

Dr. Elaine Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 10, Transjordan and Jordan Valley Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 10, Transjordan and Jordan Valley, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Elaine Phillips' lecture on Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 10, focuses on the geography and history of Transjordan and the Jordan Valley. The lecture utilizes maps and photographs to explore various regions, including **Bashan, Gilead, Ammon, Moab, and Edom**, examining their geological features, political significance, and connections to biblical narratives. Specific sites like **Mount Hermon, Gamla, Gergesa, Gadara, and Petra** are discussed in detail, along with their archaeological importance. The lecture also **covers the Jordan River and the Dead Sea**, highlighting their geographical characteristics and historical role in biblical events. Finally, the lecture concludes with a look at **Jericho and Beth-Shan**, two significant cities located in the Jordan Valley.

2. 28 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 10 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Introduction & Languages → Introductory Series → Introduction to Biblical Studies).



**Phillips_IBS_Session
10.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided source, "Phillips_IBS_EN_Session10.pdf":

Briefing Document: Transjordan and Jordan Valley

Overview:

This session focuses on the geographical regions of Transjordan and the Jordan Valley, areas east of the Jordan River and Rift Valley. It builds upon previous lectures covering the regions west of the Jordan, moving from north to south through Transjordan. Dr. Phillips uses geological, historical, and biblical lenses to provide a detailed understanding of the significance of these regions.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Regional Overview and Terminology:

- The lecture shifts focus from Cisjordan (west of the Jordan River) to Transjordan (east of the Jordan River).
- Review of previously covered regions (Wilderness, Judah, Shephelah, Philistia, Negev, Sinai, Jerusalem, hill countries, Sharon Plain, Galilee) to provide context.
- Use of regional study maps (maps two and three) for reference.

1. Mount Hermon and Bashan:

- Mount Hermon is identified as a key northern point. Its base is limestone, and its outline is marked on a schematic map.
- Bashan, south of Hermon, is characterized by basalt outflow from volcanic cones, resulting in fertile soil.
- The area is good for cattle breeding and wine production.
- The Yarmouk Wadi is a significant geographical divider, marking the southern boundary of Bashan.

1. Golan Heights:

- The Golan Heights is a basalt area with a hard limestone foundation.
- It is divided into Eteria Trachonitis (the torn area) and Golanitis, from which the modern name "Golan Heights" is derived.

- Gamla, a site significant during the Jewish revolt against Rome (AD 68), is mentioned.

1. **The Decapolis and Gergesa/Kursi:**

- The Decapolis, a league of ten Hellenized cities, is introduced, with a focus on Hippias (also a Decapolis city).
- Gergesa/Kursi is an ancient site near Hippias that is significant in understanding the context of healing the demoniac in the Gospels.
- The text critic issue around the locations of Gergesa, Gadara and Gerasa in relation to the demoniac narrative is discussed, and geographical rationale is presented for the use of Gergesa as most logical.
- The Roman Legion stationed at Hippias with the swine as a mascot connects to the pig imagery of the gospel narrative.
- Gadara is located south of the Yarmouk Wadi, further away from the Sea of Galilee than Gergesa.

1. **Gilead and its War-Torn History:**

- Gilead is a war-torn area due to conflicts with Syria to the northeast and Ammon to the southeast.
- The area was settled by two and a half Israelite tribes (Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh).
- Amos 1:3 is cited, condemning Damascus for threshing Gilead with iron threshing sleds, demonstrating the atrocities inflicted upon the inhabitants of Gilead.

1. **Geographical Features of Gilead:**

- "Remote Gilead" is a contested junction on the north-south Transjordanian Highway.
- The "Dome of Gilead" in Upper Gilead has similar geological composition to areas to the west, including limestone.
- The Jabbok Canyon/Wadi cuts through the Dome of Gilead, a location of great significance to the narrative of Jacob's wrestling match in Genesis 32.
- The Jabbok River swings toward Rabat/Amman.

1. **Gerasa:**

- Gerasa (also a Decapolis city) is a well-preserved city with a Cardo (main north-south street) and a forum.
- An earthquake in the 800s significantly damaged the city.

1. **Ammon and the Mishor:**

- Ammon is south of Gilead and is important due to its interactions with figures like Saul and David. It was also condemned by Amos for slaughtering Gileadites.
- The Mishor (Meribah Plateau) is a flat, level area, a contested region due to its fertile nature.
- Mount Nebo is located on the Mishor.

1. **Israelite Interactions in the Mishor:**

- Moab frequently attempted to take the Mishor, an area also settled by two and a half Israelite tribes.
- Major events that occurred in the area are listed: Jacob's wrestling, Israel's journey towards Canaan, a battle at Heshbon, Moses' death in Transjordan, the settlement of the Reubenites, Gadites, and half-tribe of Manasseh, David's interactions with Ammon and the story of his son Absalom's coup d'état which took place near Penuel/Mahanaim in the Jabbok Wadi.
- Military narratives unfold in Remote Gilead.

1. **Southern Transjordan: Moab and Edom:**

- The Arnon Wadi divides the Mishor from Moab.
- The Zered Wadi separates Moab from Edom.
- Israel's journey around Edom is discussed, with the suggestion that they did not go as far south as traditionally thought.
- The bronze serpent episode and the subsequent redirection by the Lord are mentioned in Numbers 21.

1. **Edom and Petra:**

- Edom, the descendants of Esau, is described with its limestone plateau, sandstone, and copper smelting.

- Petra, a major Nabataean city (built in 312 BC), is discussed for its remarkable sandstone carvings.
- Petra's impregnability is referenced in Obadiah, and its "high place" mentioned.
- The Sikh, a narrow canyon entrance to Petra, is noted as a main thoroughfare.
- Aaron's tomb is traditionally thought to be located in the area.

1. **The Jordan Valley:**

- The Sea of Salt (Dead Sea) is described as about 53 miles long and 10 miles wide, with a high salt content (35%).
- Water levels have decreased due to drought and water usage.
- The Jordan Valley is described using Arabic designations: the *Ghor* (entire width of the valley), the *Zor* (riverbed), and the marl (area between the river and the cliff face).
- Jericho and Beth-Shan are mentioned as key cities.
- Jericho had routes that went east to Rabah of Ammon and west to Bethel and Ai.
- Beth-Shan is the only Decapolis city west of the Jordan River and was called Scythopolis during the New Testament period.

1. **Biblical Events in the Jordan Valley**

- Lot settled in the Jordan Valley when he separated from Abram.
- The Israelites crossed the Jordan River before their conquest and established the river as the boundary between the eastern and western tribes.
- Saul and Jonathan's bodies were hung on the walls of Beit Shan.

1. **Geographic Features and Historical Locations**

- The Jordan River has a meandering shape.
- A 6th century map shows a fording system across the Jordan River and the location of Jericho.
- "Thickets of the Jordan" are a place to hide.
- Old Testament Jericho has an ancient tower dating to before 8000 BC.

- Beit Shan is a location of importance due to its position at the junction of the Jordan and Harod Valleys.
- The Old Testament site of Beit Shan includes remains of the Israelite and Egyptian periods.
- The Decapolis city of Scythopolis grew out of Old Testament Beit Shan and included a theater and baths complexes.

Key Quotes:

- "The term Transjordan is sometimes countered with the term Cisjordan by some geographers."
- "When basalt weathers away, it becomes really excellent soil."
- "Trachonitis means the torn area, and it is that."
- "Damascus is condemned because they threshed Gilead with iron threshing sleds."
- "The sword shall not depart from your house."
- "...you think you're so safe, you too are going to come down."
- "The word Jordan in English comes from Yardane, which comes from Yarad, which means to go down."
- "Beit Shan...is that hinge."

Conclusion:

This lecture provides a comprehensive overview of the regions of Transjordan and the Jordan Valley, emphasizing their geographical, geological, historical, and biblical significance. The lecture highlights the strategic importance of these areas, their involvement in biblical narratives, and their continued relevance to the study of ancient Israel and the surrounding regions. Dr. Phillips successfully utilizes maps, photographs, and specific examples from the biblical text to bring these regions to life. The discussion around the decapolis also highlights the integration of Greek and Roman culture to the biblical lands.

4. Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 10, Transjordan and Jordan Valley

Transjordan and the Jordan Valley: A Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the geographical distinction between Transjordan and Cisjordan, and which area is the focus of this lecture?
2. Describe the geological composition of the Golan Heights, including the type of soil it produces.
3. Why is the Yarmouk Wadi a significant geographical marker?
4. Explain the textual issue related to the location of the healing of the demoniac and how the location of Hippus relates.
5. Why was Gilead a war-torn region in biblical times?
6. What is the significance of the Jabbok Wadi in biblical narrative?
7. What is the Mishor, also known as the Medeba Plateau, and why was it a contested region?
8. Describe the geographical features of Moab and how they contrast with the land of Edom.
9. What is significant about the city of Petra, and what group of people inhabited it?
10. Describe the three regions of the Jordan Valley and identify key cities within the valley.

Quiz Answer Key

1. Transjordan refers to the areas on the east side of the Jordan Valley and Rift Valley, while Cisjordan refers to the west side. The lecture focuses primarily on the regions of Transjordan.
2. The Golan Heights is composed of a basalt outflow over a hard limestone foundation. The weathering of the basalt results in excellent soil, which is good for agriculture and livestock.

3. The Yarmouk Wadi is a major cliff and topographical divider that delineates the area of Bashan from the regions below, including Gilead. It is a significant geographical feature in the area.
4. There is a textual issue regarding the location of the demoniac healing in the Gospels with the places listed as Gergesa, Gadara, or Gerasa, with the best textual choice being Gergesa. The nearby city of Hippus, with its legion that had a swine as a mascot, lends evidence for Gergesa as the correct location.
5. Gilead was a war-torn area because it was frequently contested over by Syria to the northeast and Ammon to the southeast, due to its strategic location and resources. Additionally, there were disputes amongst the Israelite tribes settled in the area.
6. The Jabbok Wadi is the location of Jacob's wrestling match with a divine figure before meeting with Esau, making it a site of significant spiritual and narrative importance. It cuts through the high elevation area known as the Dome of Gilead.
7. The Mishor, also known as the Medeba Plateau, is a flat, level region that was a contested area because of its decent grazing land and strategic positioning, with the Moabites and Ammonites frequently seeking to control it.
8. Moab was located south of the Arnon Wadi, while Edom was situated to the south of the Zered Wadi. Moab was somewhat desirable for its grazing land, while Edom was known for its rugged terrain and copper smelting, with the city of Petra at its center.
9. Petra is a remarkable city carved into beautiful sandstone cliffs by the Nabataeans; it was a major center for their trade and religious activities, later taken over by the Romans. It was considered impregnable due to its rugged, mountainous location.
10. The three regions of the Jordan Valley are the Ghor, the entire width of the rift valley; the Zor, the actual riverbed; and the marl area between the river and the cliff faces. Key cities in the Jordan Valley include Jericho and Beth-Shan (Scythopolis).

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer each question with a well-developed essay of at least three paragraphs with an introduction and conclusion.

1. Discuss the significance of the geographical features of Transjordan and how they influenced the interactions of the various peoples who lived there throughout the biblical period.
2. Analyze the strategic importance of the Jordan Valley, considering its location, resources, and role in both Old and New Testament narratives.
3. Examine the archaeological evidence presented for key sites in Transjordan and the Jordan Valley and explain how these sites enrich our understanding of the biblical texts.
4. Explore the connections between the geological, geographical, and political factors that led to conflict and cooperation in the regions covered by the lecture.
5. Compare and contrast the religious and cultural significance of the various cities and regions in Transjordan and the Jordan Valley, considering both Israelite and non-Israelite perspectives.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Transjordan:** The region east of the Jordan River and the Jordan Valley.
- **Cisjordan:** The region west of the Jordan River and the Jordan Valley.
- **Mount Hermon:** A mountain located north of the region, serving as a significant geographical marker.
- **Bashan:** A region in the northern Transjordan, known for its basalt soil and volcanic history.
- **Golan Heights:** A basalt area with a limestone base, part of Bashan.
- **Yarmouk Wadi:** A major canyon or cliff, dividing Bashan from Gilead.
- **Trachonitis:** A rugged area within the Golan, meaning “torn area.”
- **Golanitis:** The basis for the modern name Golan Heights.

- **Decapolis:** A league of ten Hellenized cities, mostly east of the Jordan, but including one city west of it.
- **Hippus:** A Decapolis city near the Sea of Galilee that had a Roman legion stationed there.
- **Gergesa:** A location on the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee; the most probable site of the demoniac healing.
- **Gadara:** A Decapolis city near the Sea of Galilee.
- **Gerasa:** A Decapolis city located farther to the southeast, likely not the site of the demoniac healing.
- **Gilead:** A region in Transjordan often contested due to its resources and strategic location.
- **Dome of Gilead:** The area of higher elevation in Gilead.
- **Jabbok Wadi:** A significant wadi in Gilead where Jacob wrestled with a divine being.
- **Ammon:** A region south of Gilead, often in conflict with the Israelites.
- **Mishor:** A flat, level area, also known as the Medeba Plateau.
- **Medeba Plateau:** Another name for the Mishor.
- **Moab:** A region south of the Mishor, known for pushing north into the region.
- **Arnon Wadi:** A major wadi dividing the Mishor from Moab.
- **Zered Wadi:** A wadi dividing Moab from Edom.
- **Edom:** A region south of Moab, known for its rugged terrain and copper production.
- **Petra:** A Nabataean city carved into sandstone in Edom, known for its architecture and historical significance.
- **Sikh:** A narrow canyon that serves as the primary entrance to Petra.
- **Sea of Salt (Dead Sea):** A body of water, also known as the Dead Sea, with extremely high salt content.
- **Leshon:** A peninsula protruding into the Dead Sea.
- **Jordan Valley:** The rift valley through which the Jordan River flows.

- **Ghor:** The entire width of the Jordan Valley.
- **Zor:** The actual riverbed of the Jordan River.
- **Marl:** Caked, clay-like sedimentary soil found in the Jordan Valley.
- **Jericho:** A city in the Jordan Valley with both Old Testament and New Testament sites.
- **Beth-Shan (Scythopolis):** An Old Testament city in the Jordan Valley, also a Decapolis city known as Scythopolis in the New Testament period.
- **Tell:** An archaeological mound representing the remains of an ancient city.
- **Neolithic:** The period of the Stone Age between 8000 and 4000 BC.
- **Gaon Hayyardin:** A term meaning "thickets of the Jordan."
- **Cardo:** A main north-south street in a Decapolis city.

5. FAQs on Phillips, Introduction to Biblical Studies, Session 10, Transjordan and Jordan Valley, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Transjordan and the Jordan Valley

1. **What is the significance of the term "Transjordan" and how does it relate to "Cisjordan"?** Transjordan refers to the region east of the Jordan River and the Rift Valley, while Cisjordan refers to the area west of it. The lecture focuses on Transjordan, encompassing regions like Bashan, Gilead, Ammon, Moab, and Edom. These areas were significant in the biblical narrative for various reasons, including territorial disputes and migrations. Cisjordan is mentioned for geographical context, but the course has already covered the areas west of the Jordan in previous sessions.
2. **Can you describe the main regions within Transjordan that were discussed, and what are their key geographical features and historical importance?** The lecture covers several key regions in Transjordan:
 - **Bashan:** Located just south of Mount Hermon, known for its basalt outflows from extinct volcanoes, creating fertile soil suitable for cattle breeding and wine production. It's also known as the Golan Heights. The Yarmouk Wadi marks its southern boundary.
 - **Gilead:** A war-torn area frequently contested between Syria and Ammon. It's where two and a half Israelite tribes settled. Gilead has an upper part, the Dome of Gilead, with limestone formations, and a lower portion with the Jabbok Wadi running through it.
 - **Ammon:** Situated south and west of Gilead, was known for its conflicts with Israel. Its capital was Rabah (now Amman). It borders the Mishor (Meribah Plateau), a flat, contested area.
 - **Moab:** Located south of the Arnon Wadi, a significant geographical divider, known for conflicts with Israel over the Mishor.
 - **Edom:** Located south of Moab, separated by the Zered Wadi. Edom is a mountainous region of limestone and sandstone, known for its copper smelting and the Nabataean city of Petra.

1. **What role did the Decapolis cities play in this region, and can you name some of them?** The Decapolis was a league of ten Hellenized cities located primarily east of the Jordan River (except for Beth-Shan, or Scythopolis), significant for their Roman culture and political influence. Some key Decapolis cities mentioned include Hippus, Gadara, and Gerasa. They featured Roman amenities like theaters, forums, and temples and were important for trade and cultural exchange during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.
2. **How did geographical features, such as wadis, impact the historical events and narratives in the Bible?** Wadis (canyons or valleys formed by rivers) are major geographical dividers in Transjordan and play a critical role in historical events. For instance:
 - The **Yarmouk Wadi** separates Bashan from Gilead and was a major cliff and geographical divider.
 - The **Jabbok Wadi** cut through the Dome of Gilead, a site where Jacob wrestled with God.
 - The **Arnon Wadi** divided Moab and the Mishor, as well as Moab and Edom.
 - The **Zered Wadi** separated Moab from Edom and the Mishor. These geographical features also created natural borders and strategic locations that were often points of contention and military engagements.
1. **What is the significance of remote Gilead, and how did it feature in the Old Testament narratives?** Remote Gilead was a contested area at a strategic junction on the Transjordanian Highway. It was a place fought over by Syria and Israel. Several military narratives in 1 Kings 20 and 21 mention this area. It is also the area from where Jehu was anointed as king.
2. **How did the Israelites interact with the peoples of Transjordan during their journey to Canaan, and what conflicts arose?** The Israelites encountered various peoples in Transjordan. They asked permission to pass through Edom and Moab, but were denied, forcing them to go around these areas. They battled the Amorite king at Heshbon, conquered them, and then settled in that area, leading to tensions between Israelite tribes and the surrounding nations, and in fact, to internal Israelite conflict over land boundaries.

3. **What are some of the main features of the Jordan Valley, and what does the name "Jordan" signify?** The Jordan Valley is a significant geological rift running from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea, with a considerable drop in elevation. The name "Jordan" comes from the Hebrew word "Yarad," meaning "to go down," reflecting the valley's descent. The valley is divided into three regions: the *Ghor* (the entire width of the valley), the *Zor* (the riverbed), and the *marl* (the area between the river and the cliff face). Jericho and Beth-Shan/Scythopolis are significant cities within this valley, important both in the Old and New Testaments. The Jordan River itself is not huge and is characterized by its meandering course and thickets on the edges of its riverbed.
4. **How has the Dead Sea changed over time, and why is it also called the Sea of Salt?** The Dead Sea is called the Sea of Salt due to its extremely high salt content (around 35%). This high salinity is due to the evaporation of water, leaving behind minerals, especially salt. The water level of the Dead Sea has significantly decreased over the last 40 years due to reduced water inflow from the Jordan River (caused by drought and human usage of the water), leading to the disappearance of salt pillars and a reduction in the surface area of the water. It's called Yam HaMelech in Hebrew, which literally translates to Sea of Salt.