

Dr. Elaine Phillips, Historical Geography, Lecture 4--Shephelah

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This is Doctor Elaine Phillips, doing her first lecture on Historical Geography on “The plains and the Shephelah of Israel.” Dr. Phillips and her husband Perry have taught at the Jerusalem University College for many many years as well as at Gordon College. Dr. Elaine Phillips.

We’re continuing our course on historical geography, and one of the things we noticed at the beginning and introductory lecture is that this is “the land between.” And so what we’re going to do this time is look at some of the foreign influences that are outside and that are making life a little difficult for the people of God and “the land between.” When you read the book of the covenant, we find out that God used these foreign influences around, and foreign powers around Israel when they were disobedient to bring them to a state of discipline in which he would chastise them; that was in order to bring them back in to covenant relationship with him. And so we’re going to look at some of these foreign influences today. We’re going to take a look at the Shephelah, we’ll look at our maps, and then we’ll move north and look at how Phoenicia brought in the dreadful threat of Baal worship into the northern kingdom. Particularly we will look at the threat from the northeast, from Syria or Aram, as it is in the biblical text. And then finally we’ll move ahead into the New Testament period and see how Roman Caesarea has an impact on the land, both in terms of bring Greco-Roman influence in, and then also being the place from which the gospel goes forth.

So let’s look at these four areas, focus on them, but before we do that just a brief review. We looked at this land as it was, a small little slice right here, and between some major influences. We found that it was a testing ground of faith for God’s people as they were planted in this land. Focusing in just a little bit more, we saw that there is the hill country into which these people were planted, most of them in fact settled in this hill country area, and we notice that Jerusalem is right

about here and it's smack dab in the middle of the hill country, a much more isolated area, which means that it's much more protected. Also the agriculture is good, particularly when the people were obedient. Then God sent rain upon them from the heavens and they had good agricultural produce. All these things of course, were tenuous and they lived in a region that was marginal. They did have, as we said earlier, the testing ground of faith.

Looking where we're going next (as I already intimated in the introductory statements) we have some areas that we need to look at particularly. First of all we will look at Philistine plain in that white oval down there. We'll look at the Shephelah region because that's just to the east of the Philistine plain. Here's the plain area; here we have those foot hills, before we get into the hill country. As I've noted here, "Shephelah" is a Hebrew word, and it actually means "low" or "reduced," if you will. Therefore it's referring to the foothills, the western foot hills of this hill country area.

What it becomes is a buffer zone; we're familiar with the term "buffer zone." The major power in the coastal plain particularly in the early time of Israel's settlement would have been the Philistines. They were threatening to the people who were lodged and settled in the hill country area. The buffer zone works both ways; when God's people are stronger they manage to push out through that buffer zone. When we have the Philistines being empowered, as it were, they will push into the buffer zone as well.

Also we will look at Samaria, and particularly the northern kingdom. Here's Samaria right here, in this blue square. Phoenicia is a major power up in that area [to the northwest], from which Baal worship is going to come. The cities of Tyre and Sidon are important in that context. Right in between we have Mount Carmel. So that'll be our second major area that we are going to look at.

The third thing that we are going to focus on will be, as I said earlier, Syria to the northeast. They will always be trying to focus on a major city of Ramoth Gilead, we will look at that a little bit later on. Israel, the Northern Kingdom of

Israel, will be trying to defend that city. And so that's going to be a focal point.

And as I said a moment ago, we will focus as well in the New Testament period and beyond, on the city of Caesarea, where the Romans got a foothold, or a toehold, in the land itself. So these are the four places that we're going to focus on as we look at Israel contesting foreign influence in one fashion or another.

First of all, the Philistine Plain and the Shephelah. Here's another look at our area that we want to look at. The thing we want to focus on right here, are the five Philistine cities: these are very important to know. Gaza is first, right out there on the southern coastal plain area. Then we have Ashkelon next, also a major Philistine city, Ashdod slightly inland, but still significant. We'll see each of these showing in a set of important narratives that we're going to talk about. Moving farther inland we're going to have Gath, right on the edge of the Shephelah foothills, and finally Ekron itself. These cities will be mentioned, as I said in significant narratives, and it's important that we have those in mind.

Notice as well (if you can see the map) we have red lines going through here these are the two branches of the International Route that goes through the land. The coastal branch itself is going to be coming through our cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and then it will meet up at a junction at Apehek. We'll talk more about that a little later on. There is the inland branch that hugs the foothills as well and as we can see that will go through Gath and Ekron.

So, important cities to keep in mind, particularly the five cities that are Pentapolis, a league of five cities for the Philistines. One of the things we want to note about this area is that it is more open to foreign influences. The Philistines after all are a people group who come from across the Mediterranean Sea. These are people who are more cosmopolitan, they're wealthier, they have all the things that will go along with supposedly a higher level of civilization and culture. As we're going to see, they are in some cases, attractive to the Israelites. We are going to be thinking about it particularly in the narratives of Samson, because he is enticed by that Philistine culture.

It is a much more cosmopolitan area. It also has the more powerful advantages, as we're going to see of some advanced weaponry that the Israelites don't have. So think of that as kind of the cultural clash. If you want to think of a comparison, we're talking here about something that might be the New York City area, and that whole eastern seaboard, and what that represents to people who live up in the mountains in Vermont or New Hampshire or up state New York. There's a cultural contrast there.

As we think about this Philistine area, obviously they have to have ways to get into the hill country. In our day and age, you could just hop in a car and drive up the hills, and no matter what, you'd get there. It was not all that easy then because in some ways, these very rugged hills in the hill country served as a natural defense for the people who lived there. So there are certain ways that made it easier to get in, and they happen to be a series of valleys that cut west to east through the Shephelah area. We're going to look at those in a little more focus right now. You can see them outlined in yellow and we're going to focus on the three northernmost ones because they are going to be important for some of the stories we have.

First of all we go to the Ayyalon Valley (sometimes pronounced Aijalon) depending on what text you're reading and what translation your reading. You want to also note that there are cities that are fairly significant with regard to each of these valleys. They serve in some ways as defense cities. For the Aijalon Valley the major city is Gezer. And this will be important in a number of areas. We won't note it quite so much in our stories as today, but keep Gezer in mind as you continue to read the biblical text because it's an awfully important city. In fact it served a bit as a crossroads, if you're going on that International Route that I was talking about earlier that runs north/south. To get into the hill country from the north, you would swing in at Gezer: that becomes our crossroads. Therefore we've got some important things that are going to go on in Gezer. In fact, when Solomon (years after the period that we're really going to be talking about today)

when Solomon takes over the kingdom one of the cities that he fortifies is Gezer, because he knows how absolutely significant it is. So Gezer is important.

Moving south in terms of our valleys that are access routes from the Philistine plain into the hill country, we have the Sorek Valley. There are other cities important here too, but for our purposes, we're going to note two cities—Timnah, on the one hand (and that's going to be right about here) and Beth Shemesh, right about in this location. Timnah right here, a bit farther to the west and Beth Shemesh farther to the east. There will be two narratives that we're going to focus on around those cities, so we're going to want to notice them. They look really close together, but they're going to be worlds apart in terms of cultural influences.

And then finally, our third valley that we want to focus on in terms of our narratives is called the Elah Valley and the important city that we are going to note here is going to be the city of Azekah, right about there. A narrative that's a fairly significant one that we know well from our Sunday school stories will unfold in the Elah Valley, but you'll want to note Azekah. Again, cities here are important because they are the ones that show up in the biblical text and they are in some ways the guards or the guardians as one makes their way from the west to the east up towards the hill country.

Let's pick up our first narrative that unfolds in the Shephelah area. This is going to be particularly interesting because it's the Samson narrative. Samson gets a lot of press in the book of Judges. As you can see chapters 13 through 16 are given over to Samson. One of the reasons for that I would suggest is that Samson is going to be a major confronter of Philistines. The judges are raised up by God to deal with foreign threats from round about them, but the Philistines will be probably high profile here because they're going to be looking forward to what happens when Saul and David, especially, begin to establish the kingdom. It's going to be the Philistine threat that those two are going to be involved with.

So, Samson is kind of setting the stage for this.

Samson as we know from our stories of him in the biblical text, is a very interesting character. He's one who was designated prior to his birth as a Nazirite. Nazirites were set aside to do the work of God and therefore he is called to that. His mother and his father are made aware of this whole mission that he has. Judges 13 is given over to the visit from the angel of the Lord who appears first to Manoah's wife, Samson's mother, and then finally to Manoah himself. The Nazirites were supposed to be living a fairly shall we say rigidly constrained lifestyle. They could not come in contact with death, their hair was not to be cut and they also could not partake in any products of the vine. As we see, as we read these narratives, Samson managed to break most of those particular aspects of the vow and, of course, the hair will be the major issue here.

For our purposes, we are not going to focus so much on that although we do need to know the background. What we want to note is that Samson is from the town of Zorah, which is right about here. It's in the tribe of Dan by the way. The tribe of Dan, interestingly enough, was originally given territory in between this coastal plain area and the hill country itself; part of that tribe of Dan is going to migrate later on in the book of Judges. But at any rate, they're here at this point and Samson is from Zorah. Notice this is farther to the east than Timnah. There's Timnah.

It says that "Samson went down to Timnah" and, of course, what does he do there? He finds a Philistine woman. He's enticed by these things that appear to be more cosmopolitan, much more appealing. When we teach the Samson narrative, one of the things we want to note is how threatening this is to each individual as we come in contact with things that look appealing on the surface. For Samson his downfall continued to be the attraction of Philistine women. The first one was a woman from Timnah. As he goes down there, his parents are a bit horrified, but he says "there's a woman there, I want her." His parents say, "Why can't you have a nice Jewish girl to marry, an Israelite woman?" But he puts the

pressure on and so they arrange this marriage.

In God's providence--and of course, as we work our way through the book of Judges, one of the things we see is that God in his sovereignty continually uses even the sinful nature of people to bring about his purposes and this is certainly true of Samson. Even though he is enticed by women that are Philistines and the enemy, as those narratives unfold he brings havoc into the Philistines because he'll end up killing a fair number of them. He ties foxes' tails together, sets them on fire and burns up Philistine fields, grain fields, and there's an ongoing "tit-for-tat" situation here. Samson also uses his, or maybe I should say God uses Samson's, tendency to get revenge to bring judgment upon the Philistines. So, this is what's going on with that first set of narratives.

The sad part of this is, however, that not only is judgment brought upon the Philistines, but we see as a result of the way this narrative with this Philistine woman unfolds; that he kind of abandons her. There's a long story at the end of chapter 14 that you can read your way through. When he goes back to find her, it turns out she's been given to one of the people who was a companion of his when he deserted her. Then later on as a result of his vengeance against the Philistines, his former wife and her father are killed by the Philistines. So there are some very ugly things that are part of this story. As Samson continues to venture into Philistine territory, enticed by women, enticed by the contemporary culture round about him, he goes down to Gaza farther down the coast (beyond where our map is right here as a matter of fact), and there he finds a prostitute. Again, not a savory narrative, but one of the things that we notice in terms of our geography is that as the Philistines are about to get him in the middle of the night, he gets up he takes the doors and the gates and the bars of the city and carries them all the way up to Hebron. This is no mean task because Gaza is down on sea level area and as he's carrying these things he's going up to Hebron, and this is some 2500 feet above sea level. So Samson is demonstrating his physical prowess and the extraordinary strength that he has been given, although this doesn't accomplish much other than

to demonstrate that. It doesn't really do anything against the Philistines.

In some ways we might say that Samson, maybe towards the end of his life, is beginning to try to go home because he makes his way away from Gaza, which is the farthest he had gotten from home both geographically and possibly spiritually as well, and he heads back to the Sorek Valley. But, he's still in dalliance with a Philistine woman. This time her name is Delilah and we read the narrative of Delilah and how she entices him and then continues to harangue him until finally he gives in and tells her the source of his strength. The Philistines come upon him, cut his hair and they take him prisoner back down to Gaza. And, as we see in the Samson narrative, even in his death, which is a horrifying death, he's in the temple of their god. Down there he will say, "Dear God for my eyes which have been put out." In other words, he appeals in his spirit of vengeance one last time too, but God will use that to bring death to the Philistines who are gathered in that temple at that point in time.

So, Samson's life is a puzzle. It's a puzzle in terms of God's using someone who is so set on himself, so awash in vengeance, so awash in his own passions and yet God indeed does use him. As we see it unfold in the geography we do see yet another very helpful aspect because we see the cultural clash even in a very geographically small area between the Philistines and the Israelites.

Moving along still staying in the Shephelah area (ultimately) although we have to move a little bit north in order to get the setting of this story as it starts. We are going to have a situation in 1 Samuel chapters 4-6 where the Ark of the Covenant, had been in Shiloh, right up here in the hill country. Again keep in mind that the hill country is isolated, it's protected, it's defensible, a perfect place for the Ark, God's Ark, which is of course, representative of his dwelling in their midst. Here it is in a protected location; it's in Shiloh where the high priest is Eli. As we note, there is a major incursion and if you follow the arrows here, we see the Philistines have come on up to Aphek, where the junction of the western branch of our international coastal route meets up with the eastern branch; there's

a reason for that. If you'll look at Aphek, you see "Yarkon," right here. That's the Yarkon River and you couldn't easily, with your troops or with your commercial traffic get across that river. Therefore they would have to come east to this point of Aphek. That means that controlling the Aphek is very important; therefore the Philistines are encamped at Aphek and there will be major battles, or a series of battles I should say, between the Philistines at Aphek and the Israelites at Ebenezer.

That's the background for this narrative and as you remember particularly after losing the first battle to the Philistines the Israelites say, "Oh well, if we had the Ark here with us things would go a whole lot better." Of course, what we're seeing here is what I've got in brackets up there, and that is reducing the sense of the holiness and the awesome majestic presence of God as represented in the Ark and then abusing it, assuming that they could use it as a magic thing. They would assume that it would win the battle for them. Of course, that's utter presumption and they do indeed lose the battle at the area of Aphek and Ebenezer.

There is a major clash there. The Philistines capture the ark and it is indeed taken to the Philistine cities of Ashdod first and then Gath and then finally Ekron. Of course, we again remember those narratives. First it's taken to Ashdod, the center piece of Philistine culture. It's lodged in the temple there. Of course, that's a statement that's meant to say our god is better than your God. He is now lodged in the house of our god Dagon. But of course, as we read that narrative, Dagon falls over and breaks apart and therefore the ark of the covenant is indeed demonstrated to be representative of the God of the Israelites who was sovereign and superior.

In addition to that, the Philistines are plagued with some horrible outbreaks and therefore they want more anything else to get rid of these particular things. They first send it to Gath and then to Ekron. Notice it's moving slowly toward home, as it were. Each of those cities undergoes an outbreak of the same kind of problem. At that point they consult their priests and their diviners and they say:

“What are we supposed to do here anyway?” And of course, those priests and diviners have a very interesting sense of what this God of the Israelites demands because they know enough to say: “we need to send it back with a guilt offering.” And so they do indeed do that.

For our geographical purposes, what’s important here is that from Ekron (right here) you’ve got the ark going up the Sorek Valley and it’s going to go past Timnah, the place we talked about before and it’s going to round a bit of a corner and come to Beth Shemesh. As you can imagine, the people of Beth Shemesh, the Israelites who were there, have been living in very much of a border area. Because we had Beth Shemesh, here there’s where Zorah was when the tribe of Dan and Samson were here. So here is the frontier, the boundary.

So they are really close and they’re watching this ark coming back up the Sorek Valley on a cart. As we read the story, the Philistines say, “If that cart which is drawn by cows, who have calves back in the barn, if that continues to go straight forward, then we know this is the ark of the Lord.”

Now, one last thing that we need to note in regard to this story is that once it gets to Beth Shemesh, God’s people there actually have less sense of the sacredness and sanctity of the ark than did the Philistines, because they open it up, peek into it, and it has very deleterious effects in regard to their well-being as a number of them are killed.

But at least this gives us a sense again of the geography and how it works because hill country area was, I repeat, defensible, very easily protected, and isolated, a place where the ark should have stayed as all the people went to worship God. Instead it made its way out here. Nevertheless God will manage to bring it back, or the people will manage to have it come back by the Philistines sending it back.

Let’s move away from that down farther South. We’re moving from that Sorek Valley now into the Elah Valley, one more step South. And again the lesson that we want to draw on and one that we probably remember well from our

Sunday school background David, who is a small, young man, has been anointed king already but Saul is still in effect the king. David is going to come into conflict with Goliath, our giant. Now it helps to understand this narrative a little more if we get a sense, again, of the geography of what is going on. First of all here is Bethlehem, right up there smack dab in the middle of that hill country where that arrow is focusing in. David is from Bethlehem. David's father is there; in fact, David has been shepherding the sheep while his brothers have been out with the Israelite army. Saul is trying to hold off the Philistine encroachment because this Elah Valley is a place the Philistines would use to get right up into the hill country and the area of Bethlehem.

Why is the hill country so attractive to them? Well for one thing, as I said earlier on, it is agriculturally productive. It is there that you would have wonderful vines and vineyards for the grape products, along with olive trees. You have these things in the Shephelah but it is not nearly as productive as what you have in the hill country. So this would be an area that would be very appealing to the Philistines for that reason. Controlling it would be important for them.

Therefore it is not at all surprising that David's father, Jesse, is interested in sending David down into the area where the battle or the standoff has been taking place to see how the brothers are doing, because Bethlehem is going to be fairly vulnerable if that line breaks. The Israelites are protecting the hill country and the Philistines are camped between Socoh and Azekah right out there. We don't know exactly where the Israelites are in between them but it's probably somewhere right on the edge of where the hill country starts, between the hill country and the Shephelah Area.

As we said a moment ago there is a standoff. Saul should have been the one fighting. As we learn from the narratives, Saul is the person who is a head taller than all the rest of the Israelites. If we think of how this narrative unfolds, Goliath is big and it should have been Saul who fought him, but he hasn't been going out when Goliath issues that challenge, saying, "Let one person come out

and fight me.” Saul has not been doing it.

David shows up, his brothers are angry at him, but nevertheless he soon finds out what the issue is. He goes and picks up five stones and he wipes out the Philistine. One of the things that he says is, “It’s the hand of the living God that will take care of this.” David consistently refers to God as “the living God” as this narrative unfolds and he faces Goliath in that context. If we look at it on the ground, if you will, we are standing on the location of Azekah and looking towards the east. Here we are, the Elah Valley makes a dog’s leg right around like so. When you look at that little satellite dish that might give you a sense in terms of perhaps where the Israelite army was and where this confrontation took place. On the horizon we see the Judean hill country and that long ridge down there. Bethlehem would have been right about in this area. So if we’re standing on Azekah, and Socoh is this hill (here), then you’ve got the Philistine army all around this particular leg of the valley. You’ve got Israelites encamped here and see you can get a fairly good idea of this confrontation and where David finally wiped out Goliath.

As the Philistines begin to flee they race out the Elah Valley. It said they fled all the way to Gath. And so they are moving westward. Therefore at this point then the Israelites are gaining a little more space in the buffer zone between themselves and the Philistines out in the coastal plain. So that closes down, for now, our first area of confrontation between Israel, God’s people, and the foreign influence, particularly in that Philistine coastal plain area.

We’ve looked at three narratives that give us some illustrations about that. The problems don’t stop by the way with the Philistines, they are still there but we’re going to leave them and move north at this point and get a little bit of a sense of what happens somewhat later on, actually during the divided monarchy, between the Northern Kingdom and what we have in the threat from Phoenicia. Let’s see how this works.

After the division of the kingdom you have several dynasties up north—

they don't last terribly long. You finally have a general in the army whose name is Omri. Things have been a little bit in flux up until this point in terms of where the capital has been located, but Omri moves his capital to Samaria. It had been in the area of Shechem first of all, then went to Tirzah for a little bit, and then moved across to Transjordan for just a short time, but Omri's going to move it out to Samaria. This is extremely significant. It doesn't look like it on the map but one of the things that helps us when we look at geography is to see that moving that small distance west, Omri is basically opening his arms and he is embracing the western culture more. Samaria is a much more open area. From our perspective it doesn't really make a whole lot of sense because, again, we get through geography a lot more easily with cars. Not so much in that context. So if you have more of an open low rolling foothill area, it will be much more accessible. So Omri is making an intentional move to draw in Western influences.

And of course, what is going to be the major Western influence? It's going to be Phoenicia. Omri's son, Ahab, will marry a Phoenician princess whose name is Jezebel. Together Jezebel and Ahab do something that is really insidious. In fact it is worse than that; it is downright treacherous in terms of the religion of the Northern Kingdom. Already after the split in the kingdom Jeroboam had introduced golden calf worship and so forth but that at least was trying to be a resemblance of Yahweh worship. Now Ahab and Jezebel pretty much bring in Baal worship. Baal has been around already but not the same way that Ahab and Jezebel did it. They made Baal worship the state religion—temples to Baal and so forth. Therefore this becomes a huge, huge issue. It will be in this context that God will raise up the prophet Elijah to contest that Baal worship that was coming from the Phoenicia area. Tyre and Sidon are major cities and of course, what is really interesting is that we're going to have Mount Carmel here as our major, staging ground for this. I've already noted that Baal worship is the state religion.

Think Phoenicia to the North off our little map (right here) for now, and think of Samaria. Because of the political threats from Syria (which we're going to

look at a little bit later on) and also Phoenicia, even though there were tribes that were given land up in this area as inheritance (the tribe of Asher right here), in a fact the people of Phoenicia had pretty much pushed south. Therefore Mount Carmel, a fairly significantly high mountain range (right here), had become pretty much the geopolitical boundary between Phoenicia and this Northern Kingdom of Israel. This will become significant and we need to see more about what Mount Carmel's like, but think of the political boundaries as well. It's going to be pretty close to Baal's turf politically; it's also going to be close to Baal's turf in other ways as well.

Just a quick look at some areas of Samaria itself. Later on this whole acropolis section of the tell of Samaria is littered with temples and major royal establishments. If we had time, we would look at Herod's Temple to Augustus and the implications of that. There's the foundation of it and I think actually we saw that last time when we looked at the central hill country. For our purposes, we are interested in this Israelite area because there have been some very interesting finds there that indicate the opulence of the Northern Kingdom royalty. There are lots of Phoenician ivories found here so that gives us the sense that they had really adopted Phoenician culture, even with their artistic remains that are there. As I said a moment ago, because of this situation of Baal worship being so deeply implanted by Ahab and Jezebel, God raises up Elijah and in 1 Kings 17, we see him coming on the scene fairly dramatically. The name Elijah itself is important. You see in the last part of it, the short form of "Yahweh." The whole name means "Yahweh is my God." So even in Elijah's name, he is drawing together the significance of God as covenant Lord. And of course, once Elijah demonstrates the power of God over Baal, the people themselves who have been sitting on the fence will say, "The Lord he is God, the Lord he is God."

But let's see how this works geographically. If we look at this promontory here at Mount Carmel as it juts out into the Mediterranean Sea, we notice that geologically it has the kind of rock that will weather into good soils. Wonderful

soils are there. It also gets more rainfall because it is a higher elevation and so it's prime territory for beautiful lush growth. That's important. One of things we see as we move beyond our narrative in 1 Kings and look at some of the prophetic material, is when God is bringing judgment on his people (Amos will refer to this, and Nahum will refer to this), the top of Mount Carmel withers. When the top of Carmel withers, things are bad. Because this area is normally very lush and very productive. If the top of Carmel is withering, there is judgment. Of course, that's going to be the case in Elijah's situation because there had been no rain for three and a half years except at the word of Elijah as he is speaking for the Lord.

Now, as we can see this story unfolding, Elijah first of all has gone eastward, and then he goes right up into the home territory of Baal worship itself. He hides in Phoenicia for a while which is a slap in Baal's face, too. When he comes back down and the confrontation is arranged between the prophets of Baal and Asherah, on the one hand, and the prophet Elijah on the other, he asks that it happened on Mount Carmel and it is indeed a perfect stage. One of the reasons for that is that Baal was god of storm and thunder. Therefore rainfall and agricultural productivity and the whole idea of fertility was enhanced in the minds of the people as they got into Baal worship, by Baal and his consort having intercourse together; that was supposed to produce fertility and rainfall and all these kinds of things. So it was a very ugly kind of worship situation which was happening. Here Elijah is confronting it, and this is a stage because Mount Carmel is right next to the Mediterranean Sea and the clouds are going to come right over Mount Carmel. So it's taking place on Baal's turf.

One of the things we notice as we read this narrative is that the prophets of Baal and Asherah are trying their hardest to get Baal to respond. He doesn't, and finally Elijah, in the face of having three and half years of no rain, takes water, pours it all over his sacrifices and then calls down fire from the Lord, which does indeed consume the offerings. But that of course is not the end of the story. In accordance with the regulations and the Torah in Deuteronomy 13, these prophets

who had been leading God's people astray were to die, and therefore Elijah says, "Take them down to Kishon's Brook and there let them be slain." That was just to the northeast (right here). Draining the whole Jezreel Valley is the Kishon Brook, washing out to the Mediterranean Sea. In some ways, you might want to push it a little symbolically and say in shedding the blood of those prophets, it was going to wash clean all this filth that had been part of this whole situation of the northern king and the degradation that was part of that. It washes out to the sea.

Then what's interesting is that Elijah stays up on the mountain for a bit and as he prays and this young servant is watching, the clouds boil up from the Mediterranean Sea and there is a huge storm and God indeed does bring rain. Ahab runs for Jezreel; I should say, Ahab takes his chariot for Jezreel; Elijah will run after him at that point.

In Jezreel, Jezebel is still a major force, and Elijah is afraid, and so Elijah will run for his life, but he goes in the right direction. He will go back down to Mount Sinai; he'll go to the source of the covenant, Mount Horeb, Mount Sinai, (the same location) and there he will meet with God and God will say you know there are still those who have not bowed the knee to Baal and I still have three things for you to do. So that kind of draws some closure. By the way, one of those things is to anoint the prophet Elisha about whom we're going to be speaking later on, so don't lose sight of that connection. Elisha will pick up the prophetic mantle of Elijah, and he too will have a prophetic base at Mount Carmel. Just some interesting things that we can look at in terms of scenery, if you will. There's a lovely little Carmelite monastery on the top of Mount Carmel to commemorate this. There's a statue of Elijah and it's not a placid, peaceful statue. This is Elijah taking care of the prophets of Baal. Down here we have the Kishon Brook which is at the base, right next to the major road, the base of Mount Carmel. Then finally we get a look from across the bay to the north of Mount Carmel, the Akko Bay, of our whole promontory as it juts out into the Mediterranean Sea, appropriately over shadowed by significant rain clouds at this point.

Let's take a move away from our Phoenicia threat, or contesting influence on the west, and move east just briefly to see what happens on the eastern front. First of all look at a little bit of a map, keeping in mind here we've got Damascus and therefore Syrian influences are there. Here's Ramoth Gilead, and I want to just say a little bit more about that. Ramoth means high place and so this is an elevated location. Gilead is this larger region here so it's the high place of Gilead and in fact is an important strategic location to hold. Why? Well, the suggestion is that coming through Ramoth Gilead from the south is the Trans-Jordanian Highway, going right up to Damascus which, of course, is the hub for all sorts of traffic moving from Mesopotamia down into this area.

So our Trans-Jordanian Highway is going right along here. It's going to be significant for commerce, it's going to be significant for military enterprise, and also at this point we're going to have a major crossroads. Remember we mentioned a major crossroad at Jezreel (down here). Here's a crossroads that's going to bring a trunk route over into Israel and connect beyond Jezreel with our Coastal Highway. So, Ramoth Gilead is a key to hang onto. The people from Syria know this; the people from Israel know this. So again a very important location between Syria and Israel. Damascus is going to want to control Ramoth Gilead, and there's going to be an ongoing set of battles between those of forces of the Arameans or the Syrians from Damascus, and people from the Northern Kingdom of Samaria. They will be fighting at Ramoth Gilead. Again just to reiterate; it's significant to hold that to get a toe hold over there in the eastern side of the Jordan.

We're just going to look at two narratives. The first one is important because it connects us with Ahab again. We've already talked about Ahab in conjunction with Jezebel, and the prophets of Baal. Ahab continues to be King in the Northern Kingdom. As we read in 1 Kings 22, at one point in time, he's going to establish an alliance with the southern King, Jehoshaphat. Now, in this fascinating narrative, this alliance was not viewed kindly by God, as he spoke through his prophets. Nevertheless, Jehoshaphat is at this point in time thinking

that he wants to help Ahab. I will leave the details of the narrative because it has some fairly theologically interesting issues and simply note that it is going to take place in the area of Ramoth Gilead. That's what they're fighting to hang on to.

One of the things that we see is that a prophet has told Ahab that he is going to meet his death there. Nevertheless, Ahab, in utter rejection of that word, goes to fight anyway, and he thinks that he can fake God out by going in disguise and having Jehoshaphat be the apparent king. But as you see the narrative unfold, Ahab will lose his life as someone shoots him "randomly." And Jehoshaphat, although he's chased initially by the Syrians, says "I'm not the one you're looking for," and so he will escape with his life.

The second story we want to notice in terms of a confrontation at the place of Ramoth Gilead, is a little bit later on in the history of Israel. We have Jehu, who is going to be like his predecessor, as earlier King Omri was a commander of the army. Omri was a commander who became King. Jehu was also an army commander who is anointed king. He is anointed king while he's fighting at Ramoth Gilead. Again it just gives us an indication of how absolutely significant this particular location is for Israelites to hold.

Lots of things unfold with regard to the Jehu narrative. After his anointing it turns out that the major forces here, the King of the Northern Kingdom, Jehoram, and his relative, Ahaziah, from the South are indeed resting at Jezreel because Jehoram had been wounded. So Jehu is out there in the front fighting. He's anointed by a prophet, an unnamed prophet, and then he will drive to Jezreel and at that point he is going to take care of (and by that I mean eliminate) the rest of the household of Ahab. This is judgment that is brought on Ahab as God had decreed earlier on. We could have much more to say about that, but we need to move on.

So, one last area where the Israelites, and now we're talking about Jews, since we're talking about the New Testament period, and Christians for that matter, will come in contact with foreign influences. Let's look at Roman

Caesarea. First of all, a map to give us a little sense. We're talking about the Coastal Plain. Instead of the Philistine Plain at this point (down here), we're now going to be talking about the portion of the Coastal Plain that is called the Sharon Plain. Herod the Great is our major force in establishing Caesarea. Notice it's named after Caesar. So Herod who was made king by the Roman Senate, pays his allegiance over and over and over again in his building projects to the people to whom he owes his kingship. We'll say more about Herod a little bit later on when we talk about Galilee, but let's at this point just say that one of the things that Herod did as a puppet king of Rome was to do lots and lots of building.

The Herod family had money, but they couldn't do as most kings do (spend it by going to war), because he was a puppet king of Rome. So instead, Herod is going to invest it in building projects. The land of Israel is littered with footprints of Herod's building projects. We might say, if we want to derive some kind of a lesson from this, that Herod was building his kingdom. You can see it over and over again. He was very busy building his kingdom. Of course the question that we have to keep asking ourselves is, whose kingdoms are we building as we work our way through our lives? I'll say more about that in a moment. But Herod's building his kingdom.

Caesarea is going to be a major point in this whole project. As you know from listening to the Jerusalem lecture, Herod has established a major temple complex in Jerusalem. He establishes fortresses all over the place. He'll have, as we'll see, a temple up in Galilee. But Caesarea is key for him because he sees it as the point of access to bring Roman culture into what Herod perceived was pretty much of a backwater. He sees Judea as a backwater. He too, like Samson, was enticed by a very cosmopolitan culture. He wants to build up Caesarea to bring that Roman culture and really raise the level of Judea to something that he thinks it should be. So he starts primarily from scratch. There was a little town called Strato's tower at that point. Josephus tells us that, but Herod builds it up from scratch. He builds a temple to Augusta there. It has a theatre; it has aqueducts that

supply water; it's a major, major location. But our key thing to keep in mind is, as I've said here, his intent: bring culture into the backwater. In God's providence, we have a 180 degree turn around because it is from Caesarea that the gospel will head out to all parts of the Mediterranean Sea and the Roman Empire.

As we look at Caesarea as well, we want to think a little bit about Herod Agrippa, who is a descendant of Herod. After Herod's death we have some of his sons taking over--Herod Antipus, Herod Philip, and Archlaeus, down south. After that, we have Agrippa being king for a short while. There's going to be an incident that takes place in Caesarea that we are going to look at in a little bit more detail as we compare what the book of Acts says with what Josephus tells us about Herod Agrippa.

So Caesarea--let's have a quick look at it and then again keep asking ourselves the lesson that we want to learn from this as we look at these stone ruins and remains: whose kingdoms are we busy building? Here's a little bit of a diagram of what Herod's Caesarea probably looked like. We're going to look at some aspects of this. I mentioned temple, first of all. Here's the temple to Augustus that Herod built. One of the things that we notice is that it's oriented towards the west. All we have left of that, by the way, are the foundations of it so this is a hypothetical reconstruction. But it is oriented to the west because Herod wanted people in Caesarea to realize this city focused on its patron, Rome. He conceived of the Mediterranean sea as a Roman lake.

Now right next to that temple was a huge, huge harbor. Herod constructed this harbor. We're going to see little bits of it as we look at a photograph because they've been able to excavate this area and see the absolute mammoth size of this harbor. It is huge. Although it may be an exaggeration, I believe it's Josephus who says that the Roman fleet could indeed rest in this harbor. The harbor entrance is up here, wisely so, because prevailing winds are from the south west and therefore you could enter on this north side. Two huge statues stood on pillars here. Some people suggest that probably Herod was trying to imitate the harbor at Alexandria

which also had that remarkable lighthouse at Alexandria.

A couple of other things to notice. In addition to this harbor structure which was a monumental undertaking, we also have, within Herod's Caesarea, a palace built on a promontory jutting right out into the Mediterranean Sea. It was a remarkable palace. Apparently you could enter into it by boat and not have to enter by land. The suggestion is that when Paul was in prison in Caesarea, it would have been in this palace area.

We also want to note the fact that Herod had a hippodrome and he also started a theatre which was enhanced later on in the second century. As you look at the coastline in the 1970s, here's the current harbor area. There's a breakwater right there, very small. I'll show you an aerial in a moment which will give an indication of the fairly small size of that in contrast to Herod's harbor. Right in here is where the amphitheater later on was excavated. Then here's the promontory on which the palace has been found. Lots of archeology has been done since the 1970s and so much of this has been uncovered.

Here's our modern break water so if you think of that slide just prior that's what we we're looking at. As you look from the air you still see the remains of the huge, huge breakwater and the harbor entrance (here) on the northern side. Let me just say a little bit more about this Herod had a new technology; he and his engineers had learned how to pour underwater cement. There was a recipe if you will. There was pumice that they used and there was kind of a gravel. What they did was to sink forms, pour this stuff down, and it was dense enough once it got down under the water, that it hardened remarkably. There it stayed, underwater cement. Josephus thought these were huge blocks of stone that had been lowered down. As the archeologist started working there, they figured out what it really was. So you have this remarkable break water.

He also designed it with a kind of inner and outer wall so that he never had to dredge his harbor. The slits would face the prevailing currents coming from the southwest. The silt would pass through the slits in this outer wall, lodge in the

center open space (almost like a casemate wall) and the harbor itself would maintain its depth without having to be dredged. So incredible, incredible advance.

Here is a very rough picture of the foundations of the temple. We can also see the amphitheater here. It's been excavated. This is the only the eastern half of it. The western half out there has been broken away by the attacks of the sea. But we want to simply note the promontory palace right here. Then finally our theater. We want to make a little bit more of a note on some finds from both of those places.

First of all, I do need to say one of the things Caesarea didn't have was a source of water, fresh water. So Herod and later on the Romans as they lodged there, expanded and brought water in from the foothills of Mount Carmel. This aqueduct is the upper level aqueduct. There's also a lower level aqueduct that brought water sufficient water to keep the people in water.

In the promontory palace area we have an inscription that was found. Actually, I should say that differently: this was not found in the promontory palace area, but we can now see replica of it in that location. This is significant because we see here (if we look very carefully): Tiberium (right here) and here is Pilatus. This is often called the "Pilatus inscription" because we see very clearly a notice of Pilate's name. The "I U S" of Pontius is right in here; Pilate is mentioned there as well. It was found in early 1960s which gives us a sense that as Luke was writing his gospel he got his names right. At any rate, this is a notice that a temple was dedicated to the emperor Tiberius.

Let's talk a little bit more about the theater. This is a reconstruction; if you look really carefully you can see little bits of the original stone (right here) from the seating. This theater is used now on a regular basis. Even beyond this photograph there's a huge staging area that has been reconstructed as well. Theaters were kind of like billboards in antiquity. If you wanted to put up any kind of political advertisement, you did not put up a billboard; you went to the theater. Therefore, lots and lots of propaganda unfolded in the theater.

Let's just look at one small incident that takes place in Acts chapter 12. We have Herod (and this is Herod Agrippa). On the appointed day, Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. Of course, this is remarkable, simply because he is king. They are all gathered; they're there maybe because they have to be. They shouted: "this is the voice of a god, not of a man." Immediately because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down and he was eaten by worms and died. So we see a brief notice of this in the narrative of Acts as it unfolds, and then we see it in Josephus. "When Agrippa (and this our Herod Agrippa) had reigned three years over all Judea he came to the city, Caesarea, and there he exhibited shows in honor of Caesar (real propaganda). On the second day he put on a garment made of only of silver with texture truly wonderful and he came into the theater early in the morning (which was properly timed by the way that entrance was not accidental at all) at which time the silver in his garment being illuminated by a fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shown out after a surprising manner. It was so resplendent as to spread horror upon those who looked intently upon him and presently his flatterers cried out that he was a god. Upon this, the king did neither rebuke them nor reject their impious flattery. But as he presently looked up, he saw an owl and immediately understood that this bird was the messenger of ill tidings. A severe pain arose in his belly; he was carried into the palace and the rumor went abroad everywhere, that he would certainly die in a little time. When he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days he departed this life." So interestingly enough we have two takes on this situation of Herod Agrippa in that particular theater.

What we also see and this will close down our look at Caesarea: As I said earlier, Herod's intent was to bring the Roman culture, to shape up what he perceived to be a very provincial backwater people. God's intent was to use Caesarea as a jumping off place. It starts out with Peter and Cornelius, Cornelius a Roman centurion stationed there. Peter was sent up to minister to him and we see a

Gentile becoming a believer. Those are the seeds that are planted. Paul was imprisoned there and from there sent off to Rome. Prior to that, we have Caesarea being a significant jumping off place for the gospel.

It doesn't stop with our New Testament narratives because during the early Byzantine period Caesarea becomes a major location for church fathers. Just a quick look at a small small portion of Byzantine Caesarea; it was an opulent place because this was a major place for the church fathers such as Origen, originally from Alexandria, and also for Eusebius. And that's not a surprise as we read in the book of Acts, the Gospel will go to the ends of the earth. Just a reminder from Caesarea the gospel indeed moved westward.

Next time we'll pick up Jesus and the Galilee.

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