

## The Theology of Geography: Significant Sites in Israel

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### INTRODUCTION

The most important city in human history is the city of Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> It will be the last remaining city at the conclusion of the Tribulation (Rev. 16:19). So important is this city that the Lord denominated the believer's heavenly home as the "*New Jerusalem*" (Rev. 21:2). This city was "*the place*" that Jehovah so chose upon which to put his name (Dt. 12:5, 11). The LORD asserted the cosmic prominence of the centrality of Jerusalem, saying, "*Thus saith the Lord GOD; This is Jerusalem: I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her*" (Ezk. 5:5). Since the earth is the center of God's creation (Gen. 1:2-10; cf. Jn. 3:16), Jerusalem is the most important place in all of creation, of course being the place of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt. 16:21; Heb. 13:12). The old name for Jerusalem was Jebus and was located in the land of Canaan (I Chr. 11:4-5), the land that Jehovah designated as the physical inheritance for His chosen people Israel. The LORD had the "Promised Land" in mind when He created the land mass out of the earthly waters (Gen. 1:9-10). After the Flood the Lord allowed the sons of Ham, the Canaanites to migrate to this land (Gen. 10:15-19), which eventually the Shemites of the blessed Jehovah (Gen. 9:26-27) would receive.

The LORD commanded Abram to leave his home "in Ur of the Chaldees" and travel to Jehovah's land gift of Canaan (Gen. 11:27-12:8). Eventually, Abraham's seed under Jacob left the Promised Land for Egypt and remained until Moses led the sons of Israel into the Wilderness (Acts 7:3-36). Under Joshua the Lord GOD gave the Promised Land to His people to conquer and control. He set up judges to deal with the Promised Land physically and spiritually, which office failed because of sin and led to the office of king (cf. Joshua and Judges). Spiritual vicissitudes occurred under Saul, David, and Solomon, creating the divided kingdom and eventual judgment on both the Northern Kingdom (722 BC) and the Southern Kingdom (586 BC). Although the LORD brought the Babylonian exiles back into the Promised Land (cf. I and II Sam., I and II Kings, I and II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah), this Jewish possession fell under Gentile dominance (Daniel 2 and 7; Lk. 21:24; Rom. 11:25-26). The prophet Micah revealed that the Lord promised the reunion of His people and their reuniting with the Promised Land after the "church age" and Tribulation, saying, "*But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand and feed*

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<sup>1</sup>The Hebrew *Jerushalam* occurs 643x and the Greek *Hierousalem* occurs 83x. The compound noun means "city of peace" and is identified with Salem (Ps. 76:2; cf. also Gen. 14:18). The Lord Jesus Christ will rule with a rod of iron during the Millennium. As the Prince of Peace, He will give peace to Jerusalem and the world (Isa. 9:6-7; cf. also Ps. 122:6).

*in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth” (Mic. 5:2-4).*

It is not because of literary or theological hyperbole what the Prophet Ezekiel declared about Jerusalem’s significant and envied geographical location (Ezk. 5:5). The Land of Israel, housing Jerusalem, is a small and seemingly insignificant parcel of land (8200 sq. mi.). Its propitious location fell within the Fertile Crescent which curved from the Persian Gulf through Mesopotamia, Assyria, and Phoenicia, passing in the corridor of Israel, and around to Lower and Upper Egypt, all of which had lush vegetation due to the inundation of related rivers. Bordered by the Mediterranean Sea and Arabian Desert, and the Euphrates and Nile Rivers, this geographical inheritance from Jehovah was the physical tract between the highly developed ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt. These civilizations originated from the region of Mount Ararat and quickly developed. As commerce expanded, so did political, cultural, and ethnic factors, resulting in the control of this geographical passage way, the Land of Canaan. Nations vied for this choice piece of real estate, forcing the inhabitants, first the Canaanites and then the Israelites, into military alertness and defense. The LORD purposefully orchestrated the geographical boundaries for theological reasons, desiring that His chosen people would trust in Him and not in military might, as He asseverated, leveling a woe and affirming a blessing, saying, “*Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD!*” (Isa. 31:1) and “*Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God*” (Ps. 20:7), respectively. The geography of the Land of Israel, including its boundaries, cities, mountains, rivers, and lakes, influence the flora, fauna, climate, seasons, and religious deities, and therefore give revelatory background for the theological teaching of Scripture.

## **THE LAND OF ISRAEL**

### **TERMS**

Biblically, “*the Land of Israel*” is never designated “the land of Palestine” or “*Palestine.*” In fact, the only reference to “*Palestine*” occurs in the prophet Joel and refers to Philistia: “*Yea, and what have ye to do with me, O Tyre, and Zidon, and all the coasts of Palestine? will ye render me a recompence? and if ye recompense me, swiftly and speedily will I return your recompence upon your own head*” (Joel 3:4). The Romans applied the term “*Palestine*” to the Promised Land in the AD 2<sup>nd</sup> century, much to the theological chagrin of Asaph’s concern, who warned, saying, “*They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance*” (Ps. 83:4).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>The so-called “State of Palestine” claimed possession of the West Bank (west of the Jordan), the Gaza Strip (border of Israel and Egypt), and East Jerusalem, even though these areas have been occupied by Israel since the Six Day War in 1967.

Before Israel occupied *“the land which He [Jehovah] promised”* (Dt. 9:28; 19:8), the LORD identified it as *“the land of Canaan,”* as expressed by Moses, saying, *“And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there”* (Gen. 11:31). The expression *“the land of Canaan”* occurs 66x in the OT from Gen. 11:31 to Ezk. 16:29. It was the land which Canaan, son of Ham, inhabited after the confounding of tongues (Gen. 10:15-19; 11:1-9). The first occasion of alluding to Canaan as *“the land of Israel”* (*‘eretz yisra’el*) came from Samuel, who stated, saying, *“Now there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel: for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears”* (I Sam. 13:19).<sup>3</sup> The designation occurs 29x in the OT, culminating with Ezekiel’s affirmation, saying, *“And the east side ye shall measure from Hauran, and from Damascus, and from Gilead, and from the land of Israel by Jordan, from the border unto the east sea. And this is the east side”* (Ezk. 47:18). Mathew employed the NT equivalent *“the land of Israel”* (*gen Israel*) twice (Mt. 2:20-21). One other significant designation for the Promised Land was *hapax* expression prophesied by Zechariah, who stated, *“And the LORD shall inherit Judah his portion in **the holy land**, and shall choose Jerusalem again”* (Zech. 2:12).

## **TERRITORY**

### ***The Parameters***

Several passages give general parameters for the land promised to Abraham and his descendants; other passages suggest ultimate expansion of these parameters. First, the Lord gave the land from the Nile to the Euphrates including the territories of the 10 groups of “ites.” *“In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites”* (Gen.15:18-21). In addition, three bodies of water, namely the Red Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Euphrates River, set the boundaries as well as the desert wilderness. *“And I will set thy bounds from the Red sea even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert unto the river: for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee”* (Ex. 23:31).

The LORD again expressed that His land gift to the Jews had desert and water boundaries (Num. 34:1-15). In fact, He expected the people of Israel to reach the Euphrates, which they never did under Joshua, saying, *“Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be”* (Dt. 11:24). The LORD allowed Moses to see the “Promised Land” from Pisgah, on east side of Jordan, saying, *“And Moses went up from the plains of Moab*

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<sup>3</sup>The Scriptures differentiate the Philistines from the Hebrews and their land, *“the land of Israel”!*

unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the LORD shewed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan, And all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea, And the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar” (Dt. 34:1-3). This land Jehovah called “*the glorious land*” as Daniel affirmed (Dan. 11:16, 41). During the Millennium the Promised Land will be the reality for which the Jews desired, and Ezekiel started the description in the north with Hamath, encircled the land-gift, and culminated with Hamath in the north, saying, “*Thus saith the Lord GOD; This shall be the border, whereby ye shall inherit the land according to the twelve tribes of Israel: Joseph shall have two portions. And ye shall inherit it, one as well as another: concerning the which I lifted up mine hand to give it unto your fathers: and this land shall fall unto you for inheritance. And this shall be the border of the land toward the north side, from the great sea, the way of Hethlon, as men go to Zedad; Hamath, Berothah, Sibram, which is between the border of Damascus and the border of Hamath; Hazarhatticon, which is by the coast of Hauran. And the border from the sea shall be Hazarenan, the border of Damascus, and the north northward, and the border of Hamath. And this is the north side. And the east side ye shall measure from Hauran, and from Damascus, and from Gilead, and from the land of Israel by Jordan, from the border unto the east sea. And this is the east side. And the south side southward, from Tamar even to the waters of strife in Kadesh, the river to the great sea. And this is the south side southward. The west side also shall be the great sea from the border, till a man come over against Hamath. This is the west side*” (Ezk. 47:13-20). The Scripture gives the geographical refrain “*from Dan to Beersheba*” nine times, referring to the most northern and most southern territories occupied by Israel, respectively (Jdg. 20:1; I Sam. 3:20; II Sam. 3:10; 17:11; 24:2; 24:15; I Ki. 4:25; I Chr. 21:2; and II Chr. 30:5).

### ***The Passage Routes***

Israel was the land bridge for the three continents of Africa, Asia, and Europe, and thus frequently traveled. As a land bridge it did not provide ideal travel routes because of its broken terrain—plains, mountains, and riffs, etc. However, of the two major transverse routes the first was the so-called *Via Maris* or “*the way of the sea*” (Isa. 9:1; *Vulgate*)<sup>4</sup> moving from the Negev (desert), up into Judea, through the Plain of Sharon, over to the Plain of Beth Shean, moving on either side of the Sea of Galilee and culminating at Damascus, or Babylonia, or Ur. The second route was “*the King’s Highway*” (*derech hamelech*; Num. 20:17; 21:22), upon which the Israelites sought right of way. During their wilderness wanderings they had left Kadeshbarnea and requested passage through Edom but were denied by the king (Num. 21:23-35). The Israelites detoured between the Rivers Arnon and Jabbok and requested from Sihon the King of Heshbon passage. He denied the Israelites to his detriment, losing both battle and land (Num. 21:23-35). This international route transversed from Egypt through the Sinai Peninsula unto Edom and beyond into Moab, Ammon, Gilead, Damascus, and finally ended up at Mesopotamia. Although many other shorter routes crisscrossed from east to west throughout Israel, these aforementioned were the main south to north routes.

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<sup>4</sup>This may refer specifically to the coastal route near Dor.

*The Mountains of Israel*

North

Mt. Ararat (“the curse reversed”). A mountain range in eastern Armenia, upon which Noah’s ark rested. *“And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat”* (Gen. 8:4).

Mt. Bashan (“fruitful”). A beautiful white capped mountain northeast of the Sea of Galilee overlooking the fertile pasture lands and the land of Bashan. *“The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan; an high hill as the hill of Bashan”* (Ps. 68:15). It is 9200 feet above sea level.

Mt. Hermon (“a sanctuary”). This high mountain is north of the Sea of Galilee and overlooking the city of Dan. *“As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore”* (Ps. 133:3).

Mt. Lebanon (“whiteness”). This is a wooded mountain range on the northern border of Israel, and it was famous as the source of timber for Solomon’s Temple. *“Namely, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baalhermon unto the entering in of Hamath”* (Jdg. 3:3).

Central

Mt. Abarim (“regions beyond”). This mountain range is east of Jordan and in the land of Moab. Mt. Nebo was part of this range. *“Get thee up into this mountain Abarim, unto mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, that is over against Jericho; and behold the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel for a possession”* (Dt. 32:49).

Mt. Carmel (“garden land”). This significant mountain is on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea in northern Israel. It was the scene of Elijah’s sacrifice. *“So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees”* (I Ki. 18:42). Also, it was known for its beauty. *“Thine head upon thee is like Carmel, and the hair of thine head like purple; the king is held in the galleries”* (Cant. 7:5)

Mt. Ebal (“stone”). It is north of Shechem and opposite of Mt. Gerizim. It was the mountain of cursing. *“And these shall stand upon mount Ebal to curse; Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali”* (Dt. 11:29).

Mt. Gerizim (“cuttings off”). It is south of Shechem and opposite of Mt. Ebal, and from which the Israelites cried out blessings. *“These shall stand upon mount Gerizim to bless the people, when ye are come over Jordan; Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Joseph, and Benjamin”* (Dt. 27:12).

Mt. Gilboa (“swollen heap”). This mountain-ridge is at the southeastern end of the plain of Jezreel and the site of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. *“Now the Philistines fought against Israel: and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa”* (I Sam. 31:1).

Mt. Gilead (“rocky region”). This mountainous region was east of Jordan, south of Bashan and north of Moab. It was the scene of the covenant between Laban and Jacob. *“So he*

*fled with all that he had; and he rose up, and passed over the river, and set his face toward the mount Gilead” (Gen. 31:21).*

Mt. Hebron (“association”). This is a mountain ridge in the central Judean Hills with a tableland at the top. It is over 3000 feet above sea level. Caleb had to climb this mountain and then defeat the giants in the walled cities. *“And now, behold, the LORD hath kept me alive, as he said, these forty and five years, even since the LORD spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness: and now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in. Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the LORD spake in that day; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakims were there, and that the cities were great and fenced: if so be the LORD will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the LORD said. And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh Hebron for an inheritance” (Josh. 14:10-13).*

Mt. Moriah (“chosen by Jehovah”). This was the site of Abraham’s intended sacrifice of Isaac, and the mountain on which the Temple of Jerusalem was built. *“Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the LORD appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite” (II Chr. 3:1).* The Islamic Mosque of Omar resides on the site today.

Mt. Nebo (“prophet”). This is a range of hills forming the western edge of the Moabite plateau above the Jordan. Moses saw the Land of Israel from this mount. *“Get thee up into this mountain Abarim, unto mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, that is over against Jericho; and behold the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel for a possession” (Dt. 32:49).*

Mt. Olivet (“olive tree”). The Mount of Olives is a mountain ridge east of and adjacent to Jerusalem. This was a significant place concerning the Lord’s advents. *“And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (Mt. 24:3; cf. Zech. 14:4).*

Mt. Pisgah (“cleft”). This headland of the Nebo range was that from which Moses saw the Promised Land. *“And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the LORD shewed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan” (Dt. 34:1).*

Mt. Tabor (“mound”). This is a mountain in the Plain of Esdraelon rising abruptly and insulated except for a narrow ridge on the west connecting it to the hills of Nazareth. *“And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him” (Jdg. 4:14).*

Mt. Zion (“parched place”). This is the eastern hill of Jerusalem. It was the stronghold of the Jebusites, and became the site of David’s palace and the Temple. *“Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David” (II Sam. 5:7).*

## South

Mt. Hor (“mountain”). Being situated on the eastern side of the Arabah in Edom, it was the mountain where Aaron died. “*And die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people; as Aaron thy brother died in mount Hor, and was gathered unto his people*” (Dt. 32:50).

Mt. Horeb (“desert”). Most likely it was synonymous with Sinai. Exodus recorded the reception of the Decalogue on Mt. Sinai whereas Deuteronomy recorded the reception on Mt. Horeb. It was the scene of the burning bush, of the giving of the Law, and of Elijah's vision. “*Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb*” (Ex. 3:1).

Mt. Seir (“hairy”). This is a mountain range identified with Edom. “*And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom*” (Gen. 32:3).

Mt. Sinai (“thorny”). Most likely it was synonymous with Sinai. Exodus recorded the reception of the Decalogue on Mt. Sinai whereas Deuteronomy recorded the reception on Mt. Horeb. It was the scene of the burning bush, of the giving of the Law, and of Elijah's vision. “*And the LORD came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount: and the LORD called Moses up to the top of the mount; and Moses went up*” (Ex. 19:20).

## Seas and Rivers

Within the Land of Israel there are three major bodies of water including the Lake Huleh, the Sea of Galilee, and the Dead Sea. First, Lake Huleh is in the northern end of Israel and is the source for the Jordan River. It eventually runs into the Sea of Galilee ten miles south. Josephus referred to it as Lake Semichonitis but the rabbin called it the Sea of Samcho. It may be what the Scripture referred to as “*the waters of Merom*” (Josh. 11:5, 7).

The second body of water is “*the Sea of Galilee*,” the lowest freshwater lake on earth, fed primarily by the Jordan River. The OT called it “*the Sea of Chinnereth*” (Num. 34:11; Josh. 13:27; cf. 11:2), presumably taking its name from the Hebrew *cinnor* for harp, depicting the Sea's harp-like shape. Although Luke called it “*the Lake of Gennesaret*” (Lk. 5:1), the other three Gospel writers termed it “*the Sea of Galilee*” (Mt. 4:18; 15:29; Mk. 1:6; 7:31; and Jn. 6:1) or “*the Sea of Tiberias*” (Jn. 6:1; 21:1).

The third major body of water in Israel is the Dead Sea or biblically the “*Salt Sea*” (Gen. 14:3; Num. 34:3, 12; Dt. 3:17; Josh. 3:16; 12:3; 15:2, 5; and 18:19). It is over 1400 feet below sea level and consequently the earth's lowest elevation on land. It is also the world's deepest hyper-saline lake and over nine times as salty as the ocean. Because of its high saline content, plants and animals cannot flourish, and therefore contributing to its name “Dead Sea.” The Jordan River is the main tributary for the “*Salt Sea*” as it is settled in the Jordan Rift Valley. The Scripture speaks of “*the bay [literally “tongue”] of the Salt Sea*” (Josh. 18:19; cf. also 15:2, 5),

referring to the “*tongue*” (*lashon*)<sup>5</sup> configuration of land projecting into the sea, about half way down on the Transjordan side. Other than as a boundary, the “*Salt Sea*” has little significance in Bible history.

In addition to these seas, there are several biblically significant rivers in the Land of Israel. Of course, the Jordan River is the most significant river, connecting the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea, and dividing Transjordan<sup>6</sup> from Cisjordan.<sup>7</sup> The River drops in elevation, hence its name from the Hebrew verb *yarad* (to go down), in its 156 miles-run terminating in the Dead Sea. It is known for the stupendous miracle of the LORD dividing the Jordan River for the Jews to cross into the Promised Land (Josh. 3:14-17). As well, it was the body of water in which John the Baptist baptized by immersion disciples of the Messiah, and even the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt. 3:5-17). Other rivers, in alphabetical order, included the following. 1) The Arnon (“rushing stream”) River traveled from the mountains of Gilead down a steep descent into the Dead Sea, forming the border between Moab and the Amorites (Num. 21:13). Joshua and the Jews conquered the territory including Arnon from King Sihon (Josh. 12:1; cf. Jdg. 11:22). 2) The Brook Cherith (“cutting”) was east of the Jordan flowing out of the Mountains of Gilead, and became the hiding place for Elijah (I Ki. 17:1-7). The Gihon<sup>8</sup> (“bursting forth”) Spring was near Jerusalem in the Kidron Valley and was the main water source, albeit intermittent, for the Pool of Siloam. It was the location of Solomon’s anointing (I Ki. 1:33 ff.). The Jabbok (“emptying”) River cuts through the Mountains of Gilead and into the Jordan from the east about halfway between Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. It formed the boundary between Reuben and the half-tribe Manasseh (Dt. 3:16). The Kanah (“reed”) River, being the boundary between Ephraim and Manasseh, flows into the Mediterranean Sea (Josh. 16:8). The Brook Kidron (“dark”) commences from the north of Jerusalem and runs through the Kidron Valley, going southeast and then southwest through the Tyropoean Valley and then the Hinnom Valley. It was here that in dramatic fashion David and his people passed over Jordan in fleeing from Absalom (II Sam. 15:23). Also, it was associated with the destruction of Baalim idols and vessels (I Ki. 15:13; II Chr. 29:16). It was holy unto the Lord (Jer. 31:40), and as the Lord Jesus Christ passed over it to pray in His final hours, He seemed to recognize this solemn truth (Jn. 18:1).

The Kishon (“winding”) River flows out of the Gilboa Mountains for about 43 miles into the Mediterranean Sea, passing through the Jezreel Valley. The Lord gave two significant Israeli victories with regard to the Kishon River, namely defeating Sisera (Jdg. 4:7 ff.) and the 850 prophets of Baal (I Ki. 18:40). Finally, the Brook Zered ran into the southeastern part of the Dead Sea, and it was the crossing of the Brook Zered which terminated the end of the 38 year wilderness wandering (Dt. 2:13-14).

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<sup>5</sup>The “*tongue*” now called the Lisan Peninsula has so expanded as the sea water receded, severing the Dead Sea completely into the northern and southern basins!

<sup>6</sup>This Latin expression refers to the east side of Jordan, or “*beyond Jordan eastward*” (Josh. 13:8).

<sup>7</sup>The Latin expression refers to the west side of Jordan, or “*on this side Jordan westward*” (Josh. 22:7).

<sup>8</sup>Gihon was the name of the second river in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:13).



### ***The Climate***

Because of the Mediterranean Sea, the region of the Near East has great variety in climate, ranging from wet and mild winters to hot summers, depending on altitude. Likewise, the westerly winds take unusual circuits, as Solomon observed, saying, *“The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits”* (Eccl. 1:6). Precipitation decreases from north to south and from west to east in Israel, with the hill country of Judah and Ephraim receiving favorable amounts for their respective lush vegetation. The winter rains usually begin in October and extend to April, as Joel described, saying, *“Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month”* (Joel 2:23; Hos. 6:3). The summer months of June through September bring cloudless days with high intensity of solar radiation. Solomon recognized the need to reduce the blaze of the sun, as Scripture revealed, saying, *“And for the house he made windows of narrow lights”* (I Ki. 6:4). Unlike the Nile area of Egypt where water was plentiful, the Jews had to trust Jehovah for rain. Scripture, affirmed, saying, *“For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs: But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: A land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year...That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.”* (Dt. 11:10-12, 14).

## **TOPOGRAPHY<sup>9</sup>**

Israel has five main natural features (from the west to the east), including the Coastal Plain, the Western Hills, the Rift Valley of Jordan, the Eastern Hills of Transjordan, and the Desert.

### ***The Coastal Plain***

The Mediterranean Sea coast provides few natural harbors south of Mt. Carmel but many sand dunes and some vegetation south of Joppa. Moving northward from the 50 mile stretch of plain called the Plain of Philistia, its south was dry desert but it merged into gentle hills for crops but with minimal swamp. The Plain of Sharon<sup>10</sup> was just south of Joppa and extended into Caesarea, providing well-watered and luxuriant pasture for cattle. North towards Mount Carmel is the Plain of Dor, and beyond Mount Carmel is the Plain of Acco. Dividing the Plain of Acco from the Plain of Phoenicia are the so-called “Ladders of Tyre,” the limestone hills of Upper Galilee that form mountainous cliffs which plunge steeply into the Mediterranean. Overall, the

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<sup>9</sup>The Scripture uses the prepositions “up” and “down” to denote topological ascent or descent, rather than to give directions such as north and south on a map.

<sup>10</sup>Sharon was known for abundant wild flowers in lush pastures (Cant. 2:1; I Chr. 27:29).

sand dunes, swamps, and shifting landscapes did not make the Coastal Plain conducive to transportation. Quite often the locals would dam rivers from the east flowing toward the Mediterranean Sea and thereby producing a swampy condition along the *Coastal Plains*. Journeys from Egypt to Babylonia followed paths along the border of the foothills, stopping at sites such as Gerar, Gath, Gezer and Lydda.

### ***The Western Hills***

The Western Hills or Central Highlands of Israel consists of the Lebanon Mountain Range in Upper Galilee, the Hill Country of Ephraim, and the Hill Country of Judah. Running up and down the center of the Land of Israel is the mountainous spine of the country, with the only break at the plains of Megiddo and Jezreel which consequently provide a low and easy path of travel. Mount Lebanon extends for over one hundred miles with its highest peak in excess of 10,000 feet. The range takes its name from the Hebrew word *laban* for “white,” referring to the white snow-capped tops. Mount Lebanon was known for her forests including the prized “*cedars of Lebanon*” (Jdg. 9:15).<sup>11</sup> Hiram procured cedars for Solomon’s Temple and David lived in a house of cedars (I Chr. 14:1 and 17:1 respectively).

In the Hill Country of Ephraim, ranging from Mount Gilboa to Bethel is the limestone upland intersected with fertile valleys and small plains. Scripture differentiated between “*the mountains of Israel*” and “*the mountains of Judah*” (Josh. 11:21), and designated “*the mountains of Israel*” as “*the mountains of Samaria*” (Jer. 31:5; Amos). Many crops were cultivated and harvested on the gentle slopes of this mountainous range. In fact, the Tribe of Ephraim inherited the most fertile territory in all of Israel, but nevertheless complained to Joshua that “*the hill is not enough for us*” (Josh. 17:16). Jeremiah predicted the restoration of the abundance of vegetation in the northern mountain ranges for the benefit of Jehovah’s people, saying, “*And I will bring Israel again to his habitation, and he shall feed on Carmel and Bashan, and his soul shall be satisfied upon mount Ephraim and Gilead*” (Jer. 50:19). Jeroboam built the city of Shechem which enjoyed the plain between Mount Ebal on the north and Mount Gerizim on the south (I Ki. 12:25). It was on the two mountain slopes that the tribes of Israel volleyed responses among themselves, giving antiphonal affirmations. Moses commanded the people, saying, “*These shall stand upon mount Gerizim to bless the people, when ye are come over Jordan; Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Joseph, and Benjamin: And these shall stand upon mount Ebal to curse; Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali*” (Dt. 27:12-13). Joshua’s burial place was on the hill of Gaash near Timnath-heres (Jdg. 2:9).

The Hill Country of Judah extends from north of Jerusalem, or the Jerusalem Hills, to the Hebron Hills (3050 ft.), then down to the Valley of Beersheba. The Judean Mountains are about 3000 feet high and rocky with sparse vegetation. The mountain range of Judah divides the soft-sloping Shephelah (“lowlands”) Hills and coast of Philistia from the Jordan Rift Valley on the east. South of Beer-sheba and into the Negeb (desert) is the barren steppe descending into the Arabah (low depression).

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<sup>11</sup>See also Pss. 29:5 [2x]; 104:16; Cant. 5:15; Isa. 2:13; 14:8; 37:24; Jer. 22:23; Ezk. 27:5; and Zech. 11:1.

### ***The Rift Valley***

The Arabah or Aravah is physical depression caused by two great geological faults. Between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon Mountains is the beginning of the Rift Valley through which the Orontes and Leontes Rivers flow. The Rift Valley contains the Jordan River,<sup>12</sup> fed by fresh snow melt off from Mount Herman, and continues its descent in which Lake Huleh and the Sea of Galilee lie. Its increasing depression contains the Jordan River south to the Dead Sea (the lowest place on earth at 1285 ft. below sea level) and beyond the Wadi Arabah, to the Gulf of Aqaba, and then the Red Sea.

### ***The Eastern Hills of Transjordan***

The Transjordan tableland contains three distinct plateaus including the Bashan Hills to the north, the Gilead and Moab Hills separated from the former by the Yarmuk River, and the Seir Mountains separated by the Zered River. The Jabbok and Arnon Rivers cut through the Transjordan Hills as well. The southern hills are much higher than the northern including those surrounding the city of Petra, capital of Edom, which is settled in among the high cliffs.

### ***The Desert***

The Transjordan Hills descend down to the desert steppe known as the Syrian Desert which eventually merges to south into the Arabian Desert. It is wide-open with a rocky terrain, and very arid with few wadis.

## **TIMELINE**

The so-called “cradle of civilization” emerged from the Mt. Ararat region in the post-deluge age, as Noah’s descendants spread from the Babylonian area of Shinar (c. 2500 BC); the LORD had scattered his rebelling descendants who attempted the first ecumenical council against Jehovah (Gen. 11:1-9). Japheth’s descendants went north and west whereas Ham’s went south, west and east. The Shemites went south and east (i.e., Abraham) as well, ending up in Ur of Chaldees (Gen. 10:21 ff.). Eventually, the LORD called Abram (2166-1991 BC) to leave his home and go to the choicest piece of real estate in all of creation, the Promised Land (2091 BC). While there he begat Ishmael (2080-1943 BC) and Isaac (2066-1886 BC), who in turn begat Jacob (2005-1859 BC). One of the sons of Jacob was Joseph (1914-1805 BC) through whose instrumentality the other eleven sons of Jacob and their father moved to Egypt<sup>13</sup> (from 1876 to 1446 BC). Following their exodus, Moses (1526-1406 BC) led the 12 Tribes through the wilderness for forty years (1446-1406). Through the effort of Joshua who subjugated, subdivided, and settled the Promised Land (1406-1376 BC), the Jews conquered the Land of

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<sup>12</sup>The distance from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea is about 66 miles, although the Jordan Rivers meanders about 150 miles in this journey southward.

<sup>13</sup>“*And the sons of Joseph, which were born him in Egypt, were two souls: all the souls of the house of Jacob, which came into Egypt, were threescore and ten*” (Gen. 46:27; cf. also Acts 7:14).

Israel, but ineffectually.<sup>14</sup> With a remnant of Canaanites causing ongoing distress, Jehovah raised up judges to destroy these persistent pests (c. 1350-1051 BC). The last judge Samuel anointed King Saul (1051-1011 BC), with King David (1011-971 BC) and then King Solomon (971-931 BC) following. The kingdom erupted with Solomon's death, dividing into the Northern Kingdom of Israel (931-722 BC) and the Southern Kingdom of Judah (931-586 BC). After a seventy year hiatus of exile the Jews returned from Babylon to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the Temple (536-516 BC). Malachi was the last of the writing prophets, warning the priests of impending judgment—the coming of Elijah (Mal. 4:5-6).

## **THEOLOGY**

### **Geographical Sites and Significance**

#### ***Mediterranean Coast***

##### *Caesarea (17x)*

*Caesarea Palaestina*, in distinction to Caesarea Philippi, was on the Mediterranean coast of Israel halfway between Joppa and Dora and about 70 miles from Jerusalem. Herod the Great built the city between 25-13 BC and named it in honor of Augustus Caesar. This ancient city became the administrative center for Roman procurators of the province of Judea, and housed Roman legions. Wealthy Jews and Syrian Greeks lived there, and it became a chief port for the land. It contained the amphitheatre and hippodrome as well as the official residence of Herodian kings. Its importance to the Bible is three-fold: Peter evangelized Cornelius and his household in Caesarea (Acts 10:1-11:18); it was the home of Phillip the evangelist (Acts 21:8); and it was the location wherein Paul was tried and imprisoned for two years (Acts 23:31-26:32).

##### *Mt. Carmel (25x)*

West of the Sea of Galilee and extending from the plain of Megiddo to the abrupt edge of the Mediterranean Sea, the 12 mile mountainous range of Mount Carmel is best known for Elijah's defeat of Jezebel's prophets. Its west end forms the southern wall to the Bay of Acre, producing a natural harbor on the straight coastline of the Mediterranean. The eastern slope is luxurious with vegetation (Isa. 37:24; 35:2; Cant. 7:5) but the western promontory overlooking the Sea is rough with crags and caves (Amos 9:3). It was upon Mount Carmel that Elijah slew the false prophets (I Ki. 18) and Elisha received the bereaved mother whose son was restored (II Ki. 4:25-37).

##### *Jezreel (36x)*

The city Jezreel was near Mt. Gilboa on the border of the territory of Issachar (Josh. 19:17-18). The valley before Mt. Gilboa has the name the Valley of Jezreel. The city's most

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<sup>14</sup>“As for the Jebusites the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out: but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem unto this day” (Josh 15:63; cf. also 16:10).

notable significance in biblical history came with the ascendancy of King Ahab who built his palace there (I Ki. 21:1), and demanded the property of the adjacent vineyard of his neighbor Naboth (I Ki. 21:2 ff.). Since Naboth refused to relinquish his property, Ahab's wicked wife Jezebel instigated the murder of Naboth outside of the city, and the LORD judged the house of Ahab at Jezreel, predicting through Elijah that dogs would lick his blood and devour Jezebel's body in the place of Naboth's death (I Ki. 21:19 and 23, respectively). Furthermore, Jehu ordered that the severed heads of the seventy sons of Ahab be placed at the gate of Jezreel (II Ki. 10:7-8). Later, Hosea named his firstborn son Jezreel to signify the fall of the house of Jehu and of the nation of Israel (Hos. 1:4-5).

#### *Megiddo (11x)*

The city of Megiddo occupied a strategic location on the spur of the Mount Carmel mountain range, overlooking the Esdraelon Plain (Valley of Jezreel) to the north, and about eleven miles from Nazareth. It connected the regions of the Fertile Crescent as the international route passed through it. Megiddo's biblical fame found occasion as the Plain of Megiddo became the site for battles. Both Barak and Gideon defeated the enemies of the LORD in the Valley of Megiddo (Jdg. 5 and 6, respectively). Moreover, it was there that King Saul and King Josiah received defeat (I Sam. 31 and II Ki. 23, respectively). As a place for savage battle and ferocious bloodshed, the region will become the scene of the great Tribulation slaughter in the future Battle of Armageddon<sup>15</sup> (Rev. 16:16). The Assyrians destroyed Megiddo in 732 BC.

#### *Cana (4x)*

The city of Cana ("reed"), ten miles north of Nazareth and in the highlands of Galilee (Jn. 4:47), found its historical significance as a site that the Lord Jesus visited. He performed the first sign miracle at the wedding in Cana by turning water into wine and graciously relieved the juice shortage (Jn. 2:1-11). Also, the Lord proclaimed the healing of the nobleman's dying son in this city (Jn. 4:46), which was the hometown of Nathanael (Jn. 21:2).

#### *Nazareth (29x)*

The city of Nazareth was the home of Joseph and Mary as well as the childhood home of the Lord Jesus (Lk. 2:39; 4:16). He began His public ministry in the synagogue of Nazareth (Lk. 4:17 ff.). Nazareth was about 14 miles from the Sea of Galilee on a steep hill among the southern ridges of Lebanon. The name Nazareth comes from the Hebrew *natzar* meaning "to guard" and apparently refers to the hill overlooking and guarding the geographical expanse. It was from the brow of the hill from which the inhabitants attempted to cast their Messiah as He proclaimed His scriptural ministry (Lk. 4:29). This steep hill received the name "the Mount of Precipice." Later, when the Lord made His final visit to Nazareth, the people rejected Him with apathetic unbelief (Mk. 6:1-6). Although traffic from Egypt to Asia passed near Nazareth, it seemed to be a mean city of little significance since it maintained a derogatory reputation (Jn. 1:46).

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<sup>15</sup>Literally this means "The Mountain of Megiddo."

### ***Northern Boundary***

#### *Dan (70x)*

The City of Dan is the northern-most city of Israel located in the Galilee Panhandle between Mount Lebanon and Mount Hermon. The runoff from the surrounding mountains made the territory very fertile (Jdg. 18:9). The inheritance of the Tribe of Dan was deemed too small and the Tribe went north and murderously conquered and renamed the City of Leshem (Josh. 19:47).<sup>16</sup> Later the City of Dan became one of two sites for Jeroboam's syncretistic worship (I Ki. 12:28-30).

#### *Caesarea-Philippi (2x)*

About 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee with its spring the major source for the Jordan River, Caesarea-Philippi sits at the base of Mount Hermon. The City of Caesarea-Philippi was rebuilt by Philip the tetrarch and called Caesarea in honor of Tiberias Caesar. Originally it was the locale of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC pagan god Pan, the half-man, half goat deity, and hence the City of Panias. The grotto of the deity Pan was "a bottomless pit" and known as the "gates of hades." The ritual sacrifices were cast into the cave to go to hades. In this place of abject paganism the Lord asked His disciples about His identity. The paganistic region was the location of the great Petrine declaration that the Lord Jesus Christ was the true God-Man deity, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Mt. 16:16; cf. also v. 13). Moreover, the Lord Jesus declared, alluding to the backdrop, saying, "*That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*" (Mt. 16:18).

### ***Sea of Galilee***

#### *Sea of Galilee*

Obviously the Sea of Galilee was the location in which the precious Lord spent a good deal time in His ministry. This harp-shaped body of water with a circumference of about 33 miles, length of 13 miles, and width 8 miles, became the backdrop for the Saviour's preaching and miracles. He preached in the synagogues (Lk. 4:14-15), received rejection in Nazareth (Lk. 4:16-30), made residence in Capernaum (Mt. 4:13-16), called fishermen (Mk. 1:16-20), cast out demons (Lk. 4:31-37), cleansed lepers (Mt. 8:2-4), healed the sick (Mk. 2:1-12), preached His sermon on the mount (Mt. 5:1-7:29), preached His sermon on the plain (Lk. 6:17-42), fed the 5000 and 4000 (Mt. 14:13-21), walked on water (Mk. 6:47-52), received the Transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-8), and found coinage for tribute money (Mt. 17:24-27).<sup>17</sup>

#### *Magdala (1x)*

Magdala ("tower [of the fishes]") is a village on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, the apparent home of Mary Magdalene (Mt. 27:56). The Lord visited Magdala, as Matthew

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<sup>16</sup>"*Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward*" (Gen. 49:17).

<sup>17</sup>This is a partial list of the multitude of biblical examples concerning the Lord's preaching and ministry on and around the Sea of Galilee.

recorded, saying, “*And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala*” (Mt. 15:39).

*Bethsaida (7x)*

Andrew, Peter, and Philip were from Bethsaida of Galilee (Jn. 1:44; 12:21) on the west side of the Sea of Galilee. Apparently, there was another Bethsaida Julius on the east side of the Sea of Galilee by the Jordan’s mouth (Lk. 9:10 ff.). Perhaps Bethsaida (“the house of fish”) was one village on both sides of the Jordan as it entered into the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee. Nevertheless, the Lord fed the 5000 in this location (Mt. 14:21).

*Capernaum (16x)*

This was a village on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee near the Jordan River’s entrance into the Sea. Meaning “the city of Nahum,” it was the hometown of Matthew and housed a synagogue. The Lord Jesus taught from the synagogue (Mk. 1:21-28), and later healed Peter’s mother-in-law (Lk. 4:38-39), healed the Roman centurion’s servant (Lk. 7:1-10) as well as the paralytic (Mk. 2:1-12). Capernaum became the Lord’s center of ministry, but because of the inhabitants’ unbelief, He cursed them to damnation (Mt. 11:23-24).

***Jordan River***

*Beth Shean (9x)*

About 17 miles south of the Sea of Galilee, Beth Shean (“house of ease”), later renamed Scythopolis by the Romans, is located at the junction of the Jordan River Valley and the Jezreel Valley. The Philistines defeated Israel at Mount Gilboa and slew King Saul and his three sons, hanging their bodies on the wall of Beth Shean (I Sam. 31:1 ff.).

*Baptismal Site of the Lord*

John the Baptist immersed multitudes of disciples identifying with the Messiah in the Jordan River. Scripture states, saying, “*Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins*” (Mt. 3:5-6 ). In addition, John baptized Jesus of Nazareth the Christ in the Jordan not far upstream from the Dead Sea “*Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him*” (Mt. 3:13-16). Later John “*was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim because there was much water there*” (Jn. 3:23). This may have been 8 miles directly south of Scythopolis where there were many springs.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>The Greek *Aenon* means “springs.”

### *The Dead Sea*

#### *En Gedi (6x)*

*Engedi* is an oasis off of the western shore of the Dead Sea about 15 miles east of Hebron and near Masada and the Qumran Caves. It means “spring of the kid” and belongs to the Tribe of Judah (Josh 15:62).<sup>19</sup> It is a place of fresh waters and great fecundity of vegetation, as Solomon recorded, saying, “*My beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of Engedi*” (Cant. 1:14). David eluded King Saul by hiding in one of its caves, as Scripture stated, saying, “*And David went up from thence, and dwelt in strong holds at Engedi*” (I Sam. 23:29). Furthermore, when Saul entered a cave to relieve himself, David and his men were hiding in the same cave, allowing David the opportunity to cut off the skirt of Saul’s robe (I Sam. 24:3-4). Subsequently the young David announced to King Saul his opportunity to slay the King but refused to lay his hand on the LORD’s anointed (I Sam. 24:5-22).<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Ezekiel prophesied that from this location on the shore of the Salt Sea that fishers would catch an abundant supply of fish during the Millennium (Ezk. 47:10), referring to the return of the earth to the Garden of Eden (Ezk. 36:35).

#### *Masada (22x)*

Although the actual location of Masada (“fortress”) has no reference in the *Tanak*, the noun means a stronghold or fortress. Herod the Great fortified this isolate rock plateau on the eastern edge of the Judean Desert overlooking the Dead Sea, about 10 miles south of Engedi. The embroglio between Rome and the Jews intensified in AD 66 and culminated in the destruction of the Second Temple, as Daniel had predicted (Dan. 9:24-27). According to the Jewish historian Josephus, a group of extremist Jewish rebels of the Sicarii (“dagger men”) overtook Masada and attempted to resist the Roman Legion by hunkering down in the fortified Masada. The Roman soldiers surrounded Masada and began to siege it. In AD 73 the Romans broke through the defense of the Sicarii and found that they had burnt the buildings and committed mass suicide, killing 960 men, women, and children. Only 2 women and 5 children remained alive. The account of Jewish resistance at Masada has been of hope for and inspiration to the Jewish people.

#### *Qumran Caves*

About 13 miles from Jerusalem and about one mile from the western shore of the Dead Sea near its head are “the ruins of Qumran” (Khirbet Qumran). The 11 caves (now 12) in the sheer desert cliffs are the Qumran Caves, the site where the Dead Sea Scrolls were hidden centuries ago, and then eventually found in 1946-47. The scrolls contain Jewish writings, both

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<sup>19</sup>“*Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria; and, behold, they be in Hazazontamar, which is Engedi*” (II Chr. 20:2). The other name *Hazazontamar* means “*the dividing of the date palm.*”

<sup>20</sup>Psalm 63 apparently was the product of David’s time of hiding at Engedi, as the title states, saying, “*A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah.*” Other psalms refer to the possibility of David’s foot slipping on the rugged and craggy Judean wilderness (Pss. 38:16; 94:18).



Scripture and secular, on parchment or papyri in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, and date back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC and AD first century. The scrolls seem to have originated with the Essenes sect of Second Temple Judaism. Within the 225 biblical texts all of the *Tanak* is represented except the Book of Esther. Although some scholars are enthusiastic about the discovery of very early and non-pointed (without vowels) Hebrew texts, their value is of little importance to the Bible believer because the LORD has already preserved His inspired words in the Masoretic Text! The preservation of the Lord's inspired words has occurred through the instrumentality of the Baptist assembly movement (Mt. 28:19-20; I Tim. 3:15).

### ***Jerusalem***

#### ***Temple Mount***

The Temple Mount is Mount Moriah (Gen. 22:2; II Chr. 3:1; I Chr. 21:21-28), the place where Abraham took Isaac to sacrifice, which place was on the eastern edge of Jerusalem. Here Solomon built the First Temple (967 BC) and Zerubbabel built the Second Temple (516 BC). Currently the Islamic Dome of the Rock (AD 692) resides over the foundation stone of Abraham's sacrificial offering.

#### ***Pilate's Hall (8x)***

*"Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews?"* (Jn. 18:33). Pilate's Hall or the *Praetorium* (Mk. 15:16) may have been located either in the Antonia Fortress or Herod's Palace. It was here where the soldiers beat and mocked the Lord (Mt. 27:24-31).

#### ***Pool of Bethesda***

North of the city was the Sheep Gate and nearby was Pool of Bethesda where the Lord healed the man waiting 38 years to be healed,<sup>21</sup> as Scripture revealed, saying, *"Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches"* (Jn. 5:2).

#### ***Stephen's Gate***

St. Stephen's Gate, also known as the Lions' Gate, is on the eastern wall of Jerusalem, facing the Mount of Olives and Gethsemane. It is so-named St. Stephen's Gate because he supposedly was stoned at this gate (Acts 7:1-60). It is currently decorated with four lions and hence its newer name.

#### ***Bethlehem (39x)***

The City of Bethlehem ("house of bread") is about 5 miles south of Jerusalem in the land of Judah. The significance of Bethlehem is that Rachel died in Bethlehem (Gen. 35:19), David

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<sup>21</sup>Was the man a devotee of Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine and healing? The *asclepeion* or healing temple permeated Greece and Rome in the first century. Perhaps the Lord's question to the man was "do you want Jehovah to heal you since your deity Asclepius has failed for 38 years?"

came from Bethlehem (I Sam. 20:6), and the Lord Jesus was born in Bethlehem, as Scripture prophesied, saying, *“But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting”* (Mic. 5:2; cf. also Mt. 2:1; Lk. 2:4).

*Mount of Olives (13x)*

The Mount of Olives is east of Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley and is one of three peaks of a mountain ridge. The peak to north on this 2 mile ridge is Mount Scopus and to the south is the Mount of Corruption (II Ki. 23:13).<sup>22</sup> The Mount of Olives (named because many olive groves) is about 2684 feet high. The ridge is a watershed with its eastern slope beginning the Judean Desert. Historically it has been used as a Jewish cemetery for centuries.

It has great significance biblically with regard to David and the Lord Jesus Christ. King David fled from Absalom, leaving Jerusalem on the east and ascending up the Mount of Olives, weeping in humiliation and heartbreak because of his son’s spiritual tragedy (II Sam. 15:30). The Mount of Olives was a frequent place of solitude for prayer as the precious Saviour visited it often. Luke revealed, saying, *“And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him”* (Lk. 22:39). It was from the Mount of Olives overlooking the City of Jerusalem (c. 2500 feet high) that the Lord delivered the “Olivet Discourse” informing of the coming judgment on the City and Second Temple (per Dan. 9:24-27) and future Tribulation (Mt. 24:1-25:46). Moreover the Lord wept over the City of Jerusalem (Jn. 11:35). It was from the Mount of Olives that the resurrected Saviour ascended and to which mount His feet will touch when He returns again at the end of the tribulation, as Scriptures stated respectively, saying, *“And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day’s journey”* (Acts 1:9-12) and *“And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south ”* (Zech. 14:4).

*Garden of Gethsemane (2x)*

The Garden of Gethsemane (“oil press”) sits at the foot of the Mount of Olives. This was *“the place”* to which the Lord went to pray in agony, as Luke recorded, saying, *“And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him. And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation”* (Lk. 22:39-40). Mark’s Gospel expanded on the place, saying, *“And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray”* (Mk. 14:32; Mt.

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<sup>22</sup>Solomon built altars to pagan deities on this mount (I Ki. 11:7).

26:36). John revealed that Gethsemane was a garden and that the Lord was arrested there, saying, “*When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples*” (Jn. 18:1-12; cf. also v. 26)

*Via Dolorosa*

The “way of sorrow” or the Latin *Via Dolorosa* is a street within the old city of Jerusalem believed to be the path that the Lord Jesus walked on the way to His crucifixion. It is based on the assumption that the *Praetorian* was next to the Antonia Fortress. The Scripture revealed that the precious Saviour 1) was arrested in Gethsemane, 2) brought to Caiaphas, 3) was brought before the council, 4) was brought to Pilate at the *Praetorian*, 5) was sent to Herod and returned to Pilate, 6) and sent to Golgotha Hill.

*Golgotha (3x) and the Garden Tomb*

Tradition maintains that the prominent rocky-crag escarpment near a rock-hewn tomb was the place of the skull (Golgotha). Scripture states, saying, “*And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha*” (Jn. 19:17; vide also Mt. 27:33 and Mk. 15:22). Nearby is a tomb with an adjacent large cistern traditionally accepted as the Garden Tomb. Scripture states, saying, “*And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed*” (Mt. 27:60; Isa. 53:9).

***“He is not here: for he is risen, as he said.  
Come, see the place where the Lord lay” (Mt. 28:6)***

*Finis*

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