

## **Dr. Jeffrey Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 7, The Geographical Arena, Part 3**

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This is Dr. Jeffrey Hudon in his teaching on Biblical Archaeology. This is session 7, The Geographical Arena, Part 3.

Okay. Our next region to study as we look at the geographical context of understanding the archaeology of the Bible is the Shephelah. That's a Hebrew word meaning lowland again, but it's actually foothills and valleys, and you can see some pictures of it here, and here. And again, that's taken from the perspective of the Israelites up in the hill country looking to the west and seeing that lowland or foothills below them, and that's where the term Shephelah comes from. The Shephelah is a series of valleys that come out of the hill country and meander their way out to the coast.

They are in sequence. The Ayalon Valley, and again this is where the sun stood still in the Book of Joshua during the conquest. The major city along the Ayalon Valley is Gezer.

And then farther south is the Sorek Valley, and that comes actually or begins up near Jerusalem, the Rephaim Valley. And the Sorek Valley again means red, probably from the viticulture that took place along it. And the major city there, kind of the gateway city, is Beit Shemesh.

And farther down would be Timna. And then farther south from the Sorek Valley is the Elah Valley, famous, of course, for the battle between David and Goliath. But the major city there, the gateway city, is Azekah, both an Israelite city and a Canaanite city.

Further south is the Lachish Valley, which is dominated by the site of Lachish, the major city of Lachish. Again, these pictures kind of give an idea of the terrain there. You've got valleys and foothills, low hills, excellent for farming.

But remember, geopolitically, you've got the Philistines here and the Israelites up here. We're talking about the context of the Iron Age pre-monarchy and early monarchy here. And so, the Shephelah served as the border area.

This is where the wars, most of the wars and battles took place. If the Israelites were strong, they would push the Philistines back into the coastal plain. If the Philistines were strong, they would push the Israelites back up to the hill country and even farther.

So that gives us an idea of the importance of the Shephelah. Here's the Island Valley. You can see the modern freeway here in the distance.

But again, very, very famous both in antiquity and in modern times for wars and battles being fought in this valley. Beautiful valley. And here is the major city dominating the Island Valley, which is Gezer.

And Gezer was both a powerful Canaanite city and later an Israelite city. A city that Solomon fortified in the book of 1 Kings mentions that. And this is the famous Solomonic gate at Gezer.

You can see the city drain going here. This would have been paved over. This is the inner gateway into the city and the six chambers here and this famous six chamber gate again shown here.

Another famous monument at Gezer is the Canaanite high place, a series of massive stone, standing stones that was some sort of a worship area for Canaanites in the Bronze Age. Now these in antiquity may have been plastered over with inscriptions on them or drawings. And of course, that's all has been long erased, but they still stand and actually were recently published by Bill Deaver in a paper.

Okay, the next one south is the historic valley and this is famous for the stories in the book of Judges surrounding Samson. And Samson, this is kind of his bailiwick during his life. And you can see some of the scenes there from that valley.

Beth Shemesh is the major city here. Interesting, again, Canaanite, then Israelite city. And you remember the Ark narrative where the Ark was captured by the Philistines at the Battle of Ebenezer near Aphek and then made a circuit around the Philistine cities and caused all sorts of problems, and the Philistines sent it back on a cart up the historic valley and the men of Beth Shemesh were farming and saw that cart coming and they sacrificed the oxen and were rejoicing that the Ark of the Lord was back in Israelite hands.

Beth Shemesh has been excavated several times, most recently by Tel Aviv University, and there is a lot of evidence there of occupation during the Iron Age, especially during the 8th century; ironically, we'll talk about this later, was unfortified. We're not able to find a city wall, which may have some interesting geopolitical connotations. There's Zora, the hometown of Samson, again on this hilltop here, today wooded and covered by the reforestation of the Holy Land that's been going on both sides of the Jordan Valley.

Elah Valley here is where, again, David fought Goliath and we've got an interesting overview here of where things happened. Elah Valley itself here, this is to the east, this is to the west, and the site, the famous site now of Khirbet Qeiyafa, which might

be biblical Sha'arim, again the dual form of Sha'ar or gate because there were two gates found there. Was this a stronghold of Saul or was it a stronghold of David? There are questions about that.

Did David built a post here or a city here or was it built earlier by Saul? But the Israelites camped in this area and then the Philistine camp was across the valley and David and Goliath fought in this area right here. So that gives a good bird's eye view of the arena of this Mano E Mano, man on man, contest. Interestingly enough, Azekah is here, again, later on an important city of Judah.

Gath of the Philistines, Goliath's hometown is way out here in the coastal plain, still in the Elah Valley, along the Elah Valley here. Earlier ideas about Sha'arim because the Philistines fled by way of the road to Sha'arim. And one suggestion was that there were two ways around Azekah, two gateways into the coastal plain.

And that was a good explanation. But now we've got this city here with two gates and that might be the site behind that name. And then farther down we have Tel Es-Safi, which we've seen slides of before.

Gan Leumi Tel Tzafit, International Garden or Park. Tel Tzafit is the Hebrew name for Tel es-Safi or Gath of the Philistines. And you've got these cutouts of Philistine soldiers here greeting the visitors to the site.

And that is a major city. And again, during the ninth century, it was the largest city that we know of in the Levant, much larger than Jerusalem or any other city, very large. The archaeologists that have been working at Gath found an ostracoon that's been incised with a variation of the name Goliath, which is kind of interesting there.

Farther south along the Lachish Valley, we have the site of Lachish. Again, a major city, very large city, the second largest city in Judah, second only to Jerusalem. By the way, this is not an ancient wall.

This is a wall built during the 1930s or later for dumping debris from the excavations here that was dumped here, but a very major city. Here's again an artist's rendition of what it looked like at the time of the Assyrian invasion in 701 BC.

You can see this Judean palace fort on the Acropolis. The platform is still extant today, and the walls are there.

And it's been excavated several times. Currently, it's being excavated, I think, by an Austrian group. It was excavated by an American-Israeli expedition several years ago.

And before that, of course, the major excavations by David Ussishkin. And then before that, back in the 1930s by James Leslie Starkey. So, artist's rendition of the gates of Lachish being attacked by Sennacherib's troops.

In 701 BC. Okay, Makeda, if you remember, the defeat of the Canaanite coalition by the Israelites and Joshua, all the Canaanite kings hid in a cave, Makeda, and were killed there. And the cave entrance was sealed.

And Makeda is probably a site called Khirbet el-Qom, located here, excavated in the 1970s by Dever and by Jack Holliday at the University of Toronto. Has not been published. The inscriptions, they found inscriptions there, which have been published, the Khirbet el-Qom inscriptions, but the site has not been published.

Unfortunately, Professor Holliday passed away, so I don't know who's working on that. But again, this is a problem in archaeology.

You have an excavation, and the excavator passes away. Who will take that task up and publish it? Obviously, information is lost when the professor dies and when the excavator dies. So, the report's never going to be quite as good unless they kept fantastic notes.

Because the information that's in the head of that excavator is lost forever, inscriptions here mention Yahweh and his Asherah and, of course, Bill Dever, who worked on those and published those in Hebrew University, Hebrew Union College Annual, excuse me, HUCA, back in the late 1960s. Has made much of that, suggesting that there was some sort of a suppressed religion of God, Yahweh, the Lord, having a wife or consort.

And what Dever doesn't seem to understand is that the Bible talks about this. It's called syncretism, the blending of Canaanite and Israelite religions that plagued Israel and Judah throughout its entire existence. So, finding something like this should be of no surprise.

It's simply Judeans and Israelites practicing syncretism, blending these two religions together. And this is not some suppressed widespread folk religion that Dever thinks it was. It was just simply practiced by many people because they took aspects of both religions and blended them together.

So, the tantalizing title there, the shocking title, shouldn't be a shock at all. One of the first sites that was systematically excavated in the Holy Land was a place called Tel Beit Mirsim. We still don't know the ancient name of the site.

Albright thought it was Debir. He was wrong, unfortunately. But it was excavated in the 20s and 30s by William Foxwell Albright and published.

And well done for its time. This is quite an interesting picture here. This is Cyrus Gordon back in the early 1930s looking at what they thought was a divat.

It's actually an olive press, the bottom part of an olive press. Cyrus Gordon, I was privileged to hear him lecture back in 1992 before he passed away. But he was a brilliant Jewish scholar, just gifted in linguistic skills and kind of a maverick.

A lot of his ideas were kind of off the norm, but he was a very, very influential scholar of his time. Okay, so we move from the Shephelah up into the hill country. And you can see the difference again.

Again, similar to the hill country of Ephraim and Manasseh, this is the hill country of Judah. And the same, similar terrain here. Bethel and Ai, we'll talk about that and unpack that in another lecture.

But again, views of this hill country terrain and some famous biblical sites. Again, you can see the suburbs of Jerusalem on the skyline here, but this is Jib, the site of ancient Gibeon. You can see again the terracing up, and the ancient city would have been at the top here, partially covered now by a Palestinian town.

Nearby Jib or ancient Gibeon is Nabi Samuel. And this is, in Arabic, that means a prophet Samuel, supposedly where he was buried. Although the Bible says he wasn't buried there, he was buried in Ramah.

And this is, again, an important site. It was a site on the horizon of Jerusalem. Excavations there have uncovered evidence from both the New Testament and Old Testament, probably a watchtower or a fort that guarded the approaches to Jerusalem.

Later on, both Muslim and Crusader armies would stop at Nabi Samuel and catch their first glimpse of the holy city before advancing. Nabi Samuel was also probably the site of the high place of Gibeon, not Gibeon itself, but the high place separate from the city. And you can see here from the Mount of Olives, way on the horizon, is the Muslim mosque atop Nabi Samuel, as it appears today.

By the way, that's where Solomon prayed for wisdom at the beginning of his reign. Very early shot here of a modern shot of the ruins of Tel El Ful or Gibeah of Saul, Givat Shaul in Hebrew. Tel El Foul simply means Hill of Beans, which is kind of funny.

But it's probably the site of ancient Gibeah. Jerusalem, again, is to the south here. This is the main road that goes north towards Shechem.

And this is a corner of the ruins. First excavated by Albright in the 1920s, then by Paul Lapp in the 1960s, and some work done later than that as well. Albright's work was not up to par.

Lapp's was better. Again, can't be absolutely certain this is actually the site of Gibeah of Saul, but probably the best candidate. Again, another interesting modern footnote.

You've got this partially finished building here. This is a picture from that building looking towards Jerusalem, which was the planned summer palace of King Hussein of Jordan. And that was under construction when the Six-Day War broke out in 1967.

And there it sits, still unfinished, out of the reach of the Jordanian king. And still is. But it is a beautiful site because from Gibeah or from Tel El Ful, you can see both the Mediterranean and the Jordan Valley.

You've got a wonderful vista there. And that would have been an ideal place for a palace, whether you're King Saul or King Hussein. South of Jerusalem, just south of Jerusalem, is the start of the Rephaim Valley.

And actually, the start of the valley is actually the southern approach to Jerusalem. And this is used since the Ottomans or the British built a railway from Jaffa up to Jerusalem. I believe the Ottomans did that.

That railway is still in existence. The Rephaim Valley was also the green line between the West Bank and Israel proper. So, this was a border area during the years between the 1948 and 1967 wars.

This was a breadbasket of Jerusalem. Again, farm, farmsteads and farms and hamlets and villages dotted the Rephaim Valley and brought food, grew food, both on the slopes and in the valley itself, and provided Jerusalem and its environs with foodstuffs. At the very top of the Rephaim Valley, before it curves into its beginnings near Jerusalem, is a hilltop site of Ramat Rachel.

It's today a modern resort and a kibbutz. And this is the pool there. And, but on the hilltop is a Iron Age site.

Now this Iron Age site was discovered and first excavated in 19, the 1920s by Benjamin Mazar and then later by Yohanan Aharoni, a Mazar student in the 1950s and early 60s. And later on, in 2007, I believe, Tel Aviv University did some extensive excavations and reinterpretation of the site.

This is their interpretation of the palace and fort at Ramat Rachel, dated to the 8th and 7th centuries and then into the 6th century BC. This site was probably

established at least as early as the reign of Uzziah and used by Hezekiah as well. The second phase was built by Jehoiakim.

And that's mentioned in Jeremiah as Jeremiah complains and lashes out at Jehoiakim for spending money on fancy palaces. And he describes things that have been found in the excavations. There was Babylonian and Persian evidence of occupation here as well, including a lavish garden and terrace gardens around it.

Again, the Tel Aviv people, led by Oded Lipschitz, have reinterpreted this as more of an Assyrian or Babylonian site than a Judean site, which the material culture does not seem to fit at all. So, I think they're wrong in their interpretation. I think it was a Judean site that was reused during the Persian period as an administrative site.

It's a beautiful site, clearly a site that you'd want to have a palace at, with beautiful views. And again, the breeze coming from the Mediterranean up the Refining Valley hits the western slopes of this hillside. Farther south along the ridge route, south of Jerusalem, is Bethlehem of Judea.

And again, most of its history, a very small village, today a large Palestinian city because of its connection with the birth of Christ there at the Church of the Nativity or underneath the Church of the Nativity. Very little is known about Iron Age Jerusalem regarding the Old Testament as well as the New Testament because it's built over. And there have been places where limited excavations have taken place, and Iron Age materials have been found there.

You remember David yearned for the water from the well at the gate of Jerusalem. And no spring has been found there. There could have been wells dug there, but no spring.

These are all questions that remain unanswered. About 20 years ago, there was an excellent article on the topography of Bethlehem, which came out in, I believe, PEQ, Palestine Exploration Quarterly. But other than that, very little is known about Bethlehem during this earlier period.

The name Bethlehem, of course, in Hebrew means house of bread. And it seems to be pre-Israelite. So, there could have been some sort of a suggestion of a Canaanite shrine here, maybe to a grain god or something like that.

These are all guesses. Beautiful view here. I've got an even more dramatic view of Bethlehem here in the hill country, the wilderness of Judah here, and then beyond the rift, you jump over the rift and you see the hill country of Jordan, the Madaba Plains, or the biblical Mishor.

And there is that more dramatic view here. Again, you're here with the hill country, the edge of the hill country here with this, I believe, Palestinian village. And then you drop down into the wilderness of Judah here, which is shown by these hills here, and then down to the Dead Sea.

So, you're maybe 2,000, 2,500 feet high here, the Dead Sea's 1,400 feet below sea level. Then you have the escarpment up to what could be the plains of Moab, the southern extension of the plains of Moab, where the Israelites camped, the Book of Numbers. And then finally, the top summit of the Transjordanian Highlands, and that's the beginning of the Mishor, the Madaba Plains.

So, it is a very dramatic view showing the different topographical and geographical regions. In that part of the land. Farther south, we come to Hebron, Mount Hebron here.

Again, it's a city and archaeologically not very well known. There's been quite a bit of work, but a lot of the ancient Tell of Hebron is covered by an Islamic shrine and unable to be excavated. This is the famous Cave of Machpelah, the burial place of the patriarchs.

And we'll talk more about that in another slideshow. Some other vistas of the hill country of Judah. And then we go south into the Negev.

Negev means dry or south wind, and this is the southern part of the Holy Land or the Land of Israel. And it is kind of a transition zone. The biblical Negev is centered around Beersheba.

And there's an eastern Negev over here and a western Negev on this side of the ancient city of Beersheba. And this is a transition zone again that could be farmed on wet years. Dry farming was possible, but in dry years, no.

It was just not possible to do agriculture. But it was an important area strategically and militarily because it guarded across the Negev and traversed the spice routes to the ports of Gaza and Ashkelon. And so, if you controlled the Negev, especially the remote Negev or the southern Negev, we'd talk about in a minute; you had control over those trade routes, the spice routes.

And that's one of the ways Solomon could bring so much income into the kingdom because he extracted tolls from those caravans. Here are some pictures of the Negev and what it looks like. One of the major sites in the eastern Negev, biblical Negev, is Arad.



We talked about Arad earlier. And there's actually two cities here. The city, the early bronze city, which you see in the foreground here, which is a large city, very well preserved, excavated by Ruth Amiran.

And then the Israelite citadel, one of the border forts of Judah, that was excavated by Aharoni, both in the 1960s. And there are some other pictures. You can see the wall line of the early bronze city with horseshoe-shaped towers, very characteristic of that early period.

And then, of course, the Israelite gateway into the reconstructed into the citadel. Beersheba, again, is the center, kind of the queen of the Negeb. And we've seen pictures of that before, or a photo of that, describing what a tell looks like.

But you can see some of the reconstruction work that has gone on. This was a, again, a planned city. It wasn't just built haphazardly.

It was planned and built very carefully during the Iron Age by the kingdom of Judah. South of the Negeb is the Negeb highlands. And again, these are biblical terms.

So, when you say Negeb in modern Hebrew, it's all the southern, long southern part of the state of Israel, all the way down to Eilat. So, this is, again, biblical terminology. The Negeb highlands are very inhospitable, however, very dry and rugged.

Maktesh Ramon is a large crater. There's, Maktashim is kind of a unique Israeli term for these geological or geographical depressions or craters that dot this area. Avdot is a city built by the Nabateans, New Testament-era city in the Negeb highlands, by the Nabateans who built Petra and some of the other great cities in Jordan and northern Saudi Arabia.

Wilderness of Zin. This is where the Israelites, again, in the modern Negeb, Negeb highlands, this is where the Israelites sojourned in the wilderness. Another picture of the wilderness of Zin here.

Now, even in this very inhospitable area, in the 11th or 10th century, there was a series of paramilitary forts built on hilltops in various areas of this expanse. And they were, sometimes they were, they were in different shapes. They were circular, or they just followed the topography of the hilltop.

But the question has been asked numerous times, who built these? Were they Israelites? Were there Israelite attempts to settle this area, perhaps under David or Solomon? Or were they non-Israelite sites by Bedouin people, such as the Amalekites or other peoples? And this is still kind of an open question. There's been a lot of articles written on that. One of these sites is unique in a way that is slightly later, late ninth, early eighth century, Horvat Teman more properly known as Kuntillet Ajrud.

And we'll talk more about that when we talk about our eighth-century sites. But it's a very interesting site for sure. Kedesh Barnea is another site in the native highlands.

Again, technically, in Sinai today, both Kuntillet Ajrud and Kedesh Barnea are currently in Egypt, but both were excavated by Israeli Israelis during the occupation of Sinai. You can see the towers, the fort here, the towers around the square fortress. Kedesh Barnea, again, was where the Israelites encamped because there was a spring there.

The spring Ein Kedes preserves that name, Kedesh, or holy, a derivative of the term holy. Okay, east of the Negev is the Aravah. This is an extension of the Rift Valley south of the Dead Sea all the way to the Gulf of Eilat or the Gulf of Aqaba, whatever you want to call it.

And this is again is a kind of a depression. It goes to slightly above sea level and then back down to sea level as it hits the Gulf of Eilat. And Israelis have, as you can see here, have made use of this and built communities there, including a Yotvata, a kibbutz, and famous for its chocolate milk.

That says chocolate. There is chocolate milk from the Yotvata oasis in the Aravah. In the last 15 or 20 years, there have been extensive excavations actually on the Jordanian side of the political border.

It runs in the middle of that between Israel and Jordan. The Jordanian side, the Wadi Feynan, has sites that have uncovered a huge copper mining operation. And this is the main site of Khirbet en-Nahas, the ruins of copper, I guess you could say.

And that's been excavated by UCSD, University of California San Diego, and Tom Levy. And some very dramatic finds there, as well as farther south at Timna, the Timna Valley by Tel Aviv University, have been found again through radiocarbon dating; they've been pretty clear that this is 10th-century activity here, mining activity, major mining activity. This is clearly not just a local organized operation.

This is clearly from a large kingdom polity that would do this. And the question is, who? We believe this is clearly the work of Solomon. And this is a gateway into their complex here.

And they've actually found, I think, dung from donkeys still preserved in this gateway of donkeys being corralled there or held there as their owners unpack and pack. There are so many amazing finds and amazing discoveries there. Anyway, we'll talk more about that.

Eilat and Etzion Geber. This is the port. This is the end of the Aravah.

This is the Gulf of Aqaba or Eilat. Eilat's in the foreground here. The Jordanian city of Aqaba is over here.

The border between the two nations is in the center. And somewhere in this area was Solomon's port of Etzion Geber. Where was that? That's another debate as well.

In the late 1930s, Nelson Glueck, our famous rabbi archaeologist we talked about earlier, excavated a site called Tell el-Khalifeh right in the middle of the Aravah. This is the Aravah here looking north or looking south. I'm not sure which.

But this is the Aravah here, north-south axis. And uncovered what he believed was biblical Etzion Geber, a Solomonic seaport, and copper mining complex. And the copper mining complex with furnaces and whatnot filled by the wayside, he backed off of that interpretation.

But he still believed this was the Solomonic port of Etzion Geber. The problem was this was restudied and published by Gary Practico in the 1980s, early 90s. And Practico recognized that the pottery looks like it only went back to about the 8th century, not the 10th century, the time of Solomon.

So, if it's Etzion Geber, we have a chronological issue here. Farther south, however, past the border between Israel and Egypt, is a place called Coral Island. And this is a picture of it here.

We've got some other pictures, I think, coming up. And this was an island that had a sheltered lagoon and may be our answer to the site of Etzion Geber or the Solomonic seaport. There's a better picture of it there, looking over to Jordan and then Saudi Arabia to the south across the Gulf of Aqaba.

A site that's been surveyed and looked at. This is a medieval fort castle up here. But it had casemate walls around it, and Iron Age pottery was found.

Was this the site of Etzion Geber? Possibly. Again, those questions remain open. So if that was Etzion Geber, we have a question.

What was Tel El-Khalifeh that Glueck excavated? Possibly biblical Eilat or some other site that was occupied either by Edom or Israel, Judah, or both. Okay, so we cross over the rift and go into Transjordan here. And we look at the Edomite highlands.

This is the place where Esau and his descendants lived and became the kingdom of Edom. And this is, again, Nubian sandstone, reddish hue to the stones, again, where you get the term Edom from Adam. And very high in elevation.

Again, these hilltops got up to 3,500 feet above sea level. And with that elevation, you got adequate rainfall and you could do dry farming. But for the most part, unless you're in the highlands, Edom was very dry and barren.

Here's a picture from Petra Park overlooking some of the mountains around that great site. Again, biblical Edom. Now, a very, very famous landmark or famous site in Edom is Mount Hor.

Mount Hor is where Aaron was buried by Moses and the people of Israel as they passed through. This is accessible via a long hike from Petra. And the views are, as you can see here, spectacular.

The actual shrine is a Muslim shrine. It was built upon a rebuilt Byzantine shrine below that. Actually, Finnish excavations nearby are uncovering kind of a complex of buildings lower down the mountain that's perhaps a support network for this pilgrimage shrine.

Not sure about that. But an incredible view from Mount Hor, or today called Jebel Harun in Arabic. And this is a view again from Edom out to the Arava and the wilderness of Zin-Byan.

So, again, it is a beautiful spectacle of biblical history because you see the Arava, and then in the haze, not real clear here, is the wilderness of Zin, where the Israelites sojourned for 40 years. And then, finally, another good picture of Transjordan from the perspective of the hill country. Again, hill country, the wilderness of Judah, the Midbar, the Dead Sea, and then the Jordanian highlands.

So, a lot of different regions and sub-regions in the Holy Land and a lot of different climatic conditions, some very rich, some very dry, but a very, very large variety of topography and regional differences. Thank you very much.

This is Dr. Jeffrey Hudon in his teaching on Biblical Archaeology. This is session 7, The Geographical Arena, Part 3.