

Dr. Elaine Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 4, Regional Studies of Israel

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This is Dr. Elaine Phillips in her teaching on the Introduction to Biblical Studies. This is session 4, Regional Studies of Israel.

Well, with this lecture, we are going to move into the regional studies, having done the overviews that we have just completed at this point.

We'll have a series of these regional studies, and this first one is a quite unusual one. It's actually central to our whole approach to where God had his people planted in the land. And I want to talk just a little bit about the order of what you see in front of you there in the subtitles because you're going to see that we're going to take a bit of a cross-section, and it's going to go, at least you may think, from east to west.

We're going to deal with the Judean wilderness first, that is, rain shadow area. Then we're going to move from that point and look at the hill country. So again, moving from east to west.

But now you pause, and you say, wait a minute, I thought Coastal Plain would have been last in this scan of things. But we're doing Coastal Plain next, because in between the hill country and the coastal plain is going to be the Shephelah. And that is so incredibly important.

We've talked about buffer zones on a macro scale already, but think of the Shephelah as a buffer zone between God's people in the hill country and whatever those enemy forces. Remember the West? Remember that stuff about people coming from the West? In this particular cross-section, they're going to be our Philistine plain inhabitants. So as we look at these regions, moving again from east to west, we're skipping over Shephelah, dealing with that last.

So that's what we're doing. First of all, here is just a quick bit of review. We've talked about the land between being a testing ground of faith.

We focused on these rock and soil types, and I have tried to emphasize that even though they may seem a bit arcane to us, they're really important to understand how people live in this area. So wind-blown soil is loose soil, alluvial, water-washed soil. And then we have our sequence of soft limestone.

That's our Shephelah area. Chalk in between Shephelah and the hard limestone hill country. And then a big shout out for the characteristics of hard limestone.

Higher elevation, which means it gets more rain. Has great soil. Has steep V-shaped valleys and springs.

So if you do nothing else in terms of understanding these rock and soil types, that last is one thing you need to know. Now, just in terms of a map here, we want to get some boundary understanding of where our wilderness is. So, the extent of it talking Judean wilderness.

This is not the whole, just the Judean wilderness. Think of it as the rain shadow that's extending from Jericho, right about here, down to the south end of the Dead Sea. And if you can read the fine print on this map, you see it saying Judean wilderness.

We'll say more about the characteristics of it in a moment. Just to review our geology, most of this is this chalk stuff. It hasn't washed off, you remember, because erosion is not taking place as much because there's not as much rain.

Flint and marl are hard materials that are embedded in the chalk. You may know flint if you've read the narrative in the early part of Joshua, where when they are circumcised again, they're using flint in order to do it. The cliff faces right here; cliff face is going to be our hard limestone.

Chalk is where my pointer is moving with Judean wilderness. But as we have our major drop down to the surface of the Dead Sea, we've got an exposed cliff face that's hard limestone. We need to think about how people travel.

Do you remember when we talked about needing to have a ridge to get from a low place to a high place, for example? So let's look, first of all, at routes. By the way, I've just noted in brackets that we're talking about geological foundations. So I've tried to maintain into this map, this regional map, some of those same colors that you've already seen.

First, in terms of a route, because people always need to travel, we've got something that's going to go from Jericho up towards Jerusalem. I see that as I put my arrow in, I was probably looking cross-eyed because it's not quite in the right place. There it is right there.

That's our Jericho to central Benjamin Plateau, that's this one, and then Jericho to Jerusalem here. This one could be extended just a tad bit further. I'll have to correct that a little bit.

But you're seeing what's happening where those two red arrows are. They are superimposed on an already red line on the map, and those red lines are indicative of travel routes. This one, especially, is going to be extremely important as time goes on in our study.

This one up to Jerusalem is also significant, but secondarily so. Probably in terms of our wilderness, we're not worrying about the area here yet. In terms of our wilderness, the site we want to note is Qumran, which is right about there.

Since we are, Lord willing, going to devote an entire lecture to Dead Sea materials and Qumran in particular, that's all we're going to say about that right now. Just thinking in terms of the southern part of the wilderness area, this section is right here. Let's note one major route, and that's going to be in that location. Oddly enough, we have at least one biblical narrative that is going to talk about armies moving from this area up to the hill country, and they're going to find, they will have found, a continuous ridge.

You'll see the little red line underneath my red arrow that does indeed make its way from significantly below sea level here all the way up to the hill country there. So hang on to that. En Gedi, Bethlehem, Via Toccoa.

In terms of our locations, we have Masada. Perhaps we know that from more of our Second Temple period. Having said that, Masada, one of Herod the Great's fortresses, may also be, may, this is just may, also be the Mitsuda that is referred to in the Samuel narratives, and it's translated stronghold there because you have David staying in the Mitsuda from time to time.

There might be more than one, but it could be that one. And then there's En Gedi, another name that's going to show up with regard to David. We don't have a lot of other things to put on here because, keep in mind, wilderness is wilderness.

It's rain shadow. It's not an easy place to live. Let's talk a little bit about the history that does unfold in this area.

Just in terms of this map, what we've already noted is Qumran here, En Gedi here, Masada there. Those are the three sites that we've already noted, and now we have them on this topographical map. Generally speaking, as we think of our biblical narratives, the wilderness is a place that you got through, generally speaking.

So, as the Israelites are engaged in conquering the land, they are going to go from Jericho into the hill country area and through the wilderness. We'll talk about conquest later on. If there are occasions to travel from Moab, which is over here in Transjordan, or Edom, which is southeast of the south end of the Dead Sea, sometimes you have to do that by going across this route to that En Gedi location and up that route that we just noted earlier, going from Moab and Edom.

It could be, for example, that when we have our narrative that unfolds in the Book of Ruth, perhaps those folks, as they went from Bethlehem to Moab, may have taken

that route. However they did it, whether they went this way or this way, they had to go through the wilderness and then our route to Jerusalem. Now, having said that, in terms of the need to simply get through this area, there are times when there are people who retreat to the wilderness.

Usually, it is a matter of getting away from something threatening. Now, the threat could be physical, as with Saul pursuing David. David spent some time out there.

En Gedi is a name that's associated with David's time in the wilderness. So is Mitzudah, the stronghold. Having said that, David is, as I said a moment ago, trying to escape physical destruction from Saul.

But we also have those folks who established the Qumran community, who seem to have viewed, in the second century B.C., what was going on in Jerusalem. And by the way, it was a mess. We'll deal with a lot of that when we talk about Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

But they retreated to the wilderness. They established themselves as a new covenant community, basically to get away from Jerusalem. Yet Herod the Great, who built Masada, is only one of his fortresses.

Because Herod the Great, knowing full well that not everybody really liked him very much, in terms of members of his kingdom, built a series of means of escape. In case he had to get away from Jerusalem, he had a place called Herodium. I'm going to talk about it in a moment.

He had Masada. He had a fortress over here called Mecherus. All of those were intended to be ways of escape and safety.

John the Baptist as we read the end of the first chapter of Luke, we see that John the Baptist grew up in the wilderness. We also notice that he was baptizing in that same general area. Here's the wilderness.

Here's the Jordan River. Jesus was tempted in the wilderness and then later, kind of following the same pattern of the Qumran community. When the monastic movement really took off in the fourth century A.D., part of that impetus was because Jerusalem, because the empire had turned Christian, the church in Jerusalem became a very, very different thing.

You have a number of people basically retreating to the wilderness and getting away from a more urban kind of church context with all of its temptations. That's a quick overview in terms of history and wilderness. Just a couple of pictures to give us a sense.

The reason these are especially important is because so often, depending on where you live in this country or whatever country you're living in, wilderness may mean lakes and woods and black bears and things like that. Wilderness in the area that we're talking about is this. What you're seeing on the left is a place called Wadi Urugot.

It's one of those. Notice the word wadi here. Generally speaking, it is a huge cleft that, over, again, millions of years, water and rainfall up in the hill country have been washing to the east.

The watershed is such that it washes to the east through this dry area and has cut this huge, huge water course. Now, there happens to be a spring backup here, which is why you have a waterfall. It's called the Hidden Waterfall in Wadi Urugot, which is on the west side of the Dead Sea.

And here you see it from a top higher area, looking down at some of the little pathways here and looking at the very bottom of that wadi, that basically dry riverbed, although there's enough water to keep that kind of vegetation growing. Just a quick note, by the way, we referenced Saul and David a moment ago in terms of wilderness and David's fleeing from Saul. There's that interesting passage in 1 Samuel 26, where you've got some exchange going back and forth between Saul's men David's men, but they can't get each other because they happen to be, probably, some of them standing here, others standing over here, and they can exchange in terms of conversation and communication, but there's no way that Saul's men can get David's men in that context.

So that's a little bit of a view of that slice. Wadi Urugot, by the way, is just a little bit south of that site that we noted on the map called En Gedi, and that would have been very much of a center place for David. Masada, an old aerial, but it's a helpful one.

We have Herod, who really, as I said a moment ago, made this one of his fortresses. It wasn't, however, a primitive fortress. Herod had a western palace, Herod had a northern palace, Herod had all sorts of fortifications around here, all kinds of things that we could say about Masada.

Unfortunately, we don't have time to do it. After Herod's demise, there was some habitation, kind of give-and-take sporadic, until Jewish zealots, after the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in A.D. 70, some Jews escaped from various places around the country, but notably Jerusalem, came to Masada, and this was their last, last stand against the Roman army. I mention that only because you see this very eroded, what used to be the siege ramp that the Romans used to take over this.

Terrible narrative that Josephus tells us, in all Josephus' gory detail, about our 960 defenders of Masada, who were here and took their own lives rather than fall to the Romans, as the Romans laid siege to Masada and then were able to break through. Josephus gives us lots of details on that. Just to get a little bit of a feeling for this, this is the lowest tier of the three tiers of Herod's palace.

Even 2,000 years later, you get a sense of what this was like. You see frescoes along the wall. You see Herod's architects who created what looked like fluted columns.

Obviously these were just blocks of stone like this, but they were overlaid with a plaster to make them look like they were very carved columns. So Herod did not skimp at all in terms of creating these things. Bathhouse, swimming pool, even up in that area, and all you need to do is pause for a moment.

That's in the rain shadow area. How did they get water? How did they have water for swimming pools, for goodness sake? Well, they aqueducted it in, and then carved under this platform of Masada were numbers of cisterns, one of them very large, and the water would be brought up into that cistern, and then from the cistern, they would have donkeys, apparently, that brought the water for use. There is much more to say about Masada, but in the interest of time, we are going to keep going to En-Gedi farther north.

I mention this and show you a picture of it, not because it's particularly biblical. You may remember going back to our lecture on archaeological time periods, which was Chalcolithic before the early Bronze, which was before the Iron Age. So we're talking about 4000 to 3000 BC, but the thing to notice is that we have a footprint here of a temple, and not only have they found the footprint of that temple, but they found a very interesting cache of some lovely, lovely, very intricate copper bronze scepters and crowns and things like this.

So in this area where there was a water source, by the way, I'm sorry I should have said this, this is the word for spring. So there's a spring at En-Gedi here, and therefore habitation going way back to our Chalcolithic period. It was also, as we've said, talking about our texts, a place to which David went from time to time, and there is a waterfall below where the spring is.

And again, water. One gets a sense when you look at this and look at the dry, barren areas surrounding it why David writes so much in the Psalms about water and why he writes about rocks, rocks that are higher than the eye, but he has so much to say about water embedded in those wonderful Psalms as well. Just a quick look, again coming back to Qumran later on, but this was our community that in the second and first centuries B.C. left Jerusalem, came out here, had very much of an incredible community for scrolls, and the scrolls that were produced, this is probably our poster, postcard picture of Qumran, because that's cave four.

More to say about that. In terms of the wilderness, again here's a more broad picture of it. I want to just say two things about this.

First of all, imagine Jesus being compelled. The Gospel of Mark tells us the Holy Spirit drove him into the wilderness after the baptism, and this is where Satan actually said, I just tempt you to make these stones into bread. So think of that and think of that in terms of a contrast, if you will, between the scene that we have in Genesis 3, where Adam and Eve had everything provided for them, companionship, lush garden, they fell for it.

Jesus is here alone being tempted, but he did indeed conquer that. The second thing I want you to notice is something smaller, but it's on the horizon, and it's now it's under my green pointer, which I'm going to move, and you see a little bump on that horizon. That bump is probably about 12 miles, well 10 miles west of where we're standing for this picture, but that bump is the Herodian.

So we're going to visit that in a moment, but I'm also going to remind you, as I said earlier, Herod had fortresses, fortresses for his own safe escape if he needed it, and the Herodian was one of them, and notice that even in its state 2,000 years after it was abandoned, pretty much 2,000 years, there it stands, kind of a sentinel, a bit of an ominous one on the horizon all the way from this direction. The monastic movement, there is much more to say about that as well. Simply looking here at another wadi, this happens to be Wadi Kilt, just to the west of Jericho, and St. George's is a monastery.

What you're seeing now is a structure that has been certainly refurbished. It was kind of a mess from the 16th to the 19th centuries, but again gives us a sense in terms of this whole monastic movement retreating from Jerusalem, living in the wilderness. When the monastic movement was at its height between the 4th and 6th, 7th centuries, they say that there were upwards of 40,000 monks living out in this area, and the wadis reverberated with the sounds of those monks singing even song and so forth.

Well, let's leave the wilderness for now. Remember, we're making our trek from east to west, coming into the Judean hill country. As if you haven't been reminded enough, you get the impression we're supposed to know this, don't you? It's hard limestone, Terra Rosa, springs, and a great place to live.

Topography, ridges, deep valleys, natural terracing, good stuff. Travel has to take ridges, either the north-south ridge route that we've been talking about or those occasional east-west continuous ridges out to points lower. Agriculture, growing in the natural terracing, lots of olive trees, lots of them, and lots of vineyards as well.

More isolated, there we go. This is going to pick up on that same geological foundations map, just so we can kind of see what this is like. So our red arrow is pointing to Hebron, I will call it Hevron, and I want you to notice a couple of things about this.

First of all, here is our wilderness, chalky area right here. If you look at Hevron, it's right under where my green pointer is; notice that we have a red route going this way, a red route going this way, one going out here and there, and then one to the north as well. It's a hub.

Notice that these natural routes, those red lines don't mark 19th century or 20th century highways. Those are natural routes that are there because the topography works for them. This is why it becomes a city of refuge, because it's one of those places to which people could flee with a certain amount of ease if they had to escape the Avenger of Blood in case of a case of manslaughter.

So it was one of the three cities of refuge that were west of the Rift Valley. Also the first capital of David, when he established his kingdom for those first seven years, he reigned from Hevron. Again, good reason for it, hub, central portion of the tribe of Judah.

The tribe of Judah owed him, and we're going to see how that works when we talk about the Negev. There are just a couple of additional cities that we want to make a note of here: Bethlehem and the Herodian and Tekoa. Are there others? Yes, I'm sure there are, but for our purposes, let's just note the location of Bethlehem, which is just south of Jerusalem.

I've got Bethlehem and Herodian together because there's going to be a conjunction that I want to talk about in a moment in terms of the importance of both of those, but then we also want to note Tekoa. So here's the thing, we know Bethlehem because Micah 5.2 already says that there's going to be a ruler whose goings forth are from of old, from ever, going to be born in Bethlehem. When those Magi came from the east and came to Jerusalem, the word to them was Micah 5.2, Bethlehem.

That was where David was born, that was where the son of David was to be born. Isn't that interesting that Bethlehem lies right in the shadow of the Herodian, you're going to see a picture of this in a moment that'll make this really clear. Herod chose to build the one fortress that he named after himself.

These other fortresses are impressive to be sure, but he built the one fortress that he named after himself right next to the city of David. Some people think, and this is a maybe, maybe, perhaps kind of thing, but some people think that maybe Herod was well enough aware of that biblical tradition. He's king of the Jews, but of course he's a bit of a appointed Idumean, appointed by the Roman senate king of the Jews.

Some people think he built the Herodian there to make a messianic claim for himself, to say that he's son of David. If you want to follow that up a little bit, there's an archaeologist called Jody Magnus who has made that proposal, and it seems to be an interesting one, because this is a huge, significant, major fortress for Herod the Great. Again, we're going to look at pictures of it in a moment.

Tekoa, which you can see by the way when you stand in the Herodian, you can look just to the south, and you can see this place called Tekoa, and you're thinking, so why is that important? Well, it's important because we have Amos. Amos is a shepherd from Tekoa. Amos is a Southern boy.

Amos says he's not only a shepherd, but he tends sycamore fig trees, and Amos was the prophet who was called to, at that stage of the game, cross into somewhat hostile territory. This is now the southern kingdom in Amos's day. Here's northern kingdom.

He's supposed to go and pronounce at Bethel, and when the priest at Bethel says, get out of here and go on home, Amos identifies himself, and those two vocational identifications I gave you a moment ago are really interesting because he says, that's why I'm bringing this all up, he says, I'm a sheep herder. Well, that works out here. This is the sort of place where you have lots of flocks of sheep.

They move around. They're semi-nomadic. Depending on the rainfall, depending on the herbage, they can move, but he also says, I tend sycamore fig trees.

Well, once you see this area out here, you're thinking to yourself, no, probably not sycamore fig trees. They actually grow out here a little more. Proposal.

Amos was probably a migrant worker. As things got drier, he moved his flocks out from this area to places where there would be a little bit more area for flocks to graze, but he could also earn some money on the side, some shekels and whatever, by tending sycamore fig trees, which was not easy, as I understand it, to deal with figs. Each individual fig in the process of its growing had to be notched.

That might be what he was doing. Not easy labor. Well, here are just some historical connections as we make our way along.

Mentioned some of these already. Hebron or Hebron was where Abraham was when he had those three significant visitors, and he showed them hospitality. As a result of that, you have in the very next chapter them going to Sodom and Gomorrah and the destruction of those cities. Abraham also purchased land in that area in order to bury his wife, Sarah.

We've already mentioned the fact that it was a city of refuge and David's first capital, and our last indicator here, it's interesting that Absalom, David's son, and that whole succession issue is an interesting one in terms of the sons, but Absalom, David's third born son, when he effects his own military coup, David by that time has of course been ruling in Jerusalem for quite a while, but Absalom goes to Hebron. It is a statement that he will declare himself king there. Mentioned Bethlehem in terms of Micah 5-2, but I simply want to note the fact that Samuel will go to Bethlehem to anoint David.

Now I'm going to come back to that later on. We're just mentioning it here. We're going to come back to it later.

Herodian, we've mentioned it already, and Tekoa, I think we've got it in place. Just a couple of pictures before we move onward. This one's helpful for two things.

First of all, you see natural terraces. When we talked about geology and the composition of hard limestone, it's such that as you have water and you've got trees and tree roots and so forth, this limestone will fracture, and when it's been laid down in these horizontal things, and the anticlines have kept in this area the pretty horizontal bedding planes, it doesn't stay that way when we get farther west, but here you see natural terraces, and isn't it lovely? These are olive trees. Perfect places to grow these wonderful little, well, I call them mountainside window boxes if you want to.

The second thing to notice about this is that you've got the modern road doing pretty much what the ancient road did, following along this north-south ridge direction. So terraces and route, if you will. This picture is an interesting one for some political reasons.

It was actually taken in 1992 when it was not really good to actually go into Bethlehem. You're looking at parts of Bethlehem kind of here and kind of here. We were standing south of Jerusalem, a place called Ramat Rechel, actually looking at the remains of some more modern-day military trenches and fortifications, but my reason for showing you this is not that at all.

It is to look at our Herodian. In an earlier slide we saw the Herodian from the east. Here we're seeing it from the north, and again there it is jutting right up there, but I simply want you to see it now in juxtaposition to O Little Town of Bethlehem.

Think of what it would be like because in the first century, Bethlehem would not be the place that it is now in terms of size. It would have been a small town, but here they are, living in the shadow of Herod's monstrous fortress. We'll see a reconstruction in a moment, and they have to live in the shadow of that sign of

Roman domination and Herodian domination, and then, of course, it gets even worse when he determines to slaughter the innocents of Bethlehem.

Here, it gets a little closer, and what you need to see is a couple of things we need to see here; Herod's engineers didn't just build a fortress. They had a whole palatial structure. This is all part of the Herodian, monstrous structure all around here, pools, palaces, and so forth, residual around the fortress itself, which is up here.

Now, the other interesting thing about this is what you're seeing there is the modern-day way of accessing that. You can actually park your car here and walk up to the top. When Herod's engineers and architects built this, they had a hill that probably stopped right about here.

They took another mountain hill off from here, broke it all down, and carted it to build a fortress. So, obviously, the original went much higher than this, and it was straight up and down. This is kind of like a tell.

Notice the angle of that. That's stuff that's been falling down for 2,000 years. Here's the interior.

This is actually an old slide. There have been some developments. I like this one better because you don't see all the canvas structures over some of these things, but you get a sense in terms of some locations.

He had a little Roman bath there. Here, just off the picture, is what's called a keep, a huge tower. There, coming up right here, is access from a whole series of underground tunnels, primarily used later on by zealots who overtook this area, just as they overtook the Masada area.

This would have been one of his reception halls, later on, turned into a synagogue when Jewish zealots, after the death of Herod, took over this. But now have a look at this. Based on the ruins that have fallen down and the debris that's down below, this is what is suggested in terms of a reconstruction.

So, we just saw open ground here. We would have had a casemate wall, double wall, double wall fortress around with four towers, and this one, the most monstrous tower. Now, in the last, oh, I don't know, let's see, 2007 until now, the last 12 years or so, there has been a lot of flurry over the ostensible discovery of Herod's mausoleum, burial area, which it was thought, when they first found this very extraordinary platform and a shattered sarcophagus on it, might have been the place where Herod was buried.

I'm not going to venture into that length because there's still some dispute. Some people think that maybe he was actually buried in this big keep tower here.

Currently, you can see where archaeologists are working to open up the original entry to the Herodian.

We do, when we read Josephus, know that Herod, after his death, was brought on a major funeral procession all the way from Jericho, where he up and died, to the Herodian. So, somewhere, he's buried here. All right.

Picture of a vineyard. We've seen this already when we saw the produce of the land and a watchtower as well. Watchtower is terribly important because, obviously, they had to keep care that foreign animal entities or hostile forces not coming in and stealing things out of the fields, whatever they happened to be.

All right. Connecting the hill country and going west. As I said, you have to find some route that would get you from that elevation of the hill country.

Elevation on Shevron, by the way, is higher than Jerusalem, so probably 2,600 feet or so. Got to get down through the western hill slopes to the coastal plain area. We've already talked about the Romans who created a fairly significant system of roads.

We talked about them in conjunction with our mile markers, but here, we see a Roman road actually carved into the bedrock. And, very nice, because as you're going up the slope, you don't want to be slipping on it, so they made steps here. This is an area that is slightly west of Bethlehem on what's called the Khusan Ridge, and it's a route that, sorry, a ridge and route that runs east-west and gets us from that hill country area down.

Okay, as I said when we did our introduction, skipping over the Shephelah for now and just doing a little bit on Philistine Plain itself. So here's our coastal plain, our boundaries of the coastal plain, the Yarkone River, right? That's that area there. Talked about sand, alluvial soils, Kurkar Ridges, that calcified sandstone along there.

In antiquity, lots of swamp here. And sand dunes also are not really great for walking or traveling. Just note, you don't have roads here.

You're going to have your road in antiquity hugging the eastern edge of the alluvial soils right before you get into the low hills or right out next to where the ridges would have been. Kind of fun. Cities to notice.

This is a city we're going to do a lot more with later on. That A stands for Aphek. There's a sign here that says to Ashdod, which is pretty close to the coast itself.

We have a G for Gath and an E for Ekron. These are three of our major Philistine cities, including the Philistine Pentapolis. When you read about the transfer of the Ark of the Covenant back from these three cities, Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron, where

the stolen Ark of the Covenant was lodged for a while and did so much damage that the Philistines decided to send it back.

These are the three cities right here. The south, we're going to move up into this area here. Our southern boundary is going to be this whole connected bunch of wadis, the wadi basur.

It drains a lot of northern Sinai. Lots of our soil is going to be, because it's so dry, this soil. So you can see that there and then some of our alluvial stuff here.

Mention the three Philistine cities that are in the northern section of the Philistine plain. To repeat, they were Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron. In the south, we have two more that we need to note.

One is going to be Ashkelon. Saw a photograph of that in the preceding presentation. And Gath, I'm sorry, Gaza right here.

So Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod farther north, Ekron, and Gath inland. Five Philistine cities. So, just a little bit in terms of our history.

Period of the Judges, Samson. Samson is, as you know, those narratives; I would encourage you to read them. They are fascinating.

Samson is continually compelled to go to that more cosmopolitan culture. First, he goes to a place called Timna. Then he ventures down to Ashkelon, basically to kill off some people and get some clothes.

Then he goes to Gaza. So he's a person who is in his own heart and mind trapped by Philistine culture, but God uses that. Egyptians are going to move into this area as well.

These cities are mentioned, not just in our transition to monarchy time or the period of the Judges. The transition to monarchy, by the way, is probably encapsulated most in that narrative that I was just telling you about in terms of the capture of the Ark of the Covenant and its return back to Israel. But Zechariah is going to mention some of these cities, too, in chapter 9. Then, when we get to the New Testament, we have Azotus, a Greek rendition of the Hebrew word Ashtod in Acts chapter 8, which is interesting in that it talks about the Ethiopian eunuch whom Philip meets on the road going back home.

That Roman road I showed you earlier is an interesting thing to use to teach that narrative. Well, at any rate, just a few pictures of this, and then we're going to move to our key place, which is Shephelah. Fascinating archaeology done at Ashkelon.

Could spend more than an hour on this. Middle Bronze. Remember Middle Bronze? We're talking long, about 2000 B.C., long down to about 1550, so early.

But notice the size of this whole structure as they were excavating it. We have not only a gate area, the channel of which is at least 20 feet long, but here is a defensive structure, wall, that's called a glacis, very, very fortified of this city. Interestingly enough, as it was excavated, lo and behold, in that very strong fortified wall from the Middle Bronze period, a later structure was built into it, maybe some kind of a small temple, in which was found an urn with a tiny little silver calf.

This is probably Ashkelon's most famous yield in terms of archaeology. Interestingly enough, for those of you who like name-dropping, I've talked about Jim Monson a number of times because of his importance in this whole discipline of historical geography, Bible geography. But his son was involved in the excavation of Ashkelon when this little silver calf was discovered, so that's kind of fun, too.

Okay, so far we've looked at wilderness, hill country, Philistine plain, and now we look at the Shephelah of Judah in between the Philistine plain and the hill country. This is our buffer zone. So, let's get our geology down pat first.

By the way, I'll give you, if you're having trouble kind of tracking with me right now, first of all, you're tired, and some of this isn't making sense, I'm going to steal from Dr. Paul Wright his term for understanding the Shephelah because he says, think of an old western movie and in an old western movie you always have a small town that has a bar and in the bar you've got a fight that starts and it bursts through the bar room doors and those doors are double doors. They flop open, and the battle goes out into the street, and then the fight continues there for a while, and then those forces get a little stronger. They burst back into the bar, and the doors flop that way.

He says to think of the Shephelah as barroom doors, and, for example, if the people of the Philistines are stronger, they burst through going east. If the Israelites are stronger, they're going to burst through going west. It's our little valleys that happen to be east-west valleys that cut through the Shephelah that make this very much, notice east-west valleys, very much invasion routes from the Philistine plain into the country or means of expansion from the country outward, which did happen on occasion.

So, in terms of topography and settlement, weaker soils, but you know what, accessible stuff and here is our real highlight, valleys, invasion routes into the hills. As I said, there were some good kings, Uzziah comes to mind, who actually went out the other direction, but that didn't happen terribly often. All right, when you look at this particular map, it's one we've seen when we focused on the wilderness.

Here's the hill country. Look right down here. Whoops, I didn't mean to do that quite so fast.

There it is. Here you're seeing Shephelah and so, again, very low hills. We've been out on the coastal plain.

We've looked at Gath and Ekron, right hugging the edge of our Shephelah, but here's our main area. We're going to be talking about valleys that cut through the Shephelah, those east-west valleys, and we're going to be talking about major cities, and we're going to try and place a couple of historical events, certainly not all of them, into this region. Here's the valleys first, and here comes our kind of simplified map.

Not sure how well you can see these written in notes here, so I've put them out in the margin as well. Here is the Ayalon Valley. It's pronounced Ayalon, even though most texts are going to say Ajalon.

Ayalon Valley is right here. The major city, Gezer, standing that G right there. Anybody who's going to come from our coastal plain area, think cosmopolitan, think enemy forces, think the desire to invade if they want to get up into this area, which is just north of Jerusalem, with which we will deal a lot later, they're going to come through the Ayalon Valley.

The Ayalon Valley is also going to be significant in the conquest because Joshua and the Israelites are going to pursue their enemies in this direction, so it is an important valley. The next one is going south, Sorek. That's right in here.

Now, one thing to think about is that the Sorek Valley in Shephelah is a broad valley. You can easily come in this direction. You can get from, let's just say, Ekron, past Timna, up to Beit Shemesh.

That's right here. This is Zora and Eshtaol, that's Samson's territory. Easy valley to go through because of the nature of the geology.

Isn't this fun? Geology counts for something. However, once you get to this point where you've got hard limestone hills exposed, this is our natural defense. These are our steep V-shaped valleys.

A couple of lectures ago, I said west of Jerusalem, you have a natural defensive system built right into the geography, to the topography, right here. So, easy access this far, not beyond that. Philistines come in this far, yes.

Beyond that, it's going to be harder. Do they do it from time to time? On occasion, they're in the Rephaim Valley, which is up in here, but not very often.

Okay, working from north to south, Ailon, Sorek. The next one is the Elah Valley. This is probably next to Sorek.

These two probably share equally in terms of high profile because in the Ela Valley, we do indeed have our David and Goliath incident. Azekah, that A right there. Gath, right out here.

Soko, right there. Philistines encamped between Soko and Azekah. They've got their eye on what's going on up here.

Saul and the Israelites are gathered right about where that little confrontation mark is. Bethlehem, with David's dad up in the hill country, trembling at the prospect of a Philistine army coming in. So you can kind of see how this would unfold, that narrative.

1 Samuel 17, you can read all about it and how it would unfold in that context. Going farther south, here we've got the Beit Guvrin Valley, and you're scratching your head saying, now wait a minute, where is that in the biblical text? Well, the name doesn't show up in the biblical text, but Moresheth does. That's the M right here.

We have a prophet from Moresheth; his name is Micah. Moresheth is mentioned in the book of Micah, and so is Moresheth Gath, which is just a little bit farther north. Just a note, Micah from Moresheth is a contemporary of Isaiah from Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is the capital. Micah's outside the beltway. Micah's on the front lines.

Micah is in a difficult place because Isaiah and Micah live at the point in time when Assyrians have come down this major international route, and they're doing their level best; we're going to get to Lachish in a moment to make their way by kind of a back south door into the hill country and Jerusalem. Here are some events. First is the conquest of the south.

Just repeat what I said a moment ago. You can read Joshua 9 and 10, and as the Israelites have joined forces with Gibeonites, we'll talk about that first part of that narrative in another lecture, once they are in the ascendancy and they're defeating their enemies, they swing out and take a number of these cities. Yarmouth, Hebron, Azekah.

Samson's escapades also take place in this area. The Sorek Valley is especially important for Samson. Beit Shemesh, Zorah, Eshterol, Timnah, all those things count.

I haven't mentioned this one yet, but in the northern Shephelah area is where Dan was originally given their tribal inheritance. Some of them are going to migrate, and

they're going to migrate to the town city up north that is going to be called Dan, but keep in mind that originally, their tribal inheritance is northern Shephelah. I've already mentioned the fact that once the Ark of the Covenant was doing some major damage to the Philistine cities of Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath, it got sent back into Israelite territory, and the way it was sent back was on a cart drawn by cows.

You may remember this narrative. That worked in the Sorek Valley. That's the Sorek Valley, because again, it's broad, etc., etc.

It wasn't the way they were supposed to do it, but the Philistines didn't know better. The Ark did not tip off the cart as it would later on in a subsequent narrative. David and Goliath we've mentioned already, and then just to note, both Solomon and his son Rehoboam knew this area and its importance in terms of defending people who lived in the hill country, Jerusalem especially, but others as well.

So Solomon, 1 Kings 9:15, fortifies Gezer, the key city at the western end of the Aylon Valley. Rehoboam is going to follow in Solomon's footsteps, and he is going to create a ring of defensive fortresses, some of which are in the Shephelah area. Some of them are farther south, and some of them are southeast, but that's worth noting as well.

Now, a moment ago, I mentioned Micah, Micah, who lived in Moreshah, and I mentioned that he lived, along with Isaiah, at the time of the Assyrian onslaught. The Assyrian ruler at this time was Sennacherib, and what Sennacherib did was trot all the way down the Philistine Plain and then try and come in via another fifth valley. I didn't mark it on the map because it was off that map I showed you, but it's the Lachish Valley going up to a place called Lach-ish or Lachish.

I'm going to show you a number of pictures because Lake-ish or Lachish is an incredibly important site. We don't read about it a lot in the biblical text. We do read about it some, but it has been demonstrated from the archaeology that has been done there on site and also from the fact that Sennacherib, bless his heart if I may say that, was so proud of what he did to Lachish that when he went back home to Nineveh, he created a whole stone relief of his conquest of Lachish and actually inscriptions on it that tell us exactly what was going on.

So you can put that together with some archaeology and with the biblical text that has to do with Hezekiah during this particular time as well. Well, just to pick up some pictures of some of the things we've been talking about, again, here we are. If you're going to try to revisit that map in your mind, we are standing on Azekah.

We are looking from the west to the east. The Ela Valley makes a bit of a dog leg around here. And so here's Socoh, kind of a bare hill.

It says the Philistines were encamped between Socoh and Azekah. So here they are, ready to make a march up into the hill country. Here's hill country right here.

Saul's forces have come down. They're probably encamped just about where that very handy disk is right there. And then David is going to be sent by his father to provision the brothers that are with Saul's army.

But David, of course, will do a whole lot more. Wonderful narrative unfolding in that context.

I want to spend just a little bit of time because we talked about high and low chronology.

And I mentioned this place out in the Shephelah, which is just really close. So just to review, it has two gates, massive casemate wall, Iron Age II, fortified city, here it is right here, centralized political organization. And this is just before David's time, probably, because that's where it's located.

And you're thinking, so why are you bringing this all up right now? Well, the only reason I'm bringing it up is because when the Israelites pursue the Philistines after David is done in Goliath, which is a narrative all by itself and fascinating, but it says the Philistines ran on the road and the Israelites pursued them to Shaarayim. And you're thinking, yeah, so? Well, the Hebrew word Shaar means gate. The ending on it, ayim, means two gates.

Shaarayim means two gates. Most cities had one, but in this particular place, the Arabic name is Khirbet, it means ruin, Khirbet Qeiyafa, or the ruin of Qeiyafa. This place could be biblical Shaarayim, because as you saw in that preceding slide, the excavators found two gates.

So perhaps as the battle takes place here, somewhere in the area of that particular satellite disk, the Israelites are pursuing the Philistines past Shaarayim, perhaps located in that context, and then out to Ekron, behind Azekah, and Gath, also behind Azekah. We don't need to worry about this archaeology stuff; simply note that it does. There have also been, in addition to two gates, a very interesting ostrakon found there. Well, in the Shefei Laws where we found those Roman milestones that I showed you photographs of before.

Maresha was a fascinating city, particularly in her intertestamental period, olive presses. This is interesting for lots of reasons. I will simply say that these caves are man-made, because that's the makings for plaster.

They would excavate them out, take all this stuff out, and plaster cisterns. What we really want to focus on before we close, which won't be very long from now, is Lachish. The arrow is pointing at the gate area.

Again, this city is extremely important. This city is the one that Sennacherib bragged about taking. This city is the southeastern gateway into the area that God's people were inhabiting, and here is the gate into the city itself.

Long ramp coming up to that gate. When the Assyrians were besieging it, they built their own siege ramp here. The Israelites built a counter ramp there.

All kinds of interesting things going on. What I need to say is to focus in just a little bit more on our gate area. You see, we're getting closer and closer, and what we've got is actually a double gate area.

Here is the gate as it would have existed in the Israelite period, and here's kind of an outer gate where there were some letters, post-it notes of antiquity, if you will, ostraca found out in this area, which have some really interesting things. Sadly, I don't have time to get into what they indicate other than the fact that this place was, during the time right before the fall of the Babylonians, really feeling the last-ditch effort stress that was there. However, in this inner gate area, you see here's the other side that doesn't have the markings on it to show us our gate.

In this inner gate area, some very interesting finds. Here's the ostraca first, but there is another find, and that is a stone toilet. Stone toilet found in the inner gate area, and you're saying, well, that's a very interesting combination.

What are the implications of this? Well, where it was found, whoops, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to skip that quite so fast. This one was found in the outer gate area. Implications of that are when you read what's written on it, these people were feeling, as I said, the stress, terrible stress, before the Babylonians pretty much swept through.

Here, this stone toilet was found in an area that had been a worship area in the gate. They found some remains of what seems to be an altar that had been destroyed, and on top of that apparently destroyed altar, they found a latrine. We have two reformations that are recorded in the biblical text, and one of them was Hezekiah's.

Hezekiah, Josiah, and later after him went around the countryside destroying foreign altars and places that had been idolatrous places of worship. The suggestion is from the archaeologists that have discovered this that you actually have here the destruction of that altar that had been in the gate area, and then to make sure that it has been shamed and not ever going to be used again, you have a latrine put right into that context. Do we see this happening in other places in the biblical text? Yes, we do.

When Jehu, son of Nimshi, Northern Kingdom, destroyed Baal worship in the Temple of Baal there, what does it say the text says? What does the text say? And they built latrines over it. So, it was a way of particularly shaming or polluting a place of worship, in this case, polluting a false place of worship. It's kind of interesting in terms of finding this material there.

Lots more we could say about that. I will simply say this with regard to the gate stuff. The gate at Lachish was not one that is said Solomon built.

Just remember, Solomon built gates, fortified cities, at Gezer Megiddo Chatzor. South of that is Lachish, but Lachish's city gate was bigger than any of those three. Whoever fortified Lachish to start with and then kept fortifying it realized how important this place was.

Realized it, because that fortification in that gate structure you saw, both the inner gate and the outer gate, was intended to keep enemies out. Well it didn't, because here is a portion of Sennacherib's depiction of his triumph storming Lachish, the city of Lachish. You see here, as he depicts it, as this has been put into his palace in Nineveh, as it now rests in the British Museum.

If you go to the British Museum, you can see the room devoted to Sennacherib's siege of Lachish. But you see people trying to dig through the wall underneath. See those conical heads? That's Assyrians.

You see siege ladders being put up here. You see defenders up here trying to deal with all of that. You see people being pitched off the walls.

Later on, as you make your way around, you see people being brought in procession as slaves, actually into the presence of Sennacherib himself. We're going to close with just a little bit of a review of where we've been today. Well, in this last lecture.

Moving from east to west, the wilderness. The hill country is an ideal place to live for all those reasons. The Philistine plain, place primarily of enemies.

The five key cities, just to remind ourselves in terms of Philistine cities because they keep showing up in those narrations of the transition to monarchy, are from the south, Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod on the coast, moving slightly inland, Gath and Ekron. And then, finally, we talked about the Shephelah as the buffer zone. That closes down our slice through these particular regions of the country.

We now have a good handle on what's called the Southern Central Arena. Next time we're going to be moving south to the Negev itself and talk a little bit about the Sinai and its connections with Egypt. But this is good enough for now.

This is Dr. Elaine Phillips in her teaching on the Introduction to Biblical Studies. This is session 4, Regional Studies of Israel.