

Dr. Elaine Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 5, Regional Studies: Negev and Sinai

© 2024 Elaine Phillips and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. Elaine Phillips in her teaching on Introduction to Biblical Studies. This is session 5, Regional Studies: Negev and Sinai.

Well, here we are in another regional study. We're going to be dealing with Negev and Sinai this time around, which means we've moved a little bit south. First off, however, it doesn't hurt us to do a review. So, let's start by a quick shot at things we've been doing so far.

We looked at the various disciplines that contribute to our study of historical geography and worked our way through those. We spent an hour on archaeology and only tantalized ourselves, basically, in terms of realizing how much more is involved with archaeology. Following that, we did a quick overview of the Middle East and then focused in on regions of the country itself.

And finally, we got into where we really want to be, which is regional studies. And our first one was to take a slice, a cross-section, from the wilderness in the east, working west, out to the Philistine plain in the Mediterranean Sea. Now, just one quick focus, again, still review on what that last involved in terms of the regional study before we move on to our next regional study.

So, more review. Regional study number one, we did indeed look at the wilderness. And one of the things we noted is that geology is important.

Geology will always be important. And so because it is a barren place, because it was, as we learned, in the rain shadow, we discovered that for most people, this is a place to get through, not necessarily to live, although there were those who retreated to the area of the wilderness. Then we looked at the hill country.

We're going to spend a lot of time later on in this session, not this session, but the whole overview of geography and regional studies talking about various hill countries. But we did the hill country of Judah and found out that, quite frankly, it's a great place to live. Water sources, great soils, etc.

We also took a quick trek out to the Philistine Plain, the coastal plain right next to the Mediterranean Sea, and found that because it is indeed an area that has lots of travel through it, a more cosmopolitan area, we also focused briefly on the fact that there are five major Philistine cities. We talked about them because they're significant, especially in the period of the transition to the monarchy. And then last, but certainly not least, in fact, terribly important, was this region of Shephelah.

Just a reminder, that word means foothills or lowlands. And we discovered by virtue of the geography, again, geography is so important, those east-west valleys that comprise the Shephelah were great invasion routes from the coastal plain area right on into the hill country. That's a review.

What we're going to do today, right now, is to move south and kind of pick up on a much broader brushstroke approach, not only the Negev, but a quick sweep through Egypt, because Egypt has, of course, had a big impact on the life of God's people in many ways. And then we'll close down this particular hour with a look at Sinai. So first of all, the Negev.

For those of you using the regional maps, the ones that are the biblical background maps, these are maps two and four for your marking purposes. But first of all, here's a schematic of not just the Negev itself, but an area that is called the Greater Negev. This is an interesting kind of regional study because we have a Greater Negev.

And if you're looking at these dotted lines right here, it's an artificial marking right now. But basically, here we are at the north end of the Gulf of Eilat. And in your mind, follow that dotted line right on up to Gaza.

And that's going to be our artificial line from the Greater Negev to the west. Then, if we follow the Rift Valley, that will be sort of an eastern boundary. And then take a line kind of across here, and we see a big triangle that constitutes the Greater Negev.

By the way, as I note up there, the word Negev itself means both south, and that indicates that it's south of where God's people by and large have planted themselves. But it also means dry. And that's appropriate, as we're going to see when we start talking about water sources.

The Biblical Negev itself is much smaller. So, if you're looking at this map, I'm just going to point out, with my little green light here, what we want to focus on because our Greater Negev was this triangle we've just seen.

Now, as we work on the Biblical Negev, we're going to see if we can get our pointer here. We basically are talking about two basins in the Biblical Negev. I'm not sure if the print is available for you in terms of distance, but we have a basin right here.

It's the eastern Negev basin, one east of Beersheba. And here it's marked the western Negev basin. If it helps you, I've often had students think of the Biblical Negev as being sort of a bowtie.

For those of you who have uncles, aunts, or grandparents who still wear that wonderful thing called the bowtie, you know that there's one wing that sticks out,

there's another wing that sticks out. And sort of in the center here, this is why it's a bowtie, is a little bump, and that's going to be the area around Beersheba. So, at any rate, those are the two basins that we have with the Biblical Negev.

And you see it's a much more compressed area. This eastern basin, again, if you look at this topographical map, it's helpful for us because we're seeing that there are some indications of highlands along here. They run kind of from the northeast to the southwest.

They happen to be made up of our limestone, and we see limestone and chalk alternating with each other. And if you read that second bullet, you're seeing a word that you probably don't recognize in your common English parlance. Whenever you see an I-M ending on the word that's coming in from Hebrew, it tells you that the word is plural.

And so here we're talking about a singular makhtesh and plural makhtashim. And what a makhtesh is, it's a crater or a bowl of some sort, and it is something in the topography. There's all kinds of interesting reasons in terms, geologically, in terms of why this crater or bowl has formed.

But for now, just recognize it. There is a small crater. There is a large crater.

The small crater is right about here. It was lovely to visit and hike through. There's a large crater, and then there's a super crater.

So if you like to think of the small bowl, the large bowl, and the super bowl, you can consider that as one way to remember it. In addition, we have a name that probably is a little more familiar to, and that is the Wilderness of Zin. So, if you can see my green pointer right there, it's a bit of a push from our north-south area between the Gulf of Eilat and the Dead Sea, a dry sweep.

It's a little bit of an in-push into this area that is west of that Rift Valley. So Wilderness of Zin, and of course we see that, and we'll talk about a little bit more in terms of the history. There's also a very interesting place called the Ascent of Scorpions, Akrabim, and Akrab is a scorpion, and you see that I am ending again.

And so this is the Ascent of the Scorpions. Here's the deal. We always have to be thinking, whenever we're anywhere in the land, of how we get from one place to the other most easily.

And so let's just say you're on this red line right here. These red lines are always going to be indicative of travel routes. And you got to get from what's below sea level, the Dead Sea area and the Aravah itself, and you need to get up over this crest.

Yes, the elevation lowers at this point a little bit, but you're trying to go to Gaza. We're going to talk about this later. You might want to be doing that if you're a spice trader, getting spices from this region and points south and east out to a Mediterranean seaport, Gaza being a good example.

So basically, what's happening in the context of the Ascent of Akrabim is that it was one place to get from this low area, just about at the end of the Dead Sea, up over that rift ridge cliff, and then into areas of the eastern Negev Basin and continuing out. That gives us a little bit of a sense in terms of what is confronting people who are traveling or living in the Negev area. I said a moment ago that water is extremely important because we are talking about a region that does not have a lot of rainfall, a maximum of 12 inches of rain per year.

Again, if we're noticing our map, this gives us another perspective in terms of a cartographer or a map maker. But here is our western basin. Here's the eastern basin.

Again, think bow tie if it helps, and a little bump right around the area. You see that red dot, and you see Beersheba right about there. So, let's see how this works.

On this map, you have a series of wadi systems. Just a reminder that a wadi is, for most parts of the year, a dry riverbed. But it does reflect areas where water courses have developed.

And let's say, for example, that it is raining in Hebron right here, Hebron, Hebron. That's up in the hill country. Some of that rain indeed will flow east, some will flow west, but some also is going to flow south.

And so this wadi system that starts at Hebron is called the Hebron wadi system. It will join at Beersheba with the Beersheba wadi system, which has been busy draining the eastern Negev basin. Think in terms of not just one singular wadi course, but all kinds of little tributaries coming into it.

That will then continue out and it's going to join the Besor system, which will drain this whole area in here. So this is important because even though there's not a lot of rainfall, when it does rain and the water percolates down through, there are a fair number of underground, very large water reservoirs in this area. I've mentioned this already, our rainfall in the Negev area is going to average 8 to 12 inches per year.

Of course, the farther west, there's going to be a little more rain. That's one of our principles. The farther east we go, less rain.

We've already talked about the kind of soils and, as you might expect, much of the soil in the Negev area is going to be this wind-blown, dry, fine, powdery soil. Less or

less soil. In fact, Isaiah 21:1 talks about whirlwinds in the Negev and you can get a good sense of that because, again, it's dust blowing up in the air.

Add that to the thing that we've called the Hamsin, and you're going to have a really difficult context in which to live and, for that matter, breathe as well. When we do want to address this business of water sources, we're clearly going to be thinking of wells. I mentioned a moment ago there are underground water reservoirs because we're still talking limestone here and, therefore, there's going to be a fair number of rather large, in some cases, natural reservoirs there and, therefore, you can dig wells, and the wells are dug in the wadis.

Now, obviously, if you are thinking of some of your patriarchal narratives, you're going to be thinking of Abraham and Isaac, and we'll indeed come back to those in a moment. First, however, we want to get a little bit of a sense of some major cities that are here. Obviously, we don't have a large number of them, but there are some that are tremendously important.

Some names show up in the biblical text and extra-biblical material as well. If you look at our eastern Negev Basin, again, right here, and then move a little bit east, if you can read the fine print near my green pointer, it is Arad. Now, this raises all kinds of interesting issues in terms of biblical Arad, archaeological Arad, but for our purposes, think of it as, because we're going to focus on it mostly in terms of the Israelite period, Iron Age Israelite period, when Israel was in the monarchy and, particularly, we're going to talk about divided monarchy, southern kingdom.

Arad is going to be really important in that context. I will come back to Arad because Arad was a much larger city than that of the Israelite city. Significantly earlier, if I mention the term early bronze, that will ring some bells with you.

You'll be thinking 3000 to 2000 BC, and Arad was a settlement then as well. But, continuing on with our sites, I've already talked about Beersheba a number of times as we've been scanning the map. And so, moving from Arad in the east right to here, Beersheba is in the center, the bow tie, the little bump, the bow of the bow tie, and that's where we do indeed have the junction of our basins.

Again, there's a little bit of a difference in terms of where the Beersheba, for example, that Abraham knew was in terms of modern Beersheba and the tell of Beersheba, but I'll come back to those shortly. Third, we won't spend nearly as much time here, but we want to make a note of two additional sites. If you're looking carefully, you are going to see Gerar right about here, and Ziklag is going to be in that same general area.

So, they are going to be on the western edge of that western basin. Gerar will be important for Abraham, Ziklag will be important for David. So, we'll circle back to those.

I'm not going to spend a lot of time on these particular cities. If this were a class that we had a little more time with in terms of even going and visiting some of these Nabataean cities, we would, but I need to say just a couple of things. When you see the term Nabataean, it's not one that we recognize from the biblical text, but it's really an important ethnic group.

Nabataeans were those who were extremely well-versed in how to live in the desert. You might think of them as the Bedouin of about 2,000 years ago, maybe a little less. They had originally come and they had settled in this area of Edom.

In fact, Petra, if you've heard of Petra, the great red city in the sandstone, Nabataean city, settled in 312 BC, developed there, taken over later by the Romans. We'll pick that up when we do Transjordan. But the Nabataeans were extraordinarily good at moving traffic across this Negev area, right? So, they knew how to get through these difficult passes, difficult ascents.

They knew where water was, and they actually controlled the spice trade through here in the initial centuries of their settlement because they did move from our Transjordan Edom area across into this whole area. Eventually, as time went on, as the Romans came in and took over the spice trade that they'd been controlling, the Nabataean culture settled down, and they then learned how to do agriculture and became really good at managing water and water resources. So, even though we will not spend much more time talking about it, the cities of Avdat, Shifta, Nitsana, and Mamshit still are, as archaeological places, wonderful locations for seeing how the Nabataean cultures actually dealt with water.

Later on, just as a note, again, we don't have time to go there in this lecture, but the Nabataeans converted to Christianity. And so, in a number of these Nabataean cities, we also see really interesting church and monastic kinds of structures. So, those are going to be our major sites, even though it's outside of the Negev proper.

We do want to make a note of Kadesh Barnea right here, kind of on the edge. If you look at that dotted line that we were drawing between the north end of the Gulf of Eilat and Gaza, notice how close Kadesh Barnea is. And that name, I suspect, rings bells with us as we think of the Israelites on their way after Mount Sinai towards the land of promise.

It's from Kadesh Barnea that Moses will send spies into the land. Of course, they come back and there's a 40-year detour that's taken, and that's going to be located

in that general area. Much more to say about that as well, but at this point, we need to trek on.

Let's pause and just pick up just a little bit of material on the screen that I've already mentioned to a degree. Again, settled life in the Negev was not as easy. They were going to be marginally settled, semi-nomadic folks, but the spice trade, as we've said, was extremely important.

And therefore, spice trade through the Negev, they would come up that ascent, excuse me, from the Rift Valley, making their way up to the eastern basin or via the wilderness of Zin. Well, we're picking up from spice trade going through to the fact that the patriarchs actually try to settle in the Negev. They move back and forth.

We have Abraham and Isaac there, and I mentioned the name Gerar a little earlier on, and that's going to be an important name in terms of where Abraham and Isaac settle. We know that they have some contention with Abimelech, king of the Philistines. I'm not going to venture into any of the dating kinds of issues here in terms of patriarchs and Philistines, but at least for our concern, there are battles over and a lot of, as I say, contention over who has water rights.

And you'll remember as you read the narratives in Genesis 21 and Genesis 26 that they're actually stopping up wells, and then they have to make a treaty, and they have to make an oath. You have the name of Be'er Sheva. Be'er means well.

Sheva means both seven and oath, when there are seven creatures, lambs that are killed as part of making this particular oath, and the name is going to preserve that. And then we've mentioned already in terms of history, Kadesh Barnea is the location from which the Israelites were sent into the land of promise. The spies were sent in, but came back with that report.

So they're wandering, and they seem to wander primarily in the area of the wilderness of Zin during those 38 years. Earlier on, I just dropped the note that David is going to be stationed at a place called Ziklag, the western basin of the Negev. And just a quick note here as well, it's during this time period that David has actually, because he's been pursued by Saul, and it's been a pretty ugly, messy situation, he's gone over to the Philistine king, Achish.

And what Achish does is commission David to be what Jim Monson calls the sheriff of the Negev. And so, as he's stationed at Ziklag, he's probably not just down there on the fringes twiddling his thumbs. He is no doubt overseeing all those trade things that are going back and forth.

He's also protecting the southern clans of the tribes of Judah from raiding Amalekites. He's also doing a little bit of a subterfuge with Achish himself because

he'll tell Achish that he's been raiding Judah clans. So David at Ziklag has had a very interesting commission there, and the time that he spends there.

We could spend a lot more time there as well, but we won't. Just in terms of some important biblical annotations, the term from Dan to Beersheba is used primarily to indicate, in a quick way of saying it, the extent of administrative Israel. So while we have a united monarchy, when you see from Dan to Beersheba, you're recognizing that the text is talking about Israel from the north, because Dan's going to be a place up in north.

We're going to see that later on. And then Beersheba is the location, you know, and that's going to be kind of our southern boundary. Do Israelites get a little farther south? Yes, they do from time to time.

Do they get a little farther north? Indeed, especially during the reigns of David and Solomon. But Dan to Beersheba is our geopolitical note here. And then I mentioned a moment ago, we do indeed have this group of folks called the Nabataeans, who, along with the rest of the Roman Empire, converted to Christianity in the fourth century.

That's what we need to say about history. These are just some photographs to give us a little sense of what we're looking for or expecting from the experience in the Negev, and I'll try to interface some commentary as we go along. If you look closely at that photograph, you see, well, some green down here in the very basin of this wilderness with the course of the water as it would run through.

But by and large, it is sparse. It's barren. If you want to get a size perspective, I happen to be standing right there.

So that will give you a little bit of a perspective on distance and size. We are looking from west to east. So out across what would be the Aravah, that sweep of barrenness south of the south end of the Dead Sea and towards Transjordan.

Here's just a little bit of a picture of those limestone ridges that are called the Negev Highlands. As you look at this carefully, I want you to see something because, yes indeed, rocky tufts of stuff, but here we've got a very small cultivated field. And the reason that can happen is because the people that are living there now are following the same principles that folks did in antiquity.

When it does rain, if you have some barrier across one of those water courses, it forces the water that's flowing to slow down to seep in through this loose soil and to be there in enough of a reservoir to keep things growing. Nabataeans did that, modern Israelis do too. Here we have a whirlwind in the Negev, kicking up some of

that soil, that fine, fine dust, and so again we're mindful of Isaiah 21.1 in that context.

This is a very old photograph. It actually shows the hairpin curve road from the British Mandate period, but I'm showing it, even though it is old and somewhat reddened, to give us an indication of what it's like to go from the basin down the bottom here, south end, south of the south end of the Dead Sea, all the way up along through into this region, and then routes in antiquity and even in British Mandate period, and even now, would continue on. They pass the Maktesh, which is a tiny little bit of the Maktesh, small Maktesh right here, and then head on into the eastern basin of the Negev.

Just a couple of notes about a road as well, another old photograph, but one which is really helpful for us. If you look at this, you see two general areas of excavation. One is here, it's lower, one is here, upper, no doubt, and even though those are the only areas that have been excavated at that point in time, you do see as well the indications of what was some sort of an enclosure wall at this point.

We're going to focus primarily on this segment, although I will have a little bit to say about lower Arad as well. Here is standing on that upper Arad, looking down now towards that section that we saw that's lower. This is the part of the city from the early Bronze Period, in other words, 3000 to 2000 BC.

Fascinating that a woman who excavated this, the archaeologist Ruth Amiran, indicated in the things that she was finding, so the finds indicate that there were connections with Egypt during this time, and Arad really was a major entrepreneurial center with stuff going back and forth. Among the many other interesting things about this site is that it has no natural water source, no spring; that doesn't surprise us; we're in the Negev. But here, the designers of the city made a catchment basin.

It was there kind of to start with, but it's structured so that in the ancient city, everything that whenever there was rain would flow down into here, and there would be a well right in that area, so very carefully taken care of that. This area constituted some temples from that time, and here are some housing structures as well. Our main focus, however, for Arad is going to be on the upper city.

The upper city, as I believe I mentioned a moment ago, is dealing with or is representing the Israelite period, so it's Iron Age, and it's a very small administrative center at that point. Now there's lots more to say about it, but of course we can only focus on a little bit, and there are two things that we really want to mention. One of the finds at Arad that was remarkable was what the archaeologists determined to be a temple.

Now if you look at this, we've got kind of the overview of this temple. Here would be the courtyard. Here was an altar, an outdoor altar.

Here you're getting a little closer, but what we're really going to focus on is this segment right here, because the people excavating this and analyzing and trying to unpack it and do that art of interpretation found very significant things. They called it the Holy of Holies because there were two incense altars. How do they know that? Because on top were some remains of incense that had been burned.

By the way, if you go to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, you can see some of these. These are facsimiles here. You can see the real things.

They also found a standing stone We've mentioned standing stones before. They found one, but as they looked at the base where they found the one, obviously tipped over, they saw a depression in the rock, and so they're assuming that a second one was there as well. And then of course there's been a whole lot of discussion in terms of what those two standing stones represented.

Were they kosher, for lack of a better term, representing, say, two Torah tablets, stones of the tablets? Or were they much less good and representing maybe one god and his female consort, which was apparently the rage in the wider cultural context? Baal or Baal and his female consort were a major thing. To make life even more murky at this point, and oh, this merits about another 20 minutes of lecture, but it's not going to get it, there have been some archaeological finds with inscriptions talking about Yahweh and his Asherah.

And they're found in a place not terribly far from Arad, a little bit farther south on the caravan route called Kuntilat Ajrud. So, as you can see, this raises all sorts of interesting questions. What's more germane for us, perhaps, is that when you think of Israel's history, and particularly the monarchy after the split in the kingdom, and you think of the southern kingdom, and you think of two kings who were a whole lot better than the rest of them.

One was Hezekiah, the other was Josiah. And as people put together, as scholars put together, the narratives of Hezekiah's reform that he effected, you can read about them in 2 Chronicles 28 through 31. As you read about those, and then you put together the layers, remember our strata here, of finds, it turns out that this temple was destroyed at some point, and it seems like the chronology of that matches fairly well with the chronology of Hezekiah's reforms and destruction of foreign places of worship.

Are there interesting questions? Yes, there certainly are, but at least that's a start. We're going to move to Beersheba at this point, but I want to say one more thing about Arad. I forgot to put this slide in there, but that's the way life goes.

I'd said there were two important issues to deal with in terms of the upper Arad, the Israelite fortress. The second one is that a bunch of ostraca were found. On the opposite side of that Israelite fortress, from where the temple is, they found a room that had 107 ostraca, remembering that ostrakon, singular, is a piece of pottery that has an inscription on it, a post-it note of antiquity.

And these are fascinating. They span 350 years, but the later ones are particularly interesting because they suggest a pretty severe pressure coming from Edom to the southeast. And so you get, as you read between the lines, you get an interesting sense that at the end or towards the end of the Judean monarchy, when they were facing pressure from Babylon, they were also facing pressure from Edom to the southeast, even though there's a lot less said about that in the historical books.

Ezekiel 25 and 35 do suggest that as we see some passages condemning Edom at that point. But now let's move to Beersheba. Quick overview of Beersheba.

We're actually standing in a tower or on a tower. It gives us a little bit of a look of the western side of this tel of Beersheba. You see kind of a street right here.

You see the structure of a house. You see the outer wall at that point. Let's focus again on just one thing, although there's so much more that we could be talking about here.

This is one of my very compliant former students who is demonstrating what some desperate people did in the Old Testament context, which was clinging to the horns of the altar. This particular structure has been reconstructed. It's a facsimile.

The real thing is in the Israel Museum. But it's been reconstructed from the pieces that were actually found in secondary usage in the wall of a storehouse. But notice very, very clear sense of horns, what are called horns on this altar.

Other examples of this have been found elsewhere in the country, but this one was especially interesting because it was found in particularly a destroyed and then rebuilt kind of context. The suggestion is that, and again, I'll just say this before we go on to Egypt, the suggestion is that just as Hezekiah effected a reform, and we see maybe evidence of it in Arad, Josiah's reform might be reflected in that destroyed horned altar in Beersheba. There's lots more to say about that in terms of the context in which it was found, and also a very interesting reference to the gate at Beersheba, because in 2 Kings it talks about the reform under Josiah, and it actually talks about the gate at Beersheba.

So some fascinating connections that we don't have time to pursue at this point. I'd love to take time for questions, but we're going to move for a really, really quick look

at Egypt, mainly because, as I said a moment ago, Egypt, defined really by the Nile River, Upper Egypt, Lower Egypt, Delta area right here, had such an impact over the centuries on God's people. Not only of the times that they were there, not only the Exodus but also, as we see over the centuries, various pharaohs trying to take that international route.

Remember, we've got a major connection through here, and so, especially in our 18th and 19th dynasties, pharaohs are going to show up in an important way. I mentioned Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt a moment ago, and just a reminder that because the Nile flows from south to north, even though on the map this seems really upside down, this is Upper Egypt, that's Lower Egypt. In terms of Egypt itself, it's defined primarily with the first cataract.

This is again sedimentary areas, but there are going to be granite, what am I trying to say, places all along the Nile area called cataracts. And so the first cataract as you move from north to south is going to define, generally speaking, the southern boundary of geopolitical Egypt. I can't emphasize enough the significance of the Nile in terms of the daily life and, therefore, the daily worship of Egypt, the people of Egypt.

Needless to say, something that provides water and therefore a consistent source of water and therefore agricultural fertility and therefore economic security. I mean, you can put that whole thing together over and over again, as we've seen, and the Nile is going to be viewed as an extremely important source. There were lots of festivals that took place around the Nile.

We have lots of major structures built in this area. Our pyramids, the Pyramids of Giza, are just now really close to our major megalopolis of Cairo, but these are the three major pyramids that are standing here surrounded by smaller ones right out around here. We're actually standing on one of the smaller ones here.

This whole series has been excavated, and there have been fascinating excavations done. The famous Sphinx is in this area as well. And then as you fly from this area around Cairo going south, you see lots and lots and lots of these little humps along the Nile on excavated pyramids as well.

So, while we see those, there are more of them than simply those. At a place called Karnak, which is farther south along the Nile, Luxor, if you're thinking of a more modern term for us, Thebes, if you want to add that in there as well. But at Karnak we have an ongoing temple structure actually beginning to be built in the 18th century BC, added on to by pharaoh after pharaoh after pharaoh, adding extremely important worship contexts, as well as places where they could brag about the things they conquered.

We even have some material added by Alexander the Great in the 4th century BC. So, this is a growing ongoing structure. We want to notice that on this particular route, we have a series of sphinxes, and they're ram's head sphinxes, which is a little bit unusual, but the ram was an important part of the whole panoply of deities that we talk about.

The processional along here is reflective of the fact that with the Nile being so significant in terms of a deity, there were, I think I'm remembering this correctly, upwards of 60 some days that were devoted to religious festivals, and many of them took place in the context of connecting the temples of the Nile, along the Nile. A 19th dynasty pharaoh, probably the best known pharaoh is Ramses II. This gets into a whole discussion of the date of the Exodus, which we will not get into at this point, but we want to notice, first of all, that he was a phenomenal builder.

And so I just want to show you a couple of tiny representative samples; well, these aren't tiny, but a sampling of Ramses' comments, if you will, about himself. This is a statue of Ramses, one of his wives between his knees here, but here just the head itself, notice the cobra is on the crown that he's wearing. To the south, even beyond where Luxor is located, you have a place called Aswan.

Lots and lots and lots of interesting things to be discussed with regard to this particular photograph as well, and what it's representing. But I'll simply say this, what you're looking at is a reconstruction of one of Ramses' significant temples. And it's a reconstruction not in that these are fake, but they've been moved from an area that would have been flooded.

When Gamal Abdel Nasser decided that he was going to put a dam on the Nile, it would have created a lake behind it. It did create a lake behind it, and that would have flooded not just this temple, but a number of others. They would have been underwater.

So the Antiquities community actually globally got together and they raised the support to take this mountain apart, take this temple inside here, by the way, I should have said this earlier. You've got four statues of Ramses, right? This is Ramses, one, two, three, four. There is an entryway into that temple, and inside it is room after room after room, getting all the way into the inner sanctum itself, where there are four deities represented in the shadowy part.

But it has all been put in inside an artificial mountain. This is an artificial mountain here that was pretty much built to house this temple, which was taken apart stone by stone, piece by piece, marked, and then put back together again. Just to give you a little bit of perspective, each one of those statues is 67 feet high, so that helps understand it just a little bit.

This is a bunch of intrepid Gordonites from way back when visiting that temple. And here we have those shadowy numinous figures that are in the most interior section of Ramses II's temple, four of them. As I said, on the way there is wall after wall after wall, many of them talking about Ramses himself.

Well, there's so much more to say about Egypt. Haven't done it justice, but in our regional study, we want to kind of draw some closure now to this particular one by talking about Sinai. Because obviously Sinai, that little triangle, that desert of Sinai, is an important nexus between the culture of Egypt and what we're going to have in Israel proper.

And, of course, it is where God made his covenant with his people. So we need to study this at least a little bit. Here again is a very oversimplified drawing of the Sinai area, and we want to understand it a little bit because it isn't just a monolithic kind of triangle, if you will.

Just to remind ourselves, here we're talking about our greater Negev area. Here's that little part that comes off of the Aravah called the Wilderness of Zin. Here we've got Kadesh Barnea right here.

To review the Negev a little bit, here's Beersheba right in the center of our bow tie and our base or system. I've oversimplified it terribly. It's going to have all kinds of tentacles out this way.

But in terms of the Sinai itself, we also want to know that there are distinct regions of Sinai. So right up in here, sand dunes, they're the kinds of things that are also going to characterize the areas that we've already talked about in terms of the Philistine plain and sand and so forth. And then we're going to get back to what's farther north a little later on.

But across these sand and sand dunes in the northern Sinai area is going to be the way of the Philistines. So, just a reminder, when the Israelites were leaving Egypt, we have that passage that says the Lord didn't want them to go the way of the Philistines. So they end up turning and going a different way.

They end up crossing the Bitter Lakes area here. They end up at Mount Sinai. We're going to follow one of the possible treks that they took just briefly.

But after we have our northern sand, sandy area, then just as we saw with Shephelah up here, the elevation is going to rise somewhat, right? So we have foothills, and you'll see another red route right here. This was our way of the Philistines. Now, here is the indication of what we have when Hagar, the Egyptian handmaid of Sarah, leaves and heads back home to Egypt; it says in Genesis 16 that she's going along the way of Shur, which could refer to this line of fortresses along Egypt's frontier.

Interesting reading, James Hoffmeier teaches at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, has done a lot of work on Israelites in Egypt, Israelites in Sinai, and he's also done important archaeological stuff here and has written about it. So just a reference, a footnote at that point. Those two are, well, as the desert goes, relatively hospitable.

But then you get into this region here. It's called Eti and it is indeed vast and barren. Deuteronomy 8 verse 15 talks about that vast and barren wilderness that the Lord led the people through, full of scorpions and snakes, vipers, recognized as some of the denizens of this area.

And then finally, we've gone north, foothills, Eti, terribly barren area. Down here we have our granite mountains. By the way, do you remember our geological column from way back on the second or third lecture that we gave? Granite, the foundation stone.

On top of that sand stuff, we have sand structures in here. On top of that limestone, which gives us a little more in terms of water capacity. That's not to say there are no springs down here, but there aren't many here, all right? At any rate, southern granite mountains.

And although to be perfectly honest with you, full disclosure, there are at least 11 suggestions in terms of where biblical Mount Sinai is located. Some of them are up in this area. There's actually one right over here.

I tend to go along with those who would locate it traditionally, going all the way back at least to the 5th, 6th century, maybe even earlier, in this southern granite area. Why? Well, because as God's leading his people, they are a ragtaggle band of people. They haven't got any kind of organization.

They've been slaves for centuries. And so I would suggest he takes them into a isolated area that is going to be important for forming them in the subsequent year into his people. We'll look a little bit more about that at that in a moment, but water sources need to talk about it a little bit.

There was not a lot of rain, as I mentioned already. There are springs and oases in some of these places, and the largest, no surprise, is at Kadesh Barnea. And then as we look at that preceding map, here it is again, we see this set of representative blue lines, lots more, but that's going to drain the northern part of Foothills and northern Sinai and go out into the Mediterranean Sea.

And Kadesh Barnea is going to be located in that general area. And then some additional springs at various places. Just kind of a visual tour to be en route here.

By the way, I should say as well that the Israelites were not the only people in southern Sinai, if indeed that's where they were, for their experience of the covenant. There's evidence of Egyptian temples there as well, a place called Serabit el-Khadim, which was a very significant Egyptian temple long before the Israelites got there. Well, you know, let's say the Israelites have crossed the Sea of Reeds, probably not the Red Sea, but the Sea of Reeds, that's what the Hebrew means, probably that area north of the northern tip of the Gulf that is entitled on most maps Bitter Lakes, and of course now it's the Suez Canal that's going through that.

But at any rate, there are oases alongside some of this area as they'd be traveling. But then you get farther inland and it is rough and rugged. Making our way along wadis that cut down towards the southern granite mountains, you do see an oasis here.

The Israelites encountered oases. They obviously needed God's provision in addition to them in terms of water, and we have water provision, especially as we read the narrative in Exodus 17 and then Numbers 20 as well. I want to go back to that one if I can manage to do that.

There we go. As I said, even in the southern area of Sinai, the southern part of the peninsula, a number of suggestions in terms of which might be Mount Sinai. This was one of them for a good number of centuries, one possibility, Mount Serbal.

And there's a kind of a tiny little chapel in the area as well because people commemorated that. You do see the oasis down below here. But probably our most longstanding recognized candidate is, this is an aerial, traditional Mount Sinai.

The term for mountain in Arabic is Jebel, and it's called Jebel Musa, the Mountain of Moses. At the foot of that particular mountain, which you can still climb, there's a chapel on the top of it, but at the foot of that is Santa Catarina Monastery, and we could spend a day at least, a lecture, talking about the things that are inside that, talking about the icon collection that escaped the iconoclastic movement and is a phenomenal icon collection, talking about the library that had produced a number of significant manuscripts, talking about the fact that in the enclosure dating to the 6th century, we have both a minaret tower and a bell tower here because there were points in time when communities really did stick together. Well, that's going to be just a closure to where we've been today, not that any of these have been thorough, but they give us a feeling.

We've done greater and biblical Negev's. We did Egypt just briefly with a little look at especially 19th dynasty, but both the 18th and 19th dynasties affected Israel. And then finally, we focused on Sinai because of its significance in terms of God's covenant with his people and giving them instructions in the form of the Torah.

We're going to stop with that and we'll pick up with our next study, which will be Jerusalem in the next regional study.

This is Dr. Elaine Phillips in her teaching on Introduction to Biblical Studies. This is session 5, Regional Studies: Negev and Sinai.