

Dr. Robert C. Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Lecture 10, Geography of Palestine

© 2024 Robert Newman and Ted Hildebrandt

Hello again. We're working on our course in the Synoptic Gospels. We've looked so far at the historical Jesus, at the Jewish background, at the introduction to exegesis and exegeting narrative genre, at the authorship date characteristics of the Gospels, at exegeting parables, at the Gospels as literary works, and most recently at the synoptic problem.

In this session, we want to take a look at the geography of Palestine, including Jerusalem. So, let's jump in and have a look at that. In order to have a good overview of what's going on in the Bible, whether it be in the New Testament or the Old Testament, and in the Gospels in particular, it's desirable to have a handle on the relevant geography.

For the Synoptic Gospels, this is that of Israel in New Testament times. First of all, we will look at the physical features of Palestine, and on a large scale, there has really been little change in the basic geography since New Testament times. So, as it stands now, it's basically how it was then.

We want to first survey the major regions of the territory from east to west, and then we'll look at the more minor features going from north to south. So the reason we look at the major regions from the west-east is that the major geographical structures take the form of bands running north and south, and so we will list these here, starting at the west or the Mediterranean coast and moving eastward to the desert. The direction of prevailing winds is also from west to east, and since on the west we have the Mediterranean Sea, these winds carry moisture from the Mediterranean and then begin to deposit it as they come inland as the ground rises and causes the air to rise in the air then to become saturated and drop its moisture.

This will help us understand the climate of each region as well. The first region running along the coast is the coastal plain, sometimes called the Plain of Sharon. That's not the whole of the coastal plain, but that's a good bit of it.

This is a very low, rather flat plain, which is fertile where it's not too sandy or too salty. From a military perspective, this area was easy to travel on so long as it didn't get too close to the water where chariots or horses would tend to get slowed up by the sand, and so this area was easy to invade from outside country. The large-scale geography around Israel is Egypt to the south, and Egypt, for the period of the Old Testament, was a major political power.

By the time we reach New Testament times, it had been under foreign domination for many centuries, and then the coast there, because of the rainfall, was fairly fertile, and that runs upward and then turns over into the Tigris-Euphrates Valley and comes down this way. So, we've got a shape that's, although not exactly crescent-shaped, was called the Fertile Crescent, and typically, the big military powers in the Old Testament period had been out on the other part of the Fertile Crescent had been Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia, and then after Alexander's death, the Seleucid piece of Alexander's empire was also there as well. So, the invasion would often take place, and the invasion could come rather easily on the coastal plain, either from Egypt in the south or Syria in the north.

Going in then a little further from the west coast, we come to a series of, again, a north-south region, more or less, that is somewhat higher, somewhat more rolling terrain, though it's still pretty low relative to what we're going to call the central hill country here, which will be our next item. With these rolling hills and wide valleys, most of the travel was along the valleys, and this area was still relatively easy to invade. It was also fertile and got a decent amount of moisture as well.

The central region of Israel, Palestine, etc., is what's called the hill country, and this is a region of rather sharp hills and v-shaped valleys. If you're from the United States, this is perhaps rather like West Virginia in the eastern US, although its climate would be more like, say, Southern California, what we call a Mediterranean climate. Here, because the valleys are very sharp-bottomed, and because they've got rock in them and usually an intermittent stream of some sort in them, travel does not typically take place along the valleys but rather up along the ridges, so no particular thing interfering with travel in the coastal plain, except perhaps where you crossed a stream coming down to the Mediterranean Sea, and therefore might get some swampy land.

The lowlands, or the I don't think I gave a name before, Shephelah, was more rolling, and you could travel on either kind of territory, but here in the hill country, you really needed to, at least for vehicular traffic, travel at all and need to travel up on the ridges, and even for foot travel, that was the better way to go. This is, therefore, more difficult to invade. The invaders had to go uphill to get into the area and did not find it easy to use chariots, which were, we say, the equivalent of tanks, I suppose, in ancient warfare.

Farmers did not find this area nearly so nice for farming, and yet because of the way the material was structured, it was basically limestone, and there was a tendency for it to form terraces as you go up. The strata were basically horizontal, and so at the edge of a hill, you would have a little piece stick out. basically, the farmers manipulated this by putting rocks along the outside edge and letting soil build up, or perhaps even helping soil build up along these. It's not a great terrain for growing

grains, but they did grow grains in it. It is pretty good for growing olives and grapes and things of that sort.

On the west side of this hill country, where you had the moist air coming in from the Mediterranean and flowing up the hill, you had good moisture and good rainfall, so it was rather nice there. Unfortunately, when you reach the ridge then, the air has come up off the Mediterranean and having dumped a certain amount of its moisture, typically as it goes up the ridge, you now come over the ridge, and the air begins to fall, and falling air warms up, and that means that the relative humidity goes down quite substantially, and so it's not likely to rain. So typically, you get what's called, on the east side of a ridge like that, you get what's called a rain shadow.

In the United States, that phenomenon typically shows up in the Rockies, where you get pretty good rainfall to the west and also with prevailing winds from the west, as we have here in Israel; all that's from being in the temperate zones where the prevailing wind is out of the west. When you get over the edge of the Rockies and start to drop down, you get the same thing, a warming air, drying air, and so typically rather poor rainfall east of the Rockies, which would be the valleys up there, say around the Great Salt Lake would be a nice example of that whole area that's a very dry area. Well, that's the same situation you get here.

So, the rainfall is good in Israel west of the main ridge but poor to the east of the main ridge. Then, coming down off the hill country, we reach a north-south region, which we call the Rift Valley, and you might have heard of that name in terms of missionaries in Africa or something because there's an important rift valley in Kenya as well. It's actually part of the same rift system.

The rift we're talking about here in Israel runs from up in Lebanon down through the middle of Lebanon, runs through the Sea of Galilee, runs down along a parallel of the Jordan River, actually the Jordan River runs in the Rift Valley, runs down past the Dead Sea and then down to the Gulf of Aqaba and the Red Sea there below it, and that's not the Red Sea, that's the anyway Gulf of Aqaba, and then runs on down and runs into Africa. So, it's a geologic rift due to two plates on the continental plate system that's been discovered and worked out in the last 60 years, approximately since the 50s. In this particular case, this actually is a rather deep fault, and at the Dead Sea, the surface of the Dead Sea is actually over 1,000 feet below sea level.

The Sea of Galilee is about 600 feet below sea level, and this air that has been coming from the west has come over the rift, over the hill country, and come down to that, so you get very little rain in here, but you do have this river that was rising from the north, which we'll talk about the mountains up there, will help water the area. The climate down here is typically very hot and very arid away from the river, so in modern times, it's been irrigated to have crops, and at least some sort of

irrigation was going on in some places in ancient times as well. Well, we keep moving east, and we have one more territory to think of.

We have the Mediterranean, we have the coastal plain, we have the Shephelah or low rolling hills, we have the hill country, we have the rift valley, and then you come back out of the rift valley and you come up onto what we call the Transjordan Plateau. And it turns out that the Transjordan Plateau is actually higher than the hill country so that the air coming back up again is cooled off and actually squeezed and dumps a little bit more, almost all the rest of the moisture that it had in it, which it wasn't dumping east of the ridge because the humidity of the air was too low. Now the humidity comes back up, it does dump the rest of it, but within a few miles after you get up on the Transjordan Plateau, that's all gone, and you're out into what would be kind of the northern part of the Arabian Desert or the Syrian Desert there as well.

So, it is pretty well watered at the west edge, but it is very deserty as you get a few miles in the east of that. So that's a quick tour of the territories running north and south, and we're coming in from the west. So the Mediterranean, the coastal plain, the rolling country, the Shephelah, the hill country, the valley, the Rift Valley, and then the Transjordan Plateau.

Now, there are some smaller features that it's convenient here to look at going from north to south, and so if we go up north of Israel, we come fairly quickly just to the east of the Rift Valley to the highest peak in the Palestine area, up over 9,000 feet above sea level, and that's Mount Hermon. It's the southernmost large peak in what's called the Anti-Lebanon Range. The Rift Valley, as I say, runs up out of Israel into Lebanon, and you have mountains to the west side of the valley that is called the Lebanon Range and mountains to the east side called the Anti-Lebanon Range.

The top of Mount Hermon is generally snow-covered all year, and if you're up in Galilee in clear weather, you can usually see a little bit of that. Coming south from that, we come to the area around the Sea of Galilee, which is called Galilee, the Circle of Territory, or something of that sort. This hilly region is kind of, in some sense, an extension of the hill country down in Israel itself, except there's a thing that separates there.

So, it has some of the features of the hill country down in Judea, such as around Jerusalem, but this is the best-watered area in Palestine. Not only do we have the situation where the water coming in from the moist air coming in from the Mediterranean dumps its moisture on the hills as you come in eastward from the Mediterranean, but you also have a latitude effect going on here that we're getting near the bottom end of the temperate zone, and so as you go down south, you get into an area where there's rather low rainfall, but up in Galilee we have pretty substantial rainfall. This is about equal in rainfall to the eastern United States, so in

the 40 to 50 inches per year rain, you can convert that to the metric system if you'd like.

It's higher in the north and lower in the south, so we've got Upper Galilee and Lower Galilee. The climate is reasonably cool in the mountainous part, but as you drop down to the Sea of Galilee, you're well below sea level, and it's pretty warm there. We also mention Mount Tabor in this area.

It's an isolated peak, and it's south of the Sea of Galilee. It's over 1,900 feet above sea level. Contrast that with Mount Hermon at 9,000 feet above sea level, so one's a little under 2,000, the other one's 9,000.

It's just north of this next territory we'll mention, which is the Jezreel Valley. As we're thinking about coming from the north, Mount Hermon here, the Upper and Lower Galilee here, and then we have something coming across here, this way I guess it is, is Jezreel Valley, and also called sometimes the Plain of Esdraelon. That's more or less an east-west valley.

It actually runs from northeast to southwest, but more east-west than north-south. It connects the coast with the Jordan Valley. It separates Samaria to the south from Galilee in the north, and it actually forms the easiest transportation corridor to get from the Mediterranean Sea to the Rift Valley.

Above it, you have to go across the Galilee with all their hills, and below it, you have to go across the hill country. But if you go right through this Jezreel Valley, the terrain is actually fairly low. So, as a result, an important trade route crossed from the coast over into the interior at this particular point.

The south edge of the Jezreel Valley is marked by Mount Carmel, and then a range continues east from there. A long ridge, again approximately east-west rather as the Jezreel Valley is, south side of the Jezreel Valley with a maximum height of about 1,800 feet. So again, much lower than Mount Hermon, but actually getting up around the same height as Mount Tabor is.

This range forms a barrier to north-south travel, and a person traveling northward from, say, Egypt comes up the coastal plain, but when you get near this Mount Carmel, you've either got to go all the way over to the coast and kind of work your way around the end of Mount Carmel, which actually sticks out in the Mediterranean there, or you have to come back in a way and go through one of two or three of the passes. Control of passes was important militarily in ancient times. Remember that at the time of the New Testament, we're thinking about here Israel's not an independent state, and Rome, in fact, controls everything on the east end of the Mediterranean to get into the Parthian Empire, so they're not so worried about it then.

But in Old Testament times, the control of passes was important militarily. The city of Megiddo is on one of these passes, and Revelation's Armageddon is actually a modification of Har-Megiddo, Hill of Megiddo, and controls one such pass. The plains north of Megiddo were, in fact, a site of many major battles over the course of military history.

Jumping south now, across the areas where Samaria and Jerusalem and that sort of thing would be, we come to the wilderness of Judea. This is a badlands area. It's on the western side of the Jordan River and so in the Rift Valley, more or less.

It's actually in a rain shadow, I suppose, of the ridge of the hill country, and I use the term badlands because it reminds me a great deal of the badlands of South Dakota. It is hilly, but there's virtually no vegetation on it, not least at the tree level, a little bit of shrubbery, and some grass during the rainy system. Well, this is an area where this combination of low rainfall, you're in the rain shadow of this ridge running down the hill country, the combination of the rain shadow and a poor rather chalky soil produces an area that is bad enough in regard to vegetation that's virtually uninhabited.

So today, and probably through most of its history, it has been an area where nomads come in seasonally and graze their sheep while the grass is growing and then get out of the area when nothing is going on. So, the territory is used for grazing sheep and for grazing goats in the wetter winter season. One more area we'll mention here is south of the hilly country.

The hill country eventually comes kind of to an end somewhat south of Jerusalem. We have an area called the Negev. The King James Version typically translates that as the South.

I don't recall now how some of the other modern versions translate that. It's an arid land south of actually the city of Hebron, which, from Jerusalem down, you would go down maybe 30-40 miles to get down to Hebron. Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and then Hebron.

The territory is flat to rolling. The soil is actually pretty good, but now, due to the latitude effect, getting out of the bottom of the North Temperate Zone, if you like, you are getting very little rainfall. You might, for a moment, stop and look at the zones, if you like, of our globe.

You have the equatorial zone, and then you've got tropical zones on either side of that, and then you've got the temperate zones on either side of that, and then you get up to a more sub-arctic type further northern area. The transition between the

the temperate zone and the areas down closer to the equator has a rather low rainfall. So, the Negev area, rolling or flat, has pretty good soil, and very little rainfall.

Even in ancient times, and still in modern times as well, certain inhabitants had figured out a way to actually grow crops, thereby concentrating water through certain types of tricks. A number of places, you would have a valley that would catch rainfall, and the rainfall would then tend to run off rather quickly and deposit soil down in the bottom of the valley, and then the water would run off to the low side of the valley and out of the valley, and they basically put a dam in in the bottom of the valley, and it would catch water for a little while and would pick up all the silt that had run off, and so you could then grow crops in that silty area. Whereas you might only be getting two, three, or four inches of rain a year, you were getting your little farming plot down in the bottom, concentrating rainfall from a much, much bigger area.

Well, that's kind of a quick tour then of the major regions of Israel, from the north-south ones running from the coast inward, from west-east, and then some of the peculiar individual features running from south to north. Say a word or two about the major bodies of water around Palestine. You have the Mediterranean Sea on the west, and the Israelites of the Old Testament period were not really seafarers, but they did work as middlemen to a certain extent of people who were seafarers and who were bringing trade-in from the Mediterranean or taking spices and other things out from Arabian areas or such, and so occasionally engaged in trade in that particular way. The Mediterranean Sea, a large body of saltwater, actually connected to the Atlantic over a way of, you know, 1,500 miles further west at Gibraltar.

Palestine has few natural ports compared, for instance, with Greece or Phoenicia, and Phoenicia was on the east coast of the Mediterranean further north, so the Jews were involved in trade only as middlemen. Then the bodies of water kind of actually in Israel, you had the Sea of Galilee or the Lake of Tiberias or Kinneret, various names given to it, a little lake that was perhaps 7 by 14 miles, something like that, freshwater lake, surface is 600 feet below sea level, so lower even than Death Valley in the United States, fed by the Jordan River, which basically its waters came out from Mount Hermon area, and then they still consider it the Jordan River when it runs out the other side of the Sea of Galilee and continues on down the Rift Valley. The Sea of Galilee was important for fishing, both back then and even now, but its peculiar topography and climate were such that it produced some fierce storms.

You're talking about a lake that's a few miles across, so it's big enough that you can get some substantial waves on it, not like the Mediterranean or anything. It's got a hot desert east of it, it's got Mount Hermon at 9,000 feet northeast of it, it's got this Rift Valley that runs north and south of it, it's got higher terrain to the west of it, and it's got the Mediterranean Sea west of that, so you've got weather systems coming in from the Mediterranean, you've got an area up here where cold air can be produced

around the mountain, you've got the hot air over here, and frequently the combination of those produce some very fierce storms that arose in a very short period of time. So the Mediterranean Sea, the Sea of Galilee, then you've got the Jordan River.

The river began on the lower slopes of Mount Hermon, descends about 2,300 feet in about a hundred miles, not counting all the meanders of the river, but just as the crow flies, if you like, southward from Hermon, and it flows through the Sea of Galilee and then on down to the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea, also called by the Romans Lake Asphaltites, its surface is the lowest point on earth, 1,296 feet below sea level. Probably lower than that now because they've been using up a lot of the water for irrigation, and that has lowered the Sea of Galilee, but that was typically the kind of depth, kind of elevation in antiquity and up until the big irrigation projects started in the last 30 years. The water is extremely salty, fish can't live in it, and people find it irritates their skin, but if you go swimming in it, which a number of people do, you float in it like a cork, and that is a rather unusual phenomenon if you like.

Its waters and the salt deposits were mined back in antiquity and today for various sorts of minerals, particularly salts of one sort or another. So, a quick tour then of the major bodies of water around Palestine. All of these things we've talked about, the north-south regions and these little individual peculiar regions in the major bodies of water, they're all the same as they were in antiquity.

I've left out perhaps one item, a very small lake north of Sea of Galilee, Lake Merim, which I think still existed in some of the maps I remember seeing from the late 40s, but went in the after Israel after the Jews began to resettle land because it was good land that could be used agriculturally and so is now farmland rather than water. The political features of Palestine, however, have changed drastically since New Testament times, and we're not going to deal with the changes that have taken place or what's there today. We can basically look at the political features from New Testament times. So, this would be more helpful in understanding the Gospels.

So, we're going to start with political divisions in the ministry of Christ at the time. We start first of all with Judea, and that's the territory that runs, well at various times it's run all the way from the Mediterranean, but by this time it's back in a little bit from the coast and runs up and over the central ridge, the central hill country around north and south of Jerusalem basically. That was the old territory of the tribe of Judah.

At this particular time, it had been expanded to include Samaria in the north, which still was known by that name, and Idumea in the south, which was also known by that name, but as a kind of administrative unit often called Judea, which is obviously a modification of Judah. It was part of the territory that was ruled by Herod the Great

during his reign, and I've got that in my notes from 37 to 4 BC. There's some argument about the end point on that, but we'll not do anything with it here.

And this was also then ruled when Augustus verified and modified Herod's will by Herod's son Archelaus from let's say 4 BC to about 86, and then ruled by the Roman procurators from 6 to 41, and then by Herod's grandson Herod Agrippa I from 41 to 44, and then backed by the Roman procurators again from 44 to 66. The population of this Judea proper was mostly Jews, but Samaria mostly Gentiles, including some Samaritans, but lots of others, and the Idumea were mostly descendants of the Edomites, who, however, had converted to Judaism during the Maccabean period and didn't know to what extent how serious they were about that. North of Judea was Galilee, but this was the area west of the Sea of Galilee.

This had once been the domain of some of the northern tribes of Israel, and then after the Assyrians carried off the northern kingdom and such, it was for a long time the home of Gentiles, until the Maccabees became dominant, 160 to say 63, and they repopulated it with Jews. It may well be that Mary and Joseph wound up in Nazareth as a result of their ancestors having moved back up in that area. We don't know really much about that.

After the death of Herod the Great, when his territory was split up under his will, this was ruled by Herod Antipas, and he shows up in the Gospel accounts from, we think, 4 BC to AD 39, and then it's ruled by the Roman procurators from 39 to 41, not very long, and then by Herod Agrippa, 41 to 44, and then by the Roman procurators again. Some considered Galilee a hotbed of revolutionaries, and it certainly had some up there. Herod had some trouble with that, and the Romans certainly later in the first century, leading up to the Jewish Revolt, had troubles with revolutionaries in that area.

A narrow strip east of the Jordan River was called Perea, presumably from the Greek *pariah*, and was inhabited mainly by Jews by New Testament times. I think the situation was rather like that of Galilee. It had been largely Gentile from the Babylonian captivity down to the Maccabees and then had been repopulated. It had the same rulers as Galilee, so when Herod the Great was in control of things, this was part of his territory, and then when his territory was split up, this went to Herod Antipas, and when Antipas and Herod Agrippa first were not ruling it, then the Roman procurators were ruling it.

There's another territory that had some Herodian rule, and that's typically called today the Tetrarchy of Philip, or *Eteria Antraconitis* is another name that's given. It was a multi-ethnic region northeast of the Sea of Galilee, and had mostly Gentile inhabitants. After the death of Herod the Great, because he had ruled over that, it was ruled by another one of his sons, Philip, from, let's say, again, 4 BC to 34 AD, and then by Roman procurators and Herod Agrippa, as we've mentioned already before.

So, some of Jesus' ministry takes place in that territory as well, probably through the feeding of the 4,000 and some miracles as well. A fifth region we should mention is the region called the Decapolis, Latin Greek for ten cities, but it wasn't just ten cities. The whole administrative operation of those areas, and probably very commonly in the ancient Near East, was a city-dominated territory around it. The Decapolis cities were a league of usually ten Hellenistic cities; the number of cities in there actually went up and down some, and they're city territories, and we now have some evidence that the territory of several of these cities included a piece of coast of the Sea of Galilee, so presumably they shared fishing rights and had their own piers and perhaps their own fishing fleets on the Sea of Galilee.

The Decapolis would be mostly Gentile inhabitants, though again, it's most likely since there were Hellenistic cities, there were some Jewish people there as well. After the Romans came, after the Maccabean period ended, this was made independent of Jewish control, so it was never under the control of Herod the Great or of his descendants. So, a quick tour then of the territories, political territories if you like, around the time of Jesus.

We might mention a few of the cities of Palestine during the first century AD. There was, of course, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, located right up on the ridge in the hill country, so that not going too far west you could look down and I guess, see off in the distance where the Mediterranean would be; it wouldn't be very obvious, and going over east of Jerusalem you could look down, and you could actually see the Dead Sea, and you could certainly see the wilderness to the east. That was the Jewish, what we might think of as the religious capital of Judea and Palestine.

Herod certainly would have his palace there, but not his only palace there. He perhaps was not excited about being in that area in the winter. You're up getting towards 3,000 feet, so he had some winter palace stuff down at Jericho, which was much nicer weather, and even down at Masada, we'll say something about Herod's fortifications here in a bit.

The Romans did not consider this their capital of Judea while they were in control of the east. Herod himself had built a port city to the northwest of Jerusalem on the Mediterranean coast, and because Palestine did not have any natural harbors, well you have a little sort of something where caramel sticks out, but even that's not very satisfactory, Herod has spent a great deal of money to build an artificial harbor, put huge stones in the water, used cement. Cement is a, we think, as far back as we know, it's a Roman invention.

It might conceivably have gotten it from somebody else, and they had even figured out how to make cement that would dry underwater, which we have varieties of that will do that as well. So, they had made sort of large jetties that would run out and

made an area of calm water that you could bring ships into, and then they could ride out storms in there and not be mashed and such. So that became an important port during Herod the Great's control, and then after his death, the Romans kind of took this as a capital, so when their procurators, when their prefects, whatever, were ruling over Judea, they operated this as the capital.

It was a city in which there were both Jews and Gentiles and in fact, the outbreak of the Jewish Revolt against Rome spun out of a riot; probably the right term to say a confrontation between the Jews and Gentiles of Caesarea. So, Herod had a palace there, the Roman procurators had a palace there, and an inscription mentioning Pontius Pilate was found there and was probably a part of the theater at Caesarea as well. A rather important city in Old Testament times was the city of Samaria, which became the capital of the Northern Kingdom. and that had had its ups and downs, but Herod the Great rebuilt that during his reign, and he named it Sebastia, which is Greek for Augustus essentially, and so Caesarea named for Caesar, which is kind of becomes the whole family name eventually, but only Julius and Augustus at the time that Herod was around, and Sebastia then named even more explicitly for Augustus, why chose the Greek for it instead of the Latin Augustus, I don't know, and that was rebuilt for his army veterans, for Herod's army veterans and the inhabitants of that were mostly Gentile.

A third city in Palestine, Tiberias, was named for another emperor, so you've got Julius, who shot at the emperor and got killed, Augustus, who succeeded, and then his adopted son, I think a nephew or something, Tiberias. This city was built by Herod Antipas when he was made heir of the territory Galilee and Perea, and so he built it on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and named it in honor of Tiberias. The spelling is for the emperor Ius at the end and for the city Tiberias.

That is actually pretty near where Jesus' ministry takes place, and yet there, as far as I know, there are no explicit references to him being in the city at any time. Besides Antipas, you remember one of the other heirs was Philip, and Philip got the area northeast of the Sea of Galilee, Sea of Galilee here in northeast, and so he built a city, and he called it Caesarea again, but for purposes of not confusing it with other Caesareas, some people in antiquity called it Caesarea Philippi, Philip's Caesarea, and that has stuck then for use in modern times. So, to distinguish the two Caesareas, if it's nothing said, it's the earlier Caesarea that Herod built or that's sometimes called Caesarea Maritima, a Caesarea on the sea, and the other one's Caesarea Philippi.

It was built as a capital for Herod, for so up in that territory and up pretty close to the headwaters of the Jordan River there. They've numbered the capitalist cities, more than ten at sometimes and less than ten at other times. I just gave for my students five of them here, which show up now and then either in the New Testament or in Josephus writing, Scythopolis, the city of the Scythians, so something about its history back several centuries.

Hippos, named for horse, okay, I'm not sure what the exact reason for that is. Gadara, one of the alternative names that should come up in the Gadarene demoniacs things, well that's one of the passages we'll look at here later, so we'll say something about that. And Gerasa, one of the other names that show up for that.

And then Philadelphia, named for Ptolemy Philadelphus probably, so the city of brotherly love, as those of you who live in the east or live in the Philadelphia area know it from Pennsylvania here. So those would be some of the Decapolis cities. Galilean towns, probably cities, would be pushing it a little bit.

These are not at least fortified cities. Nazareth, where Jesus comes from, is not named explicitly in the Old Testament, though there are these Netzer passages that we mentioned in connection with Messianic prophecy. Cana, Magdala, Capernaum, Chorazin, Bethsaida.

Magdala, Capernaum, Chorazin, Bethsaida, all basically on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and Cana and Nazareth back up in sort of the hill country of Galilee. Some Judean towns besides Jerusalem. Jericho is certainly important in Old Testament times and still important at New Testament times.

There was an old and new Jericho, and that's probably part of the explanation for how Jesus heals this particular blind man coming to Jericho. So, coming to Jericho in Luke and leaving Jericho in Matthew and Mark. The New Jericho was a snazzy place, and well-to-do people lived there, that's probably where the tax collector Zacchaeus lived, and the other one was the more traditional city and probably what Matthew at least perhaps would have thought of in terms of a Judean city.

Bethany across the Mount of Olives from Jerusalem. Bethlehem south of Jerusalem is actually heading out a little bit, almost into the wilderness. And then Emmaus, there's some uncertainty on where the two are going to Emmaus, which is a couple of different locations, but the general agreement is northwest of Bethlehem.

So, cities of Palestine during the first century AD. Jerusalem, the Jewish was a religious capital. Caesarea, the Roman capital.

Sebastii, the Old Testament Samaria rebuilt for Herod's veterans. Tiberius, the capital of Galilee. Caesarea Philippi, the capital of the Tetrarchy of Philip.

These two capital cities are Galilean towns and Judean towns. A word or two about some major roads: to the best of my knowledge, we do not have names for these roads that come from New Testament time, so the names I'm going to use here for the three roads we're going to discuss are traditional names that are used in biblical

studies and some of these certainly come from earlier periods in the history of the region.

The first of these, the name actually comes from a passage in Isaiah. I think it is, via Maris, the Way of the Sea, which is a nice descriptive term. It was a coastal highway that came up not quite at the coast but parallel the coast and a few miles inland from Egypt and then just south of the Carmel Ridge, it split, and one piece went up to the west and stayed on the coast and went on up then to Tyre, Sidon, etc., to Antioch eventually, up that direction, and the other one turned east at that point, went through I think the Megiddo Pass and comes down to the Sea of Galilee, goes by Tiberius, and then goes on up and heads out to Damascus. So, it was a major north-south coastal road and certainly carried a good bit of trade traffic that did not go, say, by sea.

Certainly, a lot of trade traffic would have run up the coast and come in at a port or something and then perhaps been trans-shipped over. The second road I want to say a word or two about is kind of parallels this, but it's back across the Rift Valley and up on the Transjordan Plateau, and that had the name the King's Highway, and that goes back to who knows what king, but runs on the Transjordan Plateau and runs from the Gulf of Aqaba at the top of the, I guess we call it the Red Sea, and so goods shipped in from the south came up to the port there and then went overland up the King's Highway, and that went by some of the Decapolis cities and then angled over to Damascus as well, and both of those, the Via Morris and the King's Highway from Damascus, connected into roads that went up into the Mesopotamian Valley. So, the cities over there, Palmyra and such, then over to the west, over to the east, excuse me.

A third road, probably rather more used by the Jews in connection with our travel back and forth from Galilee to Jerusalem, is the road that stayed along the ridge of the hill country and so has the name that we use, Ridge Route. It was less important for international traffic because it was not as easy to travel along. It went up and down and perhaps not as well paved, we might say, but was rather important, as I say, for pilgrims going from Jerusalem to Galilee with one serious drawback, and that's it went through Samaria.

So, people going from Jerusalem back home to Galilee or vice versa coming down for festivals might use it, but if they were edgy about the Samaritans or not in too much hurry, they might instead go down and go down into the Rift Valley and use a road there and then come back up again, and so we see both of those kinds of routes used in connection with people going to and from Jerusalem. So, a quick tour of the three major roads. There were obviously a lot more roads.

There were roads, obviously, that connected, you know, from the Via Morris over to Jerusalem and from Jerusalem over and down through across the Jordan and back up

to the King's Highway, and there would be something similar to that at a couple of other places along the way. Lastly, under our discussion of the geography of Palestine are the Herodian fortifications. One of the reasons Herod is called Herod the Great is not because of his great personality but because of his great building activities and the major structures around the Temple of Jerusalem are his, the major structures in Sebastian in Caesarea are his, the major structure at Hebron is his, okay, the patriarchal temple burial there of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc.

are all Herod's, and he also built some fortifications. He was well aware that, one, he was not super popular with the Jews, but two, that the Roman Empire ended not too many miles to the east of him and that there was a pretty strong nation, the Parthians, to the east there, and right at the beginning of his career, well not quite the beginning, right before he became the king of the Jews, the Parthians had invaded and had killed his, well, had captured and imprisoned his older brother, I think Ephesians was his older brother, slips my mind now, but Ephesians committed suicide to avoid, I suppose, being tortured or something of that sort. Herod had gotten away, so Herod always has that in mind, and then somewhat later in his career, after he was king of the Jews but didn't feel terribly safe yet, there were still Cleopatra and Antony to worry about, and then even after all that was over, there was still possible rebellions to worry about, so he built himself a number of fortifications.

He built himself a fortification at Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea, and this is a location where, according to Josephus, John the Baptist was put to death. John the Baptist was beheaded, presumably over there. The New Testament does not tell us where that took place, but that was in the territory of Herod Antipas, who was the Herod that put John to death, you remember Herod the Great is gone by then, he had put the little babies to death in trying to get Jesus, but Herod Antipas had put John the Baptist to death.

Then there was Masada on the west side of the Dead Sea and Masada, I guess both Machaerus and Masada were not only fortifications, but they were palaces for Herod, so he wanted somewhere where he could retreat to and did not have to give up at least all of his royal prerogatives while he was laying low to whatever revolt or whatever blew over. On the west of the Dead Sea, and that has been pretty extensively excavated and has two palaces on it, one kind of up on top, it's a what we call a mesa, I guess in southwestern American English, so a plateau with rather steep sides, the Dead Sea off to one side and various wadis coming down to the Dead Sea on the west side, and so he built a western palace on top, and then on the north end, down kind of working its way down the slope so that it got some shade, there was his north palace and some rather elaborate stuff still surviving there in recent excavations. So this was his palace, and then after he died, it fell into the hands of the Zealots during the Jewish Revolt, and this was, in fact, the place where they made their last stand against the Romans.

The Romans had conquered Jerusalem in 70, but it wasn't till 73 that they felt they were ready to go and surround Masada and smoke them out, so to speak, and in fact, the Zealots at Masada committed suicide rather than give up there. A third fortification of Herod is one called Herodium, so Herod modestly named it for himself. Here he took a hill southeast of Bethlehem and built up the top of it, so it actually looks a little like a volcano today, and put a palace in there.

That was his retreat palace, and then down at the base of the hill, he had a palace that he could use for, what shall we say, less dangerous situations. For many, many years, well, since Josephus, it's been understood that Herod's tomb was there, and I believe the evidence for that has been recently discovered, though I haven't heard how that's all settled out. So, no body of Herod or anything of that sort has been found there, but some structures that look like they might well be Herod's tomb have recently been found.

Well, that's our tour of the geography of Israel, Palestine if you like. We want to say a few words about the geography of Jerusalem, so here are some more details. Here we're going to divide our stuff up again into, first of all, what we might call the natural features, the valleys around Jerusalem and the hills around Jerusalem, and then look into the city walls, which we can still find some fairly good traces of some of them anyway, and then the various sections of the city, and then a few of the particular major buildings and structures and things that were there at Jesus' time.

So, Jerusalem is basically on the ridge of the hill country but surrounded by some valleys. Jerusalem was pretty easy to fortify in three directions and not so easy on the north side. We have a valley running down the west side of Jerusalem and then across the bottom that's called the Hinnom Valley, and this is a pretty deep valley and became at one point a place where garbage was burned, and so the Hebrew Ge-Hinnom, Valley of Hinnom, became a picture in Jewish thought of hell.

So, Ge-Hinnom, the term you will see in the New Testament now and again unless your translation translates it away in some way, is this particular term. To the east of Jerusalem, there was another fairly deep valley called the Kidron Valley, and it was between the temple and the Mount of Olives. So, when Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, he came down the Mount of Olives and then back up to come into probably the east gate of the temple complex.

And so the Kidron Valley would be the location of Gethsemane, though there are a couple of different suggestions for just where the Garden of Gethsemane was. There's a third valley, which is not nearly as noticeable today. Aerial photos taken near sunset, you get some hints of it, but it was the valley in Josephus is called Tyropoeon, Cheese Makers Valley.

I'm not sure exactly what the Hebrew of it might have been, and I don't know that we've got a document that tells us that. It was between the Temple Mount on the east side of the city and the territory south of that where David had originally conquered Jerusalem and such, and the western part of Jerusalem where the upper city was and such. This valley is now a pretty largely filled in, but there are some slight traces of it.

So, those are the valleys around Jerusalem. Jerusalem was also surrounded by hills. It's in hill country, and it's a hill country with lots of valleys and such.

So, a few of the important hills around Jerusalem. David, you remember, conquered the city from the Jebusites, and the Jebusites city had actually been a rather small city on a hill that is south of where the Temple is now, and that was called the city of Jebusites, and was also called Ophel, and again I don't know for sure what the history that name is. So, the area south of the Temple, but still up on this hill between the Kidron Valley to the east and the Tyropoeon Valley to the west, is Ophel.

The hill on which the Temple came to be built is Moriah, the site of the Temple, and apparently the site of Abraham's almost sacrifice of Isaac. There is not quite as much certainty there, but there are some hints in that direction from the biblical material. There's the term Zion that also occurs in connection with Jerusalem, and that was probably originally either Ophel or Moriah and comes to be kind of a generic term for the whole city, but then in medieval times, that comes to be applied to the Western Hill, the upper city if you like.

So, if you talk about going to Mount Zion now, if you tell a taxi driver you want to go to Mount Zion, he's going to put you over there rather than at the Ophel or the Temple site, if you like. A third hill is the Mount of Olives, outside the city, perhaps to the ridge about a half mile east of the city. It was at the edge of the wilderness, so up on top of Mount of Olives you can look out and see the wilderness to the west of you, to the east of you, and the much more vegetated area to the west of you.

It was on the way from Jericho to Jerusalem, so the road would come over the Mount of Olives there, the site of Jesus' ascension. The hill of the upper city is west of the Ophel across the Cheesemakers Valley and higher than Ophel or Moriah, so if you stand on the Mount of Olives and take a picture looking west across the city, you can see this territory standing higher there. As I say, that was called Zion in the Middle Ages, but probably misidentified.

So that's the hills and the valleys around Jerusalem. The next thing we might mention here is the city walls at the New Testament times. Some of these walls still stand or have walls built on the same general lines and foundations as they do, and the walls roughly follow these valleys to make it so that when a person attacks a city, they have to go down the valley and then up to the wall, and rather difficult to get into

the place. So, the south wall is generally taken to run around where the Kidron and the Hinnom Valley run together, and so it kind of encloses the Tyropoeon Valley in the city.

So that's the south wall around this way with the Hinnom Valley over here and the Kidron coming down here. The east wall on the, okay, get the Kidron Valley over here on the east side of the city, there's the city Kidron Valley here, and the east wall is up the slopes of the Kidron Valley and along the east side of the temple. The west wall on the Hinnom Valley, but on the east side of it, that is on the city side of the Hinnom Valley, and so those walls go back, I think, probably as far back as the bigger city has existed, so probably from shortly after Solomon's time or something of that, though doubtless they've been rebuilt on several occasions.

The north side of the city, though, didn't really have any good valley protecting it, and so over history, they have built several walls going out further as the city has expanded. The first north wall basically ran from the temple up north a little bit, then swung back around and came back over to meet the Hinnom Valley, which is actually down near what we call the Joppa Gate, I guess. The second north wall then was apparently built after the, excuse me, I got that not looking at my map properly. The first north wall just basically ran east from the Joppa Gate right over the temple.

The second north wall ran out from there and then went north and then came back around and came back to the temple, so it enclosed a little bit bigger area on the north side of the city. Then, the third north wall was not there at Jesus' time, so the territory that it enclosed was a suburb. I guess you would use the term there, though it doesn't have the same flavor it did and does today. It began after Jesus' ministry, begun by Herod Agrippa, and then when the Roman Emperor said cut that out, he stopped and it was finished during the revolt then in 66 to 70 AD.

It ran north from the east side of the temple up the Kidron Valley for ways and then swung around and came back down to the Joppa Gate, so three north walls. These sets of walls then divided the city into sections. Down here, south of the temple, is the old city of David, the territory he conquered, the old Jebusite city, and it's basically on Ophel Hill.

Then there's the Temple Mount north of that, and that was built by Solomon, and it's on Mount Moriah. Then there's the lower city and there's some disagreement by map makers on just where to put that, but I go along with what appears to be the majority of them and that is the Tyropoeon Valley, so west of Ophel and before you get up onto the upper western part of the city, the upper city, the lower city. The upper city, this hill that runs, here's the Tyropoeon Valley, it's over here to the west of it, and then the Hinnom Valley is over here, so it's up in that particular region, the upper city.

There are a couple of other pieces to the city. There's the territory called the second quarter, which is between the first and second city walls, and then finally what was called New City or Bezetha, which is between the second third wall, so these would both be extensions out to the north of the city. Some major buildings and structures from the New Testament period.

We have first of all the temple complex, the temple we generally think of as the building, but there was also a large platform that was built on when Herod the Great at least thought in terms of refurbishing the temple about 20 BC, he realized that because the land fell off like it did around that hill Moriah, it would be necessary to build what he wanted to extend that, and so he took what was perhaps initially a 500 cubit square, probably left over from Solomon's temple, but at least standing at the second temple, and extended that some significant distance to the south, and then we get a kind of longer rectangle, and at the outer edge of this platform, if you like, or a terrace if you like, you've actually got a pretty long drop-off to the bottom of the Tyropoeon Valley on one side and the temple stood in the not exact middle, but roughly middle, and there was a open porch way with a roof on it around three sides, two sides anyway. The south side was called the Royal Portico, and the east side was Solomon's Portico. Solomon's Portico indicates, I think, that Solomon probably had something there in the original temple, though the material we've got now is later than that, and the Royal Portico, probably built by Herod, but the name suggests that the followers did not want to advertise Herod or something of that sort.

In any case, that's the temple building. So, a platform with the courts, the outer court of the Gentiles, and then the main court is the court of the women, and then inside that, and you come up a stairway, there's a very narrow court of the men where they could stand and put their hands on the animals as they were sacrificed, and then the bigger court of the priests, and then back in that, the temple complex itself. The platform was probably about 750 feet east-west, that is about 500 cubits, and about twice that north-south, so Herod had substantially increased the size of the temple platform from what we get as the traditional size that shows up in rabbinic literature.

Just north and west of the temple, and actually adjoining it, is the fortress Antonia, which was rebuilt at least by Herod, and by New Testament times, that was being used as the place where the Roman garrison kept an eye on things, because temple festivals sometimes developed into riots of one sort or another due to dissatisfaction, perhaps, of some of the worshippers with the Romans or something of that sort. The Romans wanted to be right there to be able to do anything. Traditionally, the fortress Antonia is the site of a Jesus-Roman trial, though a number of people now think perhaps it was over at Herod's palace, which we'll say a word about here in a moment.

The west gate out of the city of Jerusalem, where a road then ran off to Joppa, was called the Joppa Gate, and three big towers for defensive purposes were built at that

gate. One was named after Herod's brother, Phasael, who had died during the Parthian invasion. One was named for Herod's, which we say favorite wife, Mariamne, who in spite of which he put to death, and one named for a friend of his, Hipparchus.

So, Joppa Gate towers. One of those towers, the lower parts are still surviving, and you can actually visit and view that when you're at Jerusalem. Just south of the Joppa Gate towers is Herod's palace, built by Herod the Great, so obviously with Herod off the scene.

This is probably used by the Roman governor when he was in the city, rather than by Herod Antipas, who, after all, didn't have quite the, what should we say, political standing that the Roman governor had, and that's the alternate site for the Roman trial. So, if Pilate was down here, then that's where it was, because we're told Pilate came out and went back in, etc., or if it was being used for some other reason at the festival, for instance, Pilate might have felt safer in the Antronio fortress than would be the Antonio. Whatever, those are the two candidates for that.

There was a Sanhedrin building, and we think it was near the temple and on the platform somewhere, but we do not now know where it was. The rabbinic literature calls it the Hall of Hewn Stones, and this is probably the site of Jesus' condemnation on Friday morning before they take him to try and get Pilate to validate their sentence. The model of Jerusalem at the Holy Land Hotel also attempts to place a chariot racing stadium called Hippodrome, in Greek, horse rod, okay, and if you've ever seen the film Ben-Hur, they have a very authentic-looking Hippodrome, long straightaways with sharp turns on either end, so instead of being a nice big oval as, say, horse racing places are in Western culture, they're a long straightaway and then a sharp turn and a long straightaway, etc., and I refer you to Ben-Hur for that particular thing.

The location is uncertain, but some put it in the Tyropoeon Valley. That's where this particular model puts it. Josephus also tells us there was a theater in Jerusalem, so both those features would have been much more Hellenistic.

They certainly weren't traditional Jewish sorts of things, and the location of that is uncertain. Most of us, when we think of a theater, either think of a movie theater or perhaps we think of something like Shakespeare's Globe Theater or something of that sort. The Greek and Roman theaters, particularly the Greek theaters, were a kind of a half circle, often cut into the side of a hill and with stone, I guess, though they may well have used concrete as well, bleachers, we could say, around going up higher and higher with various aisles running down along them, so the actual model has been used even into the 20th century for theaters and various kinds of stadiums as well.

That would probably have been used to perform plays of one sort or another. We're told by some of your Jewish writers that some of the Hellenistic Jews had, in fact, constructed plays about Ezekiel and that sort of thing so that there were some of what we might think of as religious plays rather than just the pagan Greek plays and the very lewd Roman plays around. Some other sites are related to Jesus' ministry, the Pool of Bethesda.

You remember in John 5 that Jesus finds a lame person at the Pool of Bethesda, and the tradition is at least that he was waiting for the moving of the water, etc., and I don't think the best text of John 5 supports the tradition, but appears that at least somebody, perhaps a marginal note or something, had entered a note about that, and certainly the narrative of John 5 indicates that the lame guy had some such thing in mind, and we're told of this pool that had five porticos, portico the term for these covered porches, usually with columns on either side to hold up the roof, and lo and behold, just north of the temple and northeast of the Antonia Fortress, they have found, buried pretty deeply at this point with the rubble over the centuries, but now dug out, a pool that had four porchways around the outside and one across the middle, dividing it into two pools, and so the general belief is that is the Pool of Bethesda, where this particular place that Jesus healed the lame man took place. There's another pool in the ministry, Jesus, and that's the Pool of Siloam, where Jesus sent the fellow who's blind. You remember, he made clay and put it on the blind man's eyes, and the Pool of Siloam has been known for a long, long time, or where it is, it's south of the temple, kind of south, slightly west of the temple in the Tyropoeon Valley, right down where the, near the south end of the city where the Tyropoeon and Hinnom come together, and that has also been excavated and is narrated for us in John 9. Some other places are the Upper Room, where the Last Supper was held. Well, there's a traditional site of the Upper Room, and it's a second floor, but the problem is from Josephus' descriptions, there does not appear to be any second floors left after the Romans finished with Jerusalem in 70 AD, so it might be near the site, hard to say, but that's the traditional one.

If you're in Jerusalem as a tourist, they'll take you to that. The architecture there is what I would call as a non-architect Gothic or something like that, so it's a Crusader period, clearly. Caiaphas House, a place where Jesus was taken for perhaps a preliminary hearing of some sort, possibly with a part or maybe even a Sanhedrin there.

That's traditionally in the Upper City, and a site is shown for that, even a little cave where Jesus is claimed to have been held as a prisoner overnight. I don't know what to say about that. It was a shrine of some sort of Christians a few centuries later, but whether they've got the right site is somewhat hard to be sure of.

Gethsemane, we know, is an olive grove in the Kidron Valley on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. There are several sites claimed by various religious groups. Last of all, that brings us to Calvary or Golgotha.

There are three sites I'm aware of now claimed, up from two, when I first taught this course. The traditional one is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and that may very well be authentic, but it certainly doesn't look very authentic anymore. It's had a church built over it for probably 1,500 years at least, and is the most widely recognized and has been recognized since the time of Constantine, and they show you a place where Calvary was and a place where the tomb was and that sort of thing, and for at least Western Christians it looks way too ornate and such, kind of turns you off.

There's Gordon's Calvary, a site that I guess General Charles Gordon suggested, that probably looks more like what Calvary looked like in Jesus' time, but the evidence is rather strong against historicity. The tomb there is not a new tomb, which is what the Gospels tell us the tomb of Joseph Aaron Thea was, but this tomb appears to go back to the Iron Age period, so several centuries old by New Testament times. Ernest Martin has done a number of things in suggesting a date for the birth of Christ that's fairly close to the traditional date, but not very close to the date that's been used the last few centuries of 4 or 5 BC, but goes with 1 BC, 2 BC actually, has also suggested a site for the Mount of Olives.

He basically claims that somehow, the centurion standing on Mount Calvary was able to see the curtain ripped in half. As I read the text over, it doesn't look like that's necessary to the text, though perhaps you could read it that way, and so he puts it east of Jerusalem, so in the direction where the temple actually faced, and puts it on the Mount of Olives. He puts it near the site of the slaughtering of the Red Heifer, citing typological reasons as well as historical reasons, so that's his suggestion.

Well, that's a quick tour. There's lots and lots more that can be said, and I hear that Ted has got some good stuff up on the geography and archaeology and much of Jerusalem and Palestine, so I refer you to those here, but this is what I have in my Synoptic Gospels course. Thank you very much for your attention.