

Dr. Jeffrey Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 5, The Geographical Arena, Part 1

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This is Dr. Jeffrey Hudon and his teaching on Biblical Archaeology. This is session 5, the Geographical Arena, Part 1.

Archaeological sites and events that are attested archaeologically do not happen in a vacuum.

To understand archaeology, we need to understand the land and the geographical context. So, we're going to take some time and look at the geographical context of archaeology, which is the land of the Bible. Of course, it's a beautiful picture of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, a very typical scene or vista there.

The land of the Bible is something that is near and dear to believers worldwide, but it's especially relevant if you're Jewish. And just a little modern history here, waves of Jewish immigration, the Olim that came and made Aliyah to the land in the late 19th and 20th centuries, came from again, from Europe, from the Middle East, from Africa. One of the first things that the Sabras, the Jews that still lived in the Holy Land, were born in the Holy Land, did was they would take them on excursions.

And these excursions were called Yediat Haaretz, or knowledge of the land. It was very successful because it formed a very strong bond between the people and their new land, because they were literally coming home. And so, for Israelis, at least, again, Jews before the state of Israel was founded, and now Israelis, connection with the land is very, very important.

And here you have some of those materials used by the Jewish Agency and, later on, the government of Israel to introduce recent immigrants to the land. Now, there were certain scholars and certain teachers who were instrumental in helping not only Jews and immigrants but also, on an academic level, the study of the land. And just to point out a couple of these on the upper right is Michael Aviona, who was educated and actually got his Ph.D. in England, but was just an incredible scholar of the classical period, Greco-Roman period, Byzantine period, as well as a historical geographer.

He wrote a book, first in Hebrew and then in English, called The Holy Land. It's basically historical geography from the Persian period up until the rise of Islam. The other gentleman on the lower right is Benjamin Mazar.

He was an Old Testament scholar who made Aliyah to Israel in the 1920s and eventually rose to lead as president of Hebrew University. But he was a superb

scholar, archaeologist, and historical geographer. And that's his Hebrew work on the history of archaeological research in the land of Israel.

Their students, Mazar's and Aviona's students, again, became foremost, first and foremost, in the study of the land. And again, this is called the study of historical geography, because you use various disciplines when you try to understand history and archaeology and the archaeological sites and ruins, you have to put them in context. And these men knew how to do that very, very well.

The one with multiple pictures of him is Yohanan Aharoni, who was a student of Mazar and wrote the still popular textbook *The Land of the Bible*, which was basically a companion volume to Aviona's only for the earlier periods, the Old Testament periods. His student was Anson F. Rainey over there. He actually was my advisor when I was a student in Israel.

He was, again, a superb biblical scholar, archaeologist, and historical geographer, incredible linguist. And for anybody that's interested, I don't get any money for this. But these are two excellent atlases that are really state of the art.

The Sacred Bridge and the *Older Carta Bible Atlas*, again by Aharoni and Rainey, are very, very well received and used extensively. Okay. Many of you have heard the term the Fertile Crescent.

It was coined by James Breasted, who founded the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago. And Fertile Crescent was the idea of a strip of arable land that could be farmed. You could live very comfortably, that stretched from the Persian Gulf up the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, again, Mesopotamia land between the rivers, over to the Taurus Mountains, or the Zagros Mountains, and then down into what we call Canaan or the Southern Levant, and then eventually down into the Nile Valley as well.

This crescent-shaped strip was called the Fertile Crescent. It was the cradle, more or less, of civilization in the ancient Near East, and that's very important to understand.

And you see another picture here of that Fertile Crescent and the important empires that inhabited that land. Of course, you have the empires in Mesopotamia, which we'll talk about more in a different lecture, and then Egypt as well. And right in between that is the Levant.

That's important to point out because it is a land bridge, a very narrow land that connects Egypt and Mesopotamia, and Asia Minor and beyond. And so, it, think of it as a highway. And again, Anson Rainey's book, *The Sacred Bridge*, gives that, that indication.

Jim Monson's book, *The Land Between*, is another way of explaining it. It is a corridor to get from these different places. So, it's very, very strategic and vital and important if you have geopolitical ambitions to expand your influence.

So consequently, it was fought over from time immemorial and still is today. And so, you have these indicators of that because you've got beautiful temples and remains, architectural remains in Egypt, and massive remains in Mesopotamia, once you dig them out. But in the Land Between, or the Sacred Bridge, this narrow corridor, the Southern Levant, you don't have these extensive remains in such a great state of for the most part, because of the constant movement of empires and armies through this corridor, and with them comes destruction and, and, and violence.

So, it's a very, again, a very strategic location. It's a land that is been fought over from time immemorial. And hopefully you can understand why, because everything focuses on getting through here.

You can't go to the east; there's desert, and again, the Mediterranean Sea blocks you from the west. And so it is a very, very important strategic place. Okay, again, a modern political map of the Southern Levant, or Israel and Palestine, Jordan and Sinai, and then a more physical map.

We'll look at these areas of the Holy Land in different sections or pieces and describe their history and some of the important sites here. Again, coming from the west, you have a variety of terrain and, and climates in the Holy Land. Everybody thinks the Holy Land is a dry and arid desert.

And it is not. Some of it is, but a lot of it is not. You come in from the west, you first you hit the Sharon or Philistine Plain.

And then you hit what are called the Shephelah or the lowlands, the lowlands. And again, that's from the perspective of the hill country above it. It is actually foothills with valleys.

And that's a border area for most of the Old Testament. You continue to go to the east and you have the hill country, the Harim in Hebrew. And that is a hill country of Judah, Ephraim, Manasseh, and so on, up until the Jezreel Valley.

And then after that, you have the rain shadow, which is a Judean desert here. And north of that, just more or less, just an escarpment down into the Jordan Valley. So, to the north, you have Mount Carmel, which is actually a ridge pointing out northwest to a point over the Mediterranean.

Early Egyptians called it the Antelope's Nose. Then you have the famous Jezreel Valley, biblical Armageddon, that actually is like a interstate highway from the plain

of Akko all the way into the Rift Valley or the Jordan Valley. And that is the only way to get easily from the coast to the Jordan Valley.

Other than that, you have to go over the mountains. Again, it is very, very strategic and something that everybody would want. North of that, you have Lower and Upper Galilee.

We'll unpack that in a few minutes. Lower Galilee, again, is a series of east-west valleys. Upper Galilee is an escarpment and mountainous region that slopes down to the Latani River to the north, which is again in modern Lebanon.

Now, to the east, we continue, and we have what's called the Rift Valley. That Rift Valley starts way up in the anti-Lebanon mountains and continues down through Lake Hula, the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan River, the Dead Sea, and the Aravah all the way to the Gulf of Aqaba or Eilat, and then down into Africa, where it continues. And that is a huge, huge drop.

It's like a huge depression. Again, the level of the Dead Sea is the lowest point on earth above water. Now, this is a meeting of two plates, the African plate and the Asian plate.

These plates, again, shift and move north and south, and that creates seismic activity. So, there's a lot, a huge history of seismic activity in the Holy Land. The last huge quake was in 1927, I believe, 1927 or 1929, and did tremendous damage to, to homes and, and property.

And, throughout the activity, antiquity rather, there have been lots of recordings, of massive earthquakes. Of course, the most famous one is in Amos 1:1, where Amos opens up his oracle, his prophecy with the timing of that, which he mentions after the earthquake. And it was the earthquake during the reign of Uzziah that did so much damage, probably around 760, 750 BC.

There was another one in 31 BC, and we saw damage from that in many places, including Khirbet Qumran, the settlement where the Essenes lived, who copied the Dead Sea Scrolls. Here's another, again, breakdown of those sub-regions. Over here now, you continue east, and you come up on a plateau.

In southern Jordan or central Jordan, you have the biblical Hama shore, the table land, which is about 2,500 feet, which parallels roughly the tops of the hill country, the mountains. And then you have the lower and upper Gilead, which is mountainous, and then Bashan, which is now today called the Golan Heights. Again, very volcanic area, very rugged, but also fertile, if you can, if you can farm it.

Farther south, you have the biblical Arnon River, the Wadi Mujib, and you've got the Karak Plateau, which is called, again, the Debon and Karak Plateau, which straddle the Arnon River. And then south into biblical Edom, which is high, mountainous, Nubian sandstone mountains that, again, very dry, but the tops of the mountains rise up to about 3,500 feet, allowing farming. And so that's the, the early Edomites would use that, and we'll unpack that as well as we continue on.

Here's a relief map showing that, that very deep rift valley coming through here, separating Cisjordan, western, to the west of Jordan, from Transjordan. Good photos there to help us. Okay.

Again, the difference between the two plates, the African plate, and the Asian, excuse me, Arabian plate or Tunisian plate. And again, cross sections of the terrain and the differences in elevation and topography there. Okay.

The land of Israel had various names and borders. The land of Canaan in the Bible had a, had a boundary that did not include, apparently, Transjordan, but also, but also included the Golan Heights, biblical Bashan, up into Syria. And that was one determination of the biblical land of Canaan.

And here we have some, some travels there of the 12 spies going up and checking out the land. Okay. During the period of the Jewish monarchy in the Old Testament, at its height, Israel encompassed a very large area, up into Syria, even up into the Euphrates River.

David and Solomon had treaties and agreements with these kingdoms, which greatly expanded the land. And then again, later on, during the divided monarchy, that shrunk as, most notably, the Syrian empire began to expand. The land of Israel or the land of the Bible has a extensive road network in antiquity.

The roads we need to point out mostly in Transjordan, the King's Highway, named after the four kings that came and attacked the cities of the plain in Genesis 14. But this follows, again, the high ground and the, and in, in, in Moab, Edom, and then the Ammonite territory and beyond. To the east of that, which is not shown here, is what we call the desert way or the desert highway.

That's the route of the Israelites with Moses. They wanted to go the King's Highway where there was a lot of water and grain to feed them, but they were not allowed to do that. And so, they had to go to the desert highway, which is easier to traverse, but dry, and water is scarce on the desert way.

But anyway, that's the two north south routes there. There are several east-west routes, but the most important north-south route in Cisjordan is called the Way of

the Patriarchs or the Route of the Patriarchs. And that extends from Beersheba all the way up to Dothan and then continues on from there.

And that follows the spine of the hill country. And if you try to go to the west of that and to the east of that and try to go north and south, it's very difficult because you're just going up and down in and out of Wadis. But that provides one of the few north-south routes in Cisjordan.

The main route, again, is the coastal route, oftentimes called the way of the sea or via Maris in Latin, but that follows Northern Sinai and right up the coast or close to the coast, breaks off and goes over to the Sea of Galilee and up towards Damascus. So that's the basic road networks and the sub-networks where you have smaller roads going in various directions. Satellite view of the Galilee.

You can see the plains of Akko here, as well as the modern cities of Haifa and Akko. Rosh HaNikra, which is the ladder of Tyre here. Again, the Sea of Galilee.

You can't quite make it out too well, but you can see some of these east-west valleys and mountains going towards east towards the Sea of Galilee. Now, we'll talk about this or see more slides on this, but the wind would come off the Mediterranean and blow through these valleys, creating kind of a wind tunnel, go across the Sea of Galilee, and hit the escarpment there on the Golan Heights and cause a lot of turmoil. Or we would understand that as storms or very rough, turbulent water in the Sea of Galilee to stir the lake up.

And that, of course, is the explanation behind those storms that the disciples had to endure in the Gospels when they were fishing. That happens because of the winds all coming through those valleys from the Mediterranean. Okay, the Galilee region again is the plain of Akko here.

We're taking a picture here from Mount Carmel, looking north to Akko and then the border, the modern political border between Israel and Lebanon. This is basically a picture from this location across here, giving us an understanding of how that looks. And again, the ladder of Tyre, the borders up here on this point, and this shows the Mediterranean here, north of Akko.

Now, behind the coastline here is a foothills area called the Shephelah of Israel or the Shephelah of Galilee. This was a border region during the monarchy. We have two famous texts, 1 Kings 9 and 2 Chronicles 8, of Solomon making an agreement with Hiram, king of Tyre.

And Hiram, king of Tyre, was providing Solomon with expertise, architecture, and cedar for building his palaces and temple. And Solomon had to pay him, and so he

ceded some land called Kabal. And this has always been a crux for biblical interpreters.

What exactly does that mean? It could mean something like worthless land or whatever. And the land of Kabal, Hiram was not pleased with it what he received. But back in the 1980s, 1990s, Zvi Gal, an Israeli archaeologist, excavated a site called Horvat Rosh Zayit, head of the Olive, top of the Olive.

And he believes he has uncovered biblical Kabal. And this was a fortress from the time of Solomon. The question is, was it Phoenician? Was it from Hiram or was it from Solomon? But a very important site, 10th century site in Galilee in this border area between Israel and Phoenicia.

This is a view of Haifa, often considered the San Francisco of modern Israel. And again, in antiquity, there really wasn't too much activity where Haifa is today. The cities were more in the valleys and surrounding Mount Carmel, not necessarily on it.

We talked about Akko before. Again, this is looking south towards Mount Carmel. And Akko is, again, a Phoenician and very important historical city.

What we see here is Crusader remains. There was a Crusader castle and city here. The last actually to fall after the Crusader kingdoms collapsed.

And Napoleon actually fought here against the Ottoman armies. And there's a hill to the east called Napoleon's Hill, where he had his artillery. And that's actually an ancient tell of ancient Akko as well.

Here are some pictures of Upper Galilee. And you can see kind of this steep escarpment. Then, it slopes down, and the top of the escarpment slopes down slightly towards the north. Then, it goes into the Latani River in Lebanon.

Now, this is still, to this day, not terribly populated, not heavily populated. But in the 1950s, Yohanan Aharoni, our earliest Israeli geographer, did an archaeological survey, one of the first in this area, and found early Iron I villages. And he, again, identified those as early Israelite settlement villages in Galilee and published that in Hebrew.

He published his dissertation back in the late 1950s. So, he did pioneering work up here and others have followed him and found more of these sites. This is a one of the cities in Upper Galilee, Kedesh, that's been excavated.

And that's, again, the Iron Age, but also the Persian period and Hellenistic era. Baram is a second temple and later site in Upper Galilee. And this is one of the two synagogues that were at Baram in antiquity.

The facade of that synagogue has been restored, still stands. Montfort Castle, one of the Crusader castles in the Holy Land, of course in ruins, very close to the Lebanese border and overgrown there. Lower Galilee, again, you've got these valleys and ridges.

So, it's much more conducive to cultivation and settlement and was heavily settled throughout history. Good picture of one of the valleys and then one of the modern cities there and some of the agricultural going on. Yodfat or Jotapata is a city mentioned in the Wars of the Jews by Josephus.

He was actually one of the leaders here. This was once, believe it or not, a huge city, a walled city, and today, a barren hilltop in ruins. And that has been excavated as well.

But an important historical site during the Jewish revolt against Rome in 66 to 70 AD. Another important city in Galilee was called Sepphoris or Zipporah in Hebrew. This was a city that was flourishing at the time of Christ and only just a few miles from Nazareth.

Nazareth was kind of what we call a bedroom community at that time of Sepphoris. Ironically, this beautiful, grandiose Greco-Roman city is not mentioned in the Gospels, nor is, I believe, Tiberias, which was the capital of the Galilee under Antipas. So, again, the Gospels were very focused.

And did Jesus come here to Sepphoris? He must have. But not mentioned in the Gospels. But yet it's an incredible city.

Some scholars suggest that both Joseph and Jesus worked here as stonemasons, as workmen, building this beautiful city. We simply don't know, but we can only surmise. Today, the Sepphoris is a ruined Nazareth.

Of course, because of its association with Jesus Christ, it is a large city. This is a modern recreation of the village of Nazareth at the time of Christ. And they've done a very good job reproducing a synagogue and some of the houses right in the middle of the modern city.

From Nazareth, you can look south into the Jezreel Valley. Beautiful view here. And the beautiful shapely mountain there is Mount Tabor, famous in Judges 5, of course, with Deborah and Barak defeating Sisera and the Canaanite coalition.

This is also near the site where the population of Nazareth, the synagogue, wanted to throw Jesus over the cliff because of his pronouncement in the synagogue. This is

a modern city of Cana, not necessarily where the miracle happened, but this is a picture of that. There's a ruin that most scholars believe is the actual site of Cana.

Sfat is probably the biblical city on a hill. Again, one of these cities in lower Galilee on a ridge, on a hilltop. Beautiful city, artisan city, and the center of Kabbalistic Jewish mysticism.

And we just have sections of different geographical regions here, including the Great Rift Valley. The Sea of Galilee, Yom Kinneret, is shaped like a harp. The Sea of Galilee, from time immemorial, has been a source of water, irrigation for surrounding farms, and known for its fisheries.

So, you've got a very rich civilization around its shores throughout antiquity. And, of course, we know it mostly from the gospel narratives of Jesus and the disciples and their towns, Magdala, Capernaum, and Bethsaida. Now, the Sea of Galilee is sweet water; it's freshwater, but it's also below sea level.

It's in that rift valley, and you've got, slightly north of the Sea of Galilee, the rift falls below sea level, and then continues to fall all the way down to the Dead Sea, which is, again, the lowest point on earth, dry point on earth, and without any outlet. So, the Dead Sea is extremely salty. Some more pictures of the Sea of Galilee and its surroundings.

North of the Sea of Galilee, you have what's called Lake Hula, or the Hula Basin, and here's an excellent old photograph of Lake Hula. The problem with that is it was very marshy, and it was basically an ideal laboratory for mosquitoes and malaria. And so, when the Jews began their ways of immigration into Palestine, they purchased this land very cheaply from the absent landowners and drained this swamp at great cost and suffering, but drained the swamp and made it into a fertile area for farming.

And some of it still remains today as a kind of national park for migratory birds and so on. So, some of it still remains, but most of it has been drained and is farmed today. Great picture of the Sea of Galilee from the Mount of Beatitudes, the Italian church there, looking across up to the Golan Heights.

You can see again that escarpment where the wind comes from the west and hits that and then just circulates around the lake and causes storms. And again, other views of the lake. We'll see this in a minute, but here's a good view of some historical sites.

This is the, well we'll start over here, with the Horns of Hattin, Karnei Hattin. This is where the Crusader army, the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, was decisively defeated by Saladin in 1187, actually July the 4th, 1187 at this epic battle there. The Crusaders did not bring enough water with them and were dying of thirst.

They could see the Sea of Galilee, but the Muslim army blocked their way. This is Mount Arbel, which is kind of the rock of Gibraltar of Israel. And incredible views from the top, it's one of my favorite places to view all of the land of Israel.

Below that is the Plain of Gennesar, which is part of that international highway, or the Via Maris, that comes from the coast through there and then on to Damascus. So a lot of history here in those two sites. There's the top of Mount Arbel.

Look at the view and you can see and discuss the entire Galilean ministry of Jesus Christ from this site and point out where Jesus visited. Magdala, Capernaum, Bethsaida and so on. Some of the important archaeological sites in Galilee are Dan and Hazor.

This is the high place at Dan and Area A at Hazor with a gate chamber there, a six chamber gate, dated to the time of Solomon. Mount Hermon is the highest point in Israel and snow-capped most of the time. Legend has, and I believe Josephus mentions this, that Herod the Great would entertain guests at the temple, and he would have groups or workmen go up to the top of Mount Hermon, chip out huge blocks of ice and snow, and put those in wagons and haul that all the way down to Jerusalem so they could have ice in their lemonade or iced tea while he's entertaining guests.

And that's a difficult way to get an ice cube, but that's what they had to do. Great view of the Jezreel Valley again. Again, Mount Tabor, Hill of Moreh.

This is, I believe, on the way to the Herod Valley and Mount Gilboa. So again, just an incredible vista of biblical history from this viewpoint. And again, you've got the Akko Valley coming in from the coast, the plain of Akko, through this narrow defile here, and then the Jezreel Valley, which is, again, well known in history.

And by the way, the last cavalry charge, I think, in World War I was a cavalry battle in the Jezreel Valley between the Ottomans and the British Army Expeditionary Force. This is the Herod Valley and then down towards Beit Shan and the Rift or the Jordan Valley. This is an early photograph of Mount Tabor that's been colorized.

Mount Tabor was a Canaanite, sacred to the Canaanites. It's shaped like a woman's breast, beautifully symmetrical, and it was looked upon as a place of worship for kind of a fertility type place. And there's a Roman temple up on top, possibly one of the sites of the transfiguration in the Gospels.

Others say it would be Mount Hermon. We don't know that for sure. But even in modern times, Israeli couples would go up there and smooch and kiss and whatnot

because this was kind of the, again, even in modern times, a place of the idea of fertility.

And that's Mount Tabor. And most important, though, it was the place where the Israelites came down. The tribes of Israel united at the top of that mountain and, under Deborah and Barak, came down and defeated the Canaanites, who got their chariots stuck in the Kishon River and could not maneuver.

Mount Carmel, again, is not a mountain like Tabor. Mount Carmel is actually a ridge, and the end of the ridge, again, is, you can see on the right of the picture, this is a plane of Akko looking up at Mount Carmel. There are some other pictures of Mount Carmel and, of course, a statue of Elijah.

Going east into the Harod Valley, and then this is the rift here, the Jordan Valley, you've got Mount Gilboa here, that's where Saul and his sons were killed, and Tel Jezreel, which was an Omride, actually a military post or fortress and palace that was excavated about 30 years ago, and new excavations continue on there. So, again, an important viewpoint here because you've got a lot of biblical history here. Jezreel Spring, the Naboth vineyard, was somewhere in this area here.

They found wine presses, very large wine presses, so this was probably the land of Naboth that Ahab wanted. Ahab and Jezebel, their palace, were here. Ein Harod, we'll see more pictures of that, was the place where Gideon chose his army to fight the Midianites.

Then Mount Gilboa, again, is the place of the death of Saul and his sons as they fought against the Philistines. Some close-ups of the excavations at Jezreel. There's a close-up of the Spring of Harod.

You can go today, as these Israeli soldiers are doing, and recreate how Gideon chose his men. So, we see that the geographical context, again, gives a kind of a frame, a picture frame, to archaeology in that we understand the setting, the regional context of these sites, and events. Excellent view of Mount Gilboa, as it looks today.

Okay, and the Harod Valley ends in the, looking west up the Harod Valley there, but it ends in the Jordan Valley. And there's a major city here. We've seen this picture for our depiction of Beit Shan. And again, when the Philistines found Saul's body and Jonathan's body, they hung them from their temple wall on Beit Shan.

The men of Jabesh Gilead rescued those bodies and burned them. Beit Shan was, again, a major city in the Old Testament but also in the New Testament. This is one of the major, probably the *via*, not the *via*, but rather the *Carto Maximus of Scythopolis*, the Greco-Roman name for Beit Shan.

And here's the Tel here. Look at how tall that is over the Greco-Roman city. This is on top of the Tel, and this is a Canaanite temple that's been excavated from the Late Bronze Period.

This is Dr. Jeffrey Hudson and his teaching on Biblical Archaeology. This is session 5, the Geographical Arena, Part 1.