

Dr. Elaine Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 7, The Hill Country

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This is Dr. Elaine Phillips and her teaching on Introduction to Biblical Studies. This is session number seven, Central Arena, the Hill Country.

In a moment, we're going to do a little bit of review, but we want to see that this time, we're going to focus on one of the most important segments of the land itself as it functions as God's place for putting his people.

It's going to be what's called the Central Arena or the Hill Country, and for those of you using the biblical background study maps, these are maps three and seven. But let's review first; we just walk our way through this. We did historical geography, and you've probably seen enough of that now to know which four contribute to that.

We also, after those four sub-disciplines, did a geographical overview of the Middle East and then focused on this region called both the Land Between, because of course, it is between those major geopolitical entities and all the other things, and it became the testing ground of faith for God's people. We've talked already about the covenant at Sinai, and that's going to articulate the kind of obedience expectations as well as the blessings and chastisements. From those three overview things, we then went on to do some regional studies.

We've worked through the wilderness, Judean Hill Country, Shephelah, and Philistine Plain. We, on a broader brush stroke type approach, did the Negev and Sinai and tagged a little Egypt into that, and then we really zeroed into Jerusalem, spending quite a bit of time with both Old Testament Jerusalem and New Testament Jerusalem. As a preview and kind of a connection, because we've pretty much finished up the southern part of the country, we are going to move from Jerusalem and go to the central hill areas that are to the north of Jerusalem.

Now, what's going to happen is we're not going to move from Jerusalem and go directly to Benjamin and directly beyond that. Instead, we're going to take the same kind of approach, actually, that we took when we studied the Shephelah. We saved that till the last.

We're going to save the area of Benjamin till the last for all kinds of reasons, not least of which is it was a battleground and a place to be fought over, and it had everything to do with security or not for Jerusalem. So, let's see where we're going to go with this. Starting farther up north in this central area, we're going to call it the hill country of Manasseh, and what I've got here for you is this geological foundations

map, and I'll remind us of what some of these colors are just in case it's a little hard to remember.

Our green is going to be this hard limestone stuff, which has all of those wonderful qualities of good soil, springs, etc. Whenever we see yellow, we see it down here. Now we're going to see it up here, and this is our soft limestone.

That's going to be particularly important when we're talking about central, western, and eastern hill country of Manasseh. Manasseh, just to remind ourselves, is talking about the half tribe settling west of the Jordan Valley. The other half was going to be over here, but half of the tribe settled just about in here.

Yes, that rectangle is artificial, but it's giving us a little sense, and we're going to see then that we have the central part. We'll spend most of our time there. We have the western segment, which is a little bit different, quite different, as a matter of fact, in terms of geology, and then over here, sort of the equivalent of the wilderness that we saw farther down.

So here's what it's like, especially in the central part. You can see our color coding. This is our soft limestone, and the two things that we need to be aware of are going to be Mount Ebal here and Mount Gerazim there.

Mount Ebal and Mount Gerazim are there, and just to the east of that, you see a kind of white area. Don't go all the way out here, but sort of here. We want to think of that as the plain of Sychar, and that's going to ring some bells for us, I'm guessing, in terms of John chapter 4. The western slopes of this area, as I said a moment ago, are going to be a little bit different.

The mixture, soft limestone, chalk, and some green stuff as well, but a little bit of a mixture. And then out here, mostly our hard limestone, but also kind of a rain shadow. We will not spend time there.

Here's our map again. As we go from the area that is, excuse me, of great interest to us, we're going to see a white, that means alluvial soils, that means a wadi of sorts, and that's going to be wadi far up there, connection to the Rift Valley. There it is right there.

Then we're going to have to the west. Notice, by the way, the difference. Wadi, Arabic, reflects that when these names were kind of doled out, that was the language is still spoken by most of the population there.

Nahaw is Hebrew. And so when we talk about the valley that is heading west, most geographers call it Nahal Shechem. It's going to the west.

Obviously, we're going to see then that this area, in terms of central Samaria, with Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, is going to be pretty important. And I just explained why. We have a connection across here, don't we? If someone's coming from here, they can make their trek up Wadi Farah, take a little dogleg jog down, and then head west.

Let's look at it from a slightly different perspective now and pick up some of the cities that are going to be most important. We're certainly not going to get all of them, but if we're thinking of this as having been our central Samaria area, right in here, sorry, our tribal area of Manasseh, central right here, clearly Shechem, or Shechem, is one of the first ones that comes to our mind. We know it all the way back in Genesis when Abraham is going to arrive at Shechem in Genesis 12.

Just to the east of Shechem is going to be that little plain of Sychar that we looked at in the geological map. So, hold on to that connection. We also are going to want to note a place called Tirzah, because when we start talking about the history of the divided kingdom, there is going to be a short period of time in that fractious northern kingdom time, place when Tirzah is going to serve as the capital, just for a short time.

And then, most importantly, there is going to be Samaria. When we get to our historical segment of this shortly, we're going to talk about the sequence of capital movement from first Shechem to Tirzah to Samaria, capitals of the northern kingdom. The term that is in parentheses, Sebast, is there because that is the term, the name that was given to it when it became a Roman city that was re-established by none other than Herod the Great.

But that's farther on down the line. Let's now outline some of these specific regional issues or historical issues that I've been talking about randomly. RSM stands for Regional Study Map, in case you're going to be opening a set of maps in conjunction with this.

Abraham, actually that should say Avram, Abram at this point, because his name change doesn't happen until Genesis 17, but we know him as Abraham. And so we find, as we read Genesis, that in chapter 12 he's going to arrive. This is the first named location to which he will come in Genesis.

Sometime later, well after the patriarchal period, well after the time in Egypt, after the exodus, after the wilderness wanderings, the conquest happens. And kind of as an interval after the people take Bethel, Ai, there is a hiatus, and Joshua will gather the people at Shechem in order to do what Moses told them to do, recite the covenant, and they're going to do it again in chapter 24. Going on down further, past the United Monarchy, the death of Solomon, and tumultuous time, we've already had some unrest that seems to manifest itself as Solomon is reaching his end, and then certainly, when he dies, his son Rehoboam actually goes north.

He meets the rest of the Israelites; he confronts them at Shechem, so we see that it's, well, it's centrally located, that's true, but it's also going to be important in terms of drawing them all together for this little confab that takes place. The kingdom splits, Jeroboam, son of Nebat, will indeed keep the north, and there will be a time, and I've given you the biblical references, chapters 14 through 16 of the 1 Kings, which describe for us how unsettled this was, both for the southern kingdom and for the northern kingdom. And because a pharaoh from Egypt named Shishak shows up on the scene, and it's particularly threatening, like because there is enough equivalent of civil war going on even within the northern kingdom itself, the capital moves around.

It goes to that location of Tirza that we saw a moment ago on the map, slightly farther away, maybe a little bit out of reach of Shishak's invasion, and then there's going to be a new dynasty, under a guy named Omri, and he's going to move the capital from Tirza out to Samaria, and we'll say more about that in a moment. When Omri does indeed move the capital, just remember that map I showed you a moment ago. It looks like it's really close, but it's far enough west, it's far enough out of that really central area, so that in moving that capital to Samaria, he buys it from a guy named Shemer, names it Shomron, that's the Hebrew, and basically what he's doing is embracing foreign influence, stuff coming in from the west. We've seen all along that whatever comes in from the west is threatening in a way, and so Omri moves his capital there, pretty much opens his virtual arms to the west, and in marrying off his son Ahab to Jezebel, who is the daughter of a Phoenician king, Etbaal, she is pretty much going to invite Baal worship in.

It's always been a threat, but now it's going to be a major part of the kingdom. Ahab and Jezebel together will, to all intents and purposes, make Baal worship the state religion of the northern kingdom. That's important for a narrative that will be forthcoming when we talk about Elijah.

Continuing on, in this area, as I mentioned a moment ago, the city of Shomron, or Samaria, will be rebuilt during the Hellenistic slash Roman period and be named Sebast, and we do see the remnants, the footprint again, of a temple that's pretty monumental or was. In terms of the gospel connections, the one that we know best, of course, is when Jesus and his disciples go through Samaria, John chapter 4, and he meets a Samaritan woman at the well, and they have a little interaction over a temple at Gerizim, that was a Samaritan temple, and in that context Jesus will say, you know, it's not Jerusalem, it's not Gerizim, God's people will worship in spirit and in truth. Let's just look a little bit at some of these things as we see them on the ground if you will, and there's a lot that can be said about this picture, so I'll just mention a couple of things that are of interest.

Down in between these two mountains is Shechem. It's now modern-day Nablus. Neapolis was the name in the Greco-Roman period, and the modern name Nablus is preserving that actually, you can hear it, Neapolis, Nablus, but here we have Mount Gerizim, and we're going to have Mount Ebal over here.

We'll see another picture of it in a moment. This is then, we saw on our topographical map, a valley that's going to go straight west from here. We are on the plain of Sychar, and on that plain of Sychar you can see sheep and a goat as well.

Look at the next picture and think about this one. See how it has changed depending on the season. Here, we've got wonderful green stuff growing.

We also have a little bit better view of Mount Ebal over here, but I want you just to think of those two pictures in conjunction with each other. This is springtime, of course, and so nice green stuff is growing. By the time whatever is grown there is harvested, then the flocks come in, and you have a very lovely symbiotic relationship because they are sort of grazing on the stubble that's left, and as you might guess, they're fertilizing it for the next year and go around.

So, you have a good relationship between people who bring flocks back and forth and those who are more sedentary and cultivating the fields. Think in terms of Gerizim, Ebal, and Joshua 8 and 24 that I mentioned earlier. They were to be, we see it especially in Joshua 8, on these two mountains reciting covenant blessings and curses.

Interestingly enough, the curses were recited from Mount Ebal. There is an archaeologist named Adan Zertal who has done a lot of work and he found a temple remains footprint up here from the Israelite period on Mount Ebal. Lots more we can say about that.

Here we are actually on Mount Gerizim now looking down, and so as we look down, we see just in that corner the Tell of Shechem right there, and we're looking northeast up towards Tirzah, so you can kind of imagine that on the map that we saw. Shechem, a little bit more protected location up here, and then, of course, we move out and look around Samaria, and although this is not a picture of Samaria, we're getting a feeling for the lower rolling hills around the area of Samaria itself, Samaria more accessible. Zeroing in a little bit on Samaria, I want to say two things about Samaria.

One has to do with Ahab, son of Omri. One of the things that was found in this area, this would have been the palace structure, they found ivories. They also found some ostraca, by the way, so we have some finds from this area that are from that time period, but the ivory imports are what we're really particularly interested in because

ivory would have come from somewhere foreign, and it would bespeak, well, opulence, elegance, wealth.

You have Amos, for example, condemning people for their ivory houses and so forth and so on, and so as they found these things in this palace, palace from the Iron Age period, this is indicating that we've got some reality. Also, very high class architectural structures of that as well. On the other side of this, just get back over here; we're going to see this.

This is not Samaria so much as it's the city now of Sebast because this is just the platform leftover from another one of Herod's temples. This one was built in honor of Augustus, and simply if you want to get some kind of a sense of the size, the mammoth size of this, if you look at that base for the column just there, someone who's about five feet five can lie on that, and their feet will be here, and their head's going to be here, so the columns that actually stood up from that base, Josephus tells us, could be seen from the Mediterranean Sea. Well, we are going to leave that central region. Sorry, the tribal inheritance of the Manasseh region is right here, and the next thing we're going to do is go a little bit south.

We've done Manasseh, now moving to the hill country of Ephraim, and again, just kind of blocking it off somewhat artificially, but give us a sense of what we're looking at. Obviously, if you're looking at this, the first thing you want to focus on is the primary color that's evident in that whole thing that's outlined, and it happens to be green, which is indicative of our hard limestone. This tells us the things we already know, doesn't it? We just got to see that color, and we've got a good idea of what's going on.

Its hard limestone, its rugged, deep v-shaped valleys, great soil, springs, all those things that make it a really good place for God's people to be. There is also a wadi system that kind of cuts up through from the west, and you may remember, and I'll just remind ourselves when we talked about the Shefei La down here, and we talked about Jerusalem right about here, and one of the things I said to you was that just west of Jerusalem, in that green limestone area, was such a rugged wadi system that it provided, frankly, a natural defense. The same is true of this Shiloh system here.

It's not an accident that in those early years of Israel's being in this area, Joshua judges that we have the Ark of the Covenant at Shiloh. It was protected in that location. We'll come back to that when we talk about cities, which is going to be right about here.

There's Shiloh. Look at the topography. Again, it's hard to get a sense of it, but we get a little bit of an idea that it's a rugged area, easily protected.

Shiloh would be a place to keep your most precious, precious thing, which was the Ark of God's Covenant. Spend your time in Shiloh. We also have in this region the combination of Bethel and Ai, two cities that are significant in terms of the conquest, which started at Jericho and went up.

Remember the issue? The first time with Ai was an absolute catastrophe, but then they would take it and finally control this region here, the Bethel-Ai and the Bethel Plateau. We'll come back to that. Another set of cities that we need to note on this map, they're only UBH and LBH, so Upper and Lower Bet Horon.

Although it doesn't look really particularly impressive, what this is is indicated by the fact that we've got a red route. Red's a little bit vague here, but let's just track something. If we can track with me.

You're coming from Jericho. If you want to get all the way across to the coastal plain, here you're going to make your way. You've got a choice there.

You might go up to Bethel and Ai. The Israelites did that at first. Or you could go down to this area and then you could follow that red route.

One of the few ways to get from this higher elevation, center part of Benjamin, we're going to talk about it later, is going to be a ridge that connects upper and lower Bahoran, and then you can follow your red line out to wherever you want to go, whether it's going to be Lod or Gezer or whatever. So, Upper and Lower Bet Horon show up a lot. They show up in the conquest narrative.

They're actually mentioned there. So here we are with our history. Just a couple of things.

Many more as you read your texts. Abraham and Lot. Once they come back from Egypt, Genesis 13, they settle near Bethel.

And you remember the rest of that narrative. You know, the the stuff can't support all their flocks and herds, so Lot's going to go settle in the Jordan Valley. Jacob's going to also be at Bethel.

He happens to have a dream there. There's the conquest that I mentioned already, coming up and taking that area around Bethel and Ai. And then, as the Israelites come up to help the Gibeonites, we're going to talk about that later. Think of conquest, specifically Joshua 9 and 10.

All of this is significant territory. Mention the fact that the tabernacle is at Shiloh during this time and then tragically significant. Once Jeroboam, son of Nebat, takes the ten tribes, secedes from the union if you will, one of the things he will do to

make sure that people aren't crossing the border between the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom, he puts up a golden calf at Bethel.

He puts one at Dan, too. We'll talk about that later, but he puts one at Bethel. And the idea is that Bethel is on that north-south top of the ridge; we've talked about that in terms of how you have to get from north to south; you've got to stay on the ridge. Bethel would have been there and would have been the place where folks there could say, oh, you don't need to go south of Jerusalem; that's sort of hostile area; just come on in here and worship here.

We got the trappings of a fairly, fairly, sort of decent worship golden calf. When we read the end of the book of Judges, which, by the way, is a truly painful set of chapters from 17 through 21, but especially 19 and 21, you know it's that Levite and his concubine and all the hideous aftermath, but there's this interesting verse as they're talking about something that's going to happen at Shiloh, and it all has to do with replenishing the tribe of Benjamin, but the geography plays in here. Let me read it.

Shiloh, north of Bethel, east of the road that goes from Bethel to Shechem, in other words that route that we've been mentioning already, the treks, Jerusalem, Gibeah, Ramah, Mitzvah, Bethel, and then on up to Shechem. Shiloh is a little east of that, yes, a little more protected, a little off the route to the south of Labona. This is the Labona Valley and you actually see an older road zigzagging, hairpinning its way to get down to that valley.

Okay, well, we've done hill country that belonged to the half tribe of Manasseh, hill country of Ephraim, which is much more protected as we've seen, and now, by way of contrast, the small but vulnerable and open hill country of Benjamin. Here it is in the ellipse. So, let's see what it looks like first.

Although it's small, it's strategically significant, and this picks up on something I said a moment ago about a route going right across here and that interesting place called Upper and Lower Bayhorn. Benjamin has at its center point a plateau. That green stuff there spreads out a little bit more.

It isn't just the ridge that we've been chatting about. It now spreads out a little bit more. By the way, this blue line here is watershed, in case you've been wondering.

That's not a road; it's a watershed. There is a hard limestone plateau at the center, I just mentioned that already. Obviously we've got this chalky stuff to the east, which is much less hospitable, but still got to get through it.

And I've been talking about the routes. The ridge route goes north-south. We'll look at the map that has routes on it in a moment, but it's going to follow the top part of that and then interesting east-west routes with Rama, Rama, Rama.

We'll talk about cities in a moment. Okay, here we go. Now, because there is such a clutter of important cities in Benjamin, I think I've avoided putting all kinds of arrows on here because they block everything else out.

So before I even put anything up on the list, let's just look carefully at things we already know. Coastal Plain, Shephelah, the hill country of Judah, Judean wilderness. And now let's start with Jerusalem because we know that Jerusalem, from our study of it, is on the border, the southern border of Benjamin, right? Here's Judah, the southern border of Benjamin.

If we go out to the east, Jericho, New Testament, Old Testament, Jericho, right here. If we go to the west, Gezer, and in between, look at that cluster of cities. Let's work from Gezer and notice two things that we already have seen.

Here's Upper Bet Horon. Whoops, I guess lower is not there, but there's Upper Bet Horon. Lower would be right down at that point there.

Kiriat Yairim, Gibeon. Those are two of four cities that allied themselves with the Israelites because they knew that once Israel controlled Bethel and Ai, life was going to be a little bit challenging for them, so they made an alliance, deception. That, of course, made Jerusalem really nervous, along with Hebron and other cities out in here.

So that's going to be our geopolitical configuration for a battle that takes place. But let's keep moving. We have Gibeon.

We have north of Jerusalem, Gibeah, hometown of Saul. Ramah, crossroads that we mentioned a moment ago. Mitzpah, and then Bethel.

We also want to notice two additional sites, Gebah and Mikdash, right up in here. Here's the list, and again, I'll point them out as we go along. That last walk went from west to east.

Now we're going to go from east to west, just to reiterate it. Here's Jericho. Bethel, right here, again, in Ephraim, but close enough that we need to make a note of the Bethel and Ai connection.

Gebah and Mikdash, not your garden variety names, but in a couple of narratives, really, really important. It happened to be the first Samuel narrative. Gibeah, Ramah, Mitzpah, right? Gibeah, Ramah, Mitzpah, on that ridge out there.

Gibeon, the head of our, where'd it go, here it is, the head of our league against or allied with Israel and ending up being against Jerusalem and the others. And then Gezer, actually, the tribal area of Ephraim, but tremendously important as a city of access through the Ayalon Valley into here. Before we leave this map, just notice that there is a natural defense west of Jerusalem all along here.

That's going to be important for some of the things we're going to say later on. Just notice that between Jerusalem and Ramah, even this depiction of it shows that it flattens out a little bit. That will be our central Benjamin Plateau.

All right, let's see what we can do with all this in terms of history. This will tie together some things that I've been mentioning as we've been going along looking at the map. Patriarchs of Bethel, Abraham, Jacob, important stuff.

The conquest, and I can't emphasize enough how important the central Benjamin Plateau is throughout history, starting with this particular thing. Just to say it again, Gibeon was so aware that once Bethel and I had fallen to the Israelites, they needed to protect themselves. So they're going to ally themselves with three other cities, Kephira, Yekirah, Ya'arim, Be'erot.

Those are the four cities, three cities along with Gibeon. They're the ones that go and say, oh, our shoes are worn out, our bread is moldy. Israel, Joshua, without consulting the Lord, it says, did make that treaty with them, which means then that when they, the four cities, Gibeon, Kephira, Be'erot, Kephira, Ya'arim, are attacked by Jerusalem, and four additional cities down south.

The Israelites have to go up and keep their treaty, but they will end up pursuing that League of Jerusalem and so forth, all the way down the Beit Horon route and routing them to the south. Judges 19 through 21 unfold in this area, as I said. Moving forward in history, we have our first Samuel narratives, Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel.

Samuel's hometown is Ramah. Samuel lives at the crossroads. Don't miss that.

He's located at a very significant place. It's not big, but it's the crossroads in the east-west, north-south route. And Saul's hometown, just south of Samuel's town of Ramah.

This is going to be important eventually. Just hang on to it. In the meantime, after Saul is king, that happens when we are talking about the first Samuel narratives.

And I'm realizing, by the way, that I have a bad reference there. So, in your mind, just erase 1 Kings and put 1 Samuel, right? That should be 1 Samuel, with Jonathan and his armor bearer. We'll have to correct that a little later on.

At any rate, the Philistines, in this time frame, are really making life miserable for Israel. Again, think 1 Samuel, 13 and 14. They are, I'm going to show you a map in a moment, well into the central Benjamin area.

They have actually surpassed the actual plateau. They have made their way over into the Geba and Mechmash area. Jonathan and his armor-bearer are going to be operating in that context.

Once Saul dies, at the end of 1 Samuel, then we have David. After, as we've said, reigning for seven years in Hebron, we'll move to Jerusalem, the southern border of the Benjamin area. One thing I want to do, and it's not on here, and it actually should be, is just sort of interface this at this point.

After Saul disobeys, seriously, the Lord twice, we see it first when he offers sacrifices it shouldn't have. We see it second, in the text of 1 Samuel 15, when he doesn't obey the Lord with regard to the Amalekites. The Lord sends Samuel to anoint David, and again, think of your map at this point because Samuel lives in Ramah.

In order to get to Bethlehem, which is where David is living and which is where Samuel is going to anoint him, Samuel's got to go past Gibeah. It's on that route. We can imagine that there would be people in Gibeah who would be well aware of Samuel's movements as he is going from Ramah past Gibeah down to Bethlehem, which is probably why Samuel's a little bit concerned and asks the Lord basically for a cover for this event that's going to happen in Bethlehem, which he will have.

He's going to offer a sacrifice down there. David will be anointed. At any rate, continuing to do lots of fast-forwarding, I haven't included everything in here, but one of the things you see, even at looking at that little list, that this is an extremely important area.

And after the split in the kingdom, after the north goes after Jeroboam, son of Nebat, after you have a golden calf at Bethel, there is continuous, continuous battleground back and forth across this area. First Kings 15 is only one illustration of a number of areas. The king, Asa, is in the south.

Baasha is just beginning a new dynasty up north, and we're going to talk about that in a moment. First of all, here's Ai. A little bit on Ai.

I'll skip through these quickly because I want to get to the maps with the Asa-Baasha narrative. I realize that this doesn't look like perhaps what we would think of as tableland. That's what we think of as a plateau.

But this is very much of a flattened area from the stuff to the west or to the east that's much more rugged, like that. That's eastern Benjamin. So, the plateau was a good fighting area.

Here's our narrative, first of all, about Geba, Michmash, and the Philistines. And there I've got the reference right, so this is all good. Here's a map.

This makes the routes a little clearer. So here we have our north-south route. Here we have our east-west route.

Here we have Jericho, Bethel-Ai. Here we have the R standing for Rama, and you see the crossroads right there. Jerusalem, Gibeah, Gibeon.

But what I want you to see is this next thing. There's Michmash. There's Geba.

Those are the two cities that show up in this 1 Samuel 13 and 14 narrative. Yes, others do as well, but this means that the Philistines have gotten from this area, which is where we think of them, not only into Israel's territory but well past. They have made their way into the central Benjamin plateau, across it, and over to Geba and Mekmash right here.

This gives us some indication when we look at this particular map and then the threat of the Philistines of how serious this was. In fact, the text tells us that they had an outpost right here, and the Philistines sent raiders up north, raiders out here, and raiders down this way. They were really overwhelming and oppressing the Israelites terribly.

Israelites are encamped at Geba. Philistines are at Mekmash. You can read the narratives.

Open it up and read it because Jonathan will say to his armor-bearer, you know, let's just see if we can get at them. There's a pass. This is a rugged area.

You've seen a picture of the ruggedness of that eastern Benjamin area, but here is a natural phenomenon that will lead us from Geba up here, kind of down there. You can walk through there and come across here, and then right in this area is Mekmash. Jonathan and his armor-bearer, double-handedly, just the two of them, will climb up, and as you know the story, they will route the Philistine outpost.

They will chase the Philistines at large across the central Benjamin Plateau. They chase them to the western side, and the Philistines, at least at that point, are pushed back to where they belong. But even just by seeing the map in the previous slide and this one, we get a sense of how serious that was.

By the way, this thing pass at Michmash is not only mentioned in this narrative. When Isaiah is talking in Isaiah chapter 10 about Assyrians coming, he gives a very ominous set of cities. They come to this point, they come to this point, they stop at Mekmash, they cross the pass at Mekmash, they drop their baggage, and then they keep going, and obviously, Jerusalem is in the crosshairs in that particular narrative.

Well, let's just do one last thing. Asa, king of Judah, is a good king, by the way. In fact, he's a really interesting good king because before this narrative that takes place on the central Benjamin Plateau happens, before that narrative, Asa was invaded by a bunch of Ethiopians from down here.

Hordes and hordes and hordes of them. He asks the Lord for help. The Lord delivers him.

Chronicles tells us all about it. Asa trusted God in that context. That's an important backdrop for what's coming next.

Basha. Well, Basha has just taken over the dynasty, the preceding dynasty. You can read as well as I can; he destroys the dynasty of Jeroboam.

He initiates his own dynasty right away and watches the map happen here; Basha's controlling here. Here's the southern kingdom. What do you do when you want to consolidate yourself against an enemy? Well, you grab stuff that's valuable to that enemy, and you hang on to it, and you make a power move.

And what Basha does is to grab Ramah. It's a crossroads. We've said that already.

Because this is such rugged territory, it is Jerusalem's way of getting out to the west and out to the east. Asa recognizes that he is under terrible duress. Even think economically, think geopolitically, think all kinds of things.

Once Rama is under the hold of Basha, hostile from the north, Asa thinks he's got to do something. He's got to do something because he can't go up to that crossroads and go west or go east. But unlike when he was attacked by the Ethiopians from the south, what does he do? He sends envoys up here to Syria and asks for help.

1 Kings 15, he says, please attack the northern kingdom from the north. That means that then their forces are going to go up, and they're going to fight in the north. They'll withdraw, and I'll be able to grab Rama back.

And that's exactly what he did. And in fact, if you look very carefully on this map, here's Rama. He gets it back.

And the text tells us specifically that Asa fortified Geba and fortified Mitzvah. And you see those little red blobs on the map there. Those are indicative of Asa's strategic fortification.

He puts one here on the road that goes this way. He puts a fortifying post right there at Mitzpah. And that means he's got a little fence around Rama.

He can keep Rama that way, and he can get out west. And you're thinking, man, that's really strategic. Good for him.

Is that the Lord's take on it? We don't have any commentary in the book of Kings, but in the book of Chronicles, it's very interesting because God sends a prophet to Asa and basically harks his memory back to what happened in the preceding incident when Asa did trust the Lord. And the prophet says, why didn't you do it this time around, too? So even though that strategic move looks fairly good on the map and may have looked really good to Asa, it was a mistake. It was indicative of the fact that he was not being trusted.

We are not going to walk through every battle that took place on the central Benjamin Plateau, but that one gives you an idea just in those few verses in first Kings 15 of the importance of that area, actually right on into contemporary politics. Jerusalem, for reasons that are completely understandable after 1967, annexed a lot of this area right here just to protect themselves. Kind of offense.

Well, let's just take a quick review of where we've been. We talked about the hill country of Manasseh and specifically, Shechem is a major city, Gerizim and Ebal towering over it, and the importance of that for covenant and all kinds of things. We talked about the move of the capitals, Tirzah, but then Samaria and what that meant, moving the capital of Samaria to the West, specifically in terms of opening up to Phoenicia and Jezebel marrying Ahab.

We talked about the fact that the hill country of Ephraim is a very protected area because of the topography. We have the Ark at Shiloh for a good amount of time. And then we finally talked about the small area of Benjamin, but particularly the strategic area because it ends up being a battleground, central Benjamin Plateau.

So that's where we're going to leave it at this point. And we're going to, don't lose sight, by the way, of our Samaria connection here because that's going to be a nexus to our next regional study.

This is Dr. Elaine Phillips and her teaching on Introduction to Biblical Studies. This is session number seven, Central Arena, the Hill Country.