

Dr. Jeffrey Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 6, The Geographical Arena, Part 2

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This is Dr. Jeffrey Hudon in his teaching on Biblical Archaeology. This is session 6, The Geographical Arena, Part 2.

Okay, our next geographical region in the Holy Land is called the Plain of Sharon.

And this, again, is the coastal plain that borders the Mediterranean. And you would think that this plain would be very, very fertile and wonderful for farming. But there's a problem here.

We'll discuss that in a minute. But this is a good view of Sharon looking north to south. One of the issues in antiquity and even today is the fact that there are no or very few natural harbors along the coast of the Levant.

Atlit is a small one. Herod actually built his own. Jaffa is a fairly poor port.

The Israelis have worked a lot around Ashdod and built a modern port there, again using fill and building an artificial, a lot of artificial jetties and piers. The Plain of Sharon in antiquity, as it does today, had a series of small streams or wadis going into the Mediterranean. However, these would be blocked by what's called the Kirkar Ridge.

And we'll see a picture of that in a minute. This is basically fossilized sea life that had a ridge here, and that would not allow these streams to empty into the Mediterranean. So, you have swampy area here.

And you only, and again in antiquity, it was very, very little use. And so your road, your, your via Maris or your coastal highway had to go to the east here. And we'll see this here in a minute.

This is Atlit Castle, Crusader and Islamic period castle on the coast there. Dor is an ancient city and a very important Phoenician city at the time of Solomon that was excavated extensively over many years. I think it began in 1980 and has continued to relatively recently. Farther south, we have the famous Caesarea Maritima.

And this was again built by Herod from a smaller settlement called Stratos Tower. And Herod, of course, did everything extravagantly and large. And he, I mean, state of the art at the time, actually did build an artificial inner and outer harbor and used cement developed by the Romans to actually harden underwater.

And that was all done by hand. This is an early, an early stage of this settlement. Actually used, Herod actually used the tides to wash away the sewer.

The sewer was flushed down into these vaults. You can't see them here. And the tide would come in and wash the sewage out of the vaults.

So, there was a lot of high-tech for the time and techniques used to build the city, not least of which was a water supply. There is no water supply around this site.

So, Herod built a long aqueduct from the foot of Mount Carmel to bring spring water all the way to Caesarea. This is Caesarea today. Herod had a palace, and we'll see, I think, another picture of that.

This is one of the pools that he built adjacent to his palace. And you can see the theater there and the way it looks today. Here's Herod's palace as it appeared in antiquity.

There's the theater. He had both saltwater and freshwater pools with fish and, of course, the aqueduct from Mount Carmel. Incredible ingenuity by Herod and his Roman engineers.

This is part of those Kirkar ridges. Again, sea life fossilized, and you can actually quarry this like stone. And that block, with few exceptions, blocked groundwater and stream water from getting to the Mediterranean, creating swamps.

And, of course, that's been alleviated in modern times. We talked earlier that one of the first Israeli excavations was a place called Tel Qasile, actually a Philistine site very close to Tel Aviv. You can see the skyscrapers in the distance there.

And this is part of the Philistine sanctuary, which we'll talk a little bit more about when we get to the Philistine culture. It's a very important site. Philistine sites were usually built upon earlier Canaanite sites that they destroyed, again, as part of the sea people invasion.

And Tel Qasile was a virgin site. They built it, and there was nothing underneath it. So, it's an important site for that reason.

Now, there is a large river going into the Mediterranean. It's called the Yarkon River, and it's a very short river.

And it basically starts just a few miles upstream, a place called Aphek or Ras Al Ain, head of the source, head of the spring. And that's biblical Aphek, which was an Egyptian Canaanite city and administrative center. And then in New Testament times, Antipatris.

This is an Ottoman fort that's built over part of the remains. And there's part of a stretch of Roman road here that you can walk where the Apostle Paul walked when he journeyed from Jerusalem to Caesarea Maritima to appear before the magistrate or the governor and the king. South of Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv, again, is a modern city.

It was built on sand dunes. There are no ancient remains there to speak of. Jaffa, however, which is now kind of a suburb of Tel Aviv to the south, we're looking north here along the Mediterranean, is a very ancient city.

It was a very important Egyptian base and seaport for Solomon. All of the cedars of Lebanon floated down along the shoreline of the Mediterranean and then were brought up from Jaffa to Jerusalem to build his palace of cedars of Lebanon, the temple, and so on. There's been a lot of work at Jaffa lately by the University of California at Los Angeles, UCLA, Aaron Burke, and his team.

They're not only publishing old excavations that were done in the 1950s, 60s, and even 70s, but they're also doing their own excavations, and they're doing a great job publishing that. This was an important Egyptian base in the late Bronze Age during the New Kingdom. Burke and his team discovered an inner harbor that's now dried up and allowed ships to be protected.

Again, you've got this jetty here, breakwater, a jetty that protects shipping from coming from the ocean, but never really did that good of a job. You have a lot of accounts of pilgrims or tourists coming to the Holy Land during the Ottoman period and early Mandate period, having the ship's way anchor and they have boats coming out of Jaffa Harbor. And it's a very precarious trip into the protected harbor and disembarking there at Jaffa Port.

But again, very, very important site in antiquity for those earlier periods. We move from the coastal plain east and we're north of Judah here, so we don't have a kind of a foothill area. It's just kind of a gradual descent up or ascent rather up into the hill country.

This was again until 1967, when it was under Jordanian control. The Israelis captured this in the Six-Day War, and so they began doing surveys and excavations in this area, which is really essentially the heartland of ancient Israel. And here's a couple of good views here.

This is a view of the typical topography in the hill country of Ephraim and Manasseh. And you can see to this day the evidence of terraces or terracing. And those probably were partially used up until maybe the Ottoman or early Mandate period, 20th century, as well as a watchtower, which again gives a really good illustration of how

farmers watched over their terracing, which would have been olives or grapes, viticulture there.

And then, on the wadi floor, they would have grown grain. Usually, that was usually the case. And again, the material here, we had a few slides ago, a geological overview, would be Cenomanian limestone.

And this had kind of a reddish hue and the soil that broke down, that bedrock would break down into soil. It was called terra rossa, a very rich and iron soil that was ideal for this type of agriculture. Now, the people who did excavations and surveys in this area, Adam Zertal, who excavated the area of Manasseh, and Israel Finkelstein, who did Ephraim and part of Benjamin, and Avi Faust, who wrote extensively on it, have done work there as well.

So, it is very important work to understand the emergence of Israel as a entity in the Holy Land, in the land of Canaan, during the Iron I period. Okay, the Dothan Valley is kind of the end of the route of the patriarchs, that route that goes north-south from Beersheba up the spine of the hill country, and comes out at the Dothan Valley. Dothan was a major city, a biblical city.

Of course, in Genesis 37, Joseph visits his brothers in the Dothan Valley. This is where Joseph is sold to the Midianite traders and taken to Egypt. And sadly, just kind of a modern footnote here, during World War II, in the dark days of early 1942, when the Afrika Korps, the German army, was pushing against the British defenses in Western Egypt, there were fears, and rightly so, of a German push through Egypt and into Palestine.

There was a Muslim leader by the name of Haj Amin al-Husseini who visited with Adolf Hitler, and they had already planned to build extermination camps in the Dothan Valley to destroy and kill and murder all of Palestine's Jewish population. And so that thankfully never happened. But the Dothan Valley is a beautiful area today.

Most of it's on the West Bank. You can also see the remains of biblical Dothan, which was excavated by Wheaton College way back in the 1950s and published, and is still being published to this day. Another excellent view of a typical Israelite period, Old Testament period, hill country settlement.

You've got this modern Arab village here on the top of the hill. That would have been where the farmsteads or the small Israelite villages would have been. You've got terraces all the way down to the valley floor, the wadi floor there, where you have grain farming.

And that's a typical scene from biblical Israel, how it would have looked. Ancient Samaria, Sebastia, is again a famous city built in the hill country of Manasseh. It was chosen by Omri, king of Israel.

He bought the land from Shemar, which was often considered an estate, but there was an actual pre-Omri settlement there at Samaria. He built a city. And then, of course, Jeroboam II, in the later Jehu dynasty, expanded that as well.

And it was a fabulous city, very well protected, very well built. And some of this, again, is later remains of the Greco-Roman settlement. This is a Hellenistic tower here.

But some of these remains here are Israelite. Excavated, we mentioned George Reisner, but also in the 1930s as well. And a few small excavations later on.

This is a site plan of Samaria, as it appears today. And then we have the famous city of Shechem. And again, the two famous mountains of Curses and Blessings, Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, as they appear today.

We'll unpack that a little bit later. This is Adam Zertal. And in the 1980s, he made headlines by claiming to have found Joshua's altar that Joshua built on Mount Ebal.

And the jury is still out on whether that was a altar or a watchtower, some sort of a square tower. But I was told that Zertal would bring Israeli soldiers up to the site and explain it. And Israelis who are mostly agnostic, the soldiers would often renew their faith in God by seeing these remains and seeing the evidence, hearing the evidence that Zertal explained to them.

Zertal was a veteran of the Yom Kippur War and badly wounded. I think he served in a tank and walked with crutches the rest of his life. He unfortunately passed away a few years ago.

Here's ancient Shechem. Again, New Testament Neapolis. And you can see some of the walls here.

The Migdal Temple, a huge temple that was excavated in the Middle Bronze, Late Bronze Age. And again, the scene of various biblical accounts in the Book of Judges and earlier. And often called the uncrowned queen of the hill country because it was the first capital of Israel after the separation of Israel and Judah, after the death of Solomon.

But then it lost its luster and the capital moved first to Tirzah and then finally to Samaria. Again, Bronze Age gateway here. And Masibah near the Tower Temple that's been uncovered.

And again, this is for us here at Andrews University. This was the first site that our founding professor excavated at as a volunteer in 1962. Here's the second Israeli capital, Tirzah, on the Wadi Faria.

Again, a better location in some ways, but only served as Israel's capital for a relatively short time. Excavations are going on as I speak at Shiloh. And excavations were done there by, over the years, by, I believe, a Dutch expedition and then an Israeli expedition and now an American expedition looking for the site of the tabernacle.

And the recent excavations there claim to have excavator claims to have found where the tabernacle would have been located. Okay, we go back out to the coast now. South of the Plain of Sharon is the Philistine Plain.

And as you can imagine, this is the homeland of the Philistines. This is outside of Tel Aviv. Ancient tower there.

And here's an excellent, again, satellite view of the coastline of Israel looking south towards the Sinai. And you can see the darker areas are the areas where there's adequate cultivation or water, whereas the lighter areas are dry, more arid. This is the area we're looking at right here.

Okay, the coastal plain. Got a quote here from Amos Oz. Israel, the coastal plain where eight out of ten Israeli Jews live, far removed from the occupied territories, from the fiery Jerusalem, and from the religious national conflicts, is unknown to the outside world, almost unknown to itself.

One of the five major Philistine cities was the city of Ekron, which has been identified with Tel Miqne. And in the 1990s, they uncovered a huge temple palace complex here, including a monumental inscription and incredible finds there at Tel Miqne, biblical Ekron. We've already seen pictures of Gath.

This is Aaron Mayer, the Bar-Ilan University professor, with a four-horned altar, missing two of them, but originally had four. This is the site of Tel es-Safi, biblical Gath, in the 1940s, before it was excavated. The map here again shows the Philistine sites of Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gaza, Miqne, and Gath.

Those are the five Philistine major epicenters. Again, they were not, like the Greek polis, they were self-governing, but they were loosely confederated and again controlled that area during the Iron I and early Iron II period. This is Petrie's site at Tel el-Hesi, and originally he thought it was Lachish.

That's clearly wrong. Scholars now believe it's a site of Migdal Gad. And this is some modern excavations that were done in the 1970s, not Petrie's.

Pictures here of Ashdod during the excavations. Today, it's just a kind of overgrown mound; there's not much to see there. But recent excavations at the foot of the Tel have uncovered an Assyrian administrative center, dating to the 8th and 7th century BC, which has opened up some very interesting possibilities of biblical history, which we'll talk about later.

Harvard University excavated Ashkelon, again one of the cities right on the seacoast. Ashdod is slightly inland. And Ashkelon, very well funded as you can imagine.

Beautiful middle bronze gateway. You can walk into the city the way people did some 3,500 years ago. And outside of this gateway was found a small pottery container or a pottery house with a silver calf inside of it, which was a kind of very well-publicized find.

Gaza, the final city along the coast, again a Philistine city, not very well excavated because of modern political situation. And there have been some excavations there. The French have done work there, as well as the Palestinian Authority, but it has not been very well published so far.

We jump from the coastal plain, or the plain of Philistia, over to what's called the wilderness of Judah. And wilderness, again, we need to clarify what that means. In Hebrew, it's midbar, which means steppe or rugged country, dry, rugged country.

It's not desert. It's often called the Judean desert. And I've called it that and probably still will.

But it's more of a rugged steppe land. And it's a really relatively small area, about 15 miles in width and about 50 miles in length. But it's an important, important region in biblical history, because so much happened there.

And because the evidence or remains that were deposited there have more or less survived. This is where we got the Dead Sea Scrolls, all the Judean caves with finds from various periods. All happened here in the wilderness of Judah.

Here's some of the terrain, east of Jerusalem, kind of giving you an idea of what it looks like. You can see the mountain regions here, and then this steppe land, rugged steppe land that drops down dramatically from 2,500 feet to 1,400 feet below sea level. Huge drop in elevation in just a few miles.

This is looking from the Mount of Olives east. You can see some green here, probably an Israeli settlement down into the Judean desert and the Jordan Valley, kind of in

the foggy haze there. This is a theater again at Hebrew University on Mount Scopus, looking east towards that.

It's almost just a very dramatic change when you cross that watershed line because there's a rain shadow there. The rain will, the clouds will fall on the hill country and then bounce over the rift and whatever's left will fall on the Transjordanian highlands. And finally, we come to the Dead Sea.

It's a very dramatic picture there. 33% salt. Here are some pictures along the shore.

It's shrinking rapidly. There's an ecological crisis that they've been trying to resolve. And some facts there: 8.6 times saltier than the ocean.

There are a lot of health benefits, and a lot of health spas from the mud of the Dead Sea have a lot of medicinal qualities. It's about 42 miles long and 11 miles wide. And that probably would have been more or less in antiquity.

33.7% salinity and 1200 feet deep. So, it's a very deep body of water, the upper basin or the northern basin. We talked about the En-Gedi temple overlooking the Dead Sea.

So, we'll pass by that, and the Chalcolithic finds by Bar-Adon. Here's a dramatic picture again, looking down on En-Gedi from the Ascent of Ziz. And there were again fortifications here in antiquity, both Israelite and Roman because this is one of the gateways up into the hill country.

And you have in 2 Chronicles 20 an attack by the Ammonites, Moabites, and the men of Mount Seir against Jehoshaphat. And they come up this ascent and attack Judah, of course, and end up killing themselves. And again, next to En-Gedi is the Nahal David, which has a spring.

And it's a very famous or popular place to hike and to a picnic for Israelis and tourists alike. And this again was where David and his men would have hidden from Saul, as there's a lot of caves in the area. Another place in the Judean desert is the Buqeiya Valley, the Valley of Achor.

And this is east of Jerusalem, there's kind of a plain here, and popular again for mountain biking today. But in antiquity, this was used as kind of a paramilitary farmsteads that were established here in the ninth and especially during the eighth century. And we'll talk about those a little bit more in a different slide, different slide series.

In the book of Joshua chapter 15, you've got the tribal territories or the various districts, I should say, of Judah, the tribe of Judah. And the 11th district is the Judean

wilderness. And surprisingly, there were five cities, or excuse me, six cities mentioned, named as such in Joshua 15.

And one of the tasks for the biblical archaeologists and geographers is identifying those cities. And again, Pessah Bar-Adon, who found the treasure of the Chalcolithic treasure in that cave, did a lot of survey work and identified some of those five cities. One of them was Khirbet Qumran, which is where again, the settlement where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in actually 12 caves now nearby.

But there are others as well. And En-Gedi was one that was discovered. But there was also a city called Ir-Ha-Melech in Hebrew, which means the City of Salt.

He uncovered what was basically a series of warehouses and a wharf or quay going out into the Dead Sea that actually mined salt from the Dead Sea and processed it for shipment to Judah as a whole. And so literally, the City of Salt was a literal City of Salt. Interesting to note there.

Very, very straightforward in its description. Sakaka, Nibsham, and Medim are the other cities. Beit Aravah, possibly to the north here.

We simply don't know. Different scholars have given different identifications for these sites, one of which is probably Khirbet Qumran. That could be Sakaka.

But it's kind of interesting to try to figure out, try to make sense of the list in Joshua to archaeological evidence in this area. Now from Jerusalem to Jericho, of course, there's a road, very famous in the book of Luke. And again, the parable of the Good Samaritan.

And the Good Samaritan Inn has been restored. It's the only spring between Jericho and Jerusalem. And that has to be the place where the Samaritan left the injured man under the care of the innkeeper.

So that's again a popular tourist spot. This is a picture of it in the 19th, early 20th century, and then later on and before its full restoration, as you see it today. Herod built fortresses.

Herod the Great built fortresses in the Judean desert. And one of them is Hyrcania. Again, you recognize the Hasmonean name there.

It was built during the Hasmoneans and then Herod enlarged and reoccupied it, as well as Kypros right here, and others as well. And we see Qumran here. We'll have a series on the Dead Sea Scrolls, but a very important site for understanding the Jewish sect that collected and preserved the Dead Sea Scrolls for us.

They found dramatic discoveries at En-Gedi. At a synagogue, they found burned scrolls that had been deciphered using high-tech methods. They found out it was part of the Book of Leviticus.

And again, a picture of En-Gedi in its context. The Old Testament tells about some of the forts overlooking En-Gedi from various periods. Probably one of the most famous archaeological sites in Israel is, again, in the Judean desert farther south, south of En-Gedi, though inside of En-Gedi is the mountaintop fortress of Masada or Matsuda, meaning stronghold.

And this again was a kind of a battleship-shaped rocky plateau, mountaintop, that Herod, Hasmoneans before him, and probably even back into David, there was Iron Age pottery found there, used as a refuge. Herod fortified it, built a wall around the perimeter, and two palaces, a triple-tiered palace, and then a western palace here. He had lots of storage space and storage rooms, and he had this as a refuge in case the politics got too hot and he had to escape Jerusalem.

But in 66 AD, Jewish rebels, the Zealots, actually captured Masada from the garrison there. And they held out until 73 AD when they were surrounded and assaulted by the 10th Legion under Flavius Silva. Here are some of the storerooms on top of Masada, some non-restored, some restored, and you can see the Dead Sea in the distance there.

Okay, here's a good aerial view of the site. And one of the 10 ostraca found that says Ben-Yair, the commander of the fortress, that was found by the excavator Yigal Yadin. Okay, a lot of the Judean desert was very, very active in the Byzantine period, the Christian period, between about 330 to 650.

This is one of the many monasteries built right on the cliffs, on the face of the cliff, called the Mount of Temptation, overlooking Jericho and commemorating the temptation of Jesus in the 40 days in the wilderness. This is Mars Saba, the oldest continuously occupied monastery, almost in the Judean desert, actually in the world, built again right on the cliff face, and from the Byzantine period until now, and this is, in its library was found some very, very interesting and very, very early manuscripts. The Wadi Kelt, again, is one of the routes from Jerusalem down into Jericho; along that Wadi Kelt is St. George's Monastery, supposedly where Elijah took refuge on his escape from Ahab and Jezebel.

It's still a functioning monastery. I've hiked down there several times and visited this beautiful site. Finally, we reach the Rift Valley or the Jordan Valley.

And again, this is the site of Jericho. This is looking from Old Testament Jericho into the modern city. And why is it so green there? Well, you've got Elisha's Spring.

It just pumps out a tremendous amount of water. And from time immemorial, from the Neolithic period until now, Jericho has been a kind of garden in the desert. And anywhere in the Jordan Valley, anywhere in the Holy Land for that matter, but especially in the Jordan Valley, if you can add water to the equation, you've got literally grow anything.

And they do. As long as they can have water, they can grow tremendous, incredible crops of fruit, vegetables, dates, figs, etc. This is a very old picture of the Tell of Jericho, the Mount of Jericho, the Old Testament site here.

It is both the oldest and the lowest city on earth, 1400 feet below sea level. And again, the early pre-pottery Neolithic period remains there. Again, an aerial view of the Old Testament city.

Very small by modern city, maybe nine acres in size, but a large city in the Old Testament period. And this is what it's assumed to have looked like at the time of its conqueror, the time of the Israelite conquest. You can see the trench here made by Kathleen Kenyon, that famous British archaeologist who dug here in the 1950s.

And through that trench, she cut through all the strata, all the different layers of the city, down from the top to the bottom. We'll talk more about Jericho when we talk about the book of Joshua. New Testament Jericho in a different location, again, along the Wadi Kelt, was a Hasmonean palace, again enlarged and embellished by Herod.

And you see this very unique, distinctive, diamond-shaped wall blocks. That's called opus reticulatum. When you see that in the Land of Israel, the Holy Land, you recognize that's got to be Herodian who built it, because one of the earmarks of Herodian architecture was that opus reticulatum.

So, half of this palace is on one side of the Wadi, half on the other. Talk about luxurious living in the New Testament period. Incredible what they had and what they did with what they had.

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