

**Dr. Elaine Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies,
Session 3, Geography of the Middle East
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This is Dr. Elaine Phillips in her teaching on Introduction to Biblical Studies. This is session 3, Geography of the Middle East.

This is our third lecture in the series on Bible geography.

So far, we have done historical geography, introduction, and the sources that contribute to that. We've also done a lecture specifically devoted to archaeology. So now we're moving to Geography of the Middle East.

As we do this, we're going to do a little bit of review just to draw some of those threads together from the preceding two lectures, and then we'll move into an overview of where we're going. So, this map looks familiar to you already if you've looked at the first two lectures. Here, by way of review, we just want to get a sense of the large land structures.

We called them power circles in our first lecture. We talked about Mesopotamia right here, the land between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. We talked about the importance of Aram or Syria, also called Syria, being a buffer zone for traffic coming like so, either going west or coming and going down south towards Egypt.

We talked about Egypt itself and the importance of the cultural continuity there. We'll be revisiting Egypt later on in this series, but for now, just notice it's defined by the Nile River. We talked about Anatolia up in here, modern-day Turkey, and the fact, particularly in our intertestamental period in the New Testament, that will be our corridor to what we think of as Europe now.

Then, we mentioned the fact that we have deserts here, the Arabian Desert and also the Sinai Peninsula, which is smaller, obviously, but still a desert and a barrier. We talked about the Mediterranean Sea, and both of those are color-coded to indicate that they are barriers shifting the travel to go through our land between right here. So this was our geopolitical entity and the land bridge in the area that's right here, vulnerable to attack and foreign influence, but also, as we've said, capable of being a podium from which messages could go out.

George Adam Smith, a significant historical geographer from the 19th century, called this area, what we're calling the land between, a vortex of world power. And for those of you who follow contemporary history and developments, that's still true very much so these days. Still in terms of reminder, we've used the term testing ground of faith, and we read Deuteronomy 11, those particular verses that are noted there.

We mentioned the geopolitical developments, which are the stuff we've just noted on the preceding map. We talked about weather patterns and how those are also indicative of God's blessing or using where they live to deal with his people. Talked about the fact that there's a rainy season, winter, and a dry season, summer.

We talked about the effects of the sea, desert, and mountains in terms of the rain and dew. We talked about the fact that this area along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea is actually the margin of the Fertile Crescent. And then we mentioned God's promises, both articulated in Leviticus 26, as well as Deuteronomy 27 and beyond 28.

We mentioned what a land flowing with milk and honey could mean. We also mentioned the triad of crops, grain, new wine, and oil, which are noted in that order repeatedly because that's the order in which they are harvested in the land. Here's where we're going in this somewhat shorter lecture, I think, at this point.

We want to spend just a little bit of time, just a short time, talking about geological activity over time and space. And I mean long, long spans of time. And I'm also talking about the whole of our eastern Mediterranean basin, as well as the continents that surround it.

So we're just going to have a little bit of a look at that because it really is important in terms of geology and geological foundations underlying Israel as we know it today. So that's one of the places that we do indeed want to spend a little bit of time as we start. As I suggested a moment ago, the implications of those geological shifts over literally millions of years has impact on the geology of the land of Israel.

And that is going to impact not just topography, mountains, valleys, etc., but it's also going to impact soil types, water sources, and so forth. So this is going to be pretty important stuff, even though it might feel a little gnarly from time to time. That will lead us into a look at a number of maps which deal with topography and also begin to focus us on various geographical regions in the country.

So that is the direction we're going. First of all, as we think of all of the globe in which we are privileged to live, there are continents, and they're made up of plates of shifting material. So, we have in the area we're talking about, an African Mediterranean plate and an Arabian plate, and those actually are moving in different directions.

What this does, and by the way, I know I'm terribly oversimplifying at this point, but it's enough for us to get the implications of this. As these plates continue to move, and they do, we have what should we say: shattering, breaking, rifting, and faulting in the crust, which is the rock plate there. Those rifts and faults are going to be really

important in terms of what happens in Israel particularly. Our most significant example of this, of course, is the Great Rift Valley.

We're going to come back to that in a moment, but we have lots and lots of smaller ones that contribute to valleys and other kinds of fault structures. At some point in the past, a little map was forthcoming over this area that we now think of as the land of Israel was water. It's called the Tethys Sea, sometimes called the Tethys Ocean, but when you have water that is over an area, that means that you have living organisms; they up and die, they sink down to the bottom, they're made of calcium, and so you're going to have that kind of component becoming sedimentary rock at the bottom.

As this sea or ocean moves back and forth, the shifting of the plates and so forth and so on, the shoreline is going to fluctuate, and there will be points in time when the soil types, or I should say the rock types, the sedimentary rock types, are not as much limestone calcium based as they're going to be sandstone based. So keep those things in mind as we talk about geology. Here is just a little bit of a picture.

It's called the Middle Eocene Period. Don't worry about dating that at all, but what I want you to see is that the significant thing for us now is that we see continents we recognize, don't we? So it means that we've had enough shift to see recognizable continents, but the area that we know of as the Eastern Mediterranean in this particular time frame, Middle Eocene, that we're talking about, is under the water of the Tethys Sea. These parts of the plates will float in that direction more.

This is going to uplift and it'll be land eventually, but just trying to get us to understand that this is a land mass now, but it was underwater, and therefore you're going to have all the things that are part of a geological set of deposits that are the result of water. Therefore, here is a quick thumbnail sketch of what we've got. We've got an igneous base, that means things like granite, right? Excuse me.

On top of that, once you've got water over whatever that igneous base happens to have been, we'll see where that is located. For example, in terms of our Sinai Peninsula, where we actually see it now, and then underneath the sedimentary deposits farther north from there, but our igneous base has sedimentary deposits when the region was underwater, and then after all those deposits, we're going to revisit those in a moment. This is just a general statement.

It turns out that this whole set of plates and so forth is floating on active magma, and there are places and times when you have volcanic eruptions. We know those in various parts of the world today, but they certainly had them as they impacted parts of Israel too, and so when you have eruptions, especially in the northern and northeastern part of the country, the area that we now know of as the Golan Heights, they're going to, those volcanoes, spew basalt, lava, which becomes the

rock type basalt over. So just easily and simply, the bottom is igneous, next bunches of different kinds of sedimentary deposit over millions of years, and then on top of that, a volcanic overlay, and it's all going to be in this area that we're going to focus in on right about here.

I mentioned the Rift Valley a moment ago, and again, when we think of Rift Valley in terms of the land of Israel, we usually think of the Dead Sea, we think of the Jordan River, we think of the Sea of Galilee, and that's all right about here, but as you see this going way up, well beyond the top of this map, taking in the Red Sea, another arm going that direction, way down into Kenya, where some of you may know the institution called the Rift Valley Academy. This is a huge, huge, huge geological cleft in the earth, and it's riding, or it is between those two plates, which are shifting back and forth. So we just want to make note of the fact that what we're studying when we see evidence of the rift in our little area here is just a tiny, tiny fraction of something much bigger, and it's evidence of this movement of these various plates, the Mediterranean African plate on this side, the Arabian plate on this side.

Now, I'm going to walk through this, I hope, as systematically as I possibly can, because our point now is to figure out how the geology affects topography and why that's important for us. So let's see if we can make some sense out of this. I've got that section in our box, because those are primarily the rock types that are important for the people of God as they're living in that area.

We've already talked about how significant it is to be in the land between geopolitically, weather-wise, culturally, and socially, and now we're actually going to talk about why that land is important as a place to live as shaped by our geology, geography, and topography. So let's start at the bottom because you'll notice my little red thing here. It says the recent deposits, the most recent rock sediment deposits, are going to be on top.

So here's the bottom, the igneous that I mentioned already. We encounter in our high mountains in southern Sinai, high rugged mountains. When we study the Sinai Peninsula, we're going to see that, but it doesn't affect most of where Israel was parked once God brought them to the promised land.

We'll only see that in terms of where God brought his people for the covenant at Sinai. On top of that, once you start having this sea coast and fluctuating sea coast, there's going to be sand and sand deposits, especially when that sea fluctuated and there was a shoreline. So we're going to see deposits of sand, tens of thousands of feet of deposits of sand.

For those of you who have seen Petra or anything on National Geographic or whatever in the great red city in southern Transjordan, this is sandstone that has the most gorgeous hues: purple, red, gold, etc. But again, that's not our great interest as

we're studying the place where God gave his people their inheritance. Our interest is now going to be in a layer of hard limestone deposited during a geological period called Cenomanian, but don't worry about that.

And by the way, this is very simplified. There are different kinds of hard limestone. There are different kinds of chalk layers and different kinds of softer limestone.

I've simplified them into three basic types right now. What you have, I don't have a diagram of this yet, but I just want you to think with me if you can. What you have when you have these flat layers that are being put on each other, yes, then you have all that activity that's going on, seismic activity, shaping, faulting, shifting.

And that is going to create, first of all, this is the deposits, sediment deposits right here. Once movement starts taking place, you're going to have these things shifting up. We're just doing one anticline right here.

That becomes kind of a mountain. Here is our lowest layer. Is that making sense? This is our lowest layer.

But over time, as things erode, let's just say that we have more recent stuff eroding here and here, and lo and behold, even though this is older stuff, it is now going to be what's visible. Because our softer stuff, notice chalk, soft. Softer limestone, soft.

Deposited more recently, but indeed, it has eroded away. And our highest stuff in terms of our limestone, series of limestone deposits, is actually going to be hard limestone. It's older stuff, but it has lasted longer, the ravages of erosion.

I'm hoping that makes sense because it will help us a lot. I have a diagram, as I said, forthcoming. But at least at this point, maybe it helps us understand why it is we're even seeing steep V-shaped valleys.

It's because the top layers have been eroded off them. So, in terms of our main section of the promised land, our hill country is a hill country. It's our high stuff right here.

We've got steep V-shaped valleys. We have, in this limestone, a very interesting phenomenon. It breaks off in natural terracing.

So it's a place where you can farm. It's a place where the soil kind of backs up, and then the people that are living there enhance the terraces, well-farmed. It's limestone.

It has lots of springs. Limestone has all sorts of underground crevices and karstic structures so that you've got it absorbing water. Those of you who live in parts of this country, Missouri, for example, that have a lot of limestone, know caves.

There are lots of caves in Israel, too. So this is going to be extremely important. V-shaped valleys, springs, and then when this kind of limestone erodes, you get a really fertile soil.

It's called terra rosa. That means red earth. That refers to the fact that there are enough iron components built into it that it has kind of a pinkish-red tinge to it.

It's also very fertile in terms of contributing to growth. In terms of our geology and our history of the geological column here, as we saw, on top of that limestone, you're going to have a layer of chalk. Once this stuff is exposed, that will indeed erode quite quickly.

A term to keep in mind is marl. We're going to see that, especially when we look at the Dead Sea area and the area of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Lifeless clay and chalk.

So hang on to that. On top of that, there is going to be a softer kind of limestone. This is from the Eocene period.

You may remember the global thing that we had. That was the middle Eocene. That was when this softer limestone was deposited.

It has a kind of a hard calcium crust on top. It's called nari. That's this crust right here.

But because it's a different kind of limestone, because stuff filters out of it too quickly, you do not have a lot of springs there. You have to deal with cisterns as your water source. When we find this kind of geological stuff closer to the shoreline as we know it now, we have something called kerkar.

Sometimes, that's spelled with a K-U-R-K-A-R, but here, it's cubed and neither one. And that's a mixture of this limestone calcified sandstone combination formations near the coast. And then again, this is primarily the natural components as they've stacked up over time, bursting through them from time to time, only at the northeast part of the country.

So we're not going to see basalt over everything but in the northeast part of the country, where we've had volcanic cones, as you think Golan Heights right now, there are volcanic cones up there. They have spewed lava, and therefore you've got relatively flat terrain because when lava runs down, it creates a flat terrain. That's, in a nutshell, the layers that we're going to be talking about and some of the more significant implications in terms of agriculture, quite frankly, and whether or not people can live there.

Now let's pull this into the context of a map. And again, we're going to see if we can make this make sense by using some color coding. This is a standard geological map put out by Israel.

So if you look at that, you see that most of this area that is just west of the Dead Sea, Jordan Valley, is going to be green. Most of it's green. So, let's look at our code.

Green is going to be our hard limestone. Green is going to have those capacities that we just talked about. It's going to have springs.

It's going to have excellent soil. It's going to have steep v-shaped valleys. Great place to live.

Safer. More isolated. And it's higher.

It's higher because of this phenomenon with my very elementary drawing illustrated for you. So this is our ridge. When we talked way back in the first lecture about weather patterns, we talked about wind blowing clouds, prevailing winds from the sea, rising up over the mountain range.

This is the mountain range right here, and it's going to run that whole spine. Now on top of that, mostly eroded, except for out here in the rain shadow, we have chalk. So light green is our chalk.

Just to remind ourselves, when the rains come from the west, they're rising. The clouds rise. They deposit on these slopes here.

Only two to four inches of rain in this rain shadow area. When you don't have lots of rain, the erosion isn't quite so severe, and therefore, this is going to be primarily chalk exposure right here. The stuff that's golden, we see some down here.

We see some up here. This happens to be the Mount Carmel range, which is going to alternate back and forth, and then we see some in this area. That's our softer limestone.

Why is all this suddenly taking a different direction? Well, that's partly due to all that faulting, shifting process we've been talking about. Because again, we are right next to the rift, and so we've got a Mediterranean plate. We've got an Arabian plate.

This one's moving north. This one's moving south. So there's some offset, and clearly, with all the other movement, we've had some interesting developments in this area, too.

And again, keeping in mind that all these shifts are creating anticlines. That's uplifts, synclines, valleys, and then have some erosion on top of that. So no sandstone on this map.

It's going to be primarily down here, but we do have this brilliant magenta color up here. That's representing the basalt. Where are the volcanic cones? Well, they're right about in this area.

Some of them are in the Golan Heights area that's controlled by Israel right now. The Israeli military has the kind of equipment stashed in those volcanic cones that you could read a newspaper in Damascus, they tell us. But it's a great defensive area.

Some of the cones are in Syria proper, right over there. Soils are also significant. So we need to talk a little bit about soils.

You're seeing some in the brown tan here. You're seeing some that have been washed and eroded into the Rift Valley over literally millions of years.

For the soils, we just want to mention two names . The first word is, by most of us, pronounced less. Although my people who are authorities on this tell me it really is loess. If you want to say it properly, just give it a little loess, sound to it.

That's windblown soil. So do you remember back to our Hamsin when we talked about the hot desert wind and I showed you a picture of Jerusalem that was just totally in the shadows of dust in the air? That's windblown soil being brought in from the desert. That's loose soil which has come in the wrong direction.

Alluvial soil means it's water-washed. And so therefore, most of these soils here in this area are going to have been eroded by water that has rained and it's been flowing down again for millions of years, creating good soil combinations. That is our basic geological makeup.

And I hope you're beginning to get a sense of why it would be so significant to live right here. The next thing we're going to do is put these two next to each other and see how to think about topography because this map is trying to reflect elevation differences. Yes, indeed, it's done in very broad brush terms, but you're seeing a flat coastal plain area out here.

You're seeing this mountain spine right here. I realize people from Colorado are horrified when we use the term mountain here. It's hills, indeed.

The Hebrew word har can mean both hill and mountain. But for our purposes, we're noticing it's running primarily north and south, and that's corresponding, as we've

already said, to our hard limestone. Hard limestone is resilient to erosion, and therefore, now, I just repeat myself, even though deposited earlier, that it is left higher.

Here we've got in the wilderness, in the rain shadow, what we have here with chalk exposed. We will not worry so much about what's going on up in here because this is our Jezreel Valley. We'll attack that a little bit later on.

But notice when we get into Galilee proper, right up in this area, we're talking about, again, very rugged, isolated, hard limestone, and a good place to live. When we're talking about the volcanic basalt, it's interesting that it's not just there. It seems to have flowed across the Rift Valley right about here and then actually made its way down during those active volcanic millennia into this area that we think of as Eastern Galilee.

All right, that's enough on interpreting those maps. Now let's name the regions that go along with those maps or that map, particularly our geological map. And again, the point here is to get a sense of who lives where and how these regions relate to each other and why each one is important.

Overview approach. When we deal with regional studies, we'll do more with specifics. But for our purposes, here are our coastal plain areas, primarily alluvial soils.

If you think of this area in antiquity, think of it as being not just good soils but primarily swampy. Dial back about three minutes when I talked about that thing called kirkkar. It was the calcified sandstone.

It's the stuff that has been formed right along the current shore coast where you do have sand. By the way, the sands are swept up this coast of the Mediterranean Sea from the Sinai Peninsula area, where you've got granite that erodes in the sandstone. At any rate, here along our coast now are ridges of kirkkar, more than one.

They're hard calcified, said it already, sandstone. That means that when water in antiquity was flowing, raining here, flowing west, going down, it got blocked by those ridges. And so lots of this coastal plain area would have been swampy in antiquity.

Those things have been broken through. The swamps have been drained. It is now fabulous agricultural area.

Actually, the Romans began breaking through these things. So it wasn't just modern Israelis who did that sort of thing. I will have much more to say about that when we talk about specific geographical regions.

But for our purposes, think of the coastal plains as kind of culturally the equivalent of what we have, going back a couple of lectures, to the eastern coast seaboard of our country, where it is a coastal plain area. You've got big cities. You had big cities here as well.

Our Philistines had big cities in this area. Even before they showed up, there were large cities in the area, that larger cities in the area. We'll talk about how they work around the swamps a little later on.

Moving from the coastal plain area, we are now climbing in elevation a little bit, right, a little bit. Here's the shephelah. That word is a word that is Hebrew.

It comes from shafal in Hebrew, which means to be low or reduced in height. And so these are the lowlands. Sometimes your translations will use the term foothills, sometimes lowlands.

But if you're standing up here looking out towards the sea, this is a lower area. I'll show you pictures in a moment. As we've already seen from our previous map, and as you can see on this one, there is Archefela of Judah.

This is our tribal area of Judah. It's the one we read about in Joshua 19. We also have the same color showing up, lower areas in Mount Carmel.

We also have the Archefela of Galilee. We won't worry about the Transjordan thing right now. Continuing to move from west to east, coastal plain, Archefela.

And now here we are in the hill country. We've mentioned that enough. We've talked about the rain shadow.

Here's the Rift Valley. Just to get a sense here in terms of elevations, it might help us to appreciate this rift. Do you remember how to find Jerusalem? Go to the North end of the Dead Sea and go west about 12 miles. There's Jerusalem. Notice it's right on the edge.

But the elevation there is about 2,500 feet above sea level. About 2,500 feet above sea level. Here, by the time you get down to the north end of the Dead Sea, we're talking about 1,300 feet below sea level.

I'm going to come back to those figures when we deal with some of the events that take place with regard to the conquest. But for now, just think, that's quite a drop in elevation. Just for interest's sake, at the north end of the Dead Sea, not only do you have that elevation there, say around the Jericho area, being about 1,300 feet below sea level, but the water of the Dead Sea, the water level of the Dead Sea, the water

depth, I doing well or not, about 1,200 to 1,300 feet of water depth at the north end of the Dead Sea.

And then, since we're still thinking about the impressive nature of this rift valley, they've sent drill cores into the sediment that is underneath the water here, and they have found, are you ready for this, over 20,000 feet of sediment before they get to bedrock. So we are talking about a huge, huge rift in the surface of the earth and millions of years in which that has been filling up and filling up and filling up as erosion has taken place. We also see Transjordan over here, and then off the map to the south, right about in here, is going to be our region called the Negev, which we're going to be studying in greater detail.

For our purposes, however, these are really the areas that we need to have a handle on because they are important. Here's a bit of a cross-section that might help us think through relative elevations. Simple, put together, but it's simple.

Here's our coastal plain, close to sea level. Notice the Shephelah, even though at one time that was higher before anticlines and erosion, then this is now, again, really low down in contrast to our central mountain range. Here would be our location in Jerusalem.

Here's our rain shadow in the wilderness, and then the Rift Valley significantly below sea level, Transjordan again, and then the eastern desert. So there's a bit of a slice across to help us see what that might be like. Here's a much more sophisticated version of it, and I won't spend a lot of time with this, just to help us see that, again, the coastal plain, some lower-type hills.

There is, by the way, a lower area right here because if we think of our original deposits, we had hard limestone, chalk, soft limestone. Chalk is softer than soft limestone, so it's going to erode even farther down than this Shephelah section. Don't worry so much about that.

We're doing fine as we are. When we do have rain falling, obviously there's going to be a place where the water is either going to flow east or flow west, and so that's going to impact things that happen out here because it could be raining like crazy up in this location. Not raining here at all, and yet major water courses coming down through the wilderness of Judea into the Dead Sea.

In fact, back in 2012, there were some people who lost their lives. They were in Wadi Qumran, and one of these water gushes from a rainstorm up in the hill country swept them away, sadly. A couple of things on soil types and then some illustrations by virtue of pictures of the various regions.

I mentioned this already. I can't say it enough. This is the Red Earth, and it's the soil that results from our hard limestone.

So think back to that map you've just been looking at. Most of that map in the places where we have our tribal allotments was green, and so therefore when we have soil weathering away from that hard limestone, you've got great soil. We've mentioned alluvial already, and I've given you some names you don't need to worry about.

Terra Rosa, you do need to. The Redzina, Brown Forest, and Brown Red Sands don't worry so much about those, but whenever you have water moving soils around, you're going to get a mixture. Lurse, we've already mentioned, is windblown.

Other things to think about in this area, in addition to soil types, are going to be water sources. Springs, again, right at the top, because that's what most of this area is. You've got hard limestone, and when you have hard limestone, you have water in those karstic structures underneath, which makes for great springs.

Where there aren't springs, people dug wells. You may remember in the area called the Negev, which we are going to study a lot in our lecture two from now, Abraham, when he was living in the Negev, dug a well. Isaac dug a well.

They had altercations with the Philistines over water rights. Who could hold the wells, right? So water rights are a big issue down there. Water source runoff.

That may sound silly to you, but when you live in an area like the Negev, there are people that live there that learn how to trap runoff. We'll talk about Nabateans, who were masters at creating things to kind of hold back water runoff and therefore do agriculture. The next bullet right here, wadi and nahal are not water sources, but they're important for us because they are, as I indicate, river streams that are usually dry.

Riverbed is better there. Nahal is the Hebrew word, wadi is the Arabic word. They get named depending, interestingly enough, on whether it was primarily Jordan in control of certain areas, especially after 1948, or Israel.

So know both of those two names, because as we start looking at specific maps, I'm going to be using both of them depending on where this particular dry stream happens to be located. So wadi is going to be in an area where Arabic was the primary language of discourse about geography. Nahal, where Hebrew was.

Aqueducts, we've seen an illustration of an what Herod the Great did to bring water to that place called Caesarea. It's a channel for carrying water, aqueducts. And then once they learned how to make plaster, they learned that they could dig these large underground containers, plaster them, and then during the rainy season, get them

filled up, and that would last because they were covered, didn't evaporate that much, that would last through a dry season.

So, cisterns are tremendously important in areas that do not have access either to springs or wells. Just a slightly more contemporary note, when Jerusalem in 1948-49 was under siege, most of those private structures in Jerusalem that had been built maybe within the century before had cisterns underneath those houses, and they filled those cisterns every year. They'd get one off from their roofs and they'd fill the cisterns after you cleaned them out once it started raining.

During that siege of Jerusalem, when water was cut off to the people living there, they lived on their cistern water for a good long time. Well, just to summarize this, before we look at the photographs, springs in the hilly country were the water sources. They had splendid soil.

I'm emphasizing this because I can't tell you how much this land was a good place to be. Natural terracing meant they could do agriculture there, to be sure. They didn't do John Deere tractors, but they could do good agriculture, growing vines and olive trees especially.

With the steep v-shaped valleys, as you're going to see in photographs in a moment, it's pretty defensible. Hard to bring armies up, down, up, down, up, down with these v-shaped valleys. Because that was true, if you were going to travel either north-south or east-west, you had to find a continuous ridge.

Now in the north-south area, internally that would certainly mean, as we've been watching our topographical map, you'd walk along or drive or whatever along that ridge north-south route. But to get east-west was a little trickier. You had to find an east-west ridge that went in between Wadis or Nahals, that was straight going from all the way from that central ridge mountain area all the way out east to the Jordan Valley or out west to the coast.

A ridge might start, but it might not continue. So that was also very carefully done. Let's just do a little bit of reminder here and then some pictures.

Two seasons, transitional months, especially the transitional months in the spring season, that's when our khamseen, that dry, fierce, hot wind from the desert, would take place. Climate variations, more rain in the north, more rain in higher elevations, and then we've also seen evidence in a number of different contexts of the rain shadow. Just some representative slides as we kind of draw some of these things into a visual way of looking at it.

This happens to be the town of Ashkelon; I should say the city of Ashkelon is a major Philistine city, but it has had continuity well beyond that, huge in the Crusader

period, and then also a contemporary city as well. Notice that as we move inward, think of that schematic cross-section that I did for you. Here is the Shephelah. In other words, the lowlands.

We have moved from a flat coastal plain area into these low rolling hills right here. If you look way off in the background, it doesn't look terribly high at this point because that's it's on a far horizon, but that is our north-south mounted range right there. That's going to be the hill country, but here, you know what, it's pretty accessible.

This valley is something that you could kind of go back and forth on a little bit. Turns out that when David was fighting Goliath, it happened in this Ela Valley. The Philistines were coming from where I'm standing right now.

The Israelites are up there. Bethlehem is up there. David's father, Jesse, is up there.

They've got all their flocks up there. David's been taking care of them. David's brothers are out here fighting right about here at the end of the Ela Valley.

You can see why people living in this hill country area would be a little bit nervous about a Philistine army encroaching up like so, and it does say the Philistines are in camp between Soco and Azekah, which is where we're standing. Here's the hill country itself, and all you need to do is take one quick look at that, and you see that it's not easily traversed by big armies or anybody else for that matter. The Sorok Valley, we'll be dealing more with that later, is actually a natural defense for the city of Jerusalem.

The Sorek Valley system, is not just one valley, it's all sorts of little tentacles going out. It is just to the west of Jerusalem, and therefore, there's a provision there for a natural defense system. Likewise, to the east of Jerusalem, you have eastern hill country, so the other slide was to the west of our ridge area. This is to the east, and again, a little bit more difficult to traverse unless you're right on top of the ridge route itself.

And then here we have the Jordan Valley. If you're looking carefully, you're thinking, now wait a minute, that's green, and you're right, it is. This is a very unusual picture because, if you remember correctly, this is an area that gets about four inches of rain per year, but it has just rained, and therefore, we have a lot of vegetation in that area.

By the way, we are making this particular tape in March of 2020. There's been a lot of rain in Israel this year. People that I know that are there are saying they're going out into the wilderness area, the rain shadow area, they are seeing flowers out there in ways they haven't seen before.

In 1992, when it snowed in Jerusalem 16 inches in March, that's unusual still into May, people saw flowers in the area that some of the natives said they hadn't seen for 50 years. So you can see, rain makes an incredible difference, even in the Jordan Valley. Well, we're going to stop with that for now, just a little bit of a heads up that we have now done our introductory stuff, we've done sources for geography, we've done a focus on archaeology, we've got a sense of the geology and topography that shapes the whole of the land.

So from here on in, we're doing regional studies, zeroing in on land and text as they are impacted in a much more focused way. Enough for now.

This is Dr. Elaine Phillips in her teaching on Introduction to Biblical Studies. This is session 3, Geography of the Middle East.