

Understanding the culture and context of the Bible is critically important if we want to correctly apply the Bible's message of truth to our own lives, in our own culture. This week's three morning presentations will cover a tidal wave of information. Use these notes to help maximize this conference!

There's also a 61-page pdf download available at experienceisraelnow.com/anderson. It's the same document we give our travelers when they're in Israel. Loaded with photos and maps, this document is a great resource for any reader of the Bible.

Monday: Why the land of the Bible has always been “Center Stage”

Israel is a “land bridge” connecting three continents.

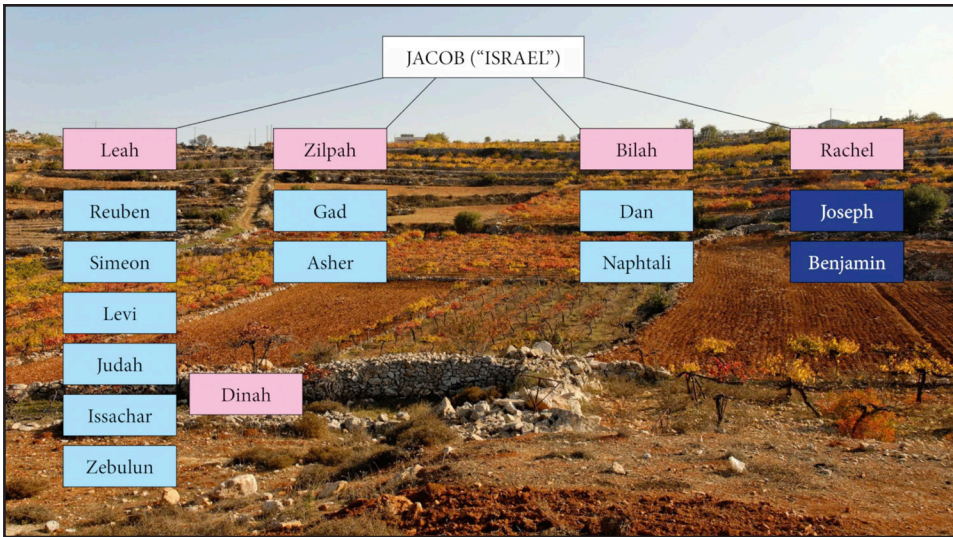
Every world power in northern Africa, southern Europe and western Asia wanted to control the narrow strip of land that was host to important trade routes.

By God's design, Israel was in perfect position to influence the world.

Abraham followed the Euphrates River to Haran. From there, the path to the Promised Land was obvious. He only needed to follow the water!



The Euphrates is the longest (1,750 miles) river in Mesopotamia. Originating in Turkey, the Euphrates flows through Syria and Iraq before joining the Tigris River.



Dothan Valley, as viewed from Tel Dothan.

It was here where Joseph was sold by his brothers to traders from Midian (Genesis 37).



Land close to the Nile River is green and lush. But the wilderness and its difficult life is only a few steps away. When Moses announced he was ready to lead God's people to freedom, they immediately knew the cost of the exodus would be very high.

Learning to trust God for water would be one of the most challenging lessons the Hebrews would have as they left Egypt on their quest to reclaim the land first promised to Abram.



Three kings ruled a united kingdom. Under Solomon, Israel experienced its only years as the dominate force in the Middle East. Solomon controlled the entire land bridge, with key fortresses at Hazor in the north, Megiddo in the center and the coastal plain in the south. With such control, Solomon could enforce favorable treaties with any country wanting to participate in international business.



The Megiddo Pass is only 150 feet wide. With an army stationed at the nearby Megiddo fortress, any world ruler could control much international commerce by limiting travel through these hills. Rehoboam immediately lost Megiddo and the entire northern area of Israel as Jeroboam led a devastating civil war.

Jeroboam	Baasha	OMRI	AHAB	Joram	Jehu	Jehoahaz	Jehoash	Jeroboam	Menahem
Rehoboam	ASA	Jehoshaphat	Jehoram <i>Athaliah</i>	Joash	Amaziah	Azariah	Jotham		

	Jeroboam	Menahem	Pekah	Hoshea				
Azariah	Jotham	AHAZ	Hezekiah	Manasseh	Josiah	Jehoiakim	Zedekiah	Jerusalem falls



The northern kingdom, called “Israel,” was defeated by the Assyrians. Those who survived were taken into captivity. They assimilated into the culture of their captors quickly, for they had not learned how to be God’s people. Since they had not celebrated Passover, they did not know how to keep the holiday as exiles. Since they had not memorized Scripture, they had no ability to remember the words that could have led them home. Since none of their leaders had modeled godly leadership, no one knew how to be God’s people in a foreign land. “Israel” never returned to the Promised Land.

The southern kingdom, called “Judah,” was completely conquered by the Babylonians about 135 years later. Judah and Jerusalem had benefited from several godly kings. When taken into exile, these “Jews” knew how to keep the biblical holidays and traditions. They remembered the scripture they had memorized. They never forgot Jerusalem and told succeeding generations of their homeland.

In time, a remnant of these exiles returned home, following the same path Abraham had taken centuries before them.



Tuesday: Discovering the world Jesus knew, Part I

You already know that **place and story** are intertwined. If you've ever returned to a childhood home, a church where you married, a building where you once worked, or a place where American history was made, you've connected your story with certain locations.

People who knew Jesus connected place with story, too. The great men and women of the Bible were their family ancestors. Towns, villages, valleys, mountains and rivers were connected with biblical events.

Jesus grew up in Nazareth, which overlooked the history-rich Jezreel Valley. Elisha had stories connected to the east, at the Jordan River and in Shunem. Elijah had his biggest moment to the west, on Mt. Carmel. As people watched Jesus work miracles in the same area, they naturally said, “(Another) great prophet has risen among us!” (See Luke 7:16)



The Jezreel Valley, as seen from the top of Mt. Tabor. Nazareth lies on the hill in the distance.

OLD TESTAMENT	400 YEARS	NEW TESTAMENT
 <p>Persians rule the world Exiles are returning to Jerusalem Nehemiah rebuilding the walls Prophets point to a future hope People are speaking Hebrew</p>		 <p>Romans rule the world Herod is king of the Jews A new Temple is a marvel John the Baptist People are speaking Greek</p>

The 400 years between Malachi and Matthew were not silent, by any stretch of the imagination! The world changed dramatically in the time between the Testaments.

While the people of Judah struggled to gain their footing in Jerusalem and began to spread out in the land of their ancestors, the Greek and Roman empires rose in the west. The impact of Greek and Roman influence on the New Testament cannot be overstated.



The Greeks gave the world ...

- ✦ A common language
- ✦ A new way of thinking
- ✦ A gateway to the West

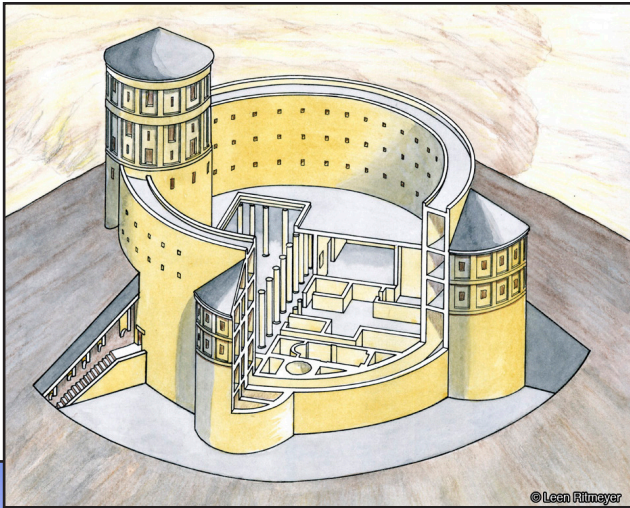
The Romans added ...

- ✦ The "peace" of Rome
- ✦ Good roads
- ✦ Improved sea travel

Eventually, Rome became the center of Christianity.

A statue of Alexander the Great (top photo) is a famous landmark in Thessaloníki, Greece. Paul's letters to the Thessalonians are in the New Testament.

A Roman road (left) from the time of Jesus runs parallel to a modern highway in Israel, near Bet Shemesh.



The “Herodium” was a man-made mountain built only three miles from Bethlehem. Herod the Great turned the fortress into his burial monument shortly after Jesus was born.



Herod the Great was the key political figure in the Gospels. As if to emphasize the importance of this, Luke mentions Herod in the opening words of his Gospel (Luke 1:5). Matthew practically does the same, telling us that “Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod.” (Matthew 2:1)

Herod was aligned with Rome and called the “King of the Jews.” Ironically, many people didn’t consider Herod Jewish. His father had converted while Herod was a boy.

He had a violent history that is nearly without description. We would expect, perhaps, that he killed his enemies. But he also had killed entire families in his conquest of the Galilee and killed at least 10 members of his own family, including his favorite wife and three of his sons. There’s no doubt he would have been capable of ordering the deaths of infants in Bethlehem and its vicinity. (See Matthew 2:16.)

Herod is best known for his amazing legacy of great building projects, including the Temple in Jerusalem.



Political and religious groups

Herodians and Sadducees were based at the Temple in Jerusalem. They were politically connected and often wealthy due to rampant corruption.



Pharisees and Zealots could be found in any community. Tiberias and the Sea of Galilee area had an abundance of these individuals.



The Essenes lived in isolation in the water-starved Qumran community. In this photo, the author examines a water channel that led from a rock dam to the Qumran community. The dam caught flash floods, providing a year's worth of water in a matter of minutes.



Men crowd around Torah scrolls at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Jesus moved to Capernaum, where a love for Scripture was passionate. His teaching constantly involved passages, phrases and concepts from the Old Testament.



Wednesday: Discovering the world Jesus knew, Part II

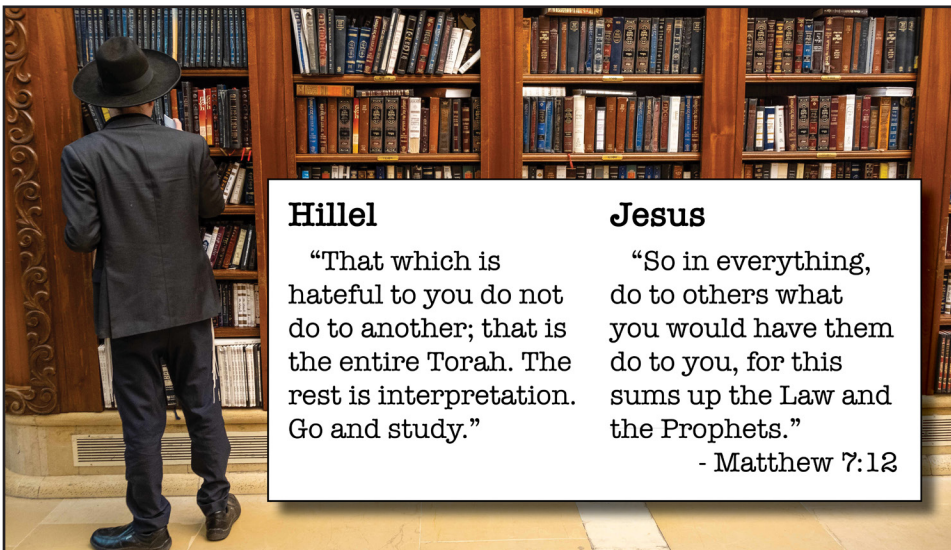
After being rejected at Nazareth, Jesus moved to **Capernaum** (above). Understanding what people in this area believed about God and how they practiced their faith is a key that unlocks great understanding of the teachings of Jesus.

At times Jesus marveled at the faith of people who lived here. At other times, he was completely frustrated.

Some of the “testing” Jesus faced was actually a way of questioning this new and popular rabbi. Two other rabbis, Hillel and Shammai, had taught in this region one generation earlier. Sometimes Jesus sounded as if he belonged to Shammai, who held to a strict interpretation of the Law. Many other times Jesus sounded more like Hillel. At the end of the day, however, people were struck by how original Jesus was.

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

– Matthew 7:28-29



Hillel

“That which is hateful to you do not do to another; that is the entire Torah. The rest is interpretation. Go and study.”

Jesus

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

– Matthew 7:12

The parable of the Good Samaritan is a classic example of Jewish teaching. Questions from potential followers are answered with questions and/or stories like this one.

Even deeper, the encounter illustrates how Jesus was breaking new ground in a community affected by occupation, class warfare and prejudice.

In the end, Jesus was a threat to the Herodians and Sadducees, who decided Jesus needed to die. He was a disappointment to the Zealots and Essenes. Both of those groups were looking for a military messiah, one who would rid the land of the Romans.

For the Pharisees and people of the land, Jesus was a decision that needed to be made. Was he crazy ... or was he the Son of God? Nicodemus was a man who'd spent his life studying Scripture. He was intrigued and challenged by Jesus. By the time Jesus was crucified, he was also a follower of Jesus.



The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was heavily traveled by the people who heard Jesus tell the story of the Good Samaritan. The narrow path is on the left side of the canyon. An aqueduct built by Herod the Great is on the right side.

