits, 60,000 in the general vicinity
- Religious affiliation: In the last century - and especially in the last two decades - Bethlehem has changed from a predominately Christian make-up to an Islamic one. Very few Christians remain in Bethlehem.



Nativity Square

Finding the Bible in Bethlehem is difficult. Instead of a typical nativity scene you might have been expecting, you'll instead find a crowded city filled with churches, mosques and tourist shops. At “Nativity Square,” two large churches are built over the cave in which Jesus was said to have been born. You'll get a better sense of the biblical environment at the “Shepherds’ Fields,” or in any cave along the ridge line of the Judean Mountains.

The Church of the Nativity was founded in 327 CE. The current building was completed in 565 and has been remodeled several times. It is currently in a remodeling stage that is anticipated to last several years. When you reach the grotto (cave), look beyond the ornate decorations to see the rough walls of the cave.

St. Catherine’s Church adjoins the Church of the Nativity. Go underneath the modern sanctuary to see more of the same cave in a more natural environment.



The Herodium

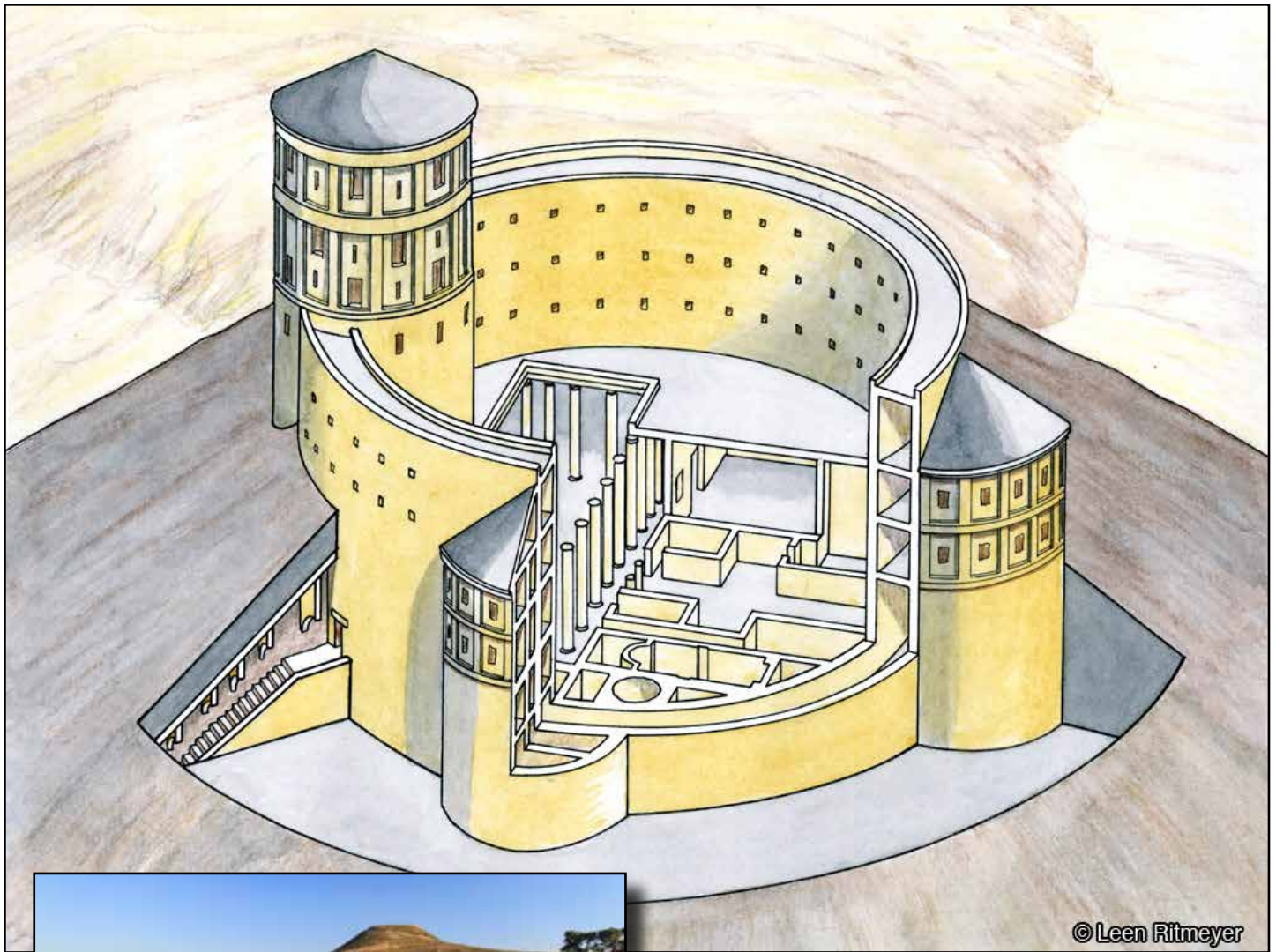
Perhaps the largest palace Herod ever built, the Herodium towered over the villages south of Jerusalem, including Bethlehem. A lookout at the top of the tower could have seen approaching danger from the Mediterranean in the West, Jerusalem from the North, or Edom in the Southeast.

- The mountain is man-made.
- The fortress could have supported 1,000 troops plus the royal family.
- Fresh water was delivered from Jerusalem via an aqueduct.
- Josephus said Herod was buried here some 19 centuries ago. However, his tomb was not discovered until 2007! Noted archaeologist Ehud Netzer found the tomb and continued to excavate there until suffering a fall from scaffolding at the Herodium in 2010. He died three days later, on Oct. 28.
- Herod died shortly after Jesus was born.

Impact on the biblical story: Matthew introduced Herod into his account of Jesus' birth in Matthew 2:1. Luke needed only five verses before he mentioned the powerful king (Luke 1:5). These writers assumed we knew that Jesus was born in the shadow of Judea's richest, cruelest and most powerful ruler! Look for the distinctive, cone-shaped hill when we're in Bethlehem.



**Refresh your memory of the biblical story
by reading Matthew 2. And don't miss Luke 1:5!**

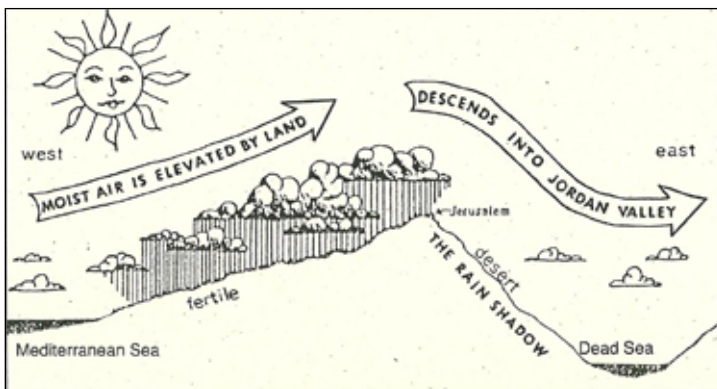
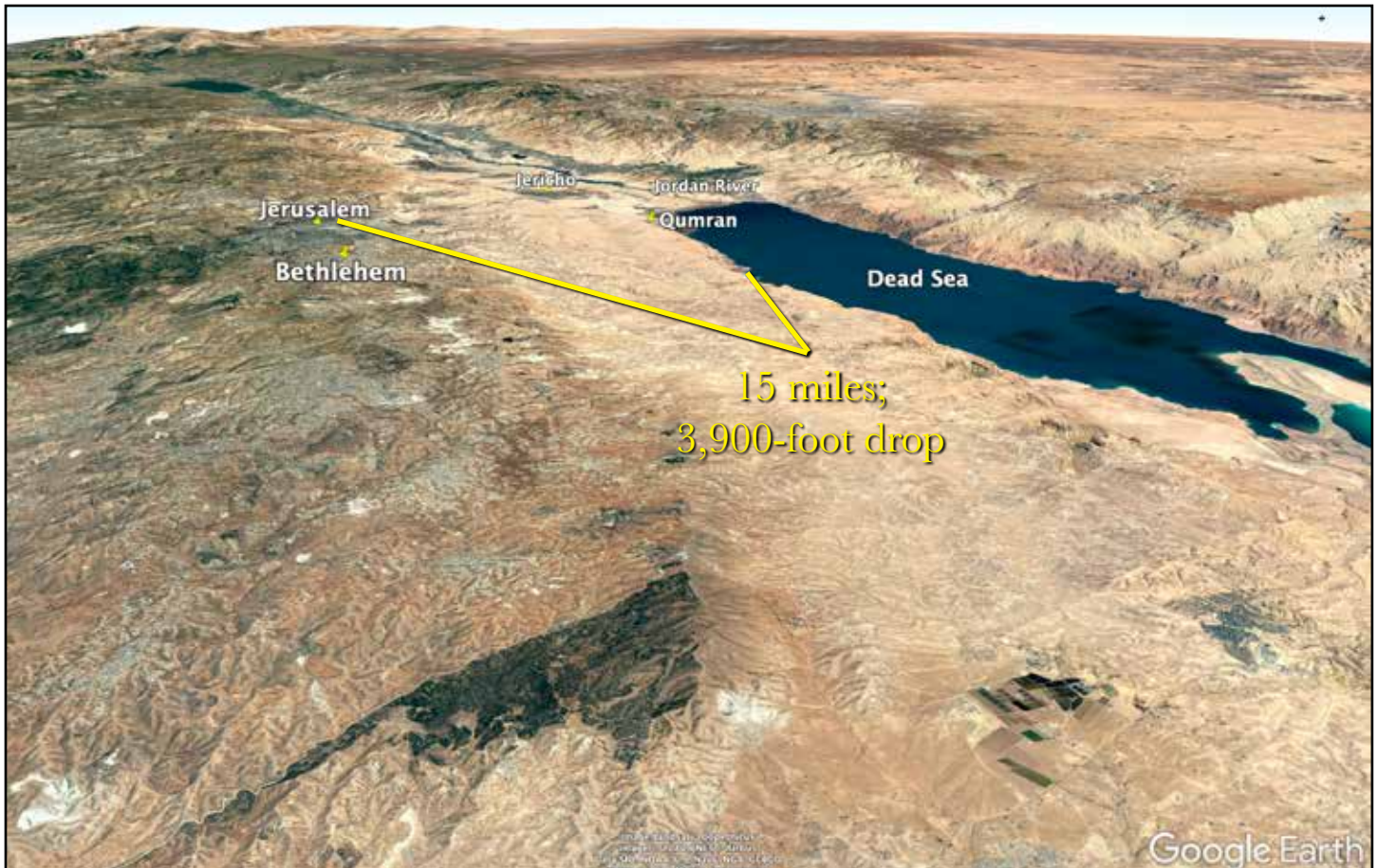


© Leen Ritmeyer



The swimming pool at the Herodium (left) was larger than an Olympic-sized pool, filled by fresh water from Jerusalem and featured an “island” oasis in its center. Small boats were part of the pool decor! The burial site of Herod (below) is part of the recent archaeological discoveries. The luxurious fortress on top of the man-made mountain was only a three miles or so from the humble cave where Jesus was born. This was the towering backdrop of the Christmas story!





Rain runoff from the Judean Mountains races through the Judean Wilderness (where it almost never rains) until it reaches the Dead Sea, the lowest place on earth.

Jerusalem and Bethlehem are 2,500 feet above sea level. The Dead Sea is more than 1,400 feet below sea level! That's a 3,900-foot drop in just 15 miles!

Flash floods in the wilderness and along the roads next to the Dead Sea are a major concern.



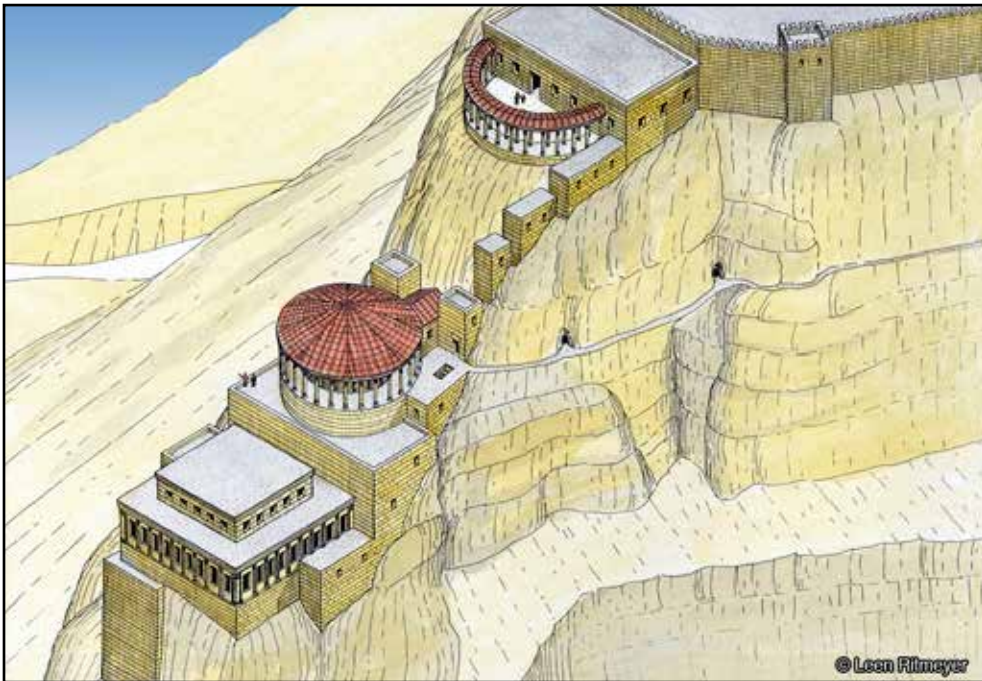
The Judean Wilderness and the Dead Sea

It might be the most aptly named body of water on earth. Though the Dead Sea is the largest body of water in Israel, none of its water is life-sustaining.

- The Dead Sea is about 31 miles long and 9 miles wide at its widest point. It has been far larger until recent decades.
- The Dead Sea is 1,400 feet below sea level, making it the lowest place on earth.
- Located as the basin for the Jordan River Valley (or “Rift Valley”), the Dead Sea is receding noticeably. In 1930, the water level was 1,280 feet below sea level and the surface of the water covered much more land. You will see visible evidence of the receding shoreline as we travel. Sinkholes are also a serious, modern-day concern. Because so much fresh water from the Jordan River is being used for irrigation and drinking water, the shoreline of the Dead Sea is receding about 3 feet a year. Almost no water is entering the north end of the sea.
- The water in the Dead Sea is eight times saltier than ocean water.
- Because of its high mineral content and the area’s distance from the sun (and thus, low UV rays), many people travel from all over the world to the Dead Sea for therapeutic purposes. Likewise, the minerals found here are used to create many beauty products.
- Water from the northern end of the Dead Sea is funneled by modern canals to the southern end for the benefit of tourism (Ein Bokek) and industry (Dead Sea Waterworks).
- Masada, one of Herod’s most famous fortresses, was built along the shoreline.
- Ein Gedi, a favorite hideout of David, is also near the shoreline.
- The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered at Qumran, which overlooks the northern end of the Dead Sea. The climate of the region helped preserve the scrolls from the time they were hidden, around 68 CE, until they were found in 1947.
- A canyon in the desert is called a “wadi.” Think of it as a dry river bed.
- Deadly flash floods can unexpectedly rush through the wadis, making hiking off limits during the winter rainy season. As you travel along the shoreline of the Dead Sea, notice the bridges of the modern-day road. The bridges seem to be crossing nothing but rocky soil. In reality, these are the dry riverbeds that can flood almost without notice during the winter months. Tiring of rebuilding washed-out roads, Israeli road-builders have instead built bridges over the flood plain, creating the illusion most of the year of bridges over sand!



Small deer, called ibex,” populate this region. You’re especially likely to see one at Ein Gedi. When the psalmist wrote of deer panting for water (Psalm 42), it’s likely he was envisioning a thirsty ibex. This photo was taken near Ein Gedi, with the Dead Sea in the background.



Masada

The most famous of Herod's palace-fortresses.

- Herod had two palaces atop Masada, including the “Northern” palace pictured here in the photo and illustration. The fortress was completed in 31 B.C.
- The fortress seemed to be impenetrable. Some 1,300 feet high on the eastern side and 300 feet high at the closest distance on the western slope, direct assault against the fortress seemed impossible.
- Years of food and water was stored away for those in the fortress, but in scarce supply for anyone seeking to attack it.
- The fortress was taken by nationalistic Jewish rebels in 66 CE in the earliest days of the Jewish rebellion against Rome.
- Romans laid siege to the fortress and reclaimed Masada in 73. The Romans used Jewish prisoners of war to build a siege ramp on the western side of the mountain.
- Choosing to die in freedom rather than dying at the hands of the Romans or to be held in slavery, the rebels elected to carry out a mass suicide pack. When the Romans broke through the last barrier, they found the bodies of 960 men, women and children. Only two women and five children were found alive.

“Let our wives die before they are abused, and our children before they have tasted of slavery; and after we have slain them, let us bestow that glorious benefit upon one another mutually, and preserve ourselves in freedom, as an excellent funeral monument for us. ... Let us spare nothing but our provisions; for they will be a testimonial when we are dead that we were not subdued for want of necessities, but that, according to our original resolution, we have preferred death before slavery.”

- From the final speech of Eleazar Ben Ya'ir, leader of the rebel forces.



The Dead Sea has receded dramatically in the last 100 years. During the time of the Essenes (and Jesus), the salt-saturated water would have come much closer to the Qumran community. Qumran is only 5-7 miles from the probable site of Jesus' baptism!

Qumran and the Essenes

The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the caves around Qumran. The community that originally stored the scrolls in the caves is known as the "Essene Community."

- The Essenes were composed primarily of men who'd grown disgusted with the corruption of the priestly families of Jerusalem. Many of them left a life of luxury to live in one of the world's harshest environments.
- The Essenes believed that if enough people showed enough radical commitment to following God, Messiah would come.
- The Essenes were spiritually and politically motivated. They envisioned a Messiah who would be spiritually pure and a king of unquestioned military strength.
- It is a matter of debate as to whether John the Baptizer was an Essene. Without a doubt, he was cut of similar cloth.
- The Essenes practiced daily, ritual immersion in a land without fresh water.
- The site of John's call to repentance and baptism was less than 10 miles away. Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan, somewhere near Jericho.
- The complete scroll of Isaiah that was found here was some 1,100 years older than the previous oldest copy of Isaiah. The scrolls are displayed today in Israel's Shrine of the Book museum and now available for study on the Internet. The photo shows "Cave No. 4," where the first scrolls were discovered.





The Jordan River

- By far the largest river in Israel, the Jordan is the country's main source of fresh water. Even so, it's probably far smaller than you've imagined it to be.
- Beginning far to the north at the base of Mt. Hermon, the river travels from Banias (Caesarea Philippi in the New Testament) to the Dead Sea, entering and leaving the Sea of Galilee. Starting at an elevation of roughly 1,100 feet above sea level, it comes to a stop some 1,400 feet below sea level. "Jordan" means "to fall" or "to descend." North of the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan runs through the Hula Valley.

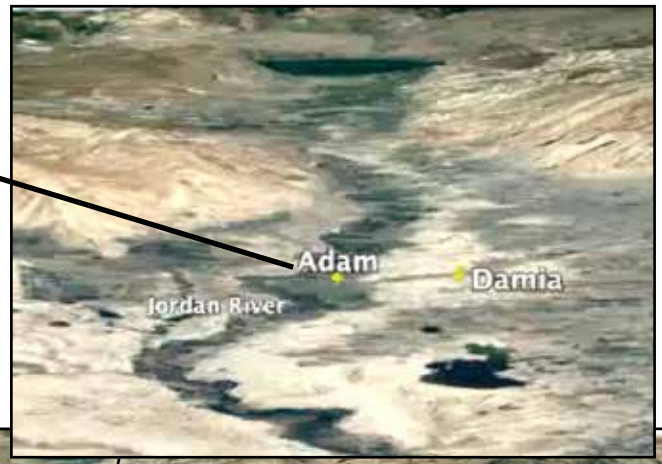


The Jordan River (look for the green water winding through the trees) leaves the Sea of Galilee, heading for the Dead Sea.

- The Jordan River Valley is south of the Sea of Galilee and held the primary highway for Jewish families traveling from the Galilee to Jerusalem. Almost certainly, this would have been the route Mary and Joseph took to Bethlehem, and the route they took each year on their Passover pilgrimage (see Luke 2:41). A journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem is about 75-80 miles. Capernaum to Jerusalem is about 90 miles.
- Multiple cities of the pagan Decapolis were along the route, including Bet She'an and Gadera (heart of the well known "region of the Gaderenes").



The Jordan River begins with a powerful display at the Banias Falls, winds its way to the Sea of Galilee, moves through the Jordan River “Rift” Valley and finally enters with a trickle into the Dead Sea. The amount of water entering the Dead Sea from the Jordan River has been reduced by 90 percent in the past century, leading to an ecological emergency for the Dead Sea. All the brown in the bottom photo used to be covered by water!



Joshua crossed the Jordan at flood stage (see Joshua 3). A dam south of the Sea of Galilee and an overwhelming use of the Jordan's fresh water for irrigation purposes keeps flooding from happening today. Photos from the early 1900s help us better imagine how massive the Jordan was in Joshua's day. And see the high banks of the river near Adam in the top photo? An earthquake in 1927 threw so much dirt and debris into the river, it stopped flowing for two days!



This mask of the Pan god was discovered in 2015 at Hippos, just across the Sea of Galilee from Capernaum, Magdala and other communities of the New Testament. The Pan cult was so frightening, even today our words “panic,” “pandemonium” and “pandemic” remind us how people felt about the cultic practices of Pan worship.



The “Cardo” of Hippos. Though it’s difficult to see in this photo, the Sea of Galilee is in the distance.



The Decapolis

The Jewish communities so familiar to us in the New Testament were surrounded by pagan cultures. These city-states were planted by Alexander the Great in an effort to introduce Greek culture to the region. The effort was highly successful and Greek/Roman influence is easily visible in all parts of the Christian story.

- The Greek language became the common language of the people. One impact of this development was the writing of the New Testament in Greek.
- From a moral and spiritual standpoint, whatever was forbidden in Torah was celebrated in the Decapolis. In this pagan culture, personal comfort, pleasure and entertainment was treasured above all other values.
- When individuals or families traveled from the Galilee to Jerusalem, they could not have avoided contact with cities of the Decapolis or the people who lived there.
- Jesus visited cities of the Decapolis! (See Mark 7:31.)
- One of the cities of the Decapolis was Gadara, which was near another community called Gerasa. The story of Jesus healing the wild man who lived among the tombs took place in the region of these two cities ... giving us alternative references to the “region of the Gaderenes” and the “region of the Gerasenes.” Both refer to the same general area near the southeastern corner of the Sea of Galilee.



The Sea of Galilee

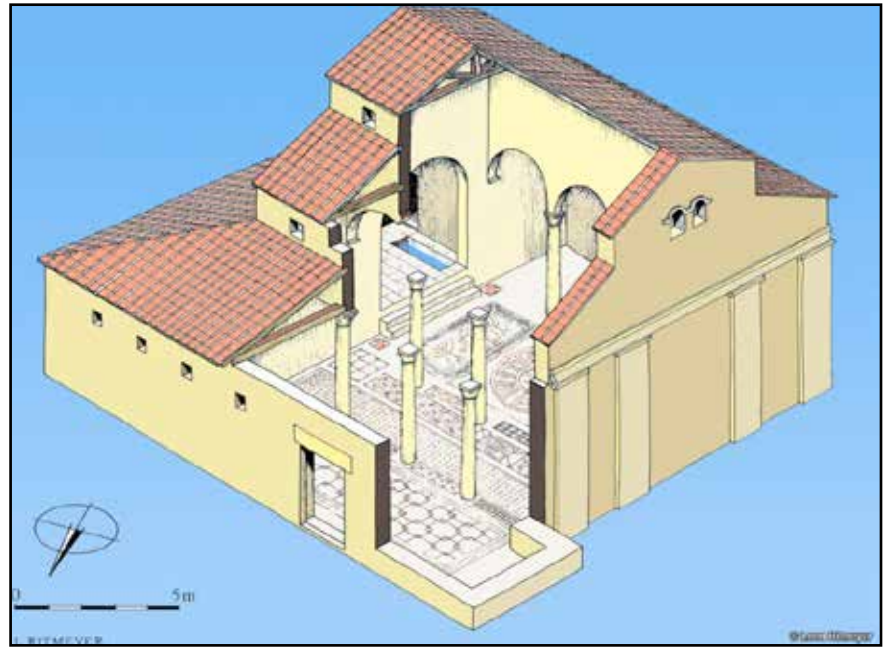
The “Sea” of Galilee is actually a lake. Only 13 miles at its very longest and seven miles wide at the widest point, the lake is the largest body of fresh water in Israel. It sits in a natural bowl, about 700 feet *below* sea level. The Golan Heights tower above the lake on its eastern shoreline at more than 1,000 feet *above* sea level. On the western side of the lake, the plains of the Galilee also rise quickly to 1,000 feet above sea level. As a result of being in this natural bowl, weather patterns can change dramatically and quickly on the water.

- The lake has multiple names, including the Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1, 23; 21:1), Chinnereth (Numbers 34:11, Joshua 12:3), the Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1) and Kinneret, which means “harp” or “lyre.”
- When his ministry began, Jesus moved from Nazareth to Capernaum. The communities along the northern shoreline of the lake were filled with conservative Jewish residents who took their faith very seriously.



Jesus spoke in the synagogues of “all the surrounding villages” of this area (Matthew 9:35). Some of the villages (like Gamla) were radically conservative, producing the “Zealots.” Jesus included a Zealot among his disciples. Judas Iscariot might also have been among this group.

- The synagogue at Capernaum is the largest ever found from its time period. Most of the synagogues, like the one at Magdala, were very small.
- Hippos (also known as Susita) is one of the original 10 cities of the Decapolis. It was thoroughly pagan. Whatever was off limits among the conservative Jews of Capernaum was celebrated in Hippos!
- The shoreline just south of Hippos is the most likely area for the region of the Gadarenes, or Gerasenes, made famous by the healing of a wild man who lived among the tombs.
- Tiberias has long been the largest city on the lake. Herod Antipas moved his palace from Sepphoris (near Nazareth) to Tiberias just in time to be near the ministry of Jesus. The two never met, however, until the day Jesus was crucified.
- The famous “Jesus Boat” was found at Ginosar during a drought in 1986. In a race against rising waters, the boat was actually floated to shore after it was wrapped with insulating foam.
- The ruins of Magdala and its First-Century synagogue were first discovered in 2009. In addition to the archaeological park, the ministry of Duc In Altum (“put out into the deep”) focuses on women in honor of Mary of Magdala. This village was apparently covered by a mudslide from nearby Mt. Arbel toward the end of the First Century. When it was discovered in 2009, it was buried underneath just 18 inches of dirt!



When you see the ruins of the synagogue at Capernaum, try to envision what residents would have known. This particular synagogue had one of the largest schools ever found attached to a synagogue. The Leen Ritmeyer illustration is a recreation of the Fourth Century (CE) synagogue in nearby Tiberias.



Magdala

One of the most exciting discoveries in the last few years is Magdala. Home to Mary Magdalene, Magdala was actually a very large city. More than 30,000 people lived there!

- Magdala sat at a key crossroads, guarding the junction of the coastal road and the road that cuts through the Arbel cliffs. It also benefited from fresh water springs and a thriving fishing industry. Once Tiberias was established in 18 CE, Magdala began to lose its importance. It was destroyed later in the First Century, probably by an earthquake and/or a mudslide from Mt. Arbel.
- The mudslide that covered the city turned out to be a blessing 19 centuries later, for now archaeologists are uncovering a First-Century community that never had another community built on top of it. Ironically, Magdala was discovered



A replica of the “Magdala Stone” seems to hide among the ancient columns of the Magdala synagogue. This find is one of the most important discoveries in Israel’s rich archaeological history.



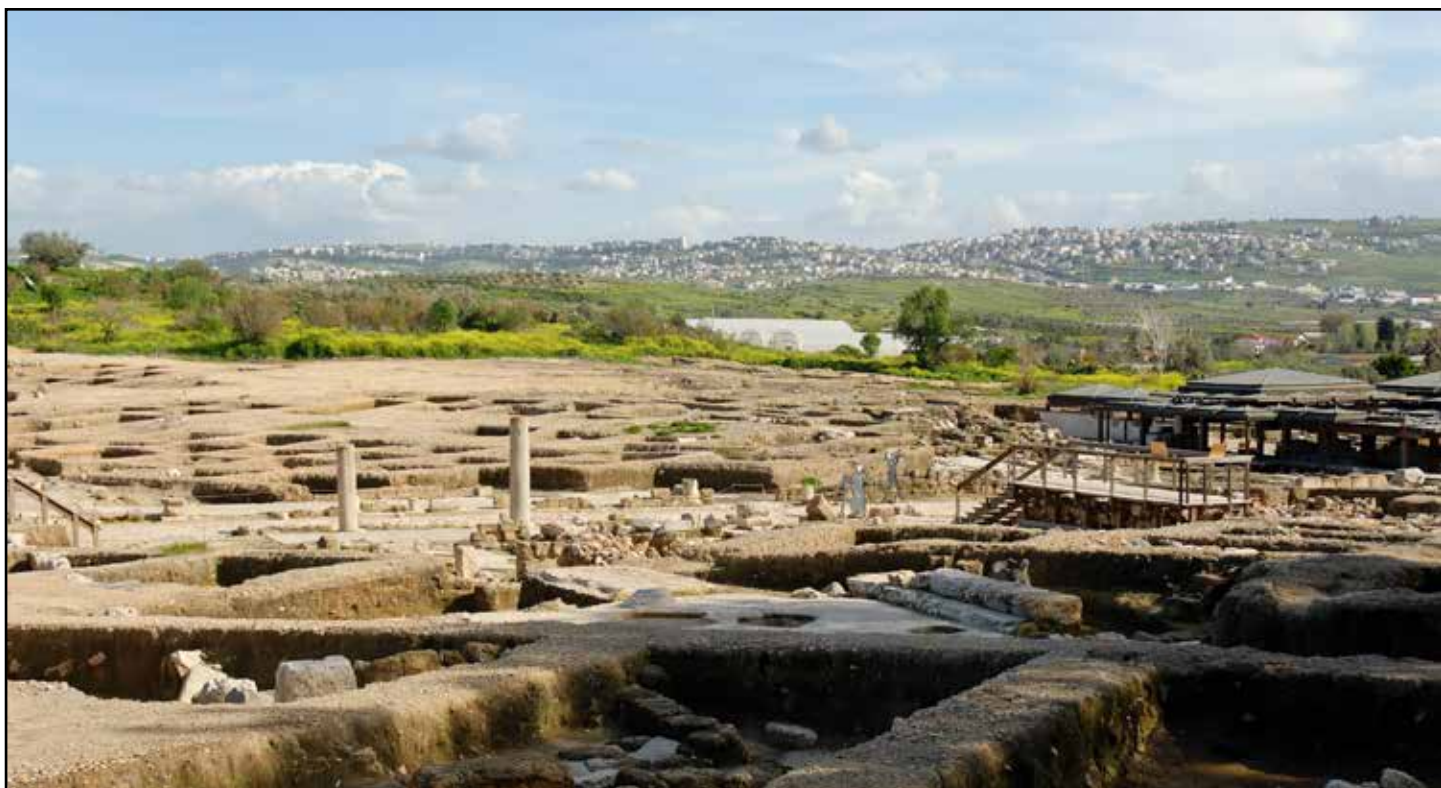
The women's center at Duc in Altum features an amazing mural in its lower floor level meeting room.

when a new hotel was being constructed ... right on top of the synagogue! Once the synagogue was discovered, plans for the hotel were changed and serious archaeological work began. It continues today.

- In honor of Mary Magdalene and in hopes of bringing reconciliation to women of different faiths, the church that owns the property has created a women's center among the ruins. The modern murals and architecture of this church - along with its vision of reconciliation - make it one of the most unusual churches in the Middle East.
- There is no record of Jesus ever coming to Magdala, but it seems almost certain that he did. Matthew 9:35 states that Jesus "went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues." Magdala is close to Capernaum, where Jesus based his ministry, and it would have been a very important village for his fishermen disciples. And of course, Mary of Magdala became one of Jesus' most devoted followers.
- The synagogue in Magdala is far too small to have served the entire community. Archaeologists are looking for another, larger synagogue. In the meantime, they have found three mickvot (ceremonial washing areas). And it's worth noting that the Jewish Talmud claims Magdala was destroyed because of its immorality. Perhaps there *was* only one synagogue here!
- Mary Magdalene is not Magdala's most famous citizen. That honor belongs to Titus Flavius Josephus. The son of a priest, Josephus first became a military hero for the Jewish forces he led out of Magdala. When he finally was forced to surrender to the Romans, he became a historian. The writings of Josephus are the most important non-biblical account of life in the First Century.



Flavius Josephus



The ruins of Zippori, with modern-day Israeli communities in the distance.

Did Jesus commute to this town?

We don't know much about Jesus between the age of 12 and the beginning of his ministry, when he was around the age of 30.

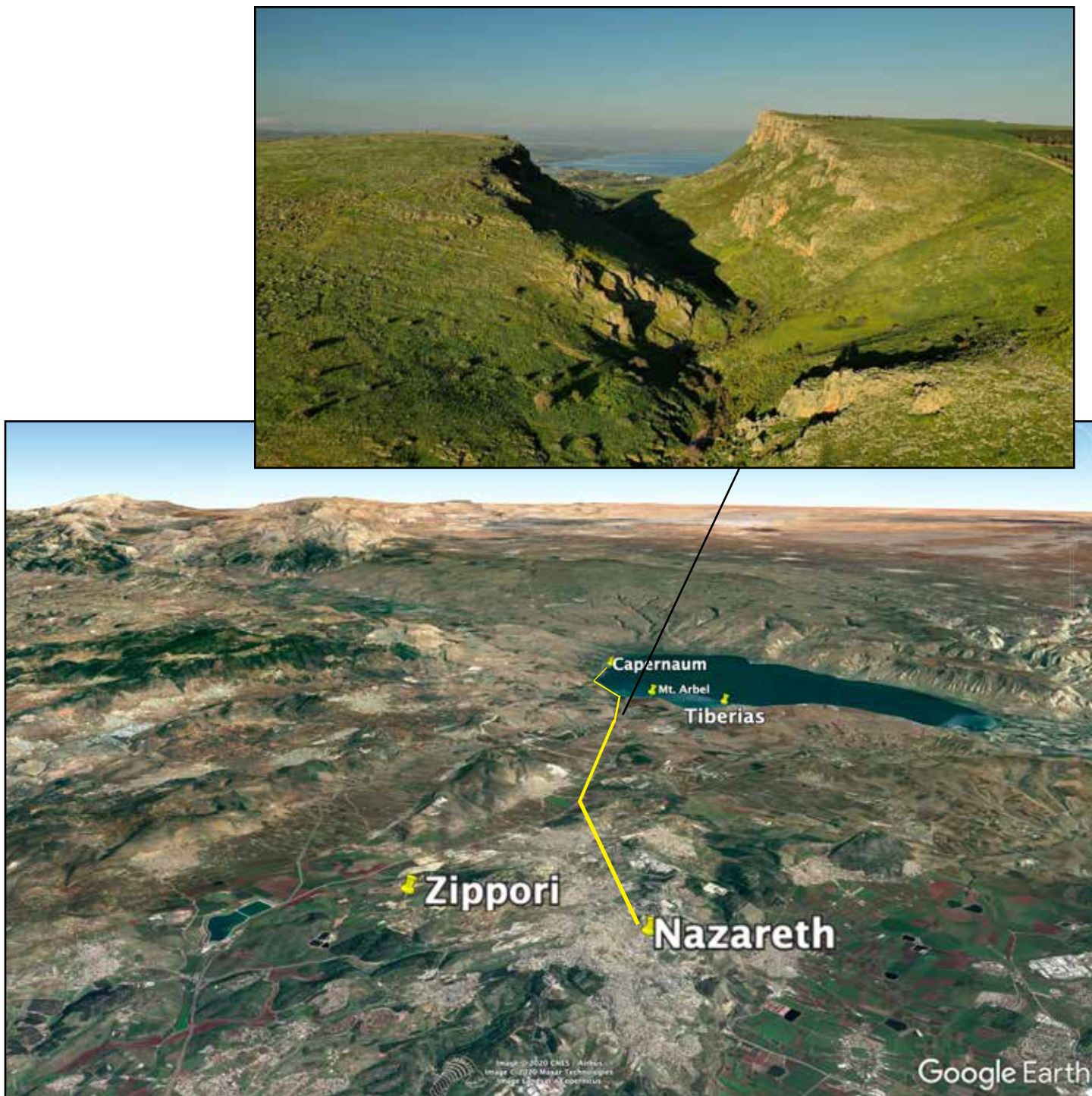
However, we do know that Jesus was a carpenter, which means he worked with both wood and stone. The Greek word used in the New Testament to describe the profession of Joseph and Jesus was "tekton," which means "artisan" or "craftsman."

In addition, the nearby town of Zippori (also called "Sepphoris") was under construction during the same time period. The town had been destroyed in a failed revolt about the time Jesus was born. Herod's son Antipas made the town his administrative center, taking advantage of the opportunity to rebuild it to his own liking.

This lends to the intriguing possibility that Jesus may have done some work in Zippori, perhaps there meeting the wife of Chuza, a man who was the "manager of Herod's household" (Luke 8:3). Joanna was one of several women helping Jesus financially once he began preaching!

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After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; *Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household*; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.
 – Luke 8:1-3



It's the road Jesus took to Capernaum

Early in his ministry, Jesus was nearly killed by the people of his hometown. So he left Nazareth and made a new home in Capernaum (Matthew 4:13). Since he was walking, it is highly likely that he took the most direct route, passing through the “Valley of the Doves” at Mt. Arbel.

Herod the Great had destroyed nearby Zippori and marched on Arbel just a few years before Jesus

was born. Herod's slaughter of families there was a dark prequel to his killing of infants in and around Bethlehem in the last few months of his life.

Herod's son Antipas, who questioned Jesus on the day of his crucifixion, had his capitol in Zippori before moving it to Tiberias. This was the same Herod Antipas who had John the Baptizer executed in a fortress called Machaerus, not far from Jericho.



Arbel's heartbreak

We don't know much about Jesus between the age of 12 and the beginning of his ministry, when he was around the age of 30.

However, we do know that Jesus was a carpenter, which means he worked with both wood and stone. The Greek word used in the New Testament to describe the profession of Joseph and Jesus was "tekton," which means "artisan" or "craftsman."

In addition, the nearby town of Zippori (also called "Sepphoris") was under construction during the same time period. The town had been destroyed in a failed revolt about the time Jesus was born. Herod's son Antipas made the town his administrative center, taking advantage of the opportunity to rebuild it to his own liking.

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Daughter Babylon,
doomed to
destruction,
happy is the one who
repays you according to
what you have done to us.

*Happy is the one who seizes
your infants and dashes them
against the rocks.*

- Psalm 137:8-9

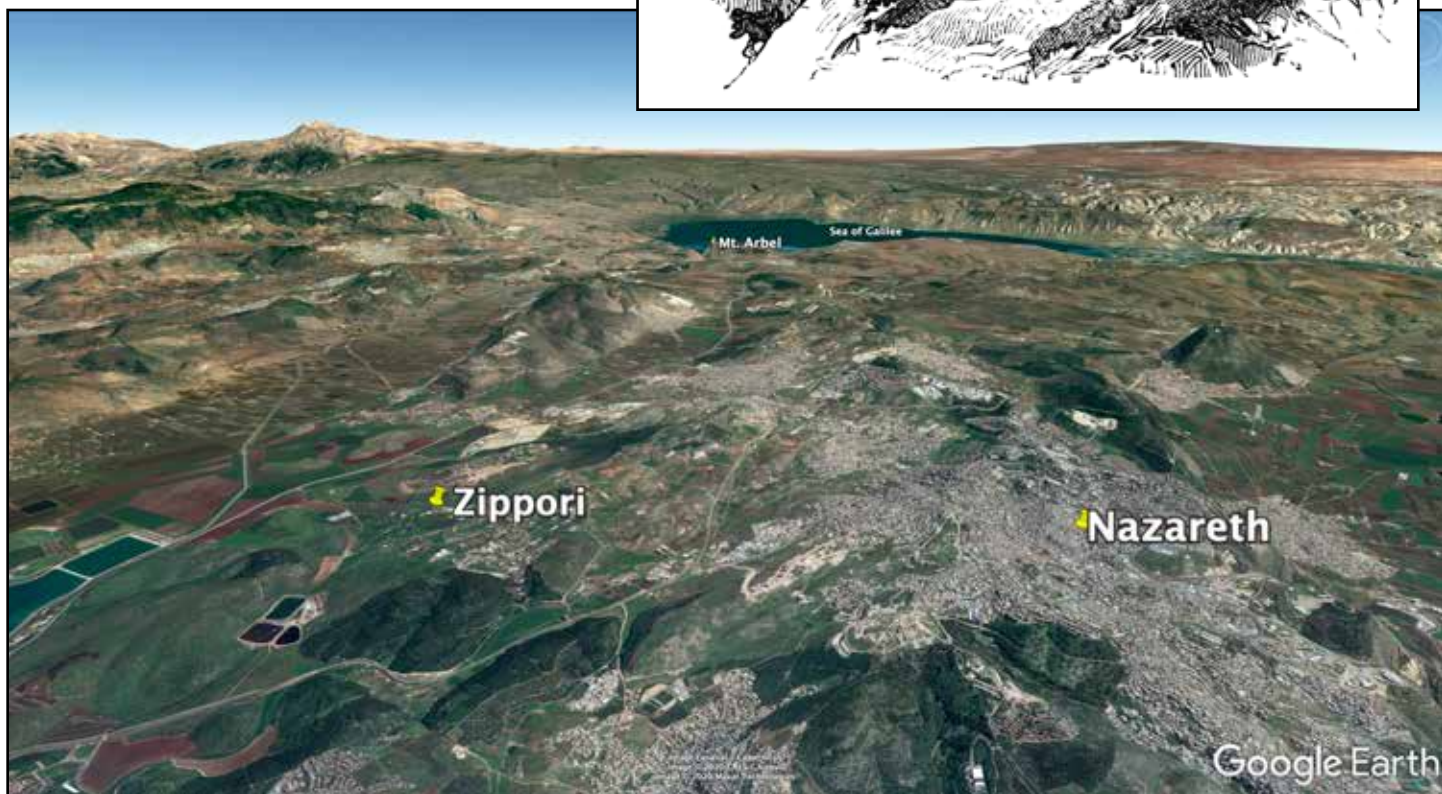
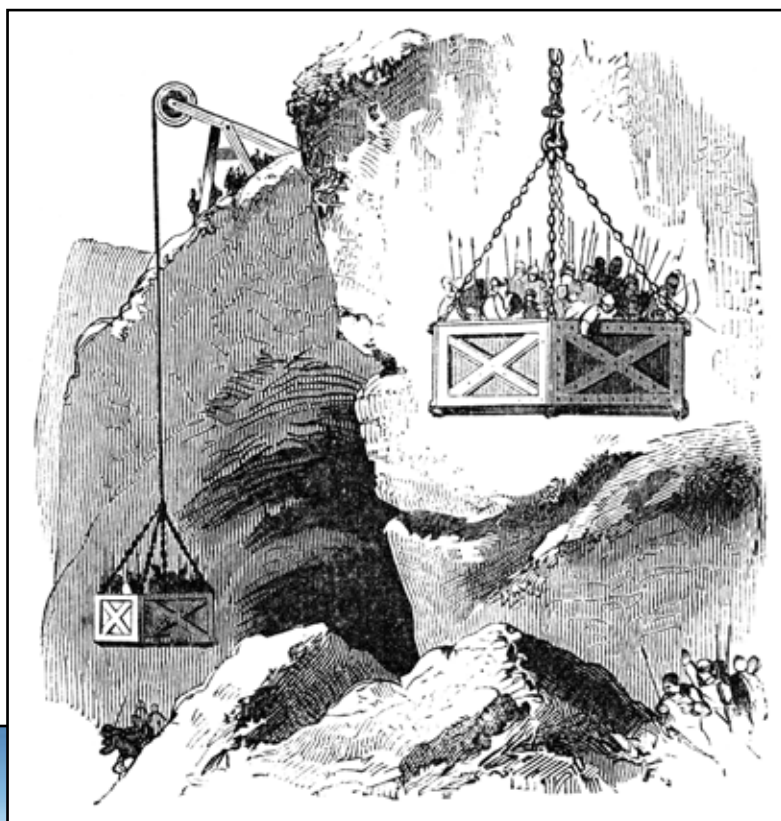
When Herod the Great was taking Judea for his own rule, he marched against Zippori, took it, and then headed to the Sea of Galilee. The highest point overlooking the area was at a farming community named Arbel. Every invading army coming against this land would have wanted to take the peaks of “Mt. Arbel.”

The people of Arbel hid in the caves of the cliffs, as their ancestors had done when attacked by the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians and Greeks. Now the Romans were marching against them, led by Herod. Herod devised a way to lower his troops in “baskets” to the hiding places. The soldiers lit fires at the entrances of the caves, forcing people to either die of smoke inhalation or to come out of hiding. When they came out, the soldiers ran swords through the adults and threw the children to their death on the rocks below.

Throwing people to their deaths wasn’t uncommon. In a fight against Edom, the army of Israel had once thrown 10,000 men to their deaths in the rocky crags of the Judean Wilderness (2 Chronicles 25:12).

The Assyrians and Babylonians had been especially cruel in their invasion of the Galilee area and the people of Arbel had paid a terrible price for farming the land on such a valuable overlook. No doubt, their families had never forgotten the days when their infants had been tossed off the cliffs. Now Herod the Great - who would later kill infant boys in Bethlehem - had done the same thing.

If you had been in their place, how would you have reacted to the teaching of Jesus, who insisted his followers must “love their enemies?” He may have preached that very message in the Arbel synagogue!



The Golan Heights and Northern Israel

The further away we travel from Jerusalem, the more we'll see of ancient pagan influences. Nowhere is that more obvious than when we travel to Banias, or as Jesus knew it, "Caesarea Philippi."

- The Jordan River begins at the base of Mt. Hermon. The closest tributary to the mountain is at Banias.
- The large cave at the base of Mt. Hermon once held an endless supply of water. An earthquake on New Year's Day, 1837 destroyed all the cities around the Sea of Galilee and closed this cave. The mysterious, instantaneous and never-ending supply of life-giving water made this location a place of pagan worship.
- The worship of Pan was so frightening and evil, our words "panic," "pandemonium" and "pandemic" remind us even today of how people felt when they came upon these cultic practices.

- The Greeks brought their gods with them to this region when Alexander the Great swept through the Middle East a little more than 300 years before Jesus was born.
- The Romans came next, instituting emperor worship in the same general time period of Jesus' birth.



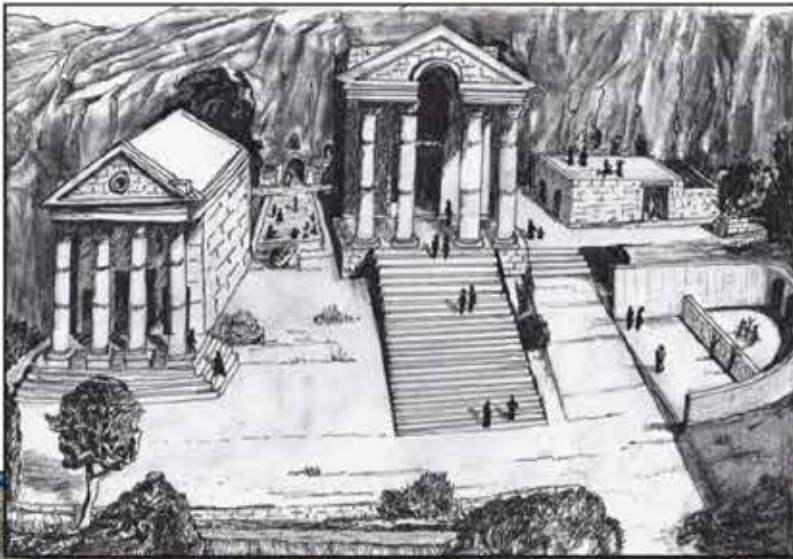
When Jesus took his young disciples to Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16), he was taking them to the most evil corner of Israel. Because of the water supply, they almost certainly followed the Jordan River and the road that led past Omrit, to Banias, and even on to Damascus.

A temple

honoring Augustus as god was built over the cave at Banias, and on a high hill overlooking the Hula Valley at a site called Omrit. The illustration at the bottom of the next page is of a typical temple of Roman emperor worship. The ruins of Omrit are pictured next to the drawing. Herod the Great is believed to have been the builder of this temple.

- Caesarea Philippi was named in honor of the Roman emperor by Philip the Tetrarch, one of the sons of Herod the Great. It kept this name only while the Romans ruled. Another temple honoring Augustus was built over the cave at Banias (see the drawing at the upper left of the next page), insinuating that the gift of never-ending water was a gift of Caesar. Also pictured in the drawing (left to right) is the worship altar of Pan, a temple to Zeus and another place of Pan worship.
- And in a related matter, the tribe of Dan moved to this region when it tired of fighting the Philistines because of its assigned location in the Shephelah (see Judges 18). Unfortunately, this move put Dan in the direct path of the Assyrians, who completely destroyed the tribe. Dan is also the only one of the 12 original tribes missing from the list of tribes in Revelation 7:5-8. One of two golden calves was set up at a pagan temple in Dan (see photo, next page, of the sacrificial area of that temple).

Refresh your memory: Read Matthew 16-17





The Galilee

The farmland of the Galilee includes many of the most familiar places of the Bible ... past, present and *future*!

- Nazareth is in the heart of the Galilee. Though it is a large city today (75,000 people), it was a small village of a few hundred when Jesus grew up there. Nazareth has the largest population of Christians (30,000) of any community in Israel. Nazareth Illit (“Upper” Nazareth) adds another 40,000 Jewish residents to the area.
- The name “Nazareth” comes from a Hebrew word that can be translated “branch,” or “shoot.” If so, the name carries prophetic connections to the promise of a “branch,” or a “shoot” coming from Jesse’s stump. If this is true, Nathanael certainly didn’t see it, for he wondered if “anything good” could come from Nazareth (John 1:46)! An alternative meaning for the words is “watchtower,” indicating it might have once held some military importance due to its location overlooking the valleys below.
- Bet She’an (known as Scythopolis after the Greek conquest) has a long history as a pagan city. The bodies of Saul and his sons were nailed to the wall of the old city (1 Samuel 31:8-13). After the Greek conquest, Alexander the Great made a new city on flat ground, making it one of the ten cities of the Decapolis. The Romans enlarged Scythopolis. It was the only one of the Decapolis communities on the western bank of the Jordan River.
- **The valleys of the lower Galilee go by several names.** As a general reference, the Jezreel (“God sows”) Valley connects the Mediterranean coast to the Jordan River. However, the large plain between Nazareth and Megiddo is also known as the Plain of Esdraelon (Greek for “Jezreel”). The Kishon River flows below Mt. Carmel toward the ocean, and that area is sometimes called the Kishon Valley. Elijah ordered the deaths of hundreds of false prophets at the Kishon Valley (1 Kings 18:40). Most famously, the wide battlefield below Megiddo became known as the plain of Armageddon.

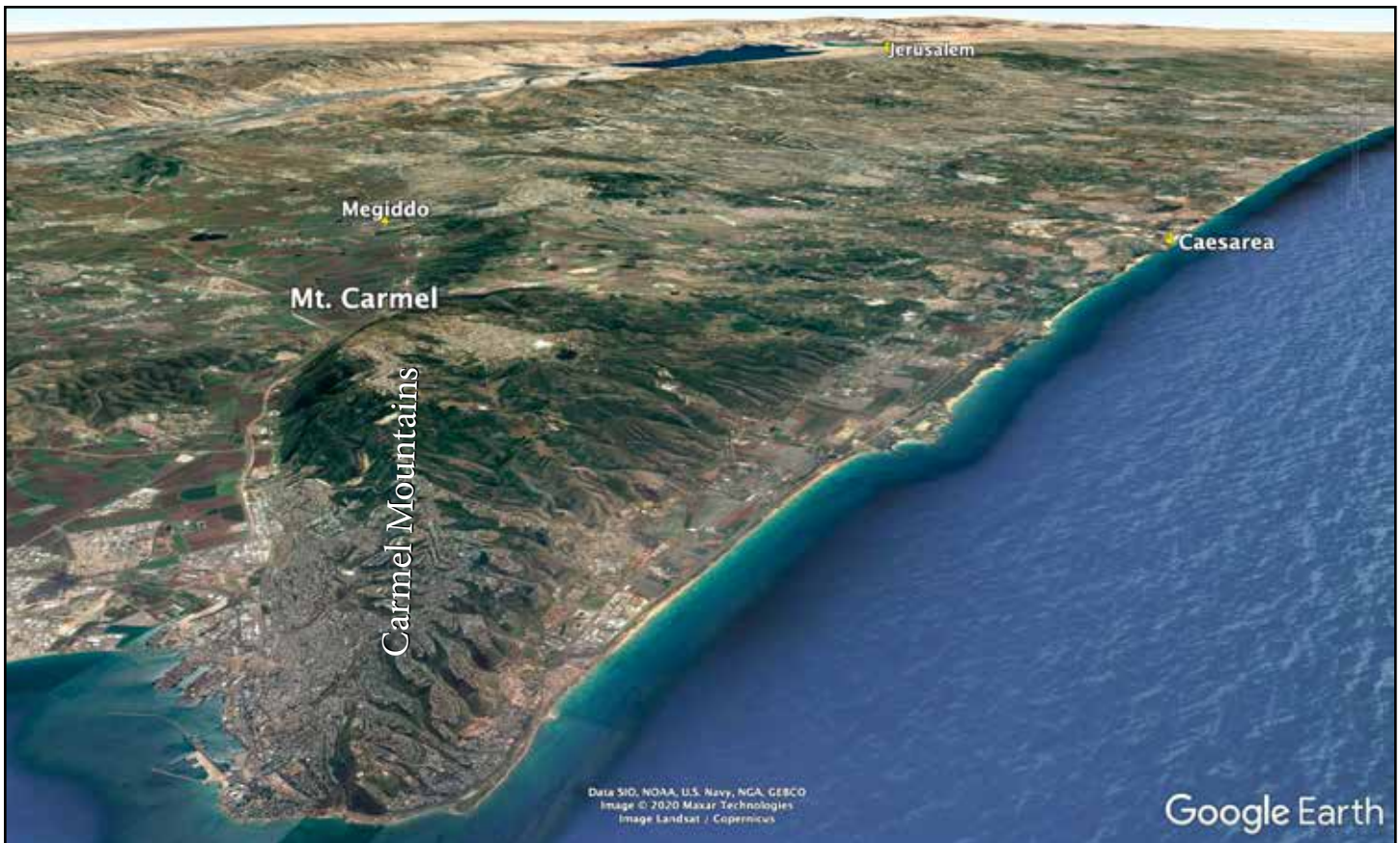


The key to Megiddo's importance lay in its location at the easiest pass through the Carmel Mountain Range (left). Even today the major highways of the Galilee intersect here. The ruins of Megiddo (above) come in layers. As the city was conquered over and over again, the artificial hill became taller and taller.

Megiddo

For being one of the most important cities in world history, Megiddo is surprisingly unknown to most readers of the Bible. Mentioned only 12 times in the Scripture, Megiddo is the most fought-over city in world history!

- The key to Megiddo's importance is its location. The Carmel Mountains are a natural barrier for traders, military personnel and other land travelers. A narrow opening at Megiddo became known as the Megiddo Pass. Whoever had control over Megiddo controlled the pass. Whoever controlled Megiddo, therefore, controlled transportation between Egypt and Asia and could charge a toll for using the pass.
- Eric Cline (*The Battles of Armageddon*) lists 35 battles that have taken place in the wide plain below Megiddo.
- With each battle in ancient times, the city was rebuilt on the ruins of the previous residents. Therefore, the tel of Megiddo grew very tall ("Har" in Hebrew). The valley below "Tall Megiddo" ("Har-Megiddo") gradually became known as Har-Megeddon, or as it came to be called, "Armageddon."
- Deborah and Barak fought here (Judges 4-5), as did Jehu and Joram. Kings Ahaziah (2 Kings 9) and Josiah (2 Kings 23) both died at Megiddo. In modern times, Napoleon and Allenby fought important battles in the valley.



Note the smooth coastline of Israel south of modern-day Haifa. Herod the Great decided to build a world-class seaport even when no natural harbor was available.

Caesarea Maritima

Caesarea by the Mediterranean was the crown jewel of Herod the Great's building projects. Even now the 2,000-year-old ruins bear witness to an amazing city that would have been favorably compared to any port in the Roman empire. Indeed, Josephus the historian said it equaled the port in Athens.

- With no natural harbor south of the Carmel Mountain Range, Herod determined to build a man-made harbor at this location. A small fishing village already existed here. Destroying the village, Herod's engineers and builders devised a way to stack a type of volcanic rock under the water as the foundation of an artificial breakwater wall.
- Finished within a decade of Jesus' birth, Caesarea was four times larger than Jerusalem in the First Century.
- The city featured a theater looking out over the ocean and a hippodrome that ran parallel to the beach. Gladiatorial games were held at the hippodrome. After the Jewish revolt of 70 CE was repressed, one historian says 2,500 Jewish prisoners were slaughtered in staged "games."
- Herod named the city in honor of Augustus. A temple to honor Augustus as god was the most prominent building in the harbor, the landmark for every ship that crossed the horizon.
- There is no natural fresh water source for the city. As many as five aqueducts brought water from fresh water sources to Caesarea.
- Jesus never visited Caesarea, but the city plays a major role in the New Testament church. Philip the evangelist visited the city (Acts 8:40). Saul shipped out to Tarsus shortly after his conversion from this port (Acts 9:30). Peter visited Cornelius the centurion at Caesarea (Acts 10-11). Many of the "missionary journeys" of Paul either began or ended at the port (Acts 18:22 is an example). Most famously, Paul was imprisoned at Caesarea for two years as Roman authorities debated what to do with him. Eventually, they put him on a ship and sent him to Rome (Acts 23-27).



Aqueducts brought fresh water to this seaside city.



The theater had seating for 3,000.



Chariot races and other “blood sports” were held at the hippodrome.



Remains of the man-made harbor are still easily identified.



Herod's swimming pool juttred into the sea!



Jerusalem

- One of the most recognizable cities in the world, Jerusalem has about 800,000 residents and is perched at the top of the Judean Mountain Range (2,400 feet above sea level). Even so, it is amazingly close (15 miles) to the Dead Sea (visible in the top right corner of the photo above), the lowest place on earth! The rugged landscape between Jerusalem to the Dead Sea is known as the Judean Wilderness.
- Modern Jerusalem is made up of segregated neighborhoods of Jewish and Arab citizens. Inside the Jewish community are subsets of neighborhoods, ranging from the ultra-Orthodox to secular Jews. A small population of Christians also live in Jerusalem, though not in segregated neighborhoods.
- Jerusalem's Old City is the focus of Bible students. Though 30,000 people live inside the city today, it is like a living museum. Some of the most important history the world has ever known took place inside or very near the Old City Walls.
- There are seven entrances, or "gates," to the Old City." You can find the Jewish Quarter and the Western Wall and the Temple Mount through the Dung Gate.
- Jerusalem has changed dramatically over the centuries. When Abraham brought Issac to Mt. Moriah, there was no city at all. When David took the city from the Jebusites (therein, "David's City"), it was very small. Jesus lived during the "Second Temple" period. Muslims arrived in the Seventh Century. The Crusaders made a relatively short appearance around 1100 CE. Only in the last 50 years has the modern city grown so large. For most of its history, Jerusalem's residents have lived in or very close to the Old City.





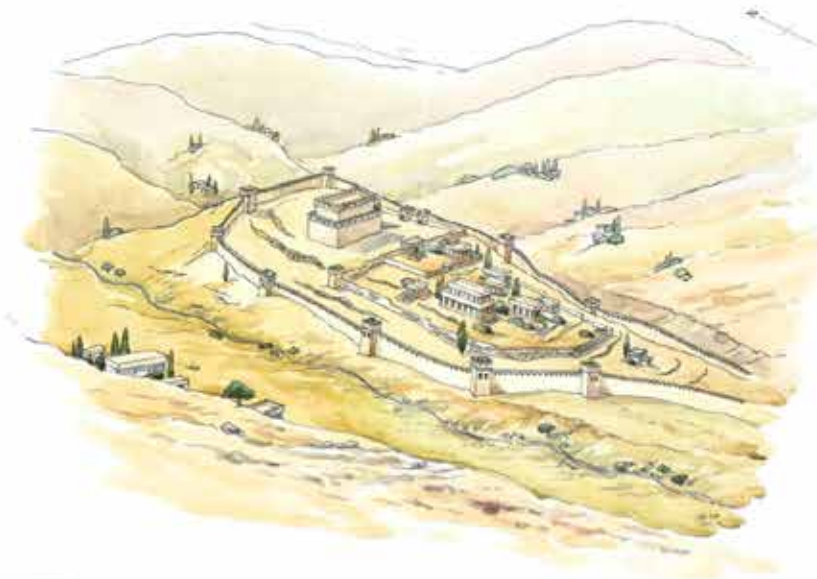
In the beginning, Jerusalem was nothing more than a collection of hills. The hills had a substructure of limestone rock ... rock that now gives Jerusalem its unique, “white-stone” look. Every building, street and block used for city walls or the Temple Mount was quarried from Jerusalem’s hills. With builders constantly taking away the rocks, the landscape of “Mt. Moriah” has changed significantly over the years. Many of the hills and valleys of biblical times are simply no longer present. In order to see the past, you’ll need to see beyond the modern city in front of you. These illustrations will help you envision the Jerusalem through the ages. And remember ... the modern city of Jerusalem that surrounds the Old City is very, very new. Until recent years, most people in this community lived inside the Old City Walls or a very short distance from those walls.



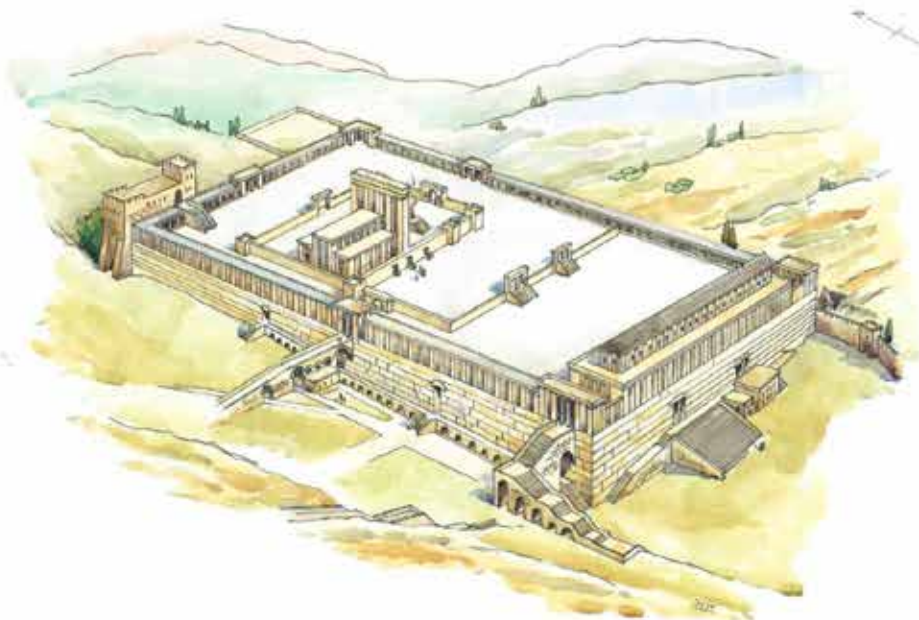
This photo was taken sometime in the late 1800s to early 1900s. Note the bare hills in the distance. Every inch of that space is covered in housing, businesses and roads today!



Early Biblical Period
Abraham and the Patriarchs

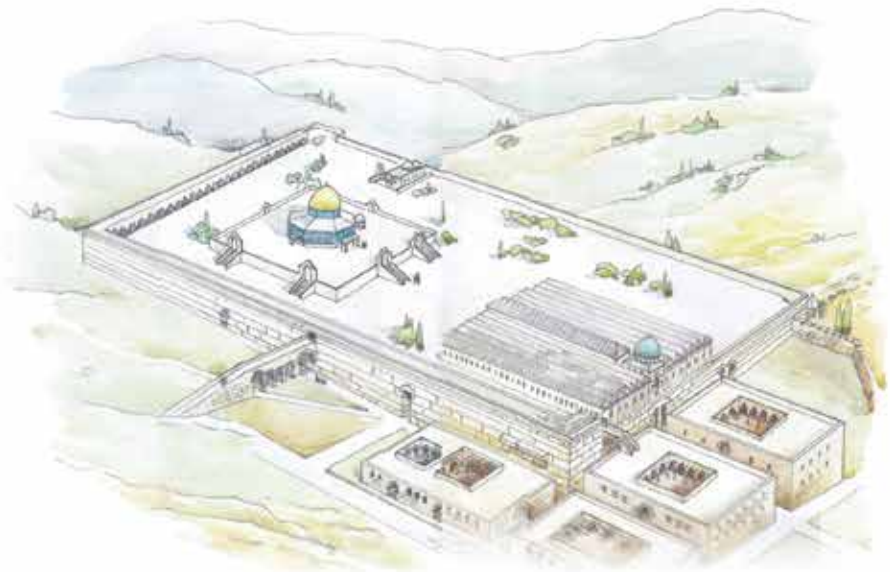


First Temple Period
David and Solomon



Second Temple Period
Jesus and the disciples

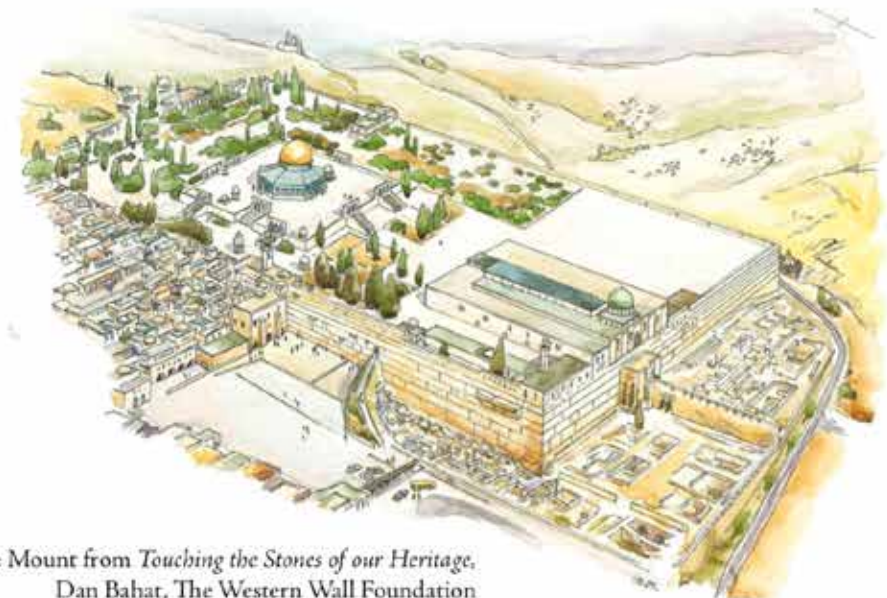
Early Muslim Period
638-1099 CE



Crusader Period
1099-1187



Modern Day Period
State of Israel reborn in 1948



Illustrations of the changing Temple Mount from *Touching the Stones of our Heritage*,
Dan Bahat, The Western Wall Foundation



The ancient “Wall of the Gentiles” (highlighted) separated the Court of the Gentiles from the interior of the Temple Mount, and the Temple itself. Warnings in Greek and Latin were posted, declaring: “No foreigner is to go beyond the balustrade and the plaza of the Temple zone. Whoever is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his death, which will follow.” Jesus may have cleared the *Gentile* area of the Temple of animals and money-changers.

The Temple Mount today

The undisputed center of Jerusalem’s Old City is the Temple Mount. In a city packed with buildings and people, the Temple Mount has a spacious, tree-lined spread of 37 acres.

- The centrally located, gold-covered Dome of the Rock was constructed in 692 CE on or very near the site of the Jewish Temple. It is not a mosque. Rather, it is a holy place for Muslims, who believe Muhammad was miraculously transported from Mecca to “the furthest mosque,” where he rose to heaven during prayer to hear instructions from Allah.
- The silver-domed building on the southern side of the Temple Mount is the Al Aqsa Mosque. The Dome of the Rock is covered with elaborate quotations in Arabic script both inside and out. Jesus is mentioned twice in these quotations on the inside of the building, both denying his place in the Trinity.¹
- The Dome of the Rock’s gold covering gradually deteriorated and was replaced with aluminum and bronze alloy in 1960, which was painted gold. In 1998, King Hussein of Jordan donated \$8.2 million to cover the dome in 80 kilograms (176 pounds) of gold.
- The Temple Mount is under the authority of the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf. Israel took control of Jerusalem in 1967 but allowed Jordanian forces to keep control of the Mount because of its importance to Islam.

¹The first quotation is from 4:171, Yusuf Ali: “The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a Messenger of God, and His Word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers, and say not ‘Three’ – Cease!” The second quote is from 19:35 Sūrat Maryam: “Oh God, bless Your Messenger and Your servant Jesus son of Mary. Peace be on him the day he was born, and the day he dies, and the day he shall be raised alive! Such was Jesus, son of Mary, (this is) a statement of the truth concerning which they doubt. It becometh not (the Majesty of) God that He should take unto Himself a son. Glory be to Him!” On a side note, the Quran also denies the Jesus died on the cross (4:157, Yusuf Ali).

The Al Aqsa Mosque has a capacity for at least 5,000. Muslims come to the mosque for daily prayers. Attendance is highest on Fridays at noon. After submitting to a careful search, non-Muslims are allowed on the Temple Mount only at certain hours on certain days. Entrance to the mosque and the Dome of the Rock is forbidden for non-Muslims. The Dome of the Rock covers the “Foundational Stone” and probably sits where the previous two Jewish temples stood.



Eight free standing entrances with multiple arches surround the Dome of the Rock. According to Muslim tradition, scales will be attached to the arches to weigh the deeds of mankind at the end of time.



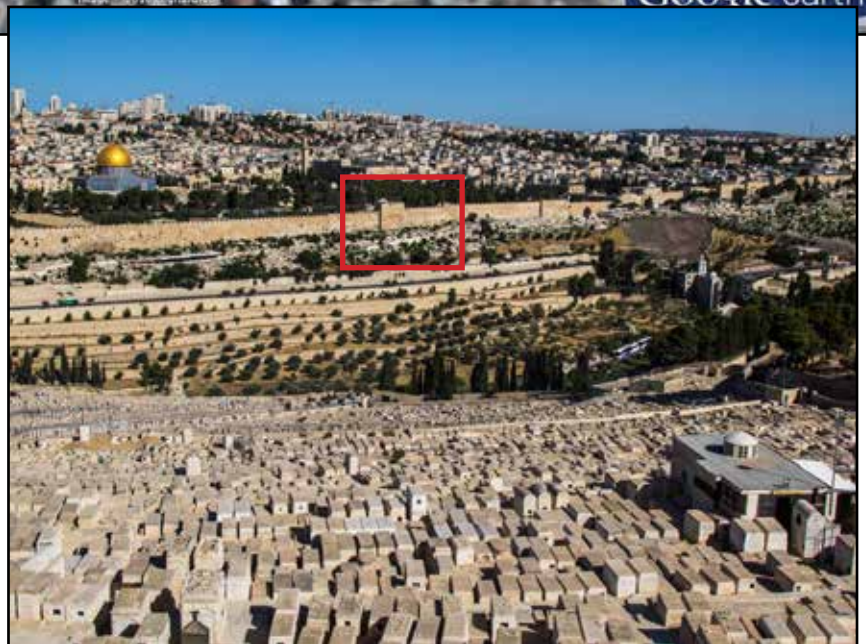
The Eastern Gate is sealed shut. Jewish and Christian traditions promote the belief that the Messiah will one day enter through the Eastern Gate. A Muslim cemetery is also positioned in front of the gate in the belief that the promised Messiah would make himself unclean by walking over graves, and thus be kept out of the Temple Mount area.



The Kidron Valley

The Kidron Valley plays a prominent role in some great Bible stories. It also provided a defensive element to the eastern walls of the City of David and the Temple Mount. Attackers approaching Jerusalem up the steep slope of the Kidron Valley would have been at a severe disadvantage. Defenders on the high ground would have had an enormous advantage.

- David left Jerusalem after Absalom's revolt by way of the Kidron Valley (2 Samuel 15:23).
- Kings Asa, Josiah and Hezekiah used the Kidron as a place to burn the idols and altars to pagan gods in the Kidron (1 Kings 15:13; 2 Kings 23:4, 6, 12; 2 Chronicles 29:16).
- A prophecy in Jeremiah makes a connection between "a valley where dead bodies and ashes are thrown" and the Kidron (Jeremiah 31:40).
- It is believed that Ezekiel's vision of a "valley of dry bones" was set here (**Read Ezekiel 37:1-14**).
- Blood from animals sacrificed at the Temple above was washed into the Kidron Valley.
- Jesus and 11 disciples crossed the Kidron to reach the Garden of Gethsemane (John 18:1) a short while before Judas led soldiers to the place where Jesus was praying.



The Kidron Valley and symbols of death have long gone hand-in-hand. Thousands of graves cover the Mt. of Olives today, which is separated from the Temple Mount only by the Kidron Valley. You can see the Eastern Gate in this photo, highlighted in the center of the Temple Mount wall.



Gethsemane

- In Hebrew and Aramaic, “gat” or “geth” means “press” and “shemane” means “oil.” Literally, then, “Gethsemane” was the place of the oil press. An oil press would have naturally been placed at the bottom of a hill covered with olive trees. Who would want to drag heavy bags of harvested olives *up* the Mount of Olives?
- Olives were first cracked open by means of a millstone. After the virgin olive oil was captured, cracked olives were then bagged, stacked and pressed by means of leverage. Heavy stones were used as weights to make sure every last drop of oil was squeezed from the olives (photo on right). That Jesus would pray with such a heavy weight upon him in this place makes Gethsemane amazingly symbolic. If you’ll recall, Jesus felt such an enormous pressure as he prayed, blood vessels in his forehead ruptured and mingled with his sweat (Luke 22:44). It appeared that he was sweating blood!
- Olives are harvested in the fall, so a covered oil press area would have been an ideal place to camp out during crowded Jerusalem for the spring Passover. More than likely, Jesus had led his disciples to this area many times, which is why Judas knew where to find him.
- The Church of All Nations was built in the traditional location of the Garden of Gethsemane in the early part of the 20th Century. It is surrounded by very old olive trees (top photo).





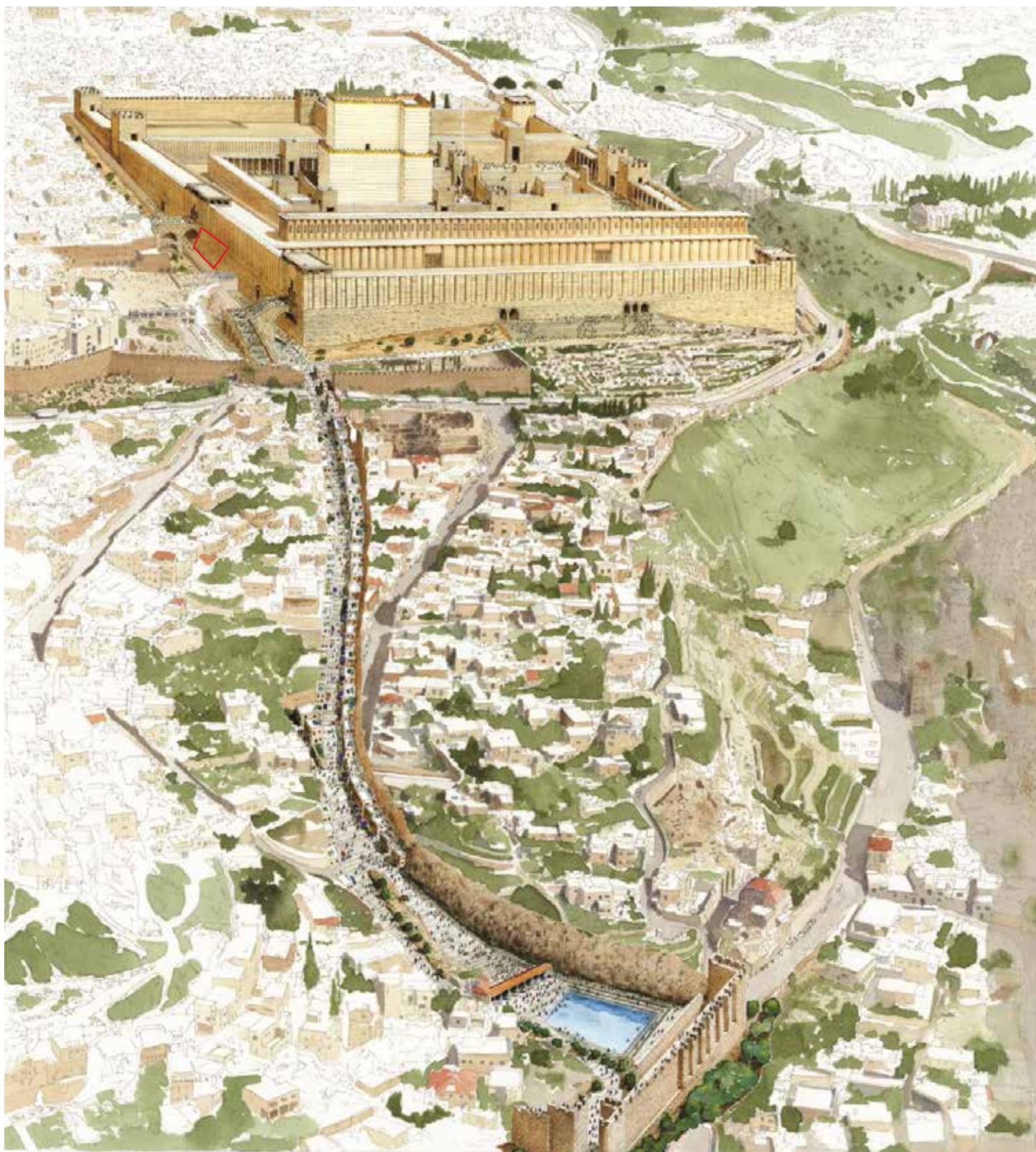
The Via Dolorosa

Though not mentioned in the Bible, the Via Dolorosa is perhaps the most famous street in the world. This is said to be the “Way of Suffering” Jesus traveled as he walked toward his crucifixion.

- The Via Dolorosa of today is not the same route Jesus walked on the day of his crucifixion. As is the case with other ancient cities, Jerusalem has grown taller in the past 2,000 years as the city has been destroyed and rebuilt multiple times.
- Though the entire path for pilgrims today is known as the way of the cross, technically, the “Via Dolorosa” is a single street on the route (see the map above).
- One of the few places to see any of the stones Jesus would have known on his journey to the cross is in the basement of the Sisters of Zion convent. What has been uncovered there is believed to be the pavement stones near the area where Jesus was tried by Pilate and tortured by the soldiers. It is not possible to know the exact location of these events, but no doubt the stones below the convent are very close to some of the events that happened on Good Friday.
- The modern-day route is more important to Catholic and Orthodox Christians than it is to Protestants. Fourteen “Stations of the Cross” are positioned along the way, five of them inside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Catholic and Orthodox groups will stop at each “station” for readings and prayers.



The Via Dolorosa, with the Fifth Station of the Cross marked by the (round and engraved) street signs and over the doorway.



The Temple Mount in the time of Jesus. This illustration shows the southern approach to the Temple Mount. The Pool of Siloam is visible at the bottom of the illustration. A wide street provided access for the throngs of holiday visitors to the city as they made their way toward the Temple. The Kidron Valley brackets the right side of the City of David while the wide street brackets the left. The Temple itself was about three times as large as the Dome of the Rock. The Western Wall (highlighted in red on the left side of the Temple Mount wall in this illustration) of modern-day fame is a section of the First-Century Temple Mount retaining wall that was not destroyed in 70 CE. The Temple and most of the retaining wall was completely destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE.

- used courtesy of the City of David -



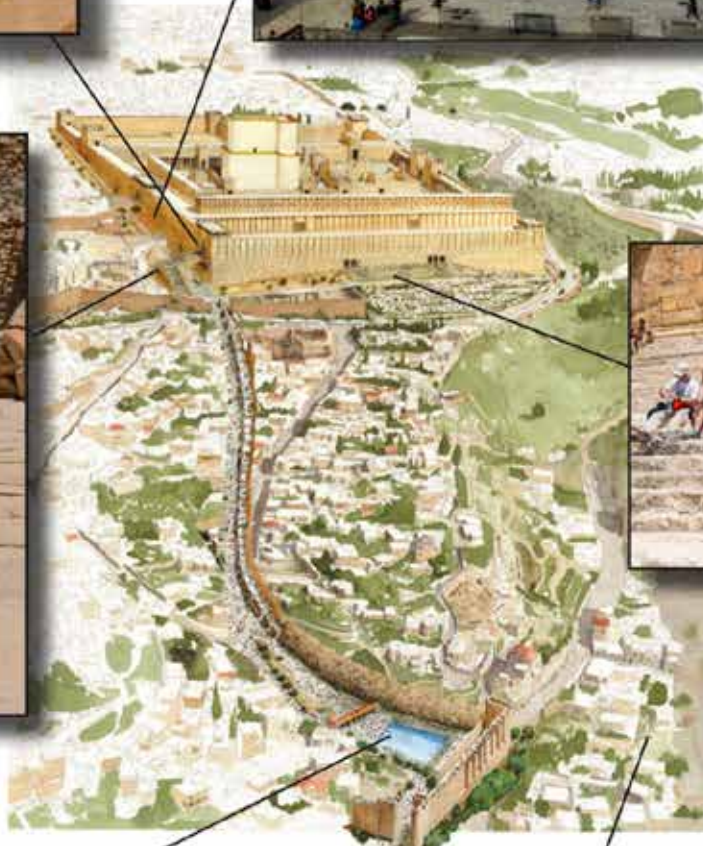
Robinson's Arch



Western Wall Plaza



First Century street and shop entrances along the Western Wall.



First Century steps leading to southern entrance of the Temple Mount



Pool of Siloam



Kidron Valley

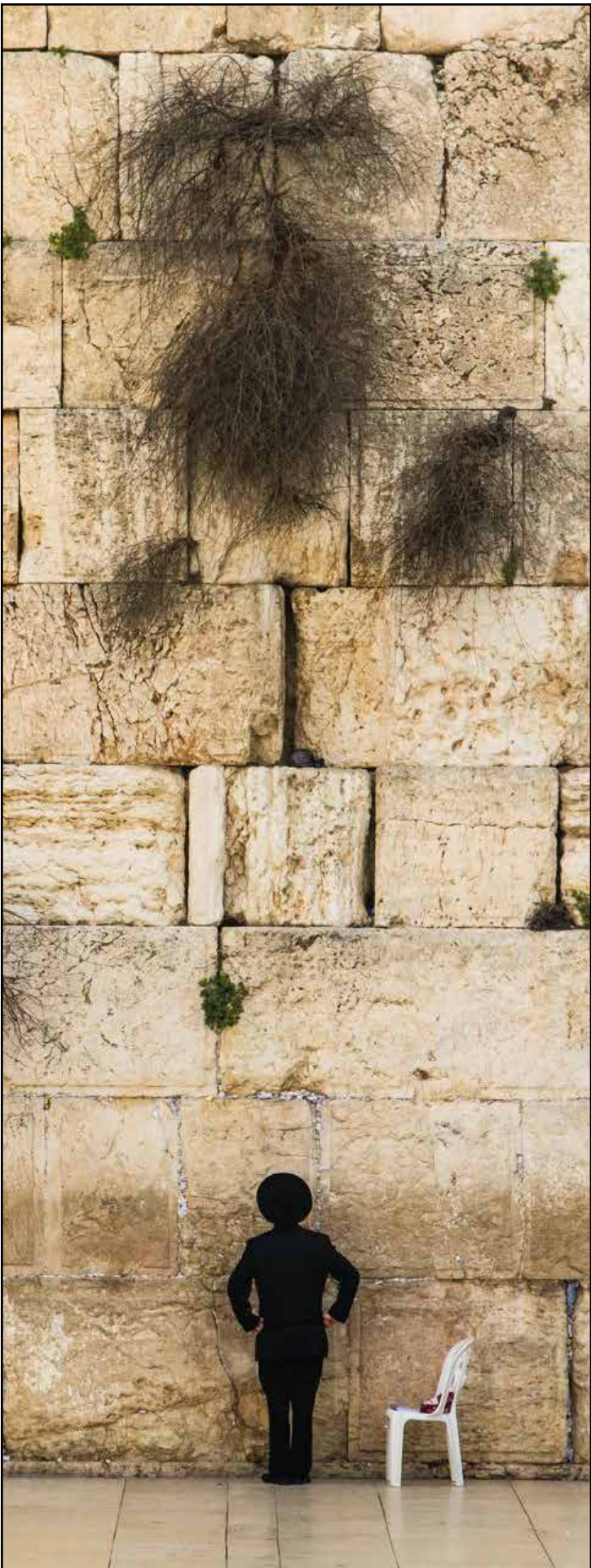
The Western Wall

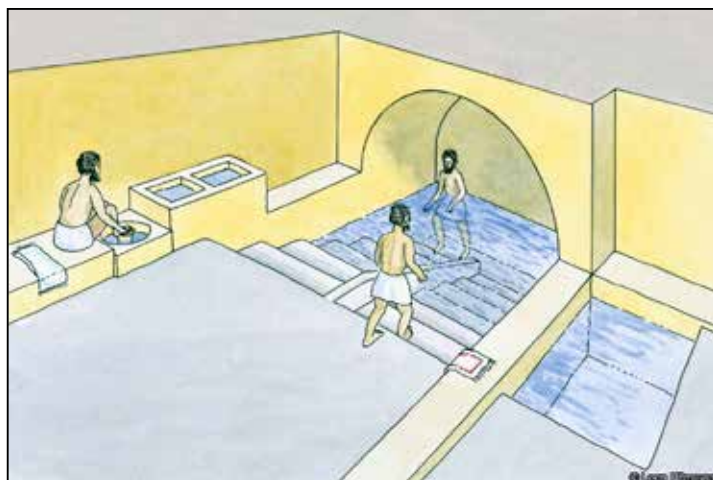
The Western Wall is the most sacred place in the world to Jewish people.

- The Western Wall is a section of the western side of the Temple Mount. When the Temple itself and most of the Temple Mount wall was destroyed in 70 CE, a section of the western side of the Temple Mount Wall was left standing. As such, these stones are the closest connection we have to the last Temple.
- The stones dating back to the First Century have a distinctive, “dressed” appearance. Used exclusively by Herod the Great, these stones are in the “Herodian” style. Smaller, less precise stones were added in subsequent centuries.
- The wall is a place of prayer, and people of all faiths are welcome to pray there. It is customary to put written prayer requests into the wall. Men are requested to have head covering. Women have an option of covering their heads, but most do not. Men and women pray in separate areas of the wall. A new area for both men and women has recently been opened.
- Excavations underneath the modern day community along the western side of the Temple Mount have exposed much more of the First Century Temple Mount complex.
- Jewish people did not have free access to the wall for much of the time between 70 CE and 1967. During the Six-Day War, Jewish forces recaptured Jerusalem on June 7, 1967. Ever since, Jewish people have celebrated their spiritual identity at the area.



The celebration of Jerusalem Day brings about a strong patriotic fervor at the Western Wall.





One enters a mikvah on one side “unclean,” bathes and prays, and then exits “clean” on the opposite side.

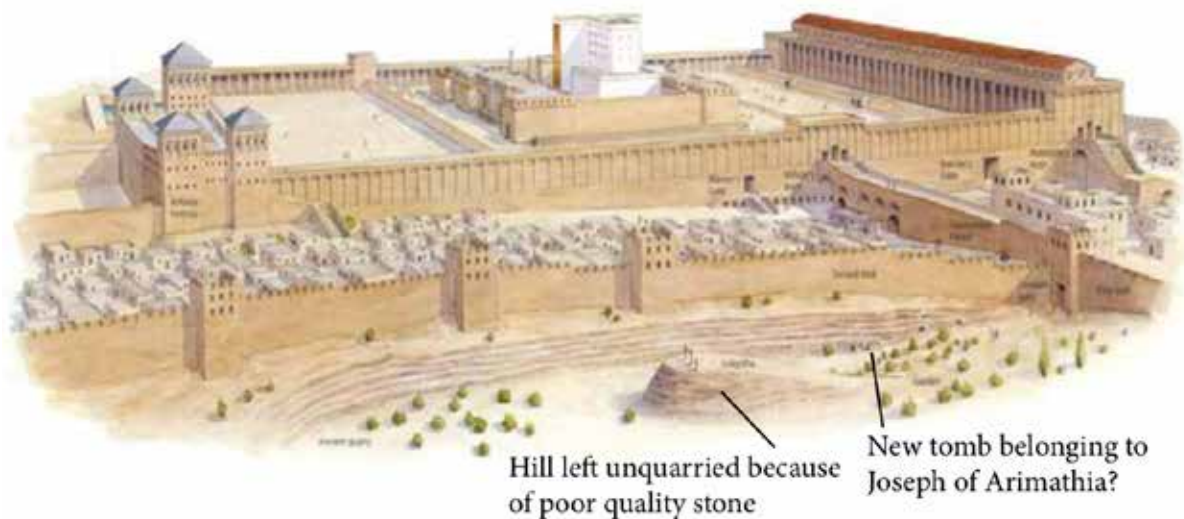
Baptism/Ritual washing

Perhaps the primary means of a Christian identifying with Jesus is through believer’s baptism. Most Christians, however, are surprised to find that Jewish people were already practicing ritual washing long before Jesus lived.

- The idea of washing the body as an outward sign of ritual cleanliness has a scriptural foundation in Psalm 24:3-4, which asks, “Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart ...”
- A place of ritual washing is called a mikvah. Typically, every synagogue had a mikvah. There are several First-Century mikvaot around the southwestern corner of the Temple Mount. On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), these places of ritual washing were no doubt the places where 3,000 new believers in Jesus were baptized. The huge ritual washing area at the Pool of Siloam was also a short walk away.
- A person could practice ritual washing for several reasons. Jewish women practiced the washing to achieve ritual purity after menstruation or childbirth. Jewish men practiced it for ritual purity. New eating utensils were washed in the purification waters before being used the first time. And most importantly, if a non-Jewish person wanted to convert to Judaism, ritual washing was part of the process.
- When John the Baptizer was drawing crowds to the Jordan River, he did not have to explain the ritual to them. Immersion in the river would have served as a sign of re-commitment for repentant sinners. Because every one of his hearers - including the Pharisees and Temple priests - already practiced ritual washing, his demand that they “Repent!” was the equivalent of charging them with being spiritually lost. Think of how insulting it would be for someone telling a pastor that he needed to be saved! As people flocked to hear John preach, news of the movement spread across the country.
- The Qumran Community, only a few miles from where John was baptizing near Jericho, practiced ritual immersion multiple times a day. John wasn’t a part of the Essenes, but he was cut from the same cloth.
- Jesus asked his followers to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This trinitarian confession was radically different from the ritual immersion practiced in Judaism.



This First Century mikvah was found near the Temple Mount with some washing utensils still in it. Look on your left as we approach the “southern steps” of the Temple Mount.



This illustration comes from the English Standard Version Study Bible (Crossway Bibles, Wheaton, Illinois). The immediate value of this illustration is to see the different placement of the city wall in the First Century. No crucifixion would have taken place inside the walls. Ironically, archaeological evidence of the exact placement of the city wall during the time period has yet to be confirmed. The collection of buildings known as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher stands over this area today.

The Church of the Holy Sepulcher

The central belief of Christianity is that Jesus died on a cross for the sins of the world, was buried in a nearby tomb and raised to life on the third day. A church has stood over what is believed to be the location of these events since approximately 325 CE.

- The Church of the Holy Sepulcher (“tomb”) today is operated by six different denominations. The three main denominations are Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox and Roman Catholic. Because of sharp differences between these groups, a Muslim family holds the key to the main entrance.
- At some point in the Second Century, the Roman Emperor Hadrian reportedly built a temple to the goddess Aphrodite over the site of Jesus’ burial in an effort to permanently remove the tomb or any memory of the Christian story. However, when Constantine converted to Christianity 200 years later, he ordered the temple torn down and a church built over the site to preserve it.
- The mother of Constantine, Helena, came to Jerusalem and “found” many of the places mentioned in the Bible. While some of her findings were no doubt authentic, many had no basis of fact.
- The Church of the Holy Sepulcher has undergone many changes in the past 1,700 years, including complete destruction on two occasions. It was destroyed by Muslim forces in 630 and 1009. It also suffered severe damage from multiple earthquakes and fires.
- As a result of the intentional burying in the Second Century and repeated damage to the property through the centuries, there is no actual tomb of Christ remaining in the church. The unquarried hill known as Calvary is also covered by the building. It is best to visit the basement of the church if one wants to confirm the existence of the hill underneath the ornate decorations. There are also tombs from the time period inside the church, adjacent to the ornately decorated “tomb of Christ.”
- The greatest argument for the church being in the correct location of both the crucifixion and resurrection lies in the location’s selection so close to the actual event. However, there is no archaeological evidence confirming the exact location of either the crucifixion or resurrection anywhere in Jerusalem.
- Arguments against the church being in the correct location for both the crucifixion and resurrection could depend on its potential location inside the First Century city walls, the potential misleading of Hadrian in building the very first temple over the spot, and lack of archaeological evidence. Even so, for those willing to voice an opinion, most scholars believe the church is built in the correct location.



This photo, shot sometime before 1900, shows the landscape around “Gordon’s Calvary” before a modern-day bus station was built in front of the cliff (see photo below). Note the road in the foreground. Travelers are walking toward the Damascus Gate.

Gordon’s Calvary

Charles Gordon was a British army officer assigned to Jerusalem in 1882-83. His fascination with a rocky hill outside the city walls led to his conclusion that the eroding rock face might have been the real place of execution of ancient Jerusalem.

- Gordon developed a deep friendship with Horatio Spafford while in Jerusalem. Spafford lost his business when fire swept through Chicago in 1871. He and Anne lost their four daughters in a shipwreck two years later. From that experience came the words of *It is Well With My Soul*. The Spafford’s moved to Jerusalem in 1881 and formed what they called the “American Colony.” The American Colony Hotel includes a small museum dedicated to the Spafford family, and displays the original lyrics to the classic Christian hymn.
- The eroding nature of the hill caused stone masons to stop their quarrying efforts there, creating “stones the builders rejected.”
- A lightning strike in 2016 struck Gordon’s Calvary, removing a section of rock that once served as the “nose” of the skull face. The natural process of erosion on such a hill over the past 2,000 years is one reason scholars don’t believe Jesus was crucified here. Even if this is not the place of the crucifixion, however, Gordon’s Calvary gives us a better idea of the kind of place that would have been used for executions.
- Jerusalem would have only had one place of execution. In addition to the crucifixion of Jesus, Stephen was stoned at that same site. Remember the woman caught in adultery? Jesus rescued her ... but had her accusers carried out their threats, she would have died in the same place Jesus was crucified!

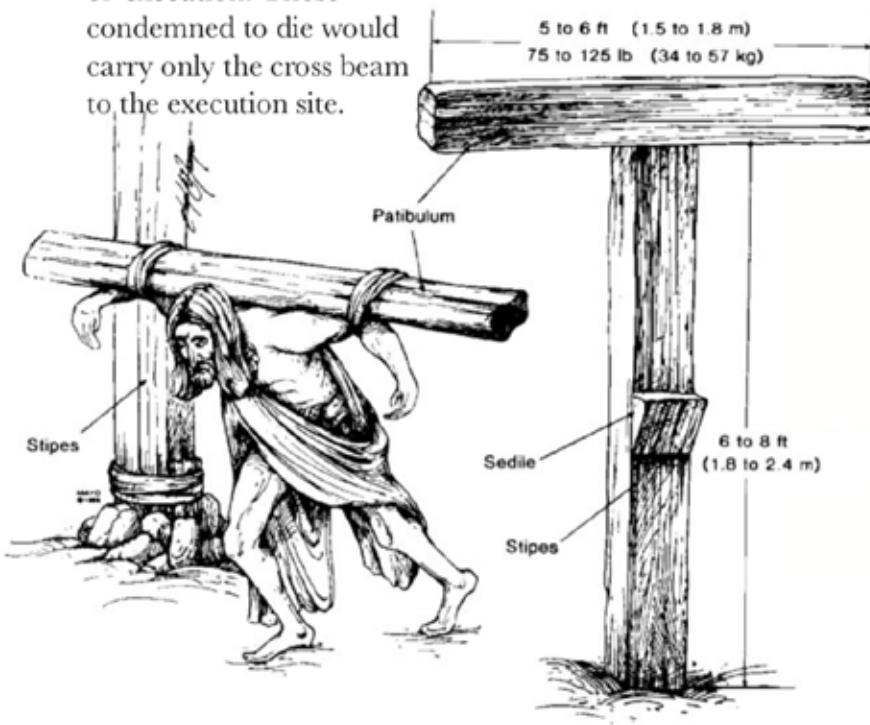


Crucifixion

- Jesus was certainly not the only person ever crucified. About a century before his execution, the Roman General Crassus is said to have crucified 6,000 prisoners of war after an attempted revolt led by slaves. Because of the heavy Roman presence in Israel, Jesus certainly had seen crucifixions, even as a child.
- Crucifixions were public events. Those punished in this manner would be displayed along roads or key intersections. The place of execution in Jerusalem would have been near the gate on the northwestern corner of the city. Today's Damascus Gate is in such a location.
- Jesus would not have been crucified at the top of a hill. Instead, he and others punished in this way would have been crucified along an area of traffic, at eye level. Anyone wanting to mock or insult the dying man would have been able to do so. Jesus was mocked in this way (Matthew 27:41, Mark 15:31, Luke 23:36).
- Victims of crucifixion were typically naked. The garments of Jesus were divided and claimed by others at the cross (Matthew 27:35, Mark 15:24, Luke 23:34 and John 19:23).
- Because of the practice of scourging, victims of crucifixion could die of blood loss, even before being nailed to a cross. However, most died of asphyxiation, or the inability to breathe. When a crucified man allowed his body to drop, as painful as it must have been, his lungs would fill with fluid. In order to breathe, he would be forced to press up on his feet, which caused intense pain. "Excruciating" means "out of crucifixion."
- If unclaimed, the bodies of crucified criminals would be left unburied, perhaps even in the city's garbage dump, the Hinnom Valley.
- The vertical part of a cross, called a "stipes" was left in a permanent position at the place of execution. Those condemned to die would carry only the cross beam to the execution site.



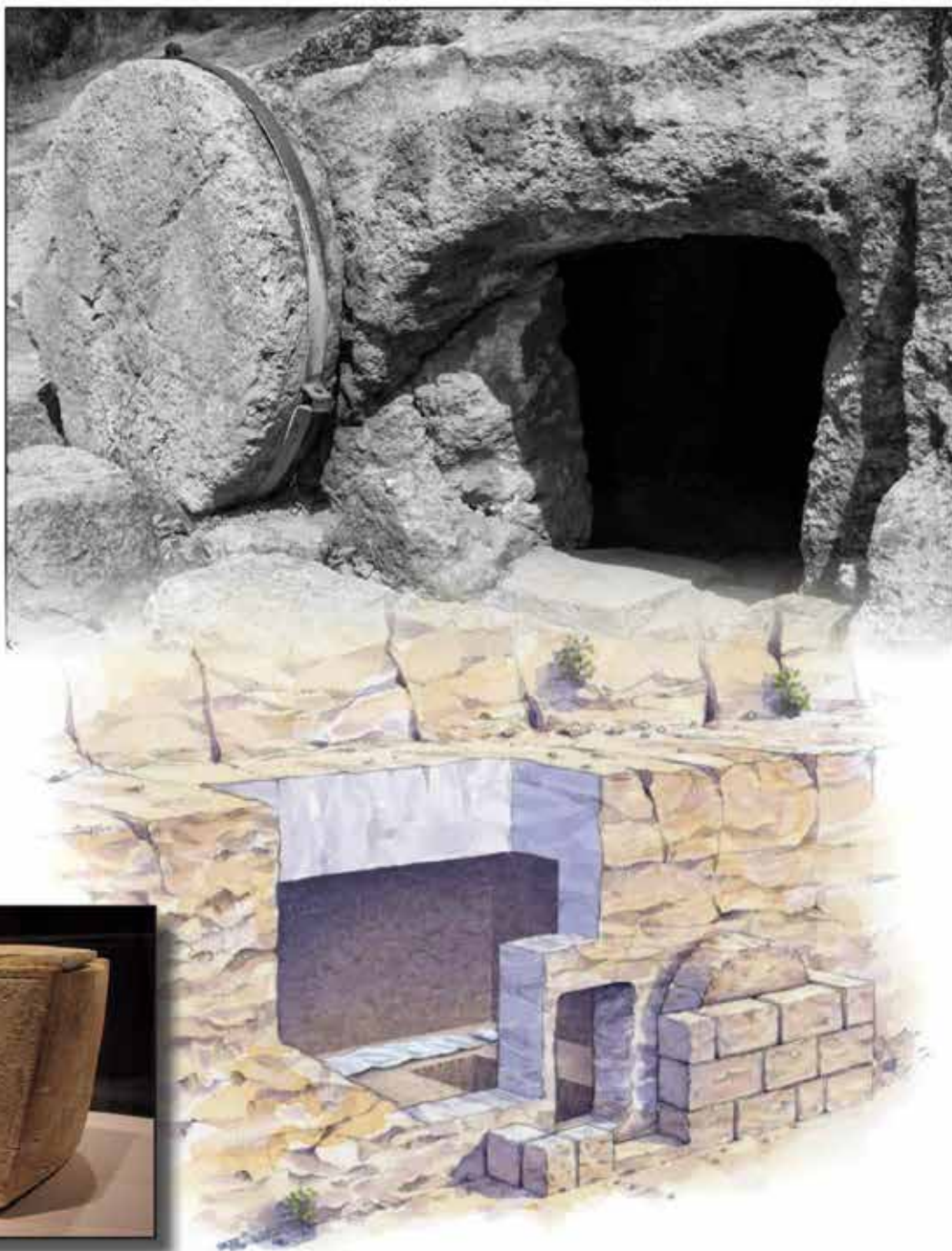
In the 1970s, a heel bone with the nail still in it was found in an ossuary of a man named Yehohanan. The nail was apparently so firmly attached to the heel, it could not be removed before burial. Though there is no doubt that the Romans practiced crucifixion as their preferred method of execution, this heel bone is the only tangible proof that crucifixion actually happened! (Photo courtesy the Israel Museum/photographer: Ilan Shtulman.)



Burial practices

After his death, the body of Jesus was wrapped in strips of linen, anointed with oils and spices and laid to rest in a new tomb in a garden that was near the place of crucifixion. **Read John 19:38-42.** As this passage notes (19:40), all of this was “in accordance to Jewish burial customs.”

- Jewish burial customs do not typically involve embalming. Rather, the body is allowed to decompose naturally. Because of this practice, even today burial is usually carried out on the same day of a person’s death. Once decomposition has taken place, a person’s remains were gathered and placed in small stone boxes called ossuaries.
- Each tomb needs ventilation and are thus not sealed tight. Note the small “window” you’ll see at the Garden Tomb.
- By tradition, a person’s spirit left the body within three days after burial. After three days, there was no hope even of a miraculous resurrection. Imagine the impact this had on the family and friends of Lazarus, who had been in his tomb four days! (See John 11:38-39.)



A rare First Century tomb with its rolling stone still in tact (top photo) can be found roadside in the Carmel Mountains. Bodies of the deceased were placed on stone benches inside the tomb. In due time, perhaps on the one-year anniversary of the death, loved ones would gather the decomposed remains and place them in a stone box called an ossuary (inset photo). The ossuaries would then be stored in another place inside the tomb. This practice allowed other family members to be placed in the tomb upon their deaths. The illustration comes from the English Standard Version Study Bible (Crossway Bibles, Wheaton, Illinois).

When did Jesus die?

Though Christian tradition holds to a “Good Friday” remembrance of the crucifixion, the Bible does not specifically say that Jesus died on Friday. However, there are enough details in the Gospels to give us a good estimation on the time line of events.

- Jesus died during the week of Passover preparation and celebration. The Passover celebration is mentioned more than 20 times in the Gospels’ account of the Week of Passion.
- Jesus was raised from the dead on “the first day of the week,” or Sunday (John 20:1).
- Jesus spoke of his coming death and resurrection on at least 12 occasions. Of these that are recorded for us, he spoke of his resurrection coming “on the third day” 11 times. He used an analogy of Jonah once, referring to the reluctant prophet being in the belly of a fish “three days and three nights.” (Matthew 12:40)
- Part of a day is considered a full day in matters of birth and death, both in ancient and modern cultures. Even if a person dies one minute after midnight, living only one minute of a day, the day of death will be recorded as if it is a full day. That being the case, the opportunity exists for a time line of a Friday death and “third-day” Sunday resurrection.
- Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were in a rush to place Jesus’ body in tomb (John 19:38-42). On any day other than Friday, their work would not have been so frantic. The work of burial would not have been permitted once sundown (and Shabbat) arrived.
- The Gospels record on six different occasions that the day of Jesus’ death was the “day of preparation.” (Matthew 27:62, Mark 15:42, Luke 23:54 and John 19:14, 31, 42). *Every* Friday is the “day of preparation” in Jewish life. Keeping Shabbat is hard work and requires much preparation. This is clearly *not* the day of preparing for Passover, since Jesus, his disciples and the entire nation had enjoyed the Passover meal the evening before. However, the Passover holiday was continuing, and the Shabbat of Passover week was, indeed, a special one (John 19:31).
- More important than the particular day of the week is the concept that Jesus died *during the 24-hours of Passover*. When the sun set on Thursday (assuming a Friday crucifixion), the entire Jewish community celebrated the Passover meal, including Jesus and his disciples. Though sunrise would have brought the psychological introduction of a new day, in Jewish thinking, “Friday” had actually begun the evening before, when they began the Passover meal. This being the case, Jesus actually died on the very 24-hour day when the entire Jewish nation was remembering that God delivered his people from bondage and death through the blood of the Passover lamb. (Refresh your memory by **reading Exodus 12.**)
- Debate over the exact date of Jesus’ death is an example of how clearly we’ve misunderstood the differences between Eastern and Western cultures, and modern and ancient life. The writers of the Gospels give us an amazing amount of information about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, but they are not modern-day news reporters. Comprehending the vast differences of cultures is one of the most important elements to fully understanding the Bible. Be sure to see the collection of further resources at the end of this document to help you continue a lifetime of learning.



Shabbat

What's the most important Jewish holiday? No doubt about it ... it's Shabbat. Celebrated once a week, Shabbat is the most identifiable practice that identifies Jewish people to the world as a set-apart people group.

- Shabbat begins at sundown each Friday. The exact time of sundown on any given day is readily available from multiple sources and followed religiously by most of the Jewish community.
- Shabbat is a celebration of family and community. Far from being a day dreaded for its strict rules concerning what one can't do, it is the most anticipated day of the week for Jewish people of all ages.
- The concept of taking a full day off each week was practiced only by Jewish people in ancient times. In terms of actually shutting down for 24 hours, this may still be the case today!
- Shabbat in Israel is clearly different from all other days of the week. Traffic is far lighter since families are at home or places they've chosen for the holiday. The biggest meal of the week is served on Friday evening. Breakfast and lunch on Saturday must be prepared on Friday so that no one is required to cook once Shabbat begins. This work is part of what is referred to as the "day of preparation" in John 19.
- Different Jewish groups take Shabbat more seriously than others. Orthodox communities will go to great lengths to protect the 24-hour period, as illustrated by concrete barricades that prohibit motorized vehicles from driving through their neighborhoods. Other Jewish families might use the day for recreation. Even then, however, they'll do their best to be at their chosen location before the sun sets on Friday.

The Holy Days

Modern-day Israel has lots of holidays. Some remember horrible events like the destruction of Jerusalem and the Holocaust. Others celebrate the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the re-taking of Jerusalem in 1967. Still others, like the costume-covered Purim, Hanukkah and a national day planned for planting trees, are marked with joy, laughter and gaiety.

But seven holidays are actually holy days. Prescribed by God after the Exodus, all of these celebrations are extremely important. There is no prohibition against Christians celebrating these “Jewish” feasts. In fact, the first few generations of Jewish followers of Jesus no doubt continued to celebrate these holy days.

SPRING - Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and First Fruits.

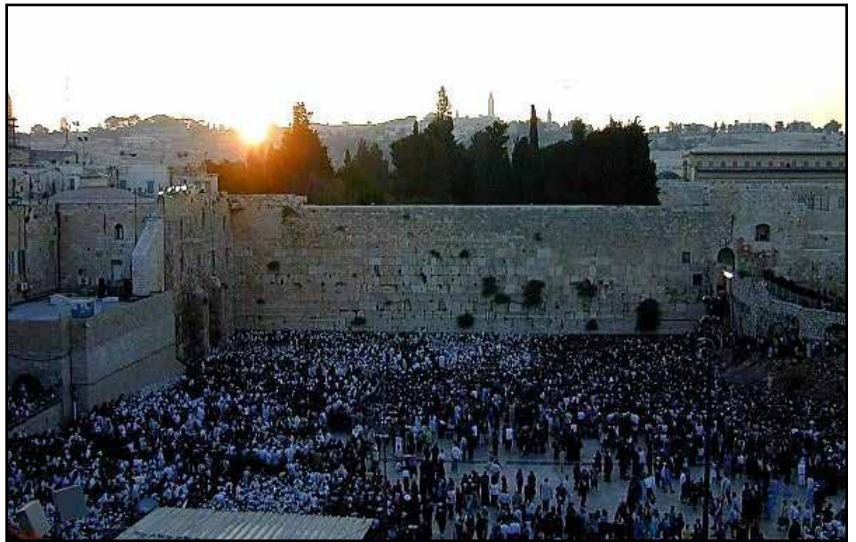
These three holy days come in a span of three to eight days. Passover is the biggest of the three, by far. Families the world over remember the exodus from Egypt as they eat what might be described as the world’s most symbolic meal. During Passover, no leaven (yeast) is allowed at any time during the week of Passover celebration. There is also a specific day of celebrating unleavened bread, and another for the very first fruits of the agricultural year. These three holidays are spaced anywhere from three to eight days apart, depending on the placement of First Fruits, which comes one day after the Shabbat following Passover.

EARLY SUMMER - Shavuot or the “Feast of Weeks.” Arriving 50 days after the first Shabbat following Passover, this festival is also known by its Greek name, “Pentecost.”

FALL - The High Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah (Trumpets), Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) and Sukkot (Tabernacles). This final trilogy includes both the most serious holy day of the year (Yom Kippur) and the longest and most joyful celebration (Sukkot).

The connection of these holy days to Christians are sometimes too obvious to miss. Jesus, for instance, died on Passover, was in the tomb on the official remembrance of Unleavened Bread and was raised from the dead on First Fruits. The Holy Spirit descended upon the followers of Jesus on Pentecost. In the writings of the New Testament, Jesus is called “our Passover Lamb,” (1 Corinthians 5:7) and as the “first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20).

As for the final three holy days, Paul spoke of a great trumpet signaling the beginning of the end-times events and pointedly referred to Jesus as the ultimate atonement offering (Romans 3:25). The writings in Hebrews also makes these comparisons. And Sukkot (Tabernacles) has connections both as a promise of the celebration yet to come and potentially, to the time of year when Jesus was born. After all, John wrote (John 1:14) that “the Word became flesh and *tabernacled* (dwelt) among us.”



Each year, tens of thousands of Jewish people gather at the Western Wall in order to be reading Torah there as the sun rises. Recognize the holiday? It’s Shavuot, known to most Christians at “Pentecost!” Others things you might notice around this holiday would include lots of flower arrangements (even on cars!), the reading of the book of Ruth and an all-night celebration that ends with joyful processions into the Old City’s Western Wall Plaza.

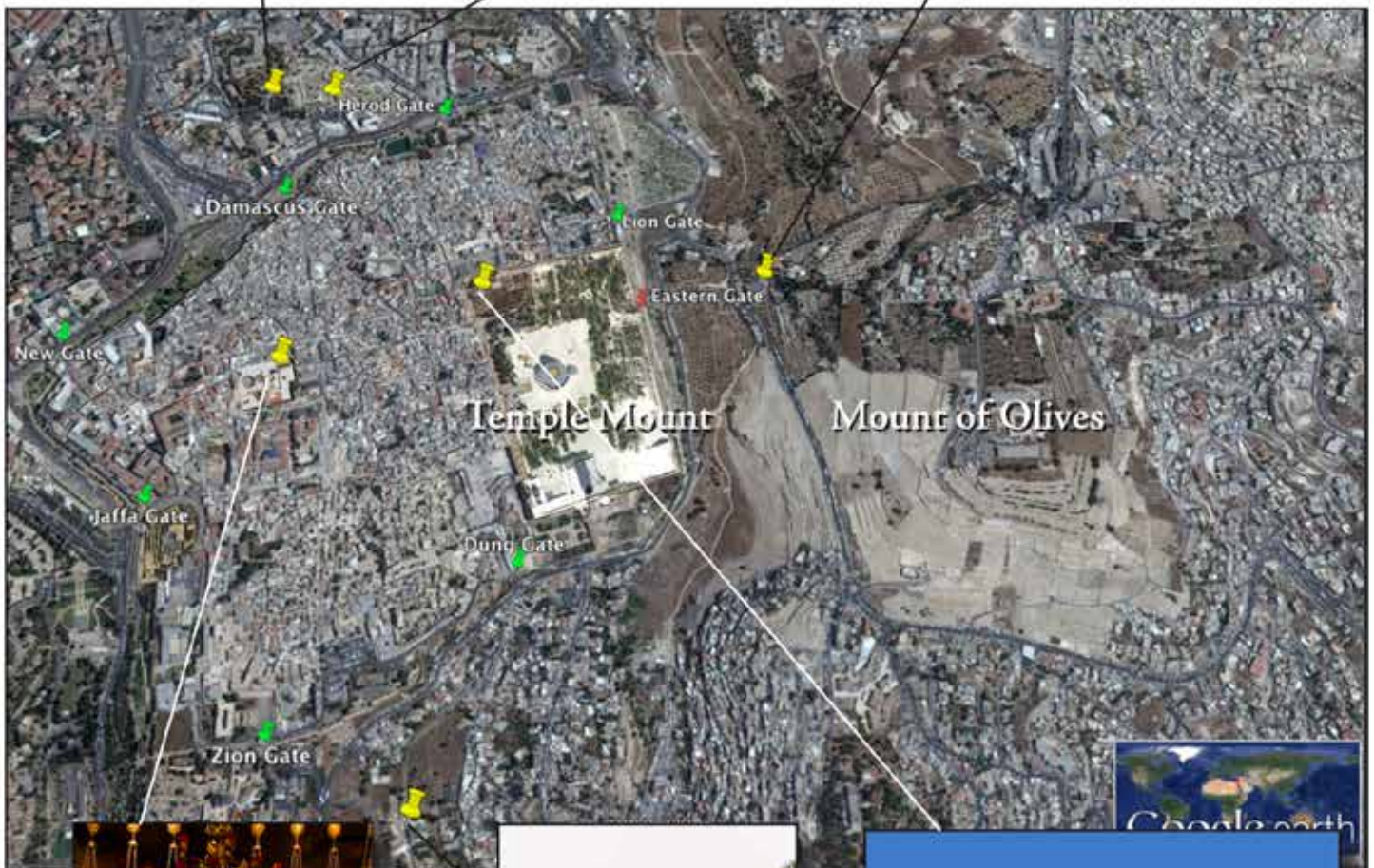
Garden Tomb



Gordon's Calvary



Gethsemane



Church of the Holy Sepulcher



Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu
Site of Peter's denial



Antonia Fortress/place of Pilate's judgment
(Leen Ritmeyer illustration)

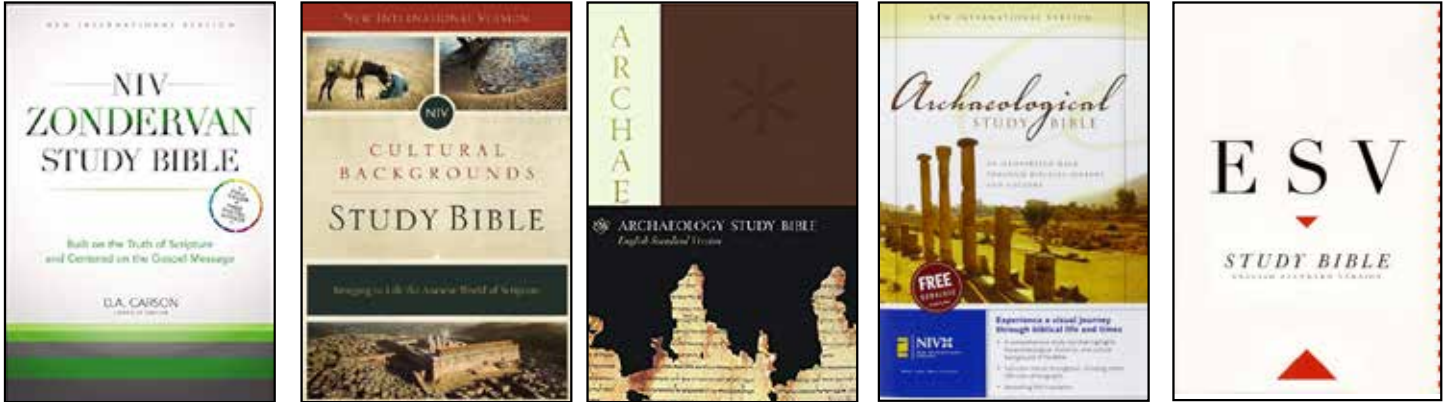
The Week of Passion

For Christians, little can match the thrill of following the footsteps of Jesus through the last week of his life. There are several places where you can still connect with these events in a very memorable way. Here's a reminder of what happened on the Week of Passion, and where those events took place.

- **Palm Sunday.** After Jesus arrived in Bethany (just to the east of the Mount of Olives) on Friday afternoon, he rested on Shabbat. On Sunday morning, he rode a young donkey down the Mount of Olives. He entered the Temple Mount area and drove out those who were selling items for sacrifice and exchanging money in an area forbidden for them to do so. He spent the remainder of the day healing many people before returning to Bethany for rest (Matthew 21:1-17).
- **Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday.** Jesus spent the heart of the week teaching his followers and arguing with his enemies. Judas made his plans to betray Jesus during this same time period. At some point in the week he asked his disciples to take care of the preparations needed for their Passover meal (Matthew 21:18-26:19, along with similar accounts in Mark and Luke).
- **Thursday evening/beginning of Passover.** Jesus and the disciples celebrated Passover somewhere in the city in an "upper room." Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and taught them one last time. There is an "upper room" you can visit in Jerusalem, but there is no chance of it being the actual place where Jesus and the disciples met. You can read what Jesus taught his disciples in John 13-16. At some point around midnight, Jesus and his disciples crossed the Kidron Valley (John 18:1) and reached a place at the base of the Mount of Olives that housed an olive press. This "Garden of Gethsemane" was where Jesus prayed intently about the next few hours of his life (Matthew 26:36-44 and John 17).
- **Midnight and early-morning hours of Friday.** Judas arrived with a large contingent of Roman soldiers and Jewish officials (John 18:2-11), identifying Jesus with a kiss. There was a brief skirmish, but Jesus was otherwise arrested without incident and taken to a holding cell awaiting trial. Before dawn, Simon Peter denied Jesus three times.
- **Friday morning.** Jesus was hauled before Annas, Caiaphas, the entire Sanhedrin (Matthew 26:59) Pilate, Herod Antipas, Pilate, the Roman Soldiers and finally Pilate again, where he was condemned (John 18:12-19:16; Matthew 27:1-26, Mark 15:1-24 and Luke 22:66-23:32). By the time the process was completed, Jesus was dehydrated, exhausted, and sleep deprived. He had been beaten and scourged until he was barely recognizable. Even so, the worst six hours were just ahead of him.
- **Friday, 9 a.m.** Jesus was crucified between two condemned criminals. Mark calls it the "third hour," (Mark 15:25) meaning the third hour of daylight. It is conceivable that Mark and others knew the time because of a shofar blast that alerted the city to the daily morning sacrifice. Each morning and evening a lamb was sacrificed on behalf of God's people at the nearby Temple. It is also possible Mark and others simply made an estimation that it was about 9 a.m. At some point on Friday morning, Judas committed suicide.
- **Friday, noon.** Darkness covered the land until 3 p.m. (Matthew 27:45, Mark 15:33, Luke 23:44).
- **Friday, 3 p.m.** Jesus raised up one last time and uttered three short statements before dying. At least two of the statements are direct quotations of scripture: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" is the first line of Psalm 22:1. "It is finished" may also come from the last line of Psalm 22. "Into your hands I commit my spirit" was a quote of Psalm 31:5. Once the death of Jesus was confirmed and permission was granted, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus claimed the body of Jesus. These men, both members of the Sanhedrin, prepared the body for burial and laid it in a new tomb belonging to Joseph.
- **Saturday.** Shabbat began at sunset on Friday and continued for 24 hours. At least 10 of the remaining disciples and the women who'd been at the cross stay in Jerusalem, faithfully keeping Shabbat.
- **Sunday.** Mary and other women discovered the empty tomb just as the sun rose. Simon Peter and John arrived next, and Jesus made his first resurrected appearance to Mary (John 20:1-18). Jesus later appeared to two men walking along the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), and then to ten of the remaining 11 disciples (Luke 24:36-49).
- **Sunday, one week later.** Jesus appeared to the disciples again, this time at the Sea of Galilee (John 21).

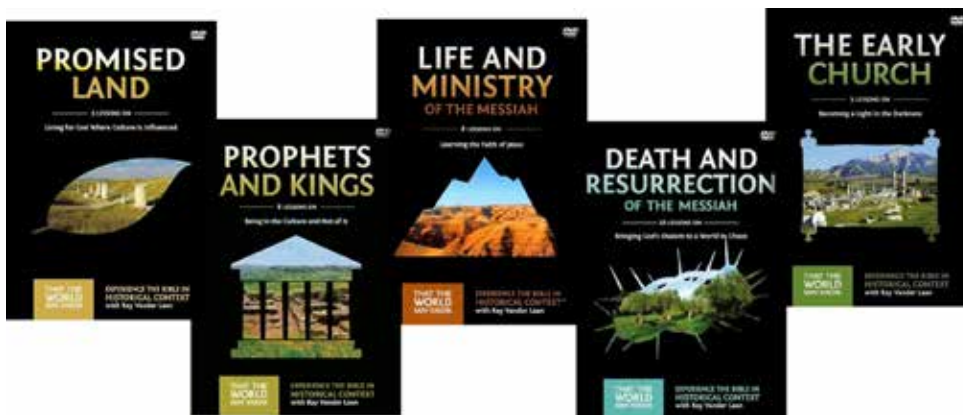
Resources for a lifetime of learning

In a very short period of time, you've been inundated with information and discovered there's much more to learn about the culture and context of the Bible. Congratulations! You're on the verge of some of the most exciting discoveries you'll ever make in your spiritual journey. Here are some resources to help you maximize this experience once you return home.



Study Bibles

These study Bibles are specifically designed for the person determined to understand more about the cultural and historical context of the Text. Available from all major retail outlets. If you're going to understand the Bible, you've got to start with the Bible! Don't have any study Bibles? Start with Zondervan's Study Bible. It's the best-selling study Bible in the world. The very best study Bible in print today is the Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible from Zondervan.

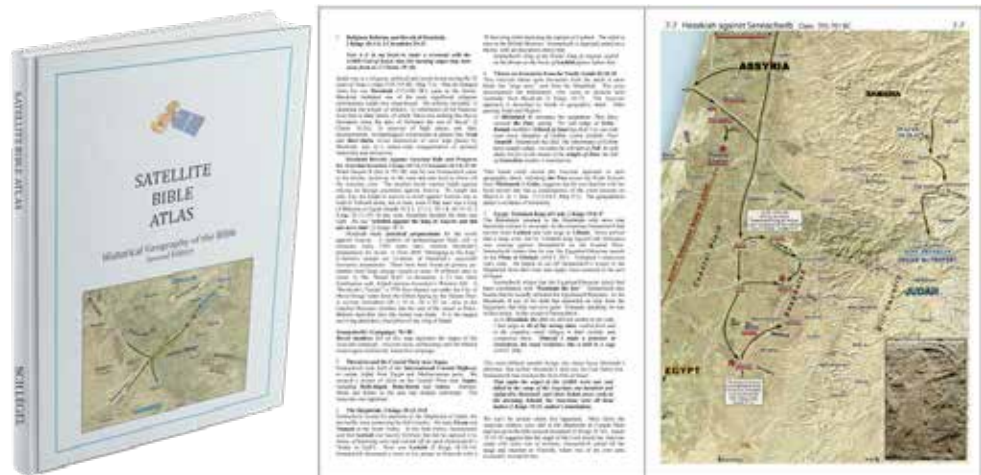


Small-group video lessons

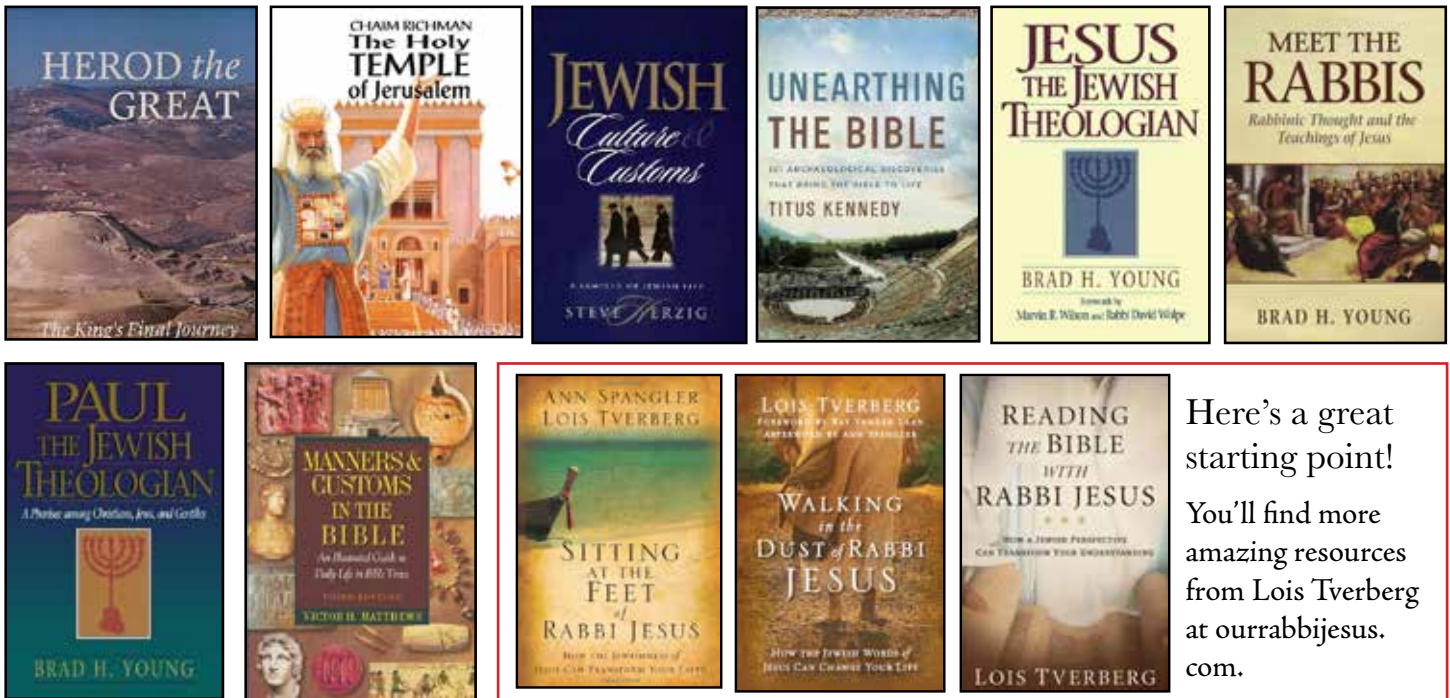
Ray Vander Laan's incredible "Faith Lessons" are published in 13 DVD sets, available from Zondervan. Visit thattheworldmayknow.com.

Bible Atlas

Keep a Bible atlas near your Bible! The best available comes from Bill Schlegel. You'll find the Satellite Bible Atlas at bibleplaces.org, which is also one of the best resources on the Internet you'll find anywhere.

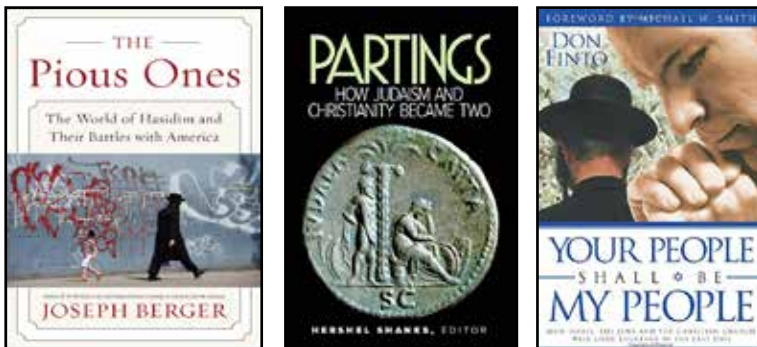


Books on the cultural and historical background of the Bible

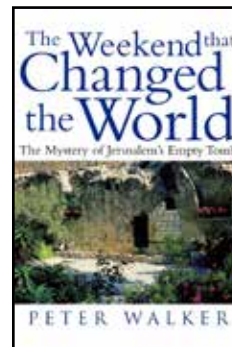


Here's a great starting point!
You'll find more amazing resources from Lois Tverberg at ourrabbijesus.com.

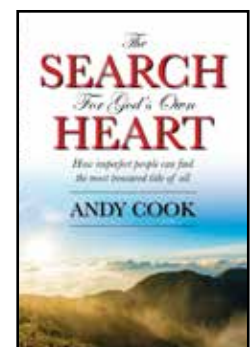
Books on the Jewish/Christian relations



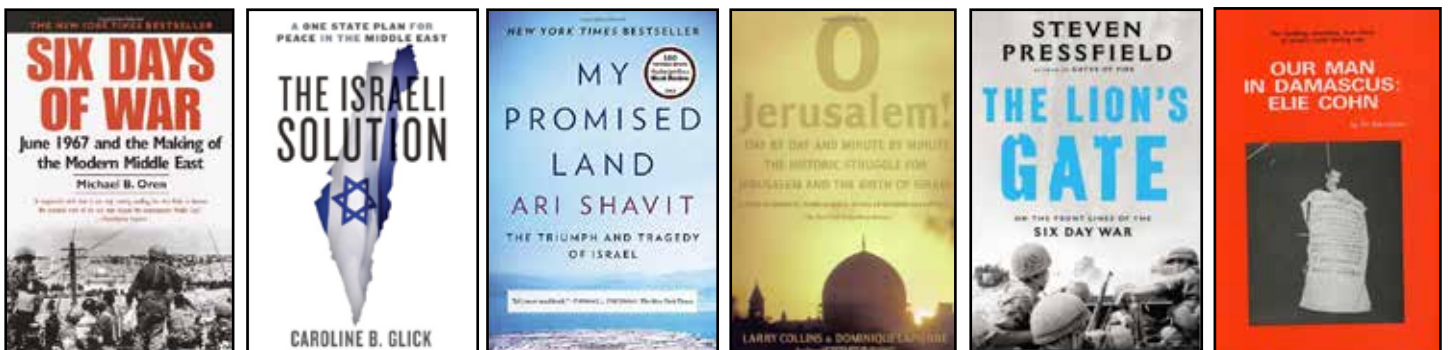
Garden Tomb



Life of David



Books on the history of and challenges facing modern-day Israel



Resources on the web



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This main street in Bet She'an was called "The Cardo," meaning "heart." Every Roman city had a Cardo, even if the Romans had to tear down existing structures in order to create it. That was the case in Jerusalem, where the ruins of the Romans' "Cardo" are now home to expensive shops (left) in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City!



Julia Chin Photo



Ancient Bet She'an

For centuries, Bet She'an grew under and later, built up after each battle destroyed the city. Saul and his sons were killed near here and their bodies hung disgracefully on the ancient walls. Once the powerful Greeks and Romans arrived, there was no need to build on top of a hill.



Theaters of the Decapolis

The Greeks – and the Romans – built massive cities, modest after their own cultural preferences, including theatrical performances. The black stones of this theater once held more seats, and jiggled for shade screens.

It's Panorama Week!

There were ten of these Greek-styled cities within walking distance of Jesus and his disciples. They visited many of them (see Mark 6:23). We're enjoying great panoramas this week, thanks to the creative genius of William Haun.



William Haun Photo



This arch at Bet She'an has only been partially uncovered. In its day, it spanned a street below it. The engineering of such an archway featured a "keystone." The keystone was a carefully constructed stone at the center of the archway. It used the weight and pressure of the stones that surrounded it to provide strength for the entire span. In the great span of scripture, Jesus is the "keystone" that holds the Jewish and Christian scriptures together in the Bible's story!

Yotam Whiting Photo/experienceisraelnow.com



The Theater at Caesarea Maritima

We're celebrating the power of archeological illustrations! Here's an illustration from the libraries of That The World May Know. The theater at Caesarea Maritima is one of the few places where we don't necessarily need an illustration to help us take in the magnificence of an ancient site. With the Mediterranean serving as a backdrop, this 3,000-seat stadium is being used again for concerts and other performing arts! Paul was held in prison not very far from this theater for two years. He must have heard the music, laughter and applause while he waited on his trial.



Find more exciting illustrations at thattheworldmayknow.com. William Haun photo experienceisraelnow.com



The "City of David" is what we would think of as the first Jerusalem. Modern-day Jerusalem surrounds this area today, making it difficult to pick out the most ancient of sites. Underneath the streets of this neighborhood lies an ancient world – and the most important archeological work going on today.



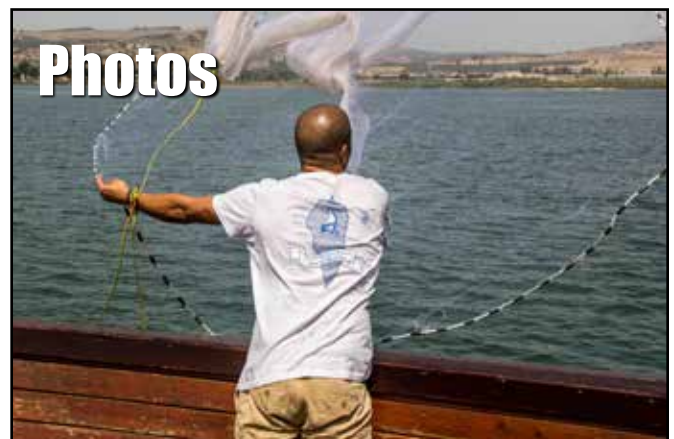
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