

# Dr. Elaine Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 10, Transjordan and Jordan Valley

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This is Dr. Elaine Phillips in her teaching on Introduction to Biblical Studies. This is session 10, Regions of Transjordan and the Jordan Valley.

With this lecture, we are going to move across the Rift Valley.

We've covered those areas that are west of the Jordan Valley and the Rift Valley, and we're going to make the connection up north and deal with various regions of Transjordan, as well as a closure on the Jordan Valley itself. So, if you're using the regional study maps, you'll want maps two and three for this particular episode that we're going to do. Just one note, the term Transjordan is sometimes countered with the term Cisjordan by some geographers.

Cisjordan, I don't use a lot, but you're going to see it as you're reading some things. That's going to refer to the areas on the west side of the Jordan Valley, the Rift Valley. But our focus now is Transjordan, but before we do that, always we need to do a review of where we've been.

So here we go. Again, you could do this in your sleep by now, I imagine. In the south, we have dealt with first the wilderness, Judah, Shephelah, and Philistia, and that slice across the whole area.

We went farther south and did Negev and Sinai. Then we did the central areas, Jerusalem, the hill countries, and the plain area, the Sharon Plain, which is north of the Philistine Plain. And then, in this last hour together, we did the Galilee, which is our northern part of the country.

That will allow us to connect at the area that's just south of Mount Hermon, where we left off, and come now through the regions north to south in our area called Transjordan. So just a reminder of Mount Hermon with a schematic map this time around. Very simple, but it's going to help us see a number of things.

By the way, I'm going to come back to this map partway through this when we start working and looking at a view of the Jordan Valley. But for our purposes now, we simply want to note that this dotted line is sort of demonstrating, again in very simplified form, the outlines of Mount Hermon. It's green, although you may not see the green there, which is indicative of the fact that Mount Hermon, the base of it, is limestone.

We talked about that already. The region just to the south of that is called Bashan, or Bashan in the Old Testament, and that's that basalt outflow from volcanic cones that were located. Well, the cones are still there, not active.

As we move farther south, which we will do shortly just to give us an overview, we're going to be talking about the whole area of Gilead. We're going to be talking about the area of the Medaba Plateau and Ammon in here. We're going to be talking about Moab down about there, and then south of this Wadi marker here, it's the Zered, we'll talk about Edom.

But for our purposes, let's focus on Mount Hermon for now. The Golan Heights is, as we've said, a basalt area with a hard limestone foundation. And just to remind ourselves of our connection with the preceding lecture that we had, at the base of Mount Hermon, in this area right here, we have both Dan, the Old Testament site, and Caesarea Philippi, just a matter of two or three miles to the east, where we encountered that huge cliff face bluff if you will, that had all those foreign deities carved into it and temples built in front of it.

Let's look at Golan itself just with a quick sketch of the things that are geological. We've mentioned some of those already, and then some political regions and cities. So, first of all, we've mentioned, I just keep saying this, that we have a basalt outflow here over limestone.

Just a reminder that when basalt weathers away, it becomes really excellent soil. This region, even today, has a lot of breeding of cattle, what we might almost think of as dairy farms, if you will, and it also is quite good in terms of wine production. At the south, and this is a major marker, geographical marker, delineating our area of Bashan from what's below, this is the Yarmouk Wadi.

Canyon is how it's located or labeled on this map, but it is a major cliff. I'll show you a picture in a moment which will give us a sense of that. We've already said when we talked about Philip the Tetrarch that he's the one who was given control over this area.

And so, sort of ethnic regional names, we have Eteria Trachonitis. Trachonitis means the torn area, and it is that. If you look and visit these areas that are basalt, very rugged, very rugged area.

Great hiking through there, by the way, but it's the torn area. And then Golanitis, which is the basis for our modern name of Golan Heights. We want to notice, and it is just barely off this map, it is right here, Gamla, which is not showing up in the New Testament Gospel accounts or in the Old Testament, but we've mentioned the terrible situation in the Jewish revolt when the Romans came through.

Gamla was a major defender against the Romans, but it would fall to the Roman onslaught in AD 68. And so that's an important site from that perspective. We have one more thing that we need to notice with regard to this area, lower Golan actually, and that's this place called Hippus.

It's right here. Just two things I'm going to say about that, even though there's lots more that could be said. Mentioned already that this area to the east of the Sea of Galilee and then the Jordan Valley was the Decapolis, the League of Ten Cities.

Those ten cities, obviously very Hellenized. There's one of them that was located west of the Jordan Valley, and we're going to end this lecture with that, but Hippus is one of those cities. It's a Decapolis city.

Later on, it would become a fairly significant site where the church would build some major structures as well. The reason I want to mention it at this point is that at the shoreline, you can see it with my green marker right here, is an ancient site called Gergesa. Now it's modern-day Kursi.

You can kind of hear the toponymy there, Gergesa and Kursi. Gergesa, well that name gets us into an interesting textual issue because when we have the healing of the demoniac, interestingly enough, the texts, depending on whether you're reading Matthew, Mark, or Luke, and on which manuscript you're reading, have either Gergesa, that's actually the least known of them, or Gadara, which is actually off our map, or Gerasa, which is way down to the southeast, far off this map. We're going to see it on another map much later on.

Well, Gerasa, the one that's way far away, is probably not the right one. It's too far away. Gadara, just off the map right here, would work only if we have our Decapolis city of Gadara controlling all the area where those pigs and where the tombs and so forth happen to be.

But actually, Gergesa makes the most sense. And just above, on the hill's cliffs above this little town called Gergesa, was Hippus, where there was a Roman legion stationed. And isn't it fascinating that the mascot for this Roman legion happened to be the swine or the pig? So that might be fitting together.

There are other things to say in that regard, and I don't at all pretend to be a New Testament text critic, but that could be, in my mind, from the geographical standpoint, this could really fit that gospel narrative fairly well. At any rate, let's look at some photographs and just draw some things together here. If you look at this and kind of think of our Sea of Galilee, or Kinneret, being harp-shaped, then we've got a photograph that looks from southwest to northeast.

Here's Mount Hermon right up here. This is Upper Golan, this is Lower Golan, and here is the Yarmouk Wadi. And now you can see what a major geographical topographical divider that happens to be.

So, Hermon, Upper Golan, where, by the way, those volcanic cones are beyond, that is Syria. Lower Golan, the Yarmouk right here. And you can also see the cliff face of the rift.

Keep in mind our Sea of Galilee is somewhere between 600 and 700 feet below sea level. Just another look along the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. We have the site of Hippus just remaining right here.

This is a very old aerial photograph. Now there's been a fair amount of archaeology done. There are all kinds of interesting things I could say about contemporary, well in the last 50 years, politics here, but we do not have time for that at this point.

Let's carry on and just slowly move our way south. You'll remember that the second of those possible cities for our healing of the demoniac was Gadara. So here we are now, across the Yarmouk Wadi to the south, in the remains of another Decapolis city, the city of Gadara.

It, too, had a theater and everything else that goes along with a major Hellenistic city. But the purpose of looking at this is simply to see that it's not really close to the Sea of Galilee. There's the Sea of Galilee way out there.

And so again, just to reiterate what I said earlier if our text in Mark 5 and parallels is reading Gadara, then we have to presume that it's talking about a regional control of this Decapolis city. I said we were going to do this quite quickly. It's an overview of Transjordan, and indeed it is.

We are now moving down to the area of Gilead. And before we look at the map, I am going to assure you, when we look at the map, you're going to understand why, that this is a war-torn area. It's a war-torn area because Syria to the northeast and Ammon to the southeast are usually trying to get their hands on Gilead.

By the way, we have two and a half tribes settled in that area, and the half-tribe of Manasseh is going to have a fair portion of Gilead. But it's war-torn. In Amos chapter 1, verse 3, when the Lord says through Amos, for three sins and for four, and then articulates the reasons why these various places are being condemned by God.

Damascus is condemned because they threshed Gilead with iron threshing sleds. Well, here you have a threshing sled. It gives us a little idea in terms of how these things work.

It's a slab that's probably about four feet from bottom to top. In little holes in the bottom of which you had either basalt, sharp basalt stones, or iron, and then in normal processes, that would be laid down on your threshing floor where you'd have your grain and weight put on it, and then it would be breaking the chaff off the kernels of grain. What is apparently happening here, whether this is figurative or whether it's a literal human rights abuse going on, but Damascus, Syria, is being condemned because they have been committing atrocities against the inhabitants of Gilead.

So that gives us a little bit of a feeling. By the way, you can still find in a number of places these old threshing sledges that are available for us to see and understand how they work. Here's the map, just to now put this into perspective.

We've looked already at this area of the Golan. Here's the Yarmouk Wadi, and now we are looking at all of Gilead, right, all of Gilead, and right out here is something called remote Gilead. Hard to see on your, with your eyesight probably.

I think I put, yeah, there it is. Remote Gilead, all you need to do is look up this direction, that's Syria. Look over this direction; that's Israel.

Notice, although we haven't talked about it, there is a major north-south route going through all of Transjordan. Let's call it the Transjordanian Highway. At remote Gilead, as the north-south traffic decides whether or not it wants to go east-west, it has a junction, and so this is a place that's contended over.

It's a prize. Syria and Israel fought over it a lot. When you read the narratives, the last part of 1 Kings chapters 20 and 21, for example, you're going to see that.

You're also going to see when the dynasty up north switches to the Jehu dynasty. He is anointed when he's been fighting out of this place called remote Gilead. So again, just see that as a significant location.

Whoops, we've just got, yeah, let's move south from our area of lower Gilead. By the way, I know that as we head to Egypt, this can be confusing because on the map, this is higher than this, but it's called lower. What we've just been doing it's called lower because it's elevation-wise lower.

Upper Gilead is this area called the Dome of Gilead. We have in the Dome of Gilead, geologically, the same components that we have in this wonderful area over here. Cinnamon, hard limestone, and everything that goes along with that.

So, this is a great place to live, to be. No surprise that folks from Syria and folks from over in here in Amman would be trying to get their little hands on that. That's our Dome of Gilead.

It's cut through with a very significant wadi. So, Yarmuk, the next one is going to be the Jabbok Canyon or wadi, and that name will ring a bell for us if we read Genesis 32. And remember that as Jacob is coming back from his sojourn with Laban, bringing along his rather extended family at this point, wives and handmaids and sons, he's going to have a wrestling match, Genesis 32, with, well, starts out, the text says a man, but then at the end of the narrative it says he saw the face of God.

So, a tremendously important place right there is the Jabbok wadi. Interesting that it's cutting through this very high area, but the river that is going to do that will actually swing, goes first of all east-west, and then it's going to swing way down here and come very close to a place called Rabat, or now Rabat, Amman, and now the capital of Amman, Jordan. So that gives us a little bit of a contemporary perspective as well.

Also, in Gilead, kind of on the fringes here, we've got it right there. We have Gerasa, the Decapolis city that I was talking about a little earlier. By the way, that yellow arrow should be down a little farther than it is, so just make it slide down in your mind. But just to draw together our demoniac narrative yet again, this is a little far away from the Sea of Galilee, to have that actually be the place where the person was living in the tombs, and then the pigs go running into the Sea of Galilee. Okay, leaving the whole view of the map and just looking a little bit at some evidence of this Decapolis city.

Interestingly enough, this is probably one of the best restored Decapolis cities that we have. They're working hard on some of the other ones, but this one's particularly nice. You can stand at one end of it up on top of the theater area and look at this elliptical forum.

They had to set these columns back up again, by the way, because in the 800s A.D., a major, major, major earthquake. There have been a series of them throughout the centuries, but that one was quite destructive. Here's a main road.

Main roads are called cardos. That makes sense because cardo comes from the word heart, and therefore this is going to be your main north-south route that is definitive and is the heart of a city in the Decapolis city planning. So elliptical forum here, come back to a close-up of that in a moment, and then we'll look at the street.

We'll kind of pretend we're walking along it, and then there's a temple up at this other end of it to Diana or Aphrodite. There's the forum close-up again. Columns have been reset, and then two views along the cardo itself.

Notice the beauty and the elegance, actually, of these cities, and then finally here is our temple of Diana or Aphrodite at the end of it. If a person were to be standing

there, they would probably reach, here's the feet, here's the head, so you're getting some sense. You can actually put something, maybe a nail file or a knife blade, in here between the column base and the actual column itself, and you can watch that thing, whether it's your nail file or the knife blade that you've set in here, you can watch the handle that's sticking out rock a little bit as the wind is rocking these columns.

It's a very eerie kind of experience. Well, here is two views of the Jabbok wadi itself as it's cutting through the Dome of Gilead, but let's keep going farther south as we make our way through this Transjordan area. We are now going to focus particularly on the region right up in here is going to be the Dome of Gilead, just off the map, and here, as you're going to see, is Ammon.

Ammon was condemned by Amos, as we said, for slaughtering Gileadites, but Ammon is also important because it's going to show up in some of our narratives. Saul, for example, is going to take on Ammonites. David has interactions with Ammonites, so that will be a very important location.

To the south and west of Ammon is a place called the Mishor. That's a Hebrew word which means kind of a flat or a level area. It's also called the Meribah Plateau because there's a major city on it called Meribah, so a very flat area here, and then Mount Nebo right at the top.

I need to go back on that one. Yeah, here we go. One of the other things we want to say, kind of getting us ready for the Israelites showing up in this area when they do, this region, the Meribah Plateau, the Mishor, contested region.

There are going to be times when Moab, which geopolitically is located south of this major divider right here. It's a wadi. We'll talk about it later.

Moab very often pushed north. No surprise there. People always try and war.

This is a fairly decent area for grazing and raising some crops. They tried to take that area. You'll find as you read 2 Kings that Israel is also going to have some contentions in this area and no surprise there either because two and a half tribes did originally settle in this region.

Reuben, Gad, half tribe of Manasseh here. So, we've got some Israelite, Moabite, and Ammonite stuff geopolitically going on here. It's a fought-over area as well.

At any rate, major events—and these are only major ones in terms of the kinds of things we want to be thinking about—are important. I've mentioned most of them, but here's our chance to get them in print in some orderly fashion: Jacob's wrestling.

Israel's journey towards Canaan. We're going to come back to that just a little bit because Israel had to make its way around Edom and Moab as well, but they did go through this region. They had a battle at Heshbon, which is in that medieval plateau area.

When Moses dies, it's after he's gone up and viewed the land from Pisgah and seen all of this, and then we have the death of Moses in Transjordan. We've already alluded to the fact that Reuben, Gad, half tribe of Manasseh are settled in this region of medieval plateau, fringes of Ammon, and particularly Gilead. I mentioned David in conjunction with Ammon because there are some interactions there.

In fact, his general Joab is fighting against Rabah, the capital of Ammon, when David is staying back home, committing the terrible sins that he did with Bathsheba and against Uriah. But somewhat after that, one of the things that the prophet Nathan said to David was, the sword shall not depart. The sword shall not depart from your house.

As it turns out, several chapters later in 2 Samuel, David's own son, his third-born son Absalom, raises a coup against David. We talked about that a little bit when we talked about the conjunction between Hebron and Jerusalem. But as David flees from Absalom and leaves Jerusalem, he will go to a place called Mahanaim.

Mahanaim is very close to Penuel. Both of those are in the Jabbok wadi. So again, major events taking place.

And then just to kind of circle back to our location of remote Gilead, we've got narratives that unfold that are primarily military narratives. In fact, I think they're all military narratives in remote Gilead. So, we've done, so far, Golan.

We've done Gilead. We've done Ammon. Now we're going to move to southern Transjordan.

Mention there's a major wadi that divides our Mishor. Now we're talking about the Mishor here. And Moab is this.

And it's the Arnon Wadi right there that is our major divider. Doesn't look big on the map, but it is a significant divide. We'll see.

And then south of geopolitical Moab, there is going to be a wadi called the Zered. These are the biblical names, by the way. Not all of them have the same contemporary names now.

But the Zered is going to separate Moab from Edom down here. Now I am doing short, and I'm short-changing both of these areas of Moab and Edom. There's much



more we could say about them, but let's at least get some sense of what's happening when we have Israel.

You'll remember that from Kadesh Barnea, right about here, Moses and the Israelites sent 12 spies. They checked out the land. They looked really good, but they looked really frightening because they were major cities, fortified cities, cities that had rather big people in them.

They said they felt like grasshoppers. And so they are, because they do not lack, they do lack the faith in God, they are sent to wander, spend a lot of time in the wilderness of Zin. But then the Lord says, okay, now it's time.

So, Moses from Kadesh Barnea is going to send messengers to the king of Edom. He's going to say, could we go through your land? And he's refused. So, therefore, the Israelites need to track in some way around Edom.

Of course, here's the interesting issue, and I can get into a lot more of this, but I will not at this point. Since there are not hard and fast boundaries, and since by this time Edom had already pushed its control across into this area, that's going to, by the way, continue to be a situation through the centuries that follow. But Edom was already controlling this, certainly this, and so we have to ask what exactly Israel was going around.

And I will suggest to you that even though most maps that you look at in Bible atlases say that Israel went all the way down to that Gulf of Eilat or Gulf of Aqaba and then turned north, I don't think that's what happened. I think they actually begin to head around this segment, and then they have that horrendous episode, Numbers 21, the bronze serpent episode. They're complaining.

They suffer the consequences of the serpents. Moses sets up a bronze serpent. But I'm going to suggest to you that maybe at that point, because right afterwards the text says, the Lord redirects them, and they do indeed turn and head north.

And they're going to head north, kind of see those green arrows as they're going here. They're not going to go through the most populated areas, but I don't think that they've gone way south. I think they are now moving north.

They have an encampment right about here, and the text tells us that, and then they continue to move north. And finally, we'll have an encounter at Heshbon with the king of the Amorites. Well, the picture of the Arnon wadi gives us a little bit of a feeling for the expansiveness of that wadi.

Obviously, part of it has been dammed up, so we have a lake behind it. Let's move, that's our one picture of Moab, let's move into Edom. Because Edom, you know, the

descendants of Esau, the Edomites, actually have, well, it's very much an outliving or living out of the quote-unquote blessing that was pronounced on Esau.

It's going to be two brothers and their descendants who constantly fight with each other. Primary limestone plateau, there's sandstone there. Hang on to that for some of the beautiful things we're going to see. Copper smelting as well.

Copper smelting seems to have taken place there. And then for tourist purposes, as well as historical purposes, we have a major city. It's a Nabataean city.

We encountered Nabataeans in our Negev area, just as we were briefly talking about that particular culture being so good in taking care of spice trade across the Negev. But the Nabataeans had kind of their center place in terms of an entrepreneurial as well as worship apparently area in Petra. In 312 BC, they indeed built this city.

The Romans would take it over in 106 BC. But Petra is a remarkable city carved into these remarkably beautiful sandstones. Red, gold, purple, all kinds of colors that are there.

Just some bit of a sense of this. This is called the Khazneh, the treasury. Lots we could say about this.

This is a close-up of this particular structure right here. What I want you to see is this, the incredibly astonishing ability to do this in hard limestone carved into bedrock and do it with such intricacy. Sadly, all this stuff that used to be here got shot off by people taking hot shots at it.

All kinds of reasons for that over time. To get to Petra, well, there are several ways to do it. But the tourist way, and actually the main way into it, is through a very, very, very narrow canyon called the Sikh.

So here we enter through here, and you just see bits of that treasury at the end of that way. It was a place, along with some of the other cities in Edom, that probably felt as if it was impregnable. It is impossible to get to because it is very protected.

I'll show you some other pictures in a moment that show how rugged it is around there. And Obadiah is going to have something to say about that. In the first number of verses Obadiah talks about basically saying, you think you're so safe, you too are going to come down.

You who live in the clefts of the rock, ha, you better worry. Petra has a Nabataean high place. This gives you a little bit of a sense of the ruggedness of those mountains roundabout.

And there's also something called a monastery, although that is not the appropriate designation for it in terms of how it was used. This is a Gordon College photo op because there are nine of us standing up there on that cupola. You can't do that anymore.

So, it is a historic photo op as well. Here, probably gives a better sense of the real sense of, in Obadiah's case in Edom's case, as represented in Obadiah, a false sense of security because they presumed those mountains would help them survive, but it didn't. Right up here, you see a little cupola on top of that peak.

Traditionally, only traditionally, Aaron's tomb. We know from Numbers, the end of Numbers, chapters 20 and 21, that Aaron died, and we are not entirely sure where that happened. Traditionally, it is in the area of Edom here, although when you take into consideration what I was saying earlier about Edom's control extending across to the west, it's likely closer in that area.

Yes, there it is again. Just a couple more things in terms of Petra. You see the usual ubiquitous theater carved in bedrock in that area, and then a facade, a whole Corinthian facade, which shows up.

There are Roman buildings that get added into this later when the Romans took over in 106 BC. That's all we're doing with Transjordan. So just before we move into our Rift Valley, we've worked in Transjordan from the north, Bashan, through Gilead, past Ammon, through the Medeba Plateau, through Moab.

Well, basically, we sailed over Moab, just a dip into Petra, and now we're going to come from that point up, move north again to the Sea of Salt. That's a translation of the Hebrew designation of this body of water, even though we know it as the Dead Sea. Yam HaMelech is what it's called, and it's actually much more appropriate because, as I understand, there are organisms that live in the Dead Sea, believe it or not, so it's more appropriate to call it the Sea of Salt.

This is, give or take, depending on the height of the water and all that sort of thing that we've been talking about, about 53 miles long, about 10 miles wide. I think I mentioned this way back when we talked about the incredible nature of this Rift Valley itself, but once one gets to the north end of the Dead Sea, it's about 1,300 feet below sea level there, and then the water itself is another 1,300 feet. Right now, the salt content hovers around 35 percent.

Now, if you need to put that in perspective, think in terms of the ocean water being somewhere around 4 to 5 percent, and those of you who may know the Great Salt Lake in Utah, that's around 8 percent. So here we are talking about very high concentration. It's higher now than it was 40 years ago because there's less water that is flowing into it for all kinds of reasons: drought, use of the water from the

headwaters of the Jordan River for irrigation, for all sorts of purposes that humans are requiring.

So, we've got 35 percent. You can sit in the Dead Sea, put a rock on your stomach, and do a good job of floating. It also has a high mineral content.

This is not just table salt. There are all kinds of things. There are big potash processing plants at the south end, and then I show you here a vintage photo.

It's vintage for a number of reasons. Some of you may smile a little bit at it, but here's vintage for several reasons. First of all, this is the south end of the Dead Sea.

If you remember, I should have had my map on here again, but the Dead Sea has a north end which has a depth of about 1,300 feet, but then it gets progressively more shallow as you go south because, obviously, the rift is a little less deep in terms of all the sediment that's been gathered, so that eventually you'll reach the point below the Dead Sea where we're above water level. So this is shallow, but there was at least water here 40 years ago. Now there are only artificially created pools where water is let in where they're actually processing their salt content.

So, it's vintage from that perspective. No more water here. The water level is down all across the board.

Second vintage part of it is this. These are salt pillars that are there that you simply don't see anymore. Probably have been the casualty of decades of tourists coming through and chopping them down.

So, this has changed quite a bit. Yes, I'm sitting on one of those salt pillars, and that's the third vintage part of this. Let's move north of our Dead Sea.

Here's where we were with that last photograph right down about here. This is called the Leshon, which means tongue, sticking out in the Dead Sea. There was a route—we mentioned it actually when we talked about the Judean wilderness—where folks here could come across that, traverse, and then go into the hill country past a place called Tekoa and up to Bethlehem.

But we're not focusing on that anymore. We're focusing on something else right now, which is going to be the Jordan Valley proper. Now, the word Jordan in English comes from Yardane, which comes from Yarad, which means to go down.

And you do indeed have from this point at the south end of the Sea of Galilee, and you're remembering that's only 700 approximate feet below sea level, all the way to this point, which we've said is about 1,300 feet below sea level, quite a descent in

that distance. And so, the word does indeed capture what's going on. When we think about the Jordan Valley proper, we've got three regions.

Each of them has an Arabic designation. It's probably a little hard for you to see, but here's our first one, G-H-O-R, and that's talking about the entire width of our valley from the limestone cliff face here to the limestone cliff face there. Actually, you'll see down here our schematic is going to indicate to us that it's wider in this area.

Right about there is where Jericho is going to be. But that's the entire valley, the width of the rift valley. The Zor sometimes spelled Z-H, but we just have Z-O here, is the actual riverbed itself.

And then in between, we've got stuff, marl. Marl is kind of a caked, clay-y, sedimentary stuff. And it's got, over the millennia, over the millions of years that this stuff has been gathering together, it has got lots of salt content as well.

So, there is not a lot of potential for growing things, usually in this marl stuff. It's going to be between the river itself and the actual cliff face, okay, stretch of the broad valley. Farther up, beyond the marl, you do have, because of alluvial soils that have collected, some fairly decent growing.

Now, we're just going to look at a couple of cities here, and that will draw to close our very, very fast run-through. First of all, we have Jericho. We've looked at Jericho already in conjunction with our tribal area of Benjamin, but we just noticed something about Jericho.

It is going to be a place from which routes coming from the east, for example, Rabah of Amman, and going to the west, for example, up to Bethel and Ai, up to Geba and Mikmash, up to Jerusalem. Jericho was very important, very important in terms of conquest, of course. And then, up here, we're going to mention Beth-Shan as well.

Jericho has both an Old Testament tell. We're just going to briefly look at it in a moment. It also has a New Testament Jericho built by none other than Herod the Great, but very much standing in Jesus' day.

Beth-Shan is the one in Decapolis city. It's an Old Testament city. That's first, and we'll come back to that in a moment.

But it's the one Decapolis city, as you can see, that is across the Jordan. Scythopolis was its name during the New Testament period. All the rest of our league of 10 Hellenized cities, Hellenistic cities, are over here.

We've met Hippias, we've met Gadara, we've met Gerasa, but here we have Scythopolis here. Big question in terms of where Sodom and Gomorrah were located. Many folks say it's probably the south end of the Dead Sea.

I think there's fairly decent biblical evidence they might have been in this area, but we're not going to go there. Let's just do some history. What I just said about the location of Sodom and Gomorrah links in with this, and you're saying, oh really? And yes, Genesis 13 tells us that Abram and Lot were in Bethel, and when they decide they need to separate, Lot looks up, sees the Jordan Valley, sees its well water, sees, interestingly enough, that it was like the Garden of Eden, and so he heads east.

So, at least his beginning settlement is going to be pretty much in that area. The Israelites have to cross the Jordan before the conquest, which starts, of course, with Jericho. You have the conquest of Jericho.

We also have this Jordan Valley being the boundary between the eastern and the western tribes. In fact, towards the end of the book of Joshua, there's a little bit of contention once that conquest has taken place, and those eastern tribes are dismissed to go back home. It's fascinating because they build a big altar, and there are some questions raised by the tribes in the West in terms of their motives.

You can go back and read that. And then we do have some incidents at Beit She'an, again the Old Testament name, because, after the death of Saul and Jonathan on Mount Gilboa, the Philistines took their bodies and hung them on the wall of the temple of Beit She'an. Whoops, skipping one here.

Here we go. Two views that I want you to have in the Jordan Valley. The one on the left indicates that we have a very meandering river here.

All right, so here it is. It's not just a straight shot down there. It's much more meandering.

Here we've seen this one before, and I show it to you because we've got green. It has been raining in a very remarkable fashion. Here, even with a little green tufting on, is going to be some of those Katara heaps that are there.

We're going to encounter Katara again when we do our material on Qumran, so just hang on to that. The Jordan River is not huge. It would have been much larger in antiquity, and especially since the Israelites crossed the Jordan during flood season.

How do we know that? Because we know it's near Passover. We know it's springtime, and so it probably would have been upwards of a mile wide at that point, but here, you know, it's not immense. On the right-hand side of this particular slide,

we have a very interesting depiction, and I show it to you only briefly, not to expand on it at length, but this is a 6th century mosaic.

Actually, this mosaic was part of a church floor in Medabah. We just talked about Medabah, and there was a church that had as its flooring mosaics, as many of them did, but part of it depicts, it has a depiction of Jerusalem down here, but here's the word Jericho, and here you see a way of getting across our Jordan River. There seems to be some sort of fording system at that point, so the Jordan will be flowing down this direction, and this represents our Dead Sea, and of course, part of the humor of our mosaic artists is they've got a fish who has turned around, decided to swim back upstream again, probably because he wasn't too sanguine about the contents of the Dead Sea.

Well, occasionally, the biblical text uses the expression Gaon Hayyardin, sometimes translated as pride, but possibly better, thickets of the Jordan. When you actually get down into that area, for those who come as tourists, there are pathways that are cleared through this stuff, but you get a sense, even as you kind of turn to the side and try to take a picture, that the term thickets really works. Sometimes, it's translated pride of the Jordan, for example, but here probably, this is our best way to see what's going on here, a place to hide.

Jericho, just a brief look, focusing on our Old Testament Jericho since that's what the Israelites would have encountered. We are looking from west to east, so there very much in the haze is going to be Transjordan. Here is going to be the broader section of our whole expanse, the gore.

This is the city of Jericho as it exists now, and here is our Old Testament tell of Jericho. You actually see a bunch of people standing right there, and they're probably looking down at this. Lots of work has been done archaeologically in Jericho, so again, it's a place to come back to study at length, but I mention this solely because as part of the early excavations of Jericho, as they were digging down through layer after layer after layer, they came across this tower, which dates to the Neolithic period.

That means that we're talking sometime before 8000 BC, so you know, give or take, it's probably about a 10,000-year-old tower. Obviously, at that point in time, and by the way, there are all kinds of things that go into dating this, but at that point in time, this would have stood as a tower, and ground level would be down here. Obviously, over the millennia, we've had buildup and coverage of this.

More to say there, no time. Our last site, and again, just a quick snapshot of what's going on, is going to be the Old Testament tell, the Old Testament site, of Beit Shan, which is this high tell. The Decapolis city of Scythopolis, much, much larger, and we'll look at bits of it a little bit later on.

You can see through the trees, just a little bit of it there, but to get up to the top of the tell, which is something along the lines of 25 strata, many steps are going to go up here, and you do see up in this area the remains of materials from the Israelite period, from the Bronze Age. The Egyptians were here, so it's obviously an important place. Why? Think of the map that I showed you when we pointed out Beit Shan.

It's at the junction of the north-south Jordan Valley, and any traffic would be going that way, and it's at the base of the Herod Valley. That junction was extremely important. One of my teachers from way back, actually served as a tour guide for a while, said that if you think of a set of pliers, right, you use pliers and you move them back and forth, and they're tools and they work.

The thing that holds those pliers together is a hinge. Beit Shan, he said, is that hinge, and so that's why it's got such significance. It's controlling everything that's coming down the Herod Valley and going up and down our Jordan Valley, and then all the stuff that's coming from the east as well.

Well, just kind of juxta positioning, here is the tail focus and here it is right here. You can see that dead tree. For those of you who like contemporary connections, well, it's not contemporary anymore, but when they filmed Jesus Christ Superstar, they used this particular tree in the scene where Judas hangs himself.

But that's not important. Well, never mind. I won't say it that way.

All that to say, here are the remains of a very, very powerful Decapolis city, continuing well into the Byzantine period as well. Let's take a closer look at that. We've seen this picture before, but it was a number of lectures back.

So just to review a little bit, here is the remains of our theater. Again, since this photograph was taken, a lot more has been added on to this because they used the theater for performance and so forth. Here is a street, the cargo, all kinds of interesting things found in this area, don't have time to go into them.

Huge baths complex here, another huge bath complex, well, way over off our screen in that general area as well. Temples, we'll close down with the photograph of the fallen columns of one of those remarkable temples. They started excavating this lower portion a long time ago.

One of my colleagues who has worked, who did work at Beit Shan for a while said it would take 25 years to dig most of that particular site if they could even do all of it. Well, that is where we're going to stop with our view, both of the Transjordan area and then this major site of Beit Shan at the hinge between the Jordan Valley and our



Harod Valley. And we close with the same slide that we started with when we talked about archaeology, the fallen columns of this temple at Beit Shan.

We've seen several fairly significant temples we saw and structures that are Decapolis city structures. I want to pause just a moment to emphasize that because there are fewer of them that exist in Israel. Once we move for a very, very broad brush sweep through the expansion of the early church, we're going to see a lot more of these remarkable remains of temples that are there.

But for now, we'll stop.

This is Dr. Elaine Phillips in her teaching on Introduction to Biblical Studies. This is session 10, Regions of Transjordan and the Jordan Valley.