

Dr. Elaine Phillips, Historical Geography Intro.: Lecture 4 – Plains & Shephelah

This is Dr. Elaine Phillips doing her first lecture on historical geography on the plains and the Shephelah of Israel. Dr. Phillips and her husband Perry have taught at the Jerusalem University College for many, many years, as well as at Gordon College. Dr. Elaine Phillips.

We're continuing our course in historical geography, and one of the things we noticed at the beginning of the introductory lecture is that this is the land between. And so what we're going to do this time is look at some of the foreign influences that are outside and that are making life a little difficult for the people of God as they're planted in this land between. When you read the Book of the Covenant, we find out that God used these foreign influences around and foreign powers around Israel when they were disobedient to bring them to a state of discipline in which he would chastise them, and that was in order to bring them back into a covenant relationship with him.

And so we're going to look at some of these foreign influences today. We're going to take a look at the Shephelah. We'll look at our maps, and then we'll move north and look at how Phoenicia has brought in the dreadful threat of Baal worship into the northern kingdom, particularly.

We will look at the threats from the northeast from Syria or Aram, as it is in the biblical text, and then finally we'll move ahead into the New Testament period and see how Roman Caesarea has an impact on the land, both in terms of bringing Roman Greco-Roman influence in and then also being the place from which the gospel goes forth. So let's look at these four areas, focus on them, but before we do that, just a brief review. We looked at this land as it was, right, a small little slice right here in between some major influences, and we found that it was a testing ground of faith for God's people as they were planted in this land.

Focusing in just a little bit more we saw that there's the hill country in which these people were planted, most of them in fact settled in this hill country area and we noticed that Jerusalem is right about here and it's smack dab in the middle of the hill country, a much more isolated area which means it's much more protected and then also the agriculture was good particularly when the people were obedient and then God shed rain upon them from the heavens and they had good agricultural produce. All these things, of course, were tenuous, and they lived in a region that was marginal, and therefore we do have, as we've said earlier, the testing ground of faith. Looking where we're going next, as I already intimated in the introductory statements, we have some areas that we need to look at particularly.

First of all, we look at the Philistine plain in that white oval down there, and we'll look at the Shephelah region because that's just to the east of the Philistine plain. Here's the plain area. Here we have those foothills before we get into the hill country, particularly, and as I've noted here, Shephelah is a Hebrew word, and it actually means low or reduced, if you will, and therefore it's referring to the foothills, the western foothills of this hill country area.

What it becomes is a buffer zone. We're familiar with the term buffer zone, the major power in the coastal plain, and particularly in the early time of Israel settlement, this would have been the Philistines. They were threatening to the people who were lodged and settled in the hill country area, and the buffer zone works both ways.

When God's people are stronger, they manage to push out through that buffer zone. When we have the Philistines being empowered, as it were, they will push in through the buffer zone as well. We will also look at Samaria and particularly the northern kingdom.

Here's Samaria right here in this blue square. Phoenicia, a major power in that area, from which Baal worship is going to come. The cities of Tiro and Sidon are important in that context, and right in between, we have Mount Carmel, and so that will be the second major area that we're going to look at.

The third thing we're going to focus on will be, as I said earlier, Syria to the northeast. They will always be trying to focus on the major city of remote Gilead. We'll look at that a little bit later on, and Israel, the northern kingdom of Israel will be trying to defend that city and so that's going to be a focal point and then as I said a moment ago we'll focus as well in the New Testament period and beyond on the city of Caesarea where the Romans got a foothold or a toehold in the land itself.

So these are the four places that we're going to focus on as we look at Israel contesting foreign influences in one fashion or another. First of all, the Philistine plain and the Shephelah. Here's another look at our area that we want to look at, and the thing that we want to focus on right here is the five Philistine cities.

These are very important to know. Gaza is first right out there on the southern coastal plain. Then we have Ashkelon next, also a major Philistine city.

Ashdod slightly inland and still significant. We'll see each of these showing in a set of important narratives that we're going to talk about. Moving farther inland, we are going to have Gath right on the edge of the Shephelah foothills area and then finally Ekron itself.

These cities will be mentioned, as I said, in significant narratives, and it's important that we have those in mind. Notice as well if you can see the map, we've got red lines going through here, and these are the two branches of the international route that goes through the land. The coastal branch itself is going to be coming through our cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and then it'll meet up at a juncture of Aphek.

We'll talk more about that a little later on. There is the inland branch that hugs the foothills as well, and as we can see, that will go through Gath and Ekron. So important cities to keep in mind, and particularly cities that are pentapolis, the league of five cities for the Philistines.

One of the things we want to note about this area is that, because it is more open to foreign influences, the Philistines, after all, are a people group who come from across the Mediterranean Sea; these are people who are more cosmopolitan. They're wealthier, they have all the things that go along with supposedly a higher level of civilization and culture, and as we're going to see, they are, in some cases, attractive to the Israelites. We're going to be thinking about Samson and the narratives of Samson, particularly, because he is enticed by that Philistine culture.

So much more cosmopolitan area, also more powerful, has the advantages, as we're going to see, of some advanced weaponry that the Israelites don't have. So think of that as kind of the cultural clash. If you want to think of a comparison, we're talking here about something that might be the New York City area and that whole eastern seaboard, and what that represents to people who live up in the mountains in Vermont, New Hampshire, or upstate New York.

There's a contrast, there's a cultural contrast there. As we think about this Philistine area, obviously, they have to have ways to get into the hill country. In our day and age, you could just hop in a car and drive up the hills, and no matter what, you'd get there.

It was not all that easy then because in some ways these very rugged hills in the hill country served as a natural defense for the people who lived there and so there are certain ways that made it easier to get in and they happen to be a series of valleys that cut west to east through the Shephelah area and we're going to look at those in a little bit more focus right now. You can see them outlined in yellow, and we're going to focus on the three northernmost ones because they're going to be important for some of the stories that we have. First of all, we've got the Aijalon Valley, sometimes pronounced Aijalon, depending on what text you're reading, what translation you're reading, and you want to also note that there are cities that are fairly significant with regard to each one of these valleys.

They serve in some ways as defensive cities. For the Aijalon Valley, our major city is Gezer, and this will be important in a number of areas. We won't note it quite so

much in our stories today, but keep Gezer in mind as you continue to read the biblical text because it's an awfully important city.

In fact, it serves as a bit of a crossroads. If you're going on that international route that I was talking about earlier, that runs north-south, kind of going up and down like so, to get into the hill country from the north, you would swing in at Gezer. That becomes our crossroads, and therefore, we've got some important things that are going to go on in Gezer.

In fact, when Solomon, years after the period that we're really going to be talking about today, when Solomon takes over the kingdom, one of the cities that he fortifies is Gezer because he knows how absolutely significant it is. So Gezer is important. Moving south in terms of our valleys that are access routes from the Philistine Plain into the hill country, we have the Sorek Valley.

For our purposes, there are other cities that are important here too, but for our purposes, we're going to note the two cities of Timna on the one hand, and that's going to be right about here, and then Beit Shemesh right about in this location. Timna is out here a little bit farther to the west, Beit Shemesh farther to the east. Again, there will be two narratives that are going to focus on around those cities, so we're going to want to notice them.

They look really close together, but they're going to be sort of worlds apart in terms of cultural influences. And then finally our third valley that we want to focus on in terms of our narratives is called the Ela Valley and the important city that we're going to note here is going to be the city of Azekah right about there and again a narrative that's fairly significant, one that we know well from our Sunday school stories will unfold in the Ela Valley, but you'll want to note Azekah. Again, cities here are important because they're the ones that show up in the biblical text, and they are in some ways the guards or the guardians as one makes their way from the west to the east up towards the hill country.

Let's pick up our first narrative that unfolds in the Shephelah area. This is going to be particularly interesting because it's the Samson narrative. Samson gets a lot of press in the book of Judges.

As you can see, chapters 13 through 16 are given over to Samson, and one of the reasons for that, I would suggest, is that Samson is going to be a major confronter of the Philistines. The Judges are raised up by God to deal with foreign threats from around about them, but the Philistines will probably be high profile here because they're going to be looking forward to what happens when Saul and David, especially, begin to establish the kingdom. It's going to be the Philistine threat that those two are going to be involved with.

So Samson is kind of setting the stage for this. Samson, as we know from our stories of him and reading the biblical text, is a very interesting character. He's one who was designated prior to his birth as a Nazirite.

Nazirites were set aside to do the work of God, and therefore, he's called to that. His mother and his father are made aware of this whole mission that he has. Chapter 13 is given over to the visit from the angel of the Lord, who appears first to Manoah's wife, Samson's mother, and then finally to Manoah himself.

The Nazirites were supposed to be living a fairly, shall we say, rigidly constrained lifestyle. They could not come in contact with death, their hair was not to be cut, and they also could not partake of any products of the vine. As we see as we read these narratives, Samson managed to break most of those particular aspects of the vow, and of course, the hair will be the major issue here.

For our purposes, we're not going to focus so much on that, although we need to know the background for that. What we want to note is that Samson, who is from the town of Zora, which is right about here, is in the tribe of Dan, by the way. Tribal area of Dan, interestingly enough, was originally given territory in between this coastal plain area and the hill country itself.

Part of that tribe of Dan is going to migrate later on in the book of Judges, but at any rate, they're here at this point, and Samson is from Zora. Notice this is farther to the east than Timna. There is Timna.

It says that Samson went down to Timna, and of course, what does he do there? He finds a Philistine woman. He's enticed by these things that appear to be more cosmopolitan, much more appealing. Often, when we teach the Samson narrative, one of the things we want to note is how threatening this is to each individual as we come in contact with things that look appealing on the surface, and for Samson, his downfall continued to be the attraction of Philistine women.

The first one was a woman from Timna. As he goes down there, his parents are a bit horrified, but he says, "There's a woman there. I want her."

His parents say, why can't you have a nice Jewish girl to marry, an Israelite woman? But he puts the pressure on, and so they arrange this marriage. In God's providence, and of course, as we work our way through the book of Judges, one of the things we see is that God in His sovereignty continually uses even the sinful nature of people to bring about His purposes, and this is certainly true of Samson, because even though he's enticed by women that are Philistines of the enemy, as those narratives unfold, he brings havoc into the Philistines because he'll end up killing a fair number of them. He ties foxes' tails together, sets them on fire, and burns up Philistine fields, grain fields, and there's an ongoing tit-for-tat situation here, and Samson also uses his, or

maybe I should say God uses Samson's tendency to get revenge to bring judgment upon the Philistines.

So this is what's going on with that first setting of narratives. The sad part of this is, however, that not only is judgment brought upon Philistines, but we see, as a result of the way this narrative with this Philistine woman unfolds, that he kind of abandons her, and there's a long story at the end of chapter 14 that you can read your way through with that. When he goes back to find her, it turns out she's been given to one of the people who was a companion of his when he had deserted the case, and then later on, as a result of his vengeance against the Philistines, his former wife and her father are killed by the Philistines.

So there are some very ugly things that are part of this story. As Samson continues to venture into Philistine territory, enticed by women, enticed by the contemporary culture around him, he goes down to Gaza, again, farther on down the coast, beyond where our map is right here, as a matter of fact, and there he finds a prostitute. Again, not a savory narrative, but one of the things that we notice in terms of our geography is that as the Philistines are about to get him in the middle of the night, he gets up, he takes the doors and the gates and the bars of the city and carries them all the way up to Hebron, which is no mean task because Gaza is down in the sea level area, and as he's carrying these things, he's going up to Hebron or Hebron, and this is some 2,500 feet above sea level.

So Samson is demonstrating his physical prowess and the extraordinary strength that he has been given, although this doesn't accomplish much other than to demonstrate that. It doesn't really do anything against Philistines. In some ways, we might say that Samson, maybe towards the end of his life, is beginning to try to go home because he makes his way away from Gaza, which is sort of the farthest he had gotten from home, both geographically and possibly spiritually as well, and he heads back to the Surak Valley, but he still is in a dalliance with a Philistine woman, her name this time is Delilah, and we read the narrative of Delilah and how she entices him and then continues to harangue him until finally he gives in and tells her the source of his strength, and the Philistines do come upon him, cut his hair, and they take him prisoner back down to Gaza, and as we see in the Samson narrative, even in his death, which is a horrifying death, he's in the temple with their god down there, he will say, Dear God, for my eyes, which have been put out, in other words, his spirit of vengeance, one last time he appeals to, but God will use that to bring death to the Philistines who are gathered in that temple at that point in time.

So Samson's life is a puzzle. It's a puzzle in terms of God's using someone who is so set on himself, so awash in vengeance, so awash in his own passions, and yet God does indeed use him. As we see it unfold in the geography, we do see yet another very helpful aspect because we see the cultural clash and contrast, even in a very small geographical area, between the Philistines and the Israelites.

Moving along, still staying in the Shephelah area ultimately, although we have to move a little bit north in order to get the set of this story as it starts, we're going to have a situation in 1 Samuel, chapters 1 through 4, where the Ark of the Covenant, I should say chapters 4 through 6, sorry, the Ark of the Covenant, which had been in Shiloh, right up here in the hill country, again, keep in mind, hill country is isolated, it's protected, it's defensible, perfect place for the Ark, God's Ark, which is, of course, representative of his dwelling in their midst. Here it is, it's in a protected location, it's in Shiloh, the high priest is Eli, but as we note, there is a major incursion. If you follow the arrows here, we see the Philistines who have come on up to Aphek, where the junction of the western branch of our international coastal route kind of meets up with the eastern branch, and there's a reason for that.

If you look at Aphek and then you see Yarkon right here, that's the Yarkon River, and so you couldn't easily, with your troops or with your commercial establishments, whatever, you couldn't get across that river, and therefore they would have to come to this point of Aphek. That means that controlling Aphek is very important, and therefore the Philistines are encamped at Aphek, and there will be a major battle between a series of battles, I should say, between the Philistines at Aphek and the Israelites at Ebenezer. That's the background for this narrative, and as you remember, particularly after losing the battle to the Philistines, the Israelites say, oh well, if we had the Ark here with us, things would go a whole lot better, and of course what we're seeing here is what I've got in brackets up there, and that is reducing the sense of the holiness and the awesome majestic presence of God as represented in the Ark, and then abusing it, assuming that they could use it as sort of a magic thing and take it out, and that would just assume, they would assume that that would win the battle for them.

Of course, that's utter presumption, and they do indeed lose the battle in the area of Aphek and Ebenezer. Major clash there, the Philistines capture the Ark, and it is indeed taken to the Philistine cities of Ashdod first, and then Gath, and then finally Ekron, and of course again, remembering those narratives, first it's taken to Ashdod, the centerpiece of Philistine culture. It's lodged in the temple there, and of course, that's a statement that's meant to say, our God is better than your God.

He is now lodged in the house of our God, Dagon, but of course, as we read that narrative, Dagon falls over and breaks apart, and therefore the Ark of the Covenant is indeed demonstrated to be representative of the God of the Israelites, who is, of course, sovereign and superior. In addition to that, the Philistines are plagued with some horrible outbreaks, and therefore, they want more than anything else to get rid of this particular thing. They send it first to Gath, and then to Ekron.

Notice it's moving slowly towards home, as it were. Each of those cities undergoes an outbreak of the same kind of problem, and at that point they consult their priests

and their diviners, and they say, " What are we supposed to do here anyway? And of course, those priests and diviners have a very interesting sense of what this God of the Israelite demands, because they know enough to say, we need to send it back with a guilt offering. And so they do indeed do that.

For our geographical purposes, what's important here is that from Ekron, right here, you've got the Ark going up this Zorek Valley, and it's going to go past Timna, the place we talked about before. It's going to round a bit of a corner and come to Beit Shemesh. And as you can imagine, the people of Beit Shemesh, the Israelites who are there, they've been living in a very much of a border area, right? Because we had Beit Shemesh here, that's where Zora was when the tribe of Dan and Samson was here.

So here is the frontier, the boundary. And so they're really close, and they're watching this Ark coming back up the Zorek Valley on a cart. And as we read the story, the Philistines say, if that cart, which is drawn by cows that have calves back in the barn, if that continues to go straight forward, then we know that this is the Ark of the Lord.

Now, one last thing that we probably need to note in regard to this particular story is that once it gets to Beit Shemesh, God's people there actually have less sense of the sacredness and the sanctity of the Ark than did the Philistines, because they open it up, peek into it, and it has very deleterious effects in terms of their well-being as well. A number of them are killed. But at least that gives us a sense again of the geography and how it works, because hill country area, I repeat, is defensible, very easily protected, isolated, a place where the Ark should have stayed, as all the people are going to worship it.

But instead, it has made its way out here. Nevertheless, God will manage to bring it back, or the people will manage to have it come back via the Philistines sending it back. Let's move away from that, down farther south.

We're moving from that Sorek Valley now into the Ela Valley, one more step south. And again, a lesson that we want to draw on, and one that we probably remember well from our Sunday school background, is David, who is a small, young man, has been anointed king already, but Saul is still in effect the king, and David is going to come into conflict with Goliath, our giant. Now, it helps to understand this narrative a little bit more if we get a sense of, again, the geography of what's going on.

So first of all, here's Bethlehem, right up there smack dab in the hill country where that arrow is focusing in. David is from Bethlehem. David's father is there.

In fact, David has been shepherding the sheep while his brothers are out with the Israelite army, and Saul is trying to hold off the Philistine encroachment because, again, this Ela Valley would be one of the avenues that the Philistines would use to

get right up into the hill country in the area of Bethlehem. Why is the hill country so attractive to them? Well, for one thing, it is, as I said earlier, agriculturally productive. It's there that you would have wonderful vines and vineyards for the great products.

Olive trees. You have these things in the Shephelah, but not nearly as productive as you have up in the hill country. So this would be an area that would be very appealing to the Philistines, for that reason, not least of which is that just controlling it is also important for them.

Therefore, it's not at all surprising that David's father, Jesse, is interested in sending David down into the area where the battle or the standoff has been taking place to see how the brothers are doing, because Bethlehem is going to be fairly vulnerable if that line breaks. So the Israelite forces are protecting the hill country settlements. The Philistines are encamped between Soko and Azekah right out there.

Don't know exactly where the Israelites are in between them, but it's probably somewhere right at the edge of where the hill country starts between the hill country and the Shephelah area. And as we said a moment ago, there's a standoff. Saul's the one who should have been fighting.

We learned from the narratives that Saul is a person who is head taller than all the rest of the Israelites. And so if we think of how this narrative unfolds, Goliath is big, and it should have been Saul who fought him, but he hasn't been going out when Goliath issues that challenge that says, "Let one person come out and fight me." Saul has not been doing it.

David shows up. His brothers are angry at him, but nevertheless, he soon finds out what the issue is. He goes and picks up five stones, and he wipes out the Philistines.

And one of the things he says is it's the hand of a living God that will take care of this. And God, I'm sorry, David consistently refers to God as the living God as this narrative unfolds, and he faces Goliath in that context. If we kind of look at it on the ground, if you will, we're standing on the location of Azekah, and we're looking towards the east.

So here we are. The Elah Valley kind of makes a dog leg right around, like so, and then it goes up in this area right here. We can see when you look at that little satellite dish, that might give you a little sense in terms of perhaps where the Israelite army was and where this confrontation took place.

On the horizon, we see the Judean country, and so you see that long ridge down there, and Bethlehem would have been right about in this area right here. So if we're standing on Azekah, and if Soko is this hill here, then you've got the Philistine army

all around this particular leg of the valley. You've got Israelites encamped here, and so you can get a fairly good idea of where this confrontation took place and where David finally wiped out Goliath.

As the Philistines begin to flee, they race out of the Elah Valley, and it says they flee all the way to Gath, and so they're moving westward, and therefore, at this point, then the Israelites are gaining a little bit more space in the buffer zone between themselves and the Philistines out in the coastal plain. So that closes down for now our first area of confrontation between Israel, God's people, and the foreign influences, particularly in that Philistine coastal plain area, and we've looked at three narratives that give us some illustrations of that. The problems don't stop, by the way, with the Philistines.

They're still there, but we're going to leave them and move north at this point and get a little bit of a sense of what happens somewhat later on, actually, during the divided monarchy, between the northern kingdom and what we have in the threat from Phoenicia. So let's see how this works. After the division of the kingdom, you have several dynasties.

They don't last terribly long. You finally have a general and an army whose name is Omri, and things have been a little bit in flux up until this point in terms of where the capital has been located, but Omri moves his capital to Samaria. It had been in the area of Shechem, first of all, then went to Tirza for a little bit, kind of moved across here for just a short time, but he's going to move it out to Samaria.

This is extremely significant. It doesn't look like it on the map, but one of the things that helps us when we look at geography is to see that, actually, in moving that small distance west, Omri is basically opening his arms and he's embracing the western culture more. Samaria is a much more open area.

From our perspective, it doesn't really make a whole lot of sense because, again, we get through geography a lot more easily over it with cars and boats and all that sort of thing if we're on the ocean. Not so in that context. And so if you have more of an open, low, foothills, rolling area, this is an area that's going to be much more accessible.

And so Omri is making an intentional move to draw in western influences. And of course, what's going to be the major Western influence? It's going to be Phoenicia. Omri's son Ahab will marry a Phoenician princess whose name is, of course, Jezebel.

And together, Jezebel and Ahab do something that's really insidious. In fact, it's worse than that. It's downright treacherous in terms of the religion of the northern kingdom.

Already after the split in the kingdom, Jeroboam had introduced golden calf worship and so forth, but that at least was trying to be a semblance of Yahweh worship. Now, with Ahab and Jezebel, they pretty much bring in Baal worship. Baal has been around +654 up the prophet Elijah to contest the Baal worship that was coming from the Phoenician area.

Again, Tyre and Sidon are our major cities. And of course, what's really interesting is that we're going to have Mount Carmel here as our major, what shall we say, staging ground for this. I've already noted that Baal worship is a state religion.

And when you think of Phoenicia to the north, off our little map right here for now, and you think of Samaria, because of the political threats from Syria, which we're going to look at a little bit later on, and also Phoenicia, even though there were tribes that were given land up in this area as inheritance, tribe of Asher right here, in effect, the people of Phoenicia had pretty much pushed south. And therefore, Mount Carmel, fairly significantly high mountain range right here, Mount Carmel had become pretty much the boundary, the geopolitical boundary between Phoenicia and this northern kingdom of Israel. This will become significant, and then we need to say more about what Mount Carmel is like, but think of the political boundary as well.

So it's going to be pretty close to Baal's turf politically. It's also going to be close to Baal's turf in other ways as well. Just a quick look at some areas of Samaria itself.

Later on, this whole Acropolis section of the Tell of Samaria is littered with some temples and major royal establishments. If we had time, we would look at Herod's Temple to Augustus and the implications of that. There's the foundation of it.

But for our purposes, and I think actually we saw that last time when we looked at the central arena, for our purposes, we are interested in this Israelite citadel area because there have been some very interesting finds there that indicate the opulence of the northern kingdom royalty. Lots of Phoenician ivories, imports found here. So that gives us a sense that they had really adopted Phoenician culture, even with their artistic remains that are there.

Well, as I said a moment ago, because of this situation of Baal worship being so deeply implanted by Ahab and Jezebel, God raises up Elijah. In 1 Kings 17, we see him coming on the scene fairly dramatically. The name Elijah itself is important.

You see in the last part of it the short form of Yahweh, and then Eli is my God. So even in Elijah's name, he's drawing together the significance of God as covenant Lord. And of course, the people themselves, once Elijah demonstrates the power of God over Baal, the people themselves who had been sitting on the fence will say, "The Lord, he is God."

The Lord, he is God. But let's see how this works geographically. If you look at this promontory here of Mount Carmel, as it juts out into the Mediterranean Sea, we notice that geologically it has some kind of rock that will decay, not decay, deteriorate into good soils, wonderful soils up there.

It also gets more rainfall because it is at a higher elevation, and so it's prime territory for beautiful, lush growth. That's important. And one of the things we see as we move beyond our narrative in 1 Kings and just kind of look at some of the prophetic material is that when God is bringing judgment on his people, Amos will refer to this, Nahum will refer to this, the top of Carmel withers.

When the top of Carmel withers, things are bad because this area, again, is normally one that's very lush and very productive. If the top of Carmel is withering, there is judgment. And of course, that's going to be the case in our Elijah situation because there had been no rain for three and a half years at the word of Elijah as he's speaking for the Lord.

Now, as we can see this story unfolding, Elijah, first of all, by the way, has gone eastward, and then he goes right up into the home territory of Baal worship itself, and he hides in Phoenicia for a while, which is a slap in Baal's face too. When he comes back down, and the confrontation is arranged between the prophets of Baal and, on one hand, the prophet Elijah, on the other, he asks for it to happen on Mount Carmel, and it is indeed a perfect stage. One of the reasons for that is that Baal was the god of storm and thunder, and therefore rainfall, and therefore agricultural productivity.

And the whole idea of fertility was enhanced in the minds of the people as they got into Baal worship by Baal and his consort having intercourse together, and that was supposed to produce fertility and rainfall and all these kinds of things. So it was a very ugly kind of worship situation that was happening here. Again, Elijah is confronting it, and this is a stage because Mount Carmel is right next to the Mediterranean Sea, and the clouds are going to come in over Mount Carmel.

So it's taking place on Baal's turf. One of the things we notice as we read this narrative is that the prophets of Baal and Asherah are trying their hardest to get Baal to respond. He doesn't.

And finally, Elijah, in the face of having three and a half years of no rain, takes water, pours it all over his sacrifices, and then calls down fire from the Lord, which does indeed consume the offerings. But that, of course, is not the end of the story. In accordance with the regulations and the Torah in Deuteronomy 13, these prophets who had been leading God's people astray were to die.

And therefore, Elijah says, take them down to Kishon's Brook, and there let them be slain. And of course, just to the northeast, right here, draining the whole of the Jezreel Valley is the Kishon Brook washing out to the Mediterranean Sea. In some ways, you might want to push it a little bit symbolically and say, in shedding the blood of those prophets, it's going to wash clean all this filth that had been part of the whole situation in the northern kingdom.

The degradation was part of that. It washes out to the sea. Then, of course, what's interesting is that Elijah stays up on the mountain for a bit.

And as he prays and as his young servant is watching, the clouds boil up from the Mediterranean Sea, and there is a huge storm. And God indeed does bring rain. Ahab runs for Jezreel.

I should say Ahab takes his chariot to Jezreel. Elijah will run after him. At that point in Jezreel, Jezebel's still a major force.

And Elijah's afraid. And so Elijah will run for his life. But he goes in the right direction.

He'll go back down to Mount Sinai. He'll go to the source of the covenant, Mount Horeb, Mount Sinai, the same location. And there he will meet with God.

And God will say, " You know, there are still those who have not bowed the knee to Baal, and I've still got three things for you to do." So that kind of draws some closure. By the way, one of those things is to anoint the prophet Elisha, about whom we're going to be speaking a little bit later on.

So don't lose sight of that connection. Elisha will pick up the prophetic mantle of Elijah. And he, too, will, at least for part of his ministry, have a base at Mount Carmel.

Just some interesting things that we can look at in terms of scenery, if you will. There's a lovely little Carmelite monastery on the top of Mount Carmel to commemorate this, and a statue of Elijah. And it's not a placid, peaceful statue.

This is Elijah taking care of the prophets of Baal. Down here, we have the Key Shone Brook, which is at the base, right next to the major road, the base of Mount Carmel here. And then finally, we get a look across the bay to the north of Mount Carmel, the Akko Bay, of our whole promontory as it juts out into the Mediterranean Sea, appropriately overshadowed by some very significant rain clouds at this point.

Let's take a move away from our Phoenicia threat, or contesting foreign influence on the west, and move east, just briefly, to see what happens on the eastern front. First of all, to look at a little bit of a map, keeping in mind here we've got Damascus, and

therefore our Syrian influences are there. Here's remote Gilead, by the way, and I want to just say a little bit more about that.

Remote means high place, and so this is an elevated location. Gilead is this larger region here, so it's the high place of Gilead, and in effect, it's an important strategic location to hold. Why? Well, the suggestion is that coming through remote Gilead from the south is the Transjordanian Highway going right up to Damascus, which, of course, is a hub for all sorts of traffic moving from Mesopotamia down this area.

So our Transjordanian Highway is going right along here. It's going to be significant for commerce, it's going to be significant for military enterprise, and also at this point, we're going to have a major crossroads. Remember, we mentioned a crossroads at Gezer down here.

Here's a crossroads that's going to bring a trunk route over into Israel and connect beyond Jezreel with our coastal highway. So remote Gilead is key to hanging on to. The people from Syria know this, the people from Israel know this.

So again, a very important location between Syria and Israel. Damascus is going to want to control remote Gilead, and there's going to be an ongoing set of battles between the forces of the Aramaeans or the Syrians from Damascus and then people from the northern kingdom of Samaria. They will be fighting at remote Gilead.

And again, just to reiterate, it's significant to hold that, to get that toehold over there on the eastern side of the Jordan. We're just going to look at two narratives. Let's just do one of these at a time.

The first one is important because it connects us with Ahab again. We've already talked about Ahab in conjunction with Jezebel, with the prophets of Baal. Ahab continues to be king in the northern kingdom.

And as we read in 1 Kings 22, at one point in time, he's going to establish an alliance with the southern king Jehoshaphat. Now, fascinating narrative there. This alliance was not viewed kindly by God speaking through his prophets, but nevertheless, Jehoshaphat is at this point in time thinking that he wants to help Ahab.

I will leave the details of that narrative because it has some fairly theologically interesting issues, and simply note that it is going to take place in the area of remote Gilead. That's what they're fighting for to hang on to. One of the things that we see is that a prophet has told Ahab that he's going to meet his death there.

Nevertheless, Ahab, in utter rejection of that word, goes to fight anyway, and he thinks he can fake God out by going in disguise and having Jehoshaphat be the apparent king. But as you see the narrative unfold, Ahab will lose his life as someone

shoots him, quote unquote, randomly. And Jehoshaphat, although he's chased initially by the Syrians, says, I'm not the one you're looking for.

And so he will escape with his life. The second one we want to notice in terms of a confrontation at the place of remote Gilead is a little bit later on in the history of Israel. We have Jehu, who is going to be like a predecessor earlier on, Omri, a commander of the army.

Omri was a commander who became king. Jehu was also an army commander who was anointed king. And he's anointed king while he's fighting at remote Gilead.

So again, just gives us an indication of how absolutely significant this particular location is for the Israelites to hold. Lots of things unfold with regard to the Jehu narrative. After he's anointed, it turns out that the major forces here, the king of the northern kingdom at that point, his name is Jehoram, and his relative, Ahaziah from the south, are indeed resting at Jezreel, because Jehoram has been wounded.

And so Jehu is out there on the front fighting. He's anointed by a prophet, an unnamed prophet. And then he will drive to Jezreel.

And at that point, he is going to take care of, and by that I mean eliminate, the rest of the household of Ahab. And this is the judgment that is brought on Ahab as God had decreed earlier. Much more to say about that, but we need to move on.

So one last area where the Israelites, and now we're talking about Jews since we're talking about the New Testament period, and Christians for that matter, will come in contact with foreign influences. Let's look at Roman Caesarea. First of all, a map to give us a little sense.

We're talking about the coastal plain instead of the Philistine Plain at this point down here. We're now going to be talking about the portion of the coastal plain that is called the Sharon Plain. Herod the Great is our major force in establishing Caesarea.

And notice it's named after Caesar. So Herod, of course, who was made king by the Roman Senate, pays his allegiance over and over and over again in his building projects to the people to whom he owes his kingship. We'll say more about Herod a little bit later on when we talk about the Galilee, but let's, for this point, just say that one of the things that Herod did as a puppet king of Rome was to do lots and lots and lots of building.

The Herod family had money. They had money, but they couldn't, as most kings do, spend it by going to war, because he was a puppet king. But Herod is going to invest it in building projects.

The land of Israel is littered with footprints of Herod's building projects. And we might say, if we want to derive some kind of a lesson for this, that Herod was building his kingdom. You can see it over and over again.

Very busy building his kingdom. Of course, the question we have to keep asking ourselves is whose kingdoms are we building as we work our way through our lives? I'll say more about that in a moment. But Herod is building his kingdom.

Caesarea is going to be a major, major point in this whole prospect. As you know from listening to the Jerusalem lecture, Herod has established a major temple complex in Jerusalem. He establishes fortresses all over the place.

He'll have, as we'll see, a temple up in Galilee. But Caesarea is key for him because he sees it as the point of access to bring Roman culture into what Herod perceived as pretty much a backwater. He sees Judea as a backwater.

He, too, like Samson, was enticed by a very cosmopolitan culture. And he wants to build up Caesarea to bring that Roman culture and really raise the level of Judea to something that he thinks it should be. So he starts primarily from scratch.

It was a little town called Stratos Tower at that point. Josephus tells us that. But Herod builds it up from scratch.

Builds a temple to Augusta, has a theater, and has aqueducts to supply water. It's a major, major location. But our key thing to keep in mind is, as I've said here, his intent is to bring culture into the backwater.

In God's providence, we have a 180-degree turnaround because it is from Caesarea that the gospel will head out to all parts of the Mediterranean Sea and the Roman Empire. As we look at Caesarea as well, we want to think a little bit about Herod Agrippa. This is the descendant of Herod.

After Herod's death, we have some of his sons taking over. Herod Antipas, Herod Philip, and Archelaus down south. But then, after that, we have Agrippa being king again for a short while.

And there's going to be an incident that takes place in Caesarea that we're going to look at in a little bit more detail as we compare what the Book of Acts says with what Josephus tells us about Herod Agrippa. So, Caesarea, let's have a quick look at it and then again keep asking ourselves the lesson that we want to learn from this as we look at these stone ruins and remains. Whose kingdoms are we busy building? Here's a little bit of a diagram of what Herod's Caesarea probably looked like, sketching it.

And we're going to look at some aspects of this. I mentioned the temple, first of all. Here's the temple of Augustus and Rome that Herod built.

And one of the things that we notice is it's oriented towards the west. All we have left of that, by the way, are the foundations of it. So this is a hypothetical reconstruction.

But oriented to the west because, as Herod wanted people in Caesarea to conceive it, this city focused on its patron, Rome. And as he conceived of it, the Mediterranean Sea was a Roman lake. Now, right next to that temple was a huge, huge harbor.

Herod constructed a harbor. We're going to see little bits of it as we look at an aerial photograph because they've been able to excavate this area and see the absolute mammoth size of this harbor. It is huge.

Although it may be an exaggeration, I believe it's Josephus who says that the Roman army, sorry, the Roman fleet could indeed rest in this harbor. The harbor entrance is up here, wisely so, because prevailing winds are from the southwest and therefore you could enter on this side. Two huge statues stood on pillars here.

Some people suggest that Herod was probably trying to imitate the harbor at Alexandria, which also had a remarkable lighthouse. A couple of other things to notice in this that we're going to look at. In addition to this harbor structure, which was a monumental undertaking, we also have within Herod's Caesarea a palace built on a promontory jutting right out into the Mediterranean Sea.

What was a remarkable palace. Apparently, you could enter by boat at this point and not have to enter by land. Probably the suggestion is that I shouldn't recall being in prison in Caesarea.

It would have been in this general area, in this palace area. We also want to note the fact that Herod had a hippodrome, and he also started a theater, which was enhanced later on in the second century. Well, let's have a little bit of a look at this.

As you look at the coastline in the 1970s, here's the current residual harbor area. There's a breakwater right there, very small. I'll show you an aerial in a moment, which will give an indication of the fairly small size of that, in contrast to Herod's Harbor.

Right in here is where the amphitheater, later on, was excavated. Let's get some points out here. And then here's the promontory on which the palace has been found.

Lots of archaeology has been done since the 1970s, and so much of this has been uncovered. Let's look at a little bit of it. Here's our modern breakwater.

So if you think of that slide just prior to that, that's what we were looking at. As you look from the air, you still see the remains of the huge, huge breakwater and the harbor entrance here and then, of course, the northern side of this. Let me just say a little bit more of a word about this, although we are running a bit short on time.

Herod had a new technology. He and his engineers had learned how to pour underwater cement. It was a recipe, if you will.

There was pumice that they used, there was kind of a gravel, and so what they did was to sink forms down there, pour this stuff down, and it was dense enough that once it got down onto the water, it hardened remarkably, and there it stood, and it was underwater cement. Josephus thought these were huge blocks of stone that had been lowered down, but as the archaeologists started working under there, they figured out what this really was. So you have this remarkable breakwater here.

He also designed it with kind of an inner and outer wall so that he never had to dredge his harbor. The silt, which would be the prevailing currents, would be coming from the southwest. The silt would work through some slits in this outer wall, kind of lodge in a centerpiece, almost like a casemate wall, and then the harbor itself would maintain its depth without having to be dredged.

So an incredible, incredible advance. Here, by the way, are the foundations. This is a very, very rough picture, but the foundations of the Temple to Augustus.

We can also see the amphitheater here. It's been excavated. This is only the eastern half of it.

The western half was out there. It's been broken away by the attacks of the sea later on. But for our purposes, we want to simply note the promontory palace right here, and then finally our theater, and we want to make a little bit more of a note on some finds from both of those places.

First of all, I do need to say, however, that one of the things Caesarea didn't have was a source of water, fresh water. And so Herod and then later on the Romans, as they expanded it, brought water in from the foothills of Mount Carmel. And this aqueduct is the upper-level aqueduct.

There's also a lower-level aqueduct that brought water, sufficient water to feed or to keep the people in water. In the promontory palace area, we have a description, sorry, a description and an inscription that was found. Actually, I should say that differently.

This was not found in the promontory palace area. We can now see a replica of it in that location. But this is significant because what we see here, if we look very carefully, Tiberium right here, and here is Pilatus.

This is often called the Pilatus inscription because we see very clearly a notice of Pilate's name. The I-U-S of Pontius is right in here, but Pilate mentioned it there as well. And a very helpful find, I think, found in the late, early 1960s, which gives us a sense that as Luke is writing his gospel, he's got his names right.

At any rate, just a note, Tiberium is a temple dedicated to the Emperor Tiberius. Let's talk a little bit more about the theater. This is a reconstruction.

If you look really carefully, you can see little bits of the original stones right here from the seating, some right down there. This theater is used now on a regular basis, and so, actually, even beyond this photograph, there is a huge staging area that has been reconstructed as well. But as I note for you, theaters were kind of like billboards in antiquity.

If you wanted to put up any kind of political advertisements, you didn't put up a billboard; you went to the theater. And therefore, lots and lots of propaganda unfolded in the theater. And let's just look at one small incident that takes place here.

In Acts chapter 12, we have Herod, and this is Herod Agrippa. On the appointed day, Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. And of course, this is remarkable.

He's king. They're all gathered there, maybe because they have to be. They shouted, this is the voice of a god, not of a man.

Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died. So we see a brief notice of this in terms of the narrative of Acts as it unfolds, and then we see it in Josephus. Possibly a little small, so I'll read this as well.

When Agrippa, this is our Herod Agrippa, had reigned three years over all Judea, he came to the city of Caesarea, and there he exhibited shows in honor of Caesar. Real propaganda. On the second day, he put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and he came into the theater early in the morning, at which, properly timed by the way, that probably was not accidental at all, at which time the silver of his garment, being illuminated by a fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those who looked intently upon him.

And presently, his flatterers cried out that he was a god. Upon this, the king neither rebuked them nor rejected their impious flattery. But as he presently afterward looked up, he saw an owl, and immediately understood that this bird was the messenger of ill tidings.

A severe pain arose in his belly. He was carried into the palace, and the rumor went abroad everywhere that he would certainly die in a little time. And when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life.

So interestingly enough, we have two takes on this situation of Herod Agrippa in that particular theater. What we also see, and this will close down our look at Caesarea, as I said earlier, Herod's intent was to bring Roman culture in and shape up what he perceived to be very provincial backwater people. God's intent is to use Caesarea as a jumping-off place.

It starts out with Peter and Cornelius. Cornelius, a Roman centurion, was stationed there. Peter sent up to minister to him, and we see a Gentile becoming a believer.

That's the seeds that are planted. Paul is in prison there, and from there, of course, sent off to Rome. But prior to that, we have Caesarea being significant as a jumping-off place for the gospel as well.

It doesn't stop with our New Testament narratives because during the early Byzantine period, Caesarea becomes a major, major location for church fathers. Just a quick look at a small, small portion of Byzantine Syria, sorry, Caesarea. It was an opulent place because this was a major place for church fathers such as Origen, originally from Alexandria, and also for Eusebius.

And that's not a surprise. As we read in the Book of Acts, the gospel will go to the ends of the earth. And so just a reminder from Caesarea, the gospel indeed moved westward.

Next time we'll pick up Jesus in the Galilee.

This is Dr. Elaine Phillips doing her first lecture on historical geography on the plains and the Shephelah of Israel. Dr. Phillips and her husband Perry have taught at the Jerusalem University College for many, many years, as well as at Gordon College.