

4-2016

Walking the Land: Exploring the Geographical, Cultural, & Historical Context of the Bible

Sarah Veldman

Grand Valley State University, veldmans@mail.gvsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/honorsprojects>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

ScholarWorks Citation

Veldman, Sarah, "Walking the Land: Exploring the Geographical, Cultural, & Historical Context of the Bible" (2016). *Honors Projects*. 531.

<https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/honorsprojects/531>

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Research and Creative Practice at ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Walking the Land

Exploring the Geographical, Cultural, &
Historical Context of the Bible



Sarah Veldman

1st Edition

Introduction	5
Abraham	6
<i>The Call</i>	6
Moses	10
<i>The Exodus</i>	10
The Israelites	13
<i>The Wandering</i>	13
Joshua	16
<i>The Archeological Evidence</i>	16
Samson	20
<i>The Judge</i>	20
David	22
<i>The Shepherd</i>	22
Solomon	24
<i>The First Temple</i>	24
Jerusalem	26
<i>The Timeline</i>	26
Bethlehem	28
<i>The Star</i>	28
Sepphoris	32
<i>The Carpenter</i>	32
Nazareth	34
<i>The Ministry</i>	34

Tabgha	36
<i>The Disciples</i>	36
Bethsaida	38
<i>The Ordinary Town</i>	38
Capernaum	39
<i>The Healing</i>	39
Kinneret Trail	40
<i>The Parables</i>	40
Caesarea Philippi.....	42
<i>The Rock</i>	42
Decapolis	44
<i>The Abyss</i>	44
Gamla.....	46
<i>The Synagogue</i>	46
Beth-Shan	47
<i>The Hellenistic Tension</i>	47
Jerusalem	49
<i>The Temple</i>	49
Mount of Olives	52
<i>The King</i>	52
Gethsemane	53
<i>The Garden</i>	53
Church of Holy Sepulchre	54

<i>The Crucifixion</i>	54
<i>The Resurrection</i>	55
Tabha	57
<i>The Fish</i>	57
Southern Steps	59
<i>The Pentecost</i>	59
Israel Today	62
<i>The Land Between</i>	62

Introduction

The history of the land of Israel is not much different from that of any other modern nation, besides the fact that it is the location for the majority of the events that are recorded in the most popular book in the world. In the United States alone, 88% of households own at least one Bible. In fact, most homes own closer to four copies of the book. The most well known and referred to book in the world is a compilation of stories that start at the creation of the world and continue through prophecies of the end of the world. The book is central to the Christian faith as well as to Judaism. This land has been in conflict and fought over throughout its entire history and it continues to be to this day.

As an individual who grew up learning and reading the stories of the Bible, it never occurred to me that there was an actual place in the world that these stories were rooted to. Over and over I have read about the people of Israel and heard about Jerusalem and Galilee but the idea that these were places that I could actually point to on a map or even visit was completely foreign. Based on most of the conversations I have had with people this seems to be the case for many individuals who read the Bible, whether they are Christians or not. This is why I went to Israel.

The lack of knowledge that I had about this land has motivated me to share all that I have learned after spending time there studying. To me, it seems that trying to study the Bible without learning about its setting, culture, or people is extremely detrimental to the understanding of the messages it teaches.

The timeline of the Bible can be broken into three parts. First the Patriarchal period begins with the story of Abraham and ends with King David's life and spans from 2200 BCE to 1010 BCE. The First Temple Period takes place from 970 BCE to 586 BCE and envelops the construction of the first temple under Solomon, the divided kingdom, and the Babylonian exile with the destruction of the First Temple. The final section of the timeline is the Second Temple Period that begins with the Persian empire in 550 BCE and ends with the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE.

The land, culture, and people of Israel are crucial to understanding many major religions especially Christianity and Judaism. Exploring the Bible in the light of this knowledge adds much deeper content to the words spoken over time by the people of Israel and a fresh way to apply them to our lives. Additionally, I believe that acquiring more knowledge about the land that is home to the three conflicting religions of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity can create great advancements towards these people being able to respect and live alongside of each other.

Chapter 1

Abraham

The Call

The Ancient Near East, 1800 to 1400 B.C.



Abram, and later Abraham, is a central figure to three of the biggest religions in the world. He is a physical ancestor of Jesus and pillar of faith to Christians, the founder of the Jewish faith, and a forefather to the prophet Muhammad to Muslims (Feiler, 2004). In Genesis 12, where we are first introduced to Abram, the scriptural focus is shifted from the creation and condition of the entire human race to this individual character. In a sense, the calling of Abram is where God sets the scene for his story in the land of Canaan. It is Abram's offspring that God claims as his people. These people's stories are recorded throughout the bible and it is through them that Jesus, the core of Christianity, is brought into the world.

“Go from your country...(Genesis 12:1)”

Abram resided in Ur of the Chaldees, one of the greatest cities in the world during his time. Ur was the capital of the ancient Chaldean (Babylonian) empire in ancient Mesopotamia (Feiler, 2004). It is estimated that God called Abram somewhere around 1900 B.C. At this time the empire was among the richest in the world, crops were bountiful because of the Euphrates River, and the empire controlled many trade routes giving them both power and wealth (Feiler, 2004). Therefore, conclusions can be made that Abraham wasn't living in poverty and hunger. However, when God told him to go to “the land I will show you” he left without any hesitation. He left “his country, his kindred, and his father's house” (Genesis 12:1) when God told him to leave, putting his faith in the promises of blessings for him and his offspring. He left his land, the one thing that determines your worth in ancient Mesopotamia, and his family which served as his security, future, stability, and identity. Leaving those things was considered a fate worse than death itself in the Middle Eastern culture (Feiler, 2004).



“So Abram went...(Genesis 12:4)”

The first stop for Abram was Haran where his father passed away and his brother settled. He continued on following God’s call. He first entered the land of Canaan at Shechem where he saw Canaanites inhabiting the land. At the Oak of Moreh, an old Canaanite sanctuary, God again promised “to your offspring I will give this land” and Abram built an altar there to the Lord (Baly, 1957). The next stop was in Bethel where Abram again built an altar and called upon the Lord before he continued toward the Negev. Abram traveled 630 miles from Ur to Haran, 400 miles from Haran to Shechem, and 100 miles from Shechem to Beer-sheba (in the Negev).



“The land I will show you...(Genesis 12:1)”

Why would God lead Abram to this place? At first glance, the land is so seemingly insignificant and small that it seems illogical for a mighty and all powerful God to place His story there. However, Canaan was known as “the land in between,” the middle of the middle of the middle of the world. All major trade routes passed through Canaan and all different people settled along those routes. It is from this land that the rest of the world was essentially controlled. Years and years of conflict over this land have and will continue because people want to control the center of the world. It brings power, wealth, stability, influence, and protection (Feiler, 2004).



“Abraham planted a Tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God...” (Genesis 21:33)

The Tamarisk tree is a common middle eastern evergreen tree. It produces needles and can grow up to 50 feet tall. The tree provides shade and coolness in a dry and weary land as explained by Hareuveni:

“The needles excrete salt. At night, moisture increases in the cool air. Water vapor adheres to the salt particles excreted on branches and needles and forms droplets. In the morning tiny droplets of water appear on the thin branches. As the morning sun warms the air, the water droplets evaporate and cool the tree and the shade below it.” (Hareuveni, N, 1989)

Tamarisk trees have a 50-100 year lifespan. Abraham’s planting of tamarisk trees is a powerful sign of faith in God’s promises because he was planting something that would benefit his future offspring.

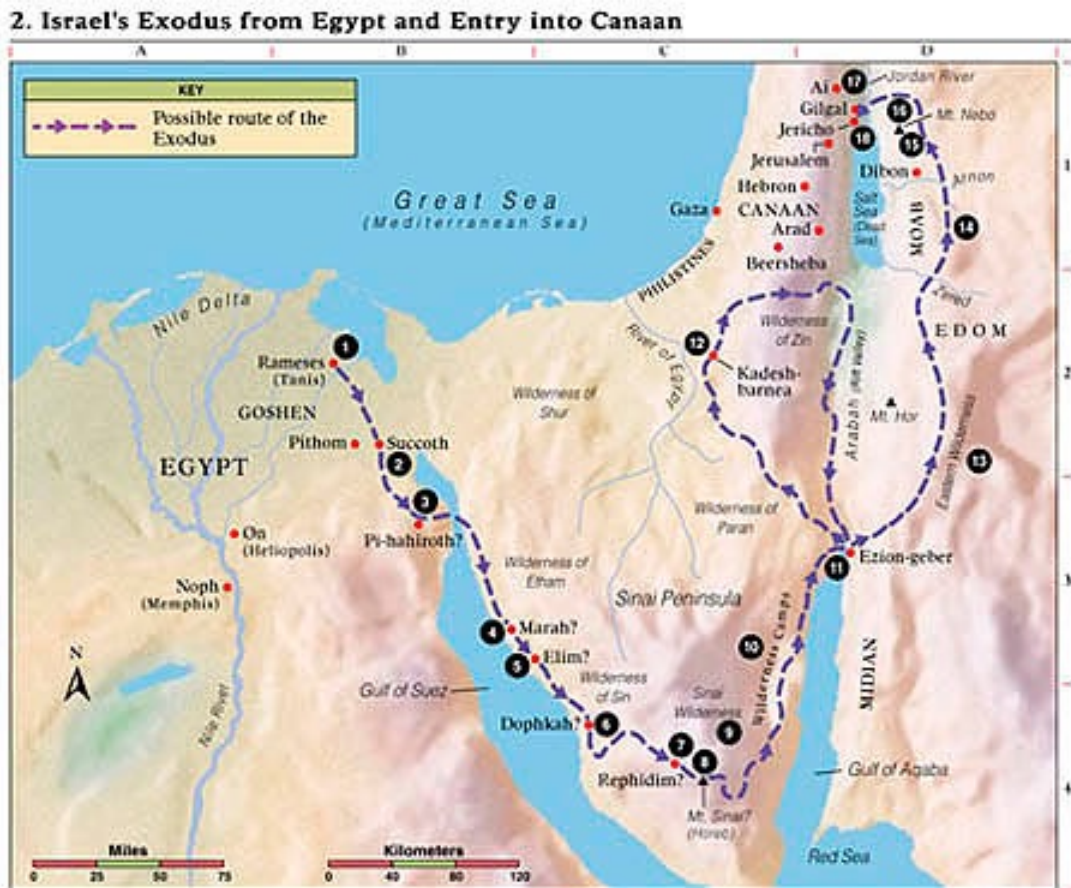
“Go...”

The command that God gives to Abram in this story is interesting in the Hebrew language. The word is translated to “lech lecha” and it literally means “go, walk yourself.” This phrase is used twice in the scriptures. In Genesis 12:1 God says, “lech lecha your land, your family, your identity, your past” and in Genesis 22:1-2 God says “lech lecha to the land of Moriah and sacrifice your one and only son to me, give up your promised blessing, your future.” Together God tells and invites Abram to give up everything: past, present, and future.

Chapter 2

Moses

The Exodus



The book of Exodus introduces a second story about the beginnings of the Israelite people. Where Genesis displays the creation of the world and the binding of Israel as a family to God through Abraham and the patriarchs, Exodus portrays the creation of a covenant that extends beyond family unto an entire nation that is delivered by Moses out of slavery.

“When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son..(Exodus 2:10)”

The Hebrew born Moses was raised in Egyptian royalty around 1390 BC (Kugel, 1998). This time period in Ancient Egypt marks the beginning of the New Kingdom up until the 18th century. The power of their religious leaders was unreachable, their culture focused on art and architecture, and wealth was abundant for those that ruled. Architecturally, the building

of pyramids shifted to the building of sphinx representing their rulers as well as the construction of the great sphinx of Giza (Mark, 2013). This required slave labor which is where we find the Hebrew people in this story. Now Moses, being a Hebrew, grew up in luxury but also watched his people suffer under the hands of the Egyptians.

“But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian... (Exodus 2:15)”

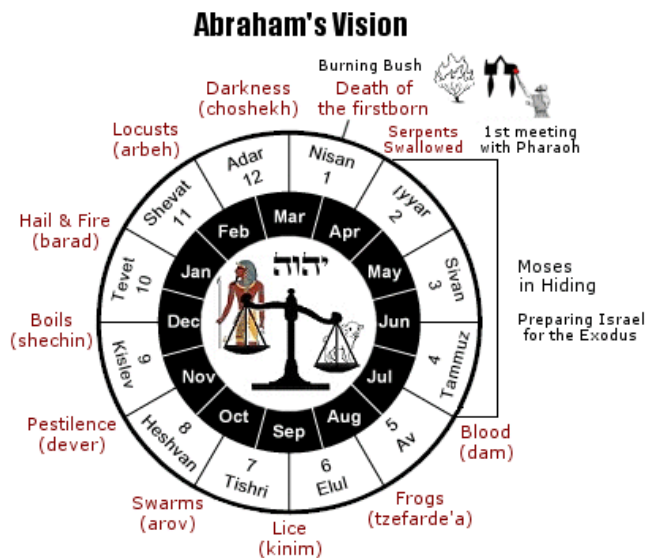
When Moses was 40 years old he killed an Egyptian that was punishing a Hebrew slave. When Pharaoh heard of this he demanded that Moses be put to death. So Moses fled. After he journeyed across the Sinai peninsula he came to the land of Midian where he encountered the Midianite people. This nomadic race from Arabia was very large in number and had great wealth in their flocks and herds (Burton, 1878). Moses married a Midianite and became a shepherd for her father’s flocks. Being a shepherd in this culture was a job usually given to the youngest child in the family or a teenage girl putting Moses in a place that was quite different from the first 40 years of his life spent in Egyptian royalty.

“Moses, Moses...(Exodus 3:4)”

It is while Moses is tending his father in law’s sheep that he has an encounter with God in a burning bush. Many scholars suggest ideas about the symbolism of God appearing in a bush. Some believe it was reassurance that even though the Exodus from Egypt would be very difficult, it would not consume the Israelites like the fire did not consume the bush. Others argue that it is more of an image for Moses. For God to make himself known humbly in a scrawny bush may have been encouragement to Moses as he struggled with his insecurities of what God was asking him to do (Enkin, 2013). This encounter takes place on Mount Horeb where Moses later receives the ten commandments from God, strikes a rock to give water to the congregation of Israel, and the Israelites find themselves wandering for many years. The language used in this conversation also carries deep meaning. God calls out saying “Moses, Moses” very specifically two times. Some theologians offer the concept that God does this to first call Moses away from something (shepherding, being a murderer, being a foreigner) and then to call him to something (delivering the Israelites from the Egyptians and being a part of God’s story)(Jacobs, 2013). After arguing with God, recruiting his brother, and seeing many signs performed, Moses finally reenters Egypt and speaks to Pharaoh at 80 years of age.



“Parashat Bo...(Exodus 10:1-13:16)”

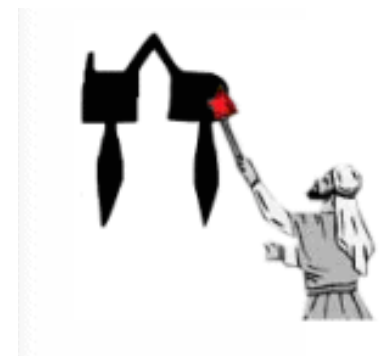


1. Av 1 - Blood (i.e., *dam*: דָּם)
2. Elul 1 - Frogs (i.e., *tzefarde'a*: צְפַרְדֵּעַ)
3. Tishri 1 - Lice (i.e., *kinim*: כְּנִים)
4. Cheshvan 1 - Swarms (i.e., *arov*: עֲרוֹב)
5. Kislev 1 - Pestilence (i.e., *dever*: דֶּבֶר)
6. Tevet 1 - Boils (i.e., *shechin*: שְׁחִין)
7. Shevat 1 - Hail and Fire (i.e., *barad*: בָּרָד)
8. Adar 1 - Locusts (i.e., *arbeh*: אַרְבֵּה)
9. Nisan 1 - Darkness (i.e., *choshekh*: חוֹשֶׁךְ)
10. Nisan 15 - Death of the firstborn (i.e., *makat bechorim*: מַכַּת בְּכוֹרוֹת)

When Pharaoh refused to let the Israelite people go, a series of plagues were inflicted upon Egypt over a time period of 12 months with approximately three weeks between each occurrence. The final plague took place a year after Moses first approached Pharaoh. (Rabbi Bechaye, 11th century).

“Makat Bechorot (death of firstborn) & The Passover Lamb”

When the final plague came, God’s instructions to the Hebrew people involved them killing a lamb and spreading its blood on their doorposts. This was to be a sign for the Lord to pass over the marked households as he struck down all the firstborns in Egypt. The blood marked on the door resembled the Hebrew letter Chet. This letter is connected with the word “chai,” which is short for “chayim” (life) in the Hebrew language. Jews associated this passover as a symbol of divine life which comes more fully into context when Jesus becomes the sacrificial lamb (Parsons, 2015).

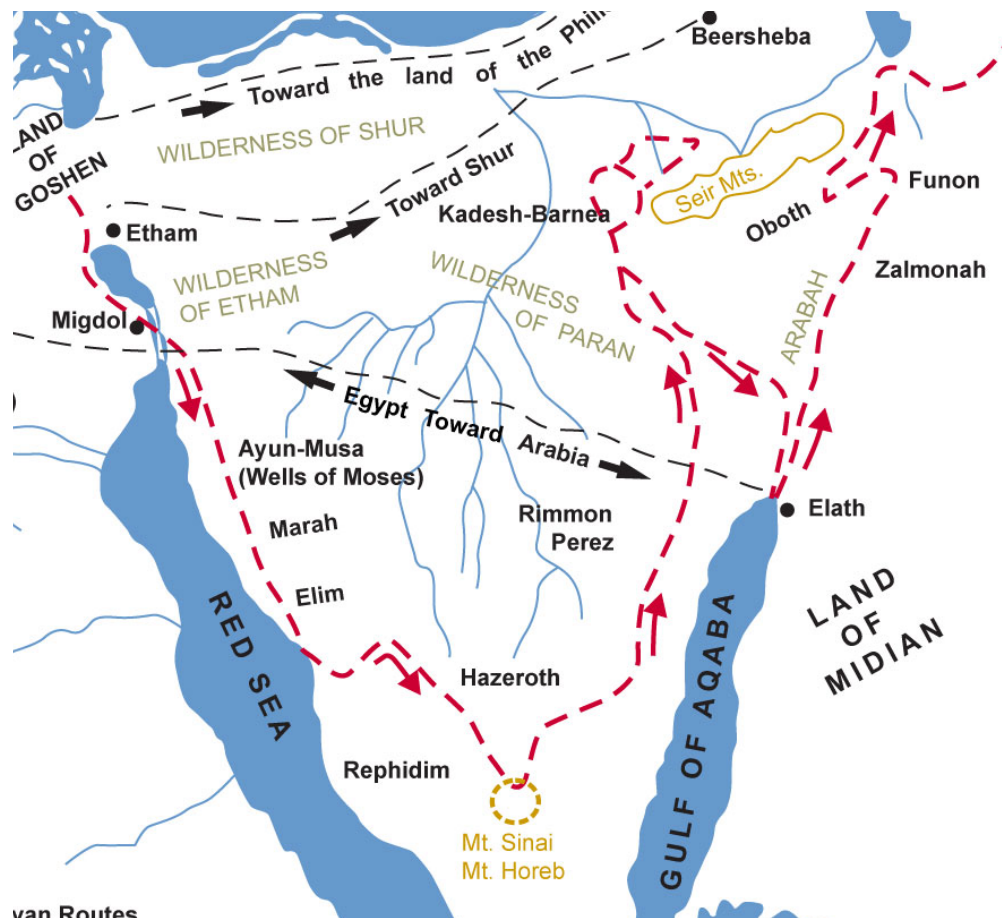


At this time, the Egyptians worshipped Khnum, a sheep god. The bones of the lambs that were sacrificed for this night were thrown out to the streets for the dogs to devour. Additionally, when the passover happened all of the Egyptian idols were destroyed (Parsons, 2015). In this powerful display of God’s supremacy and power, Moses leads the nation that God had chosen and made a covenant with out of slavery. The Jewish people continue to celebrate the passover, their freedom, and the giving of the law on Mount Sinai to this day.

Chapter 3

The Israelites

The Wandering



After God brings the Israelites out of Egypt, they miraculously cross the red sea and follow Him in a pillar of fire and smoke through the Sinai desert. They receive the law on Mount Horeb and then head north towards the promised land. When they arrive, they send twelve spies into the land. Ten reported back that they should not enter because of the fierce people living there while two, Caleb and Joshua, protested that they could overcome them because the Lord had promised them and was with them. The Israelites lack of faith and uprising against God angered Him, and he commanded that none of them would enter the promised land. They were sentenced to wandering in the wilderness for forty years. Starting when they left Egypt up through their wilderness wandering, the Israelites complained and grumbled against God many times.

“And the people grumbled against Moses saying, “What shall we drink?” And he cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet... (Exodus 15:24-25)”

The Israelites set out from the Red Sea and traveled through the wilderness of Shur, where they found no water for three days. The wilderness of Shur (Zhur) extends from Lake Serbonis to Ain Howarah, it is also known as the wilderness of Etham (Numbers 33:8, Clarke, 1831). During these three days, the Israelites covered around 12 miles because of their congregation's huge number and due to the fact that they didn't know their destination, so there was no haste (Clarke, 1831). This wilderness was a desert, but not the typical flat and sandy desert we picture. It was treeless, waterless, plantless, and full of rocky terrain and canyons. More than anything else, the Israelites needed water, this was the one thing that they were diligently searching for, and when they finally found it, it was bitter and undrinkable. Drinking it would have made the bowels and stomach swell and for women, the womb would become barren, leaving the people in no condition to continue hiking through the wilderness (Numbers 5:22). In their need, God provides in a truly supernatural way as there are no records of any plant, tree, bush, herb, or berry having the ability to turn bitter water sweet. The Israelites complained, Moses follows God's instructions, and God provides.

“Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” And Moses said, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test God?”...(Exodus 15:24-25)”

The Israelites are now in the wilderness of Zin where they once again do not have access to water. The wilderness of Zin (Sin) is adjacent to Mt. Sinai in the central southern half of the Sinai peninsula. It shares the same desert qualities as the wilderness of Shur. This is where Moses spent years shepherding his father-in-law, Jethro's, flocks (Wooley & Lawrence, 1914). He probably knew the land well, including where to find water. In the wilderness, there is a certain type of rock that has the ability to absorb water and contain it for a long period of time. Only experienced shepherds, like Moses, knew where to find these rocks and that striking them could bring forth water. So when God commands Moses to strike the rock which he is shown, it's not an odd request except if you consider that Moses would have tried





that before they got to this point. Here the Lord performs another miracle by bringing enough water out of the rock to quench millions of people's thirst. The Israelites complained, Moses follows God's instructions, and God provides.

“Now there was no water for the congregation. And they assembled themselves against Moses and against Aaron...(Numbers 20:1-2)”

Once again the Jewish people find themselves in the wilderness of Zin without water. This occurred in the 40th year of their wandering (Clarke, 1831). They are reaching the very end of their time in the desert and they are claiming that Moses has brought them out of slavery in Egypt just to perish in the desert (Numbers 20:3-4). In this situation God commands Moses to take his staff, go to the rock that He will show him, and speak to the rock to yield its water (Numbers 20:8). Unlike in Exodus 17, here the Lord plans to make His power even more obviously known. By now, the Israelites have probably learned the trick all the shepherds knew about striking rocks to get water. So here the Lord plans to quench their thirst by using the words of Moses. However, Moses caught up in his frustration ends up striking the rock twice. God speaks and says, “because you did not believe in me and uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, you will never enter into the land that I have given to you.” (Numbers 20:12) The word believe in this verse is the hebrew word “emunah.”

“specifically, “emunah” is an innate conviction, a perception of truth that transcends, rather than evades, reason. It is a belief and faith that causes one to trust and obey.” (Freeman, 2016)

Speaking to a rock to give millions of people water isn't exactly reasonable to the human mind. Because Moses did not “emunah” in God in this situation, he dies before the people get to enter the promised land. The Israelites complained, Moses did not listen to God, but God still provides for them.

Chapter 4

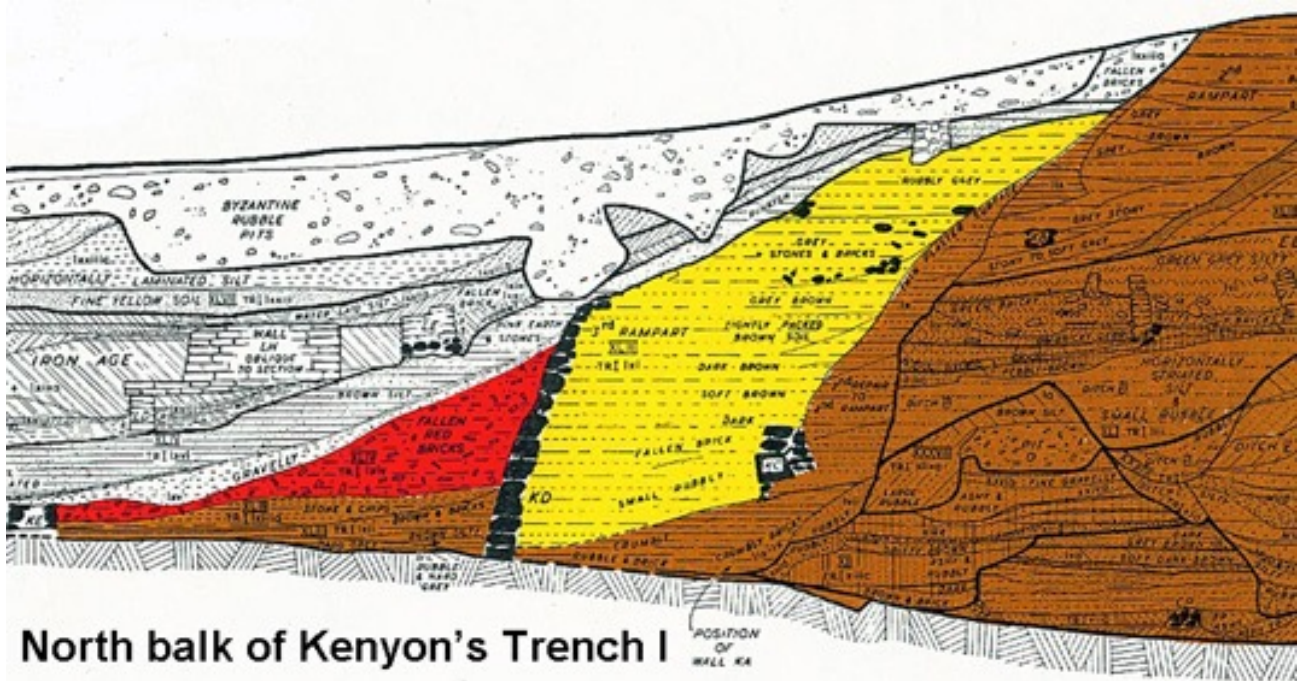
Joshua

The Archeological Evidence



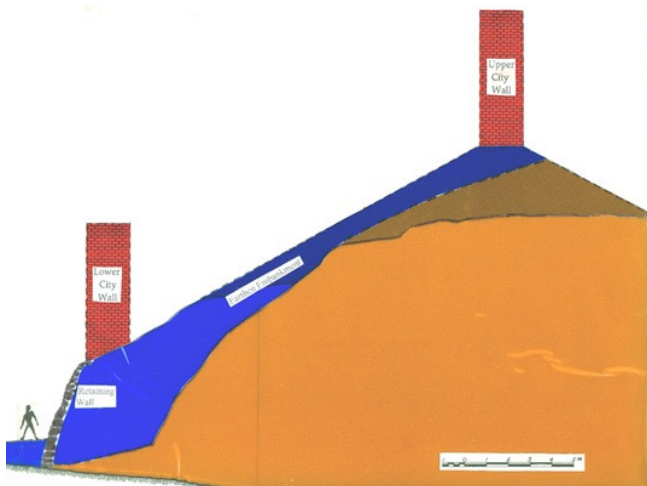
“..go over this Jordan, into the land I’ve given to you...(Joshua 1:2)”

After Moses dies, Joshua takes command and is charged with leading the Jewish people into their promised land. The most remembered event of this conquest is the famous battle of Jericho, where the walls came “a tumbling down.” In Israel today the site of ancient Jericho is a popular tourist attraction. Claims are made in the brochures given out at the site that deliberately contradict the story as it is recorded in the book of Joshua. Joel Kramer, founder of SourceFlix, decided to dig into this issue and really challenge the statements being given to the public and the statements in the Bible in his film “Jericho Unearthed.”



“..the people shouted a great shout, and the wall fell flat down... (Joshua 6:20)”

The first claim made at this tourist site is that the wall surrounding Jericho did indeed fall down, but it was caused by an earthquake. This is based much on the work of archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon in the 1950s. Being a much more realistic option than the Israelites marching around the wall and yelling at it, an earthquake seems like a logical answer to how the entire city was destroyed. However, when you examine the archeological digs, it doesn't make sense at all. The Hebrew for “fell flat down” (Joshua 6:20) is more accurately translated as the wall “fell beneath itself.”



Jericho was fortified behind a city wall and up on top of a hill. At the bottom of the hill was a mud brick retaining wall. The harvest was just taken in (Joshua 3:15) and the people of Jericho could've survived in there along time. Based on Kenyon's detailed drawings, significant evidence can be drawn to show that the mud brick city wall did collapse and that the deposits were resting at the bottom of the stone retaining wall.



Of the archeological digs at this site, Kenyon's work was the most detailed. At the west side of the tell at the base of the retaining wall (or revetment) she discovered:

“fallen red bricks piling nearly to the top of the revetment. These probably came from the wall on the summit of the bank [and/or]...the brickwork above the revetment” (Kenyon 1981: 110)

She found a pile of red bricks from the fallen city walls. If an earthquake were to have caused the destruction of the walls, the bricks would have fallen on both sides of the retaining wall and up at the top of the tel, but they weren't. They all piled at the bottom of revetment. These findings were also similar to those in 1997 in the Italian-Palestinian excavations at the south end of the tel. Another question posed is how did the Israelites then get up over the 12-15 foot mound into the city. According to Kenyon's drawings the walls falling beneath themselves created a ramp-like structure that allowed the Israelites to march up into the city.

“And they burned the city with fire and everything in it...(Joshua 6:24)”

Another claim is that there was never a fire in the city. The Lord instructed Joshua to burn the entire city and to take the gold, silver, and bronze and dedicate them to the Lord. This is also proven by the archeology of the ancient tel. After the layer of red bricks, there was a layer of ash and debris that was about three feet thick, described by Kenyon here:

“The destruction was complete. Walls and floors were blackened or reddened by fire, and every room was filled with fallen bricks, timbers, and household utensils; in most rooms the fallen debris was heavily burnt, but the collapse of the walls of the eastern rooms seems to have taken place before they were affected by the fire.” (Kenyon 1981: 370)

Additionally, Kenyon and archeologist John Garstang both found remains of jars filled with burnt grain which was a very valuable commodity and would usually be taken and used by any intelligent commander (Kenyon, 1981). However, in concordance with the Lord's command, Joshua ordered everything to be burned. The grain was also recorded as just taken in (Joshua 3:15) at the harvest, and its presence in the city affirms the account even more. The last layer described by archeologists in their reports was a wash layer that signifies a period of time where no civilization was present. This coincides and is supported by Joshua's curse on the land:

“Joshua laid an oath on them at that time, saying, “Cursed before the Lord be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho. At the cost of his firstborn shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates.” (Joshua 6:26)

“Biblical criticism exists because it can take it.”

As we saw the obvious support for the story of Jericho in the remains of the city right before our eyes, we couldn't help but wonder, “How can people even have an argument over something this obvious?” Entire fields of archeology are dedicated to contradicting the Bible. Joel commented that, “Jericho is the biggest argument against the Old Testament currently, and I can prove the argument is ridiculous in ten minutes.”

This is real evidence for the Bible. Joel also believes that, “you can't do archeology in Narnia.”



Chapter 5

Samson

The Judge



“..the people of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord and were given into the hands of the Philistines for forty years...(Judges 13:1)”

From 1200-1000 BCE, the Israelites were living in the land God had promised them. However, during this time they went through many cycles of falling away from God and becoming conquered and enslaved. God rose up judges like Deborah, Gideon, Samson, and Eli to deliver them from their enemies. They lived in a region of Israel called the Shephelah which means “low” or “to bow.” From the

Shephelah, the Judah Mountains are to the east and

the Coastal Plains are to the west. The hills had a nari-lime-crust 3-5 feet deep that made it impossible to grow anything. So, the Shephelah (which received an incredible 24 inches of rain annually and full of rich soil) was highly valued for agriculture. Lying between the International Coastal Highway and the Patriarchal Highway, containing 6 valleys from east to west, the Shephelah was a

powerful place to control. During this time period (1075 BCE) the big empires in this part of the world were preoccupied with fighting each other so the Philistines and the Israelites were left to “play” while the “cats” were away. Philistia was on the coast and the Israelites were in the mountains and they spent years fighting with each other for control of the Shephelah which ultimately meant control of this part of the world.



“the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death...(Judges 13:7)”

The man that would rise up to be a judge for God’s people was born to a barren woman. She was told that he would be a Nazirite to God from birth and that he would save his people. He was named Samson or Shimshon meaning “of the sun, little light.” The instructions for the Nazirite vow are found in Numbers 6:1-8. This vow of separation meant the individual couldn’t eat fruit of the vine, would never have a razor touch his body, and could not come in contact with dead bodies.

“Samson went to the vineyards of Timnah through the Sorek valley...(Judges 14:5)”

The word Sorek means “grape.” Samson breaks two parts of his Nazirite vow in Judges 14:1-9. On his way to Timnah a lion attacks him and he kills it leaving the carcass. While traveling back he eats honey from the carcass coming into contact with a dead body. At Timnah with his new wife, he hosts a “mishteh” or a drinking feast. After this, Samson and the Philistines go back and forth with layers and layers of revenge. Samson wipes out their grain (winter crop) and olive (summer) crops, he strikes down 1,000 men with an unclean donkey jawbone, and he falls in love with Delilah whose name means “of the night.”

“..and she called a man and had him shave off the seven locks on his head...(Judges 16:19)”

Taking a Philistine bribe, Delilah sells out the secret to Samson’s strength. His hair is cut, the Philistines capture him, and he is chained between two pillars of the prison. The people of Philistia praised their pagan god Dagon for delivering their enemy into their hands. Calling upon God one last time for his strength he makes the building collapse killing thousands of Philistines. This ended Samson’s 20 years judging Israel. If his own agenda and thirst for revenge weren’t controlling his life he could have judged for much longer and shown many people God’s glory through his magnificent strength.



Chapter 6

David

The Shepherd

“And Saul and the men of Israel encamped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up in line of battle against the Philistines...(1 Samuel 17:2)”

In 1050 BCE, Saul is reigning as the first king of Israel who is still in conflict with the Philistines. They are in the Elah Valley with Azekah to the east and Jerusalem to the west near a major road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. In this culture, “champion warfare” was common. Champions were chosen to represent the people’s gods and then the gods decide the fate of the fight (Gladwell, 2013).

“For forty days the Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening...(1 Samuel 17:16)”

The Jewish people adhered to 613 commandments found in the Bible (Bell, 2016). The “Mitzvot” or “commandments” are those given directly by God. The “halakhah” includes a wide variety of rabbinical laws which are elaborated in the Talmud, or the Jewish commentary to the Bible. These laws had very specific implications for what daily life looks like. The life and worship of Judaism is described by Miriam Bell:

“A great deal of Jewish religious observance is centered in the home. This includes daily prayers three times each day - in the morning (Shacharit), noon (Mincha), and after sunset (Ma'ariv or Arvit).

Synagogues are for congregational prayer and study. On Mondays, Thursdays, the Sabbath, festivals and High Holy Days, the synagogue service includes readings in Hebrew from the Torah and the Prophets.

The synagogue service can be led by any knowledgeable member of the congregation. However, this function is usually performed by rabbi, an ordained religious teacher who has studied in a Jewish religious seminary (yeshiva).

A rabbi is expected to conduct weekly or daily study sessions for members of the congregation. The rabbi can also be called upon to give informed decisions about the application of Jewish religious law and tradition to daily life. This may include adjudication of personal disputes.” (Bell, 2016)

The daily prayer times would start with the reciting of the Sh'ma (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). During two of those times, the 6'9" warrior chosen by the Philistines challenged the Israelites as he stood dressed in armor that weighed more than I do holding a javelin and spear (Gladwell, 2013). He openly defied the Israelites' God during their time of worship.

“Then David took his staff and chose five smooth stones from the brook. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine... (1 Samuel 17:40)”

David, the youngest of his family was left to shepherd the family's flocks in Bethlehem while his older brothers went to fight the Philistines. The young, small, and recently anointed David one day traveled to the battle lines to bring his brothers provisions. When he arrived and saw what was happening he convinced King Saul to let him fight. He grabs five stones, possibly resembling the five cities of Philistia, and steps up to the man defying his God with the one weapon that he was comfortable with.

“A sling has a leather pouch with two long cords attached to it, and ... a projectile, either a rock or a lead ball. ... It's not a child's toy. It's in fact an incredibly devastating weapon. ... If you do the calculations on the ballistics, on the stopping power of the rock fired from David's sling, it's roughly equal to the stopping power of a [.45 caliber] handgun. This is an incredibly devastating weapon. ... When David lines up ... he has every intention and every expectation of being able to hit Goliath at his most vulnerable spot between his eyes.” (Gladwell, 2013)

At noon, when David strikes Goliath in the head, the warrior falls (counterintuitively) forward and lays face down a position similar to that of the position of prayer that the Jews would be practicing at that time. God uses the thing that an under qualified David was good at and had experience with to bring glory to Himself.



Chapter 7

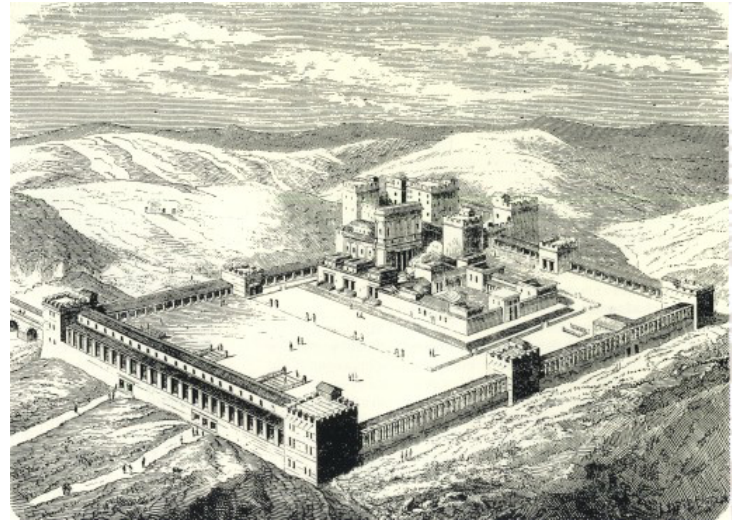
Solomon

The First Temple

“You will not build a house in my name, for you are a man of battles and have shed blood...(1 Chronicles 28:3)”

King David is remembered as both a great warrior and the emotional writer of the Psalms. He ruled from approximately 1010 to 970 BCE and dreamed of building a Great Temple that would be a resting place for the Ark of the Covenant which held the ten commandments. However, God commanded him not to do so

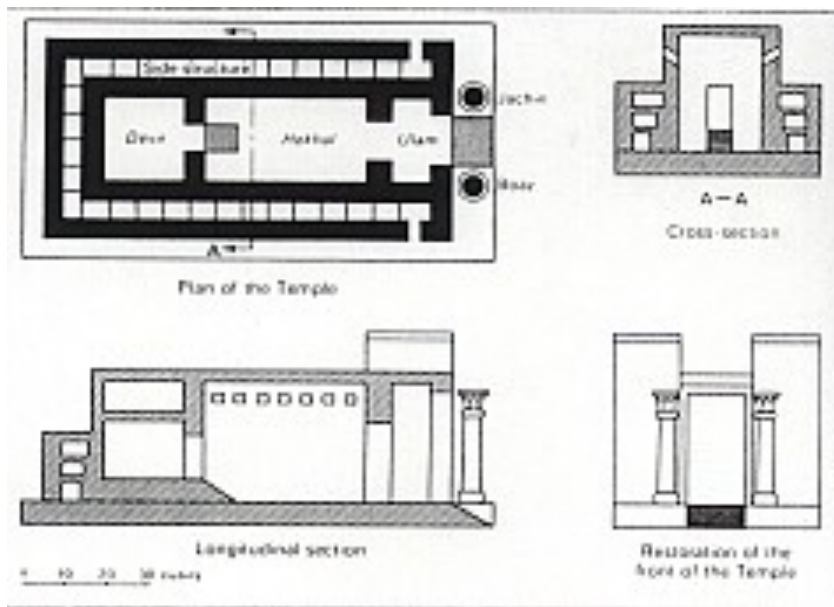
and his son, Solomon, constructed the temple during his reign as king. It stood for 374 years until it was destroyed by the Babylonians led by King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC.



The Structure (2 Chronicles)

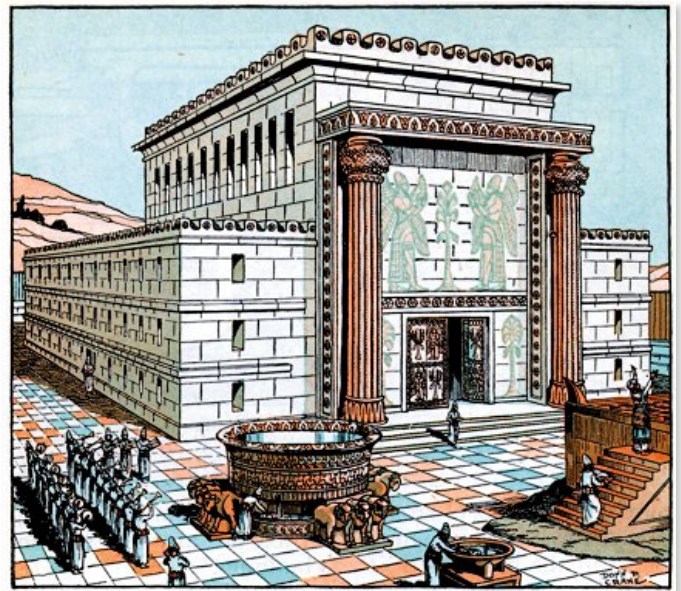
The inside ceiling was 180 feet long, 90 feet wide, and 50 feet high. The highest point

reached 120 cubits, or about 20 stories tall. Solomon used vast amounts of cedar wood from King Hiram of Tyre (1 Kings 5:20), quarried huge blocks of choice stone, and laid the entire foundation with hewn stone (Steckoll, 1972). Solomon relayed his debt to King Hiram by handing over twenty Galilean towns (1 Kings 9:11). The construction of the temple took seven years to complete and King Solomon dedicated it in 953 BC with prayer, offerings, and a great public feast. (1 Kings 8:65-66)



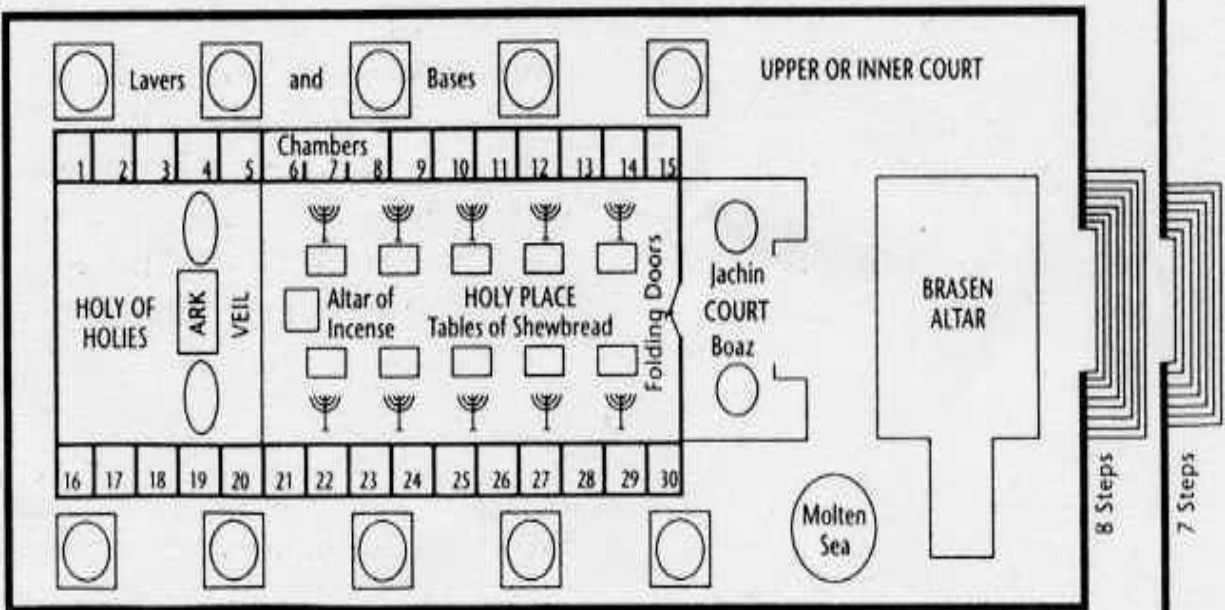
“A Temple without an Idol”

Unlike any other temple in the ancient world, Solomon’s temple contained no idols. It contained only a Cherubim overshadowing the Mercy Seat which overshadowed the Ark (1 Kings 8:27-30). The structure of the temple reflected the needs of God’s people. It emphasized salvation through forgiveness and grace and symbolized the hearing ear of God. It was a place of refuge to strangers and a house of prayer for all God fearing people (Isaiah 56:7). The Sanhedrin were housed in the Chamber of Hewn Stone in the Temple Courtyard. A ritual bath (mikvah) used by the high priest was supplied by “living” water from the Spring Ein Eitam located in the hills of Bethlehem near the pools of Solomon (Vilnay, 1973).



SOLOMON'S TEMPLE

GREAT COURT OR OUTER COURT



Chapter 8

Jerusalem

The Timeline

The Hyksos Period

14th Century BCE

The name Jerusalem appears in diplomatic correspondence as Urusalim in the Amarna Letters

1010-970

The reign of King David

1003

King David establishes Jerusalem as Capital of United Kingdom of Israel

970-931

The reign of King Solomon

950

King Solomon commences construction of the First Temple.

931

Division of Kingdom into Israel and Judah.

837-800

The reign of Hezekiah, King of Judah – tunnels conduit from Gihon spring to Siloam pool.

721

Assyrians conquer northern Kingdom of Israel and carry 10 of the 12 tribes into captivity and eventual dispersal.

701

Hezekiah successfully withstands Sennacherib's assault on Jerusalem.

598-587

Nebuchadnezzar's second invasion

597

Babylonians capture Jerusalem

588-586

Nebuchadnezzar's third invasion

586

Destruction of Jerusalem and of the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar, and the exile of the Jews to Babylon (Lam 1.4 / 2.2)

539

Fall of Babylon

The Persian Period

538

Edict of Cyrus

537

Remnant of about 50,000 Jews return from Babylon by edict of King Cyrus

520

Work begins on rebuilding the Temple

515

Completion and rededication of the Second Temple under Zerubbabel (Ezra 6.15-18)

458

Ezra the Scribe comes from Babylon — Law revived

445

Nehemiah appointed governor of Judea by Artaxerxes, return from Babylon – rebuilds city walls

397

Ezra, the Scribe initiates religious reforms

332 BCE — 63 BCE

The Hellenistic Period

332

Alexander the Great defeats Darius at Gaugamela and conquers Palestine from the Persians (*Daniel 11.3*) captures Jerusalem and Hellenization begins

323

Death of Alexander in Babylon — Wars of Succession begin

320

Ptolemy I captures Jerusalem

320-198

Rule of the Egyptian Ptolemies

198-167

Rule of the Syrian Seleucids

169

Seleucid king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-163) outlaws Judaism and on December 25th, profanes the Temple

The Hasmonean Period

- 166 The priest Mattathias begins Maccabean revolt
- 167-141 Maccabean War of Liberation
- 164 Judah Maccabee recaptures Jerusalem and restores the Temple
- 166-160 Rule of Judah the Maccabee
- 160-143 Rule of Jonathan
- 150 Essene community founded
- 143-135 Rule of Simon Maccabeus

63 BCE — 324 CE/AD

The Roman Period

- 63 General Pompey captures Jerusalem for Rome
- 63-37 Hasmonean rules continues but under the protection of Rome
- 40 Rome appoints Herod King of Judea
- 40-AD 4 Reign of Herod the Great
- 37 King Herod the Great captures Jerusalem
- 19 Preparation of stones for the rebuilding of the Temple
- 18 Herod starts actual rebuilding of the Temple

- 10 Although not complete until AD63, Temple is dedicated About 5/4
- John the Baptist, Jesus of Nazareth born (year approximate)
- 04 Herod the Great dies

BCE to CE/AD

- 26-36 Pontius Pilate, Roman procurator of Judea for 10 years
- 31 April 25 / Nisan 14 Crucifixion of Jesus
- 41-44 Agrippa, king of Judea, builds new city wall (The "Third Wall")
- 44 Death of Herod Agrippa
- 63 Temple completed
- 64
- 66-73 The Great Revolt - The War of the Jews against the Romans
- 70 Fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the Second Temple by Titus



Chapter 9

Bethlehem

The Star

*“And all went to be registered each from their own home town...
(Luke 2:3)”*

The Second Temple Period contains the Jewish return from exile in 538 BCE, the construction of the second temple in 516 BCE, and then a time period of around 400 years that takes place between the recordings of the Old and New Testaments. During that time, Alexander the Great rose to power along with his Hellenistic ideals, the Egyptian Ptolemies and the Syrian Seleucids fought over the land of Israel, Seleucid King Antiochus Epiphanes outlawed Judaism, the Maccabean Revolt occurred, and the Roman Empire took over Israel. Now under Roman rule and Herod the Great, the story found in Luke 2 takes place (Mason, 2016). The census decree from Caesar Augustus (Octavian) was most likely a way for the Romans to produce a registration list for taxes. This is a painful reminder for the Jewish people of their position under

Rome. As promised in Micah 5:1-2, the Messiah was to be born in the "city of David" also known as Bethlehem. This is where Joseph and Mary traveled for the census and this is where Jesus came to be born.



“When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed and all of Jerusalem was with him...(Matthew 2:3)”

King Herod was a “puppet king” over Israel put in place by Rome. Herod was a violent, crazy, and paranoid man. He killed 3 of his own sons and his wife as well as giving an order to kill all boys 2 years old and under after the Magi came to him seeking the Messiah. Even his friend and patron Augustus once said, “I’d rather be Herod’s pig than Herod’s son.” (Petro, 2014) Herod wanted to be King of the Jews. As a ruler he tried to please both Rome and the people, and when he heard that there was a new “King of the Jews,” he was furious and took extreme actions to make sure that his power wasn’t threatened.



Herod was also a builder. He built up structures, palaces, and fortresses to demonstrate his power, prestige, and capabilities. The Herodium building process began in 23 BC and took 3 years to complete and sits right on the edge of Bethlehem. Jerusalem lies to the North, the Mount of Olives and the Dead Sea are to the East, and the Judean Wilderness (“the land of the shepherds”) also lies to the East. The Herodium was a massive structure where Herod could retreat easily from Jerusalem. It contained four towers ranging from 14-18 meters in diameter, an outer wall 63 meters in diameter and 35 meters deep into the hill, and a swimming pool 70 x 40 x 40 meters resting down below the Herodium (Petro, 2014). The nearest water source, the Artas Spring was 3.5 miles away from this luxurious palace, and

water was brought there through the aqueducts. In the shadows of this massive structure, in a humble stable, Jesus was born.



“Magi came from the East to Jerusalem...(Matthew 2:1)”

The name “Magi” was the name that Babylonians gave to wise men, astrologers, physicians, and people who knew a lot about a lot. In 597 BC the Israelites were exiled to Babylon. It is likely that these Magi were descendants of those exiled or that they were Babylonian people that were influenced by those in exile.

A prominent example of this is in the story of Daniel. Daniel was among the Israelites exiled to Babylon. He was impressive in looks, skill, and potential so King Nebuchadnezzar brought him into the palace to learn and study under the royal curriculum. While living in the palace, Daniel was faithful to the Torah, he chose not to defile himself with the food and wine that he was being fed and because of that, God blessed him with great wisdom. He “stood before the king with ten times better understanding and wisdom in every matter than all of the magicians and enchanters in the land.” (Daniel 1:20) After interpreting a dream for King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel is put in charge of all the wise men, or Magi, in Babylon. Later in his life, he is threatened to withhold from praying to his God or he would be thrown into the lion’s den. He continues to be faithful, spends a night in the den, and returns unharmed.

After this, King Dairius, issues a decree that all people throughout Babylon shall worship and serve the God of Daniel.

Now, 500 years later, Magi from the land of Babylon who have been waiting for the promised Messiah they had learned about by studying God's word, travel over 900 miles in search of Jesus, and when they find Him, they are overjoyed. When comparing Daniel and Herod's legacies, one was a great builder and the other was a faithful and resilient servant of the Lord whose actions resulted in the Magi seeking the Messiah and spreading that news. Which one matters? Now, 2500 years later, the remains of the Herodium are still in Bethlehem and Herod's giant swimming pool is still partially in tact but it has fallen from its glory, but we are still talking about and seeking Jesus.



Chapter 10

Sepphoris

The Carpenter

“Isn’t this the carpenter’s son?... (Matthew 13:55)”

Herod had three sons that ruled different areas of Israel. One of them, Herod Antipas made Sepphoris his capital in Galilee. It took him 14 years to build his capital that would become the “ornament of Galilee.” As Jesus grew up in the Galilee region, the Gospels don’t give much detail. What we can learn from Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 is that Jesus was a carpenter’s son and therefore a carpenter, as in accordance with tradition he was taught the family trade. A more accurate description of a carpenter in this time would be a stone mason. To build his capital, Antipas utilized vast stone quarries in the area. If Jesus was working with Joseph at this time it is likely that they were supplied work from this capital building project.



We often don't think about Jesus' life prior to his ministry that began at age 30, but I wonder what it was like to be the Messiah working as a stone mason for King Herod Antipas, the man whose father wanted Jesus dead so much so he executed all children his age. A look into the Hebrew word for work, "avad" may offer some insight into that.

Genesis 3:23 "Therefore the Lord sent him out of the garden to work the land from which he was taken."

Exodus 34:21 "You shall labor six days..."

Psalms 2:11 "Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling."

Psalms 100:1-2 "Make a joyful noise to the Lord of all the Earth! Worship the Lord with gladness! Come into His presence with singing!"

"Work," "labor," "serve," and "worship" are all translated to the same word, "avad," in the original language of the Bible. Jesus worked as a carpenter for a number of years before He spent 3 years doing ministry. His work in both settings were serving and worshipping the Lord.

"If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as a Michaelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, 'Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'" -Martin Luther King Jr.

"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3:17)



Chapter 11

Nazareth

The Ministry

“When He heard that John had been arrested, He withdrew into the Galilee. And leaving Nazareth He went and lived in Capernaum ... (Matthew 4:12-13)”

Nazareth to Capernaum is a 12 mile hike along the International Coastal Highway that ends at the base of Mt. Arbel which overlooks the Sea of Galilee. The time had come for Jesus to begin His ministry. In 26 AD, Herod Antipas’ capital was moved from Sepphoris to Tiberias, a city on the Western shore of the Sea of Galilee and right off of the International Coastal Highway (Josephus, 1995). When Jesus moved to Capernaum, He was essentially moving into Herod’s backyard. This happened right after He learned that John the Baptist was thrown in prison for telling people to repent in preparation for the Kingdom of Heaven.

The move to Capernaum was probably intentional for Jesus. First, it was an area that the International Coastal Highway went through, meaning that everybody traveling through the middle of the middle of the world, went through Capernaum. It was an area under Roman control and was close to a Roman legion and customs station. Secondly, the area surrounding the Sea of Galilee was a political hot bed where tensions were high. In Gamala, to the East, Zealots used violence to enforce their beliefs. Just South in the Decapolis, was an area ruled by Hellenism and pagan worship. In Tiberias, where Herod’s capital was, there was a mix of Jewish and Hellenistic views as Herod tried to please both Rome and the



Jewish people. And in the North, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum formed the religious triangle where religious orthodox obedience to the law was stressed (Josephus, 1995).

In a politically tense hot bed and in the middle of the middle of the world where everyone passes through, Jesus begins His ministry where the impact could spread rapidly. He began by continuing John the Baptist's message, proclaiming, "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is near." (Matthew 4:17) His ministry continued here as He made disciples and brought hope and healing to the area.



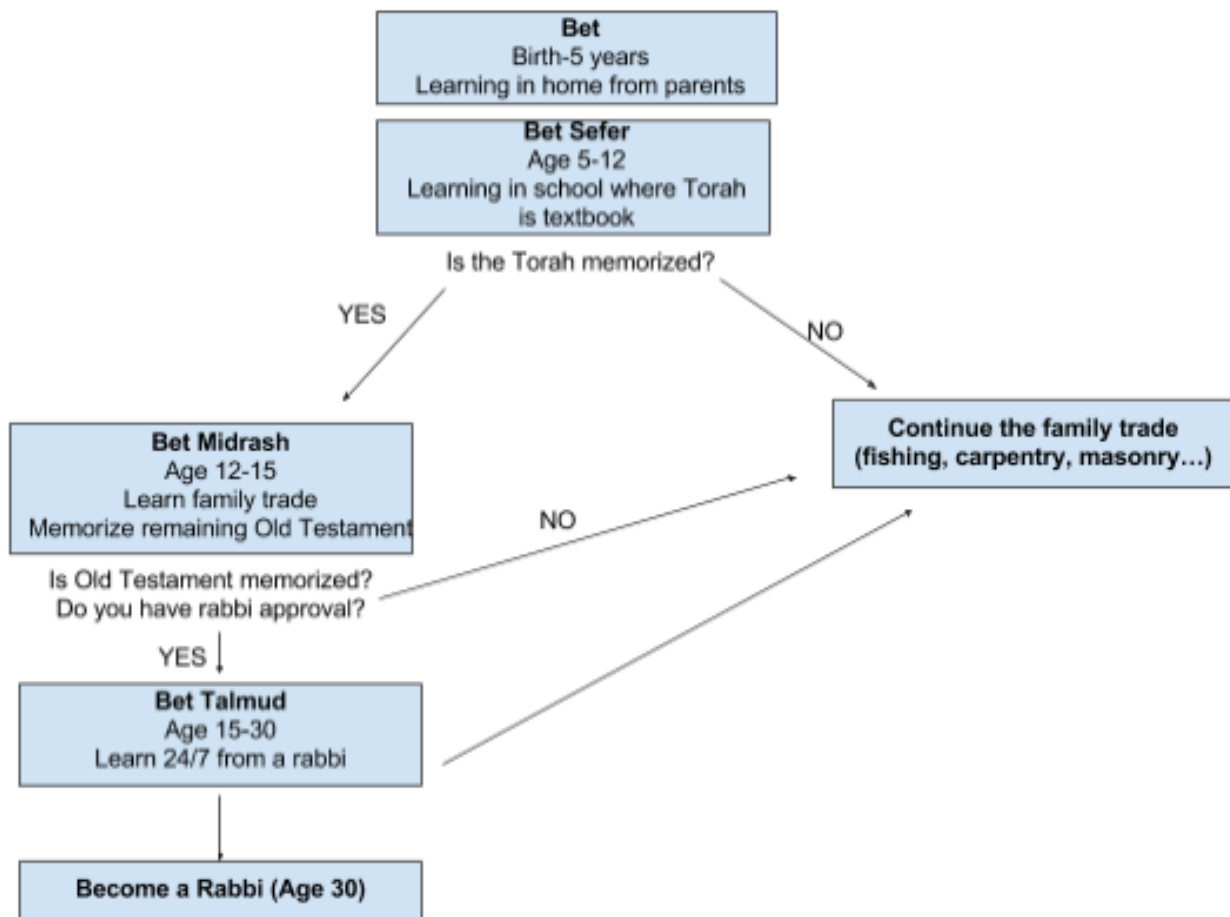
Chapter 12

Tabgha

The Disciples

“Walking along the Sea of Galilee...(Matthew 4:12-13)”

In the Jewish culture, becoming a Rabbi was every young boy’s dream as well as their parents dream for them. Rabbis were highly esteemed and considered the best of the best. The Jewish education system was a series of stages that you progress through if you met the requirements.



At each step in this process, a lot of people didn't make the cut. Very rarely did one complete Bet Midrash. Most were able to memorize the Old Testament but after that they must approach a rabbi that they wish to follow and ask, "May I follow you?" The rabbi then gives them an oral exam to see if they think that they have what it takes to become a rabbi (Vilnay, 1973). Some did get the chance to live with and learn from a rabbi and even become one themselves but most boys around age 12 were accepting the fact that they would not be a rabbi and that they would continue their family's trade.

"Come, follow me...(Matthew 4:19)"

Jesus walks along the Sea of Galilee and extends this invitation to some fisherman. He completely reverses the cultural norm. He is a rabbi asking possible disciples to follow Him, men who had got cut along the way to becoming a disciple because they were spending their day fishing. Not only did he invite fishermen, he invited tax collectors, and zealots. He invited these men and believed they had what it took to follow Him as disciples.



Chapter 13

Bethsaida

The Ordinary Town

“The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.” Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida...(John 1:43-44)”

Bethsaida, located Northeast of the Sea of Galilee, was a town whose name means the “house of fishing/fishermen.” Of the twelve disciples that Jesus called, five of them were from Bethsaida. This small and rather unimpressive town, was absolutely nothing special. These five guys were nothing more than common either. They were five ordinary guys from an ordinary town. Jesus approached them and said, “Lech Acharai” or “Come, follow me” and they chose to. They learned from Him, watched him heal and perform miracles, and eventually they went on to proclaim His name to the very end of their lives. After Jesus’ resurrection and ascension into Heaven these disciples faced a lot of persecution but they chose to follow Jesus until the very end, their faithfulness changed everything, and is why Christianity exists today.

Peter preached at Pentecost in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2), healed a lame beggar (Acts 3), is arrested (Acts 4:13), preached to Samaria (Acts 8), preached to the Gentiles (Acts 10), is imprisoned (Acts 12), preached in the face of death threats (Acts 15), writes letters throughout all of Asia Minor proclaiming the Gospel and encouraging churches, watches his wife murdered because of their faith, and is then crucified upside down because he believed he was not worthy enough to die in the same manner that Jesus did (Josephus, 1995).

Philip recruited Bartholomew, preached throughout Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, and then was crucified upside down by the Romans (Josephus, 1995).

Andrew was imprisoned for his faith in Jesus, whipped by 7 men, crucified in the shape of an ‘X,’ and continued to preach the Gospel for two days as he hung on the cross until he died (Josephus, 1995).

These disciples from ordinary-ville wanted more than anything to be like Jesus in their life and death.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.” -Margaret Mead

Chapter 14

Capernaum

The Healing

“Walking along the Sea of Galilee...(Matthew 4:12-13)”

The cities of Chorazin, Capernaum, and Bethsaida created a religious triangle North of the Sea of Galilee where Orthodox thought and practice ruled and obedience to the law was of the utmost importance. However, among these religious folk were different religious sects. The Sadducees were a group of aristocratic men who believed that the Torah should be interpreted exactly as it was given to Moses. They ran the temple, chose the high priest, and tended to be more Herodian-than Jewish. Within their system was a lot of corruption especially with running the temple. The Assines were a group that withdrew from the Sadducees because of that corruption. Lastly, the Pharisees believe that both the Torah and the Oral Torah were given to Moses on Mount Sinai. This gave them a certain “fence around the Torah” where they made different interpretations that upset both the Sadducees and the Assines (Sanday, 1903).

Galilee was known as “Galilee of the Gentiles” meaning that there were many foreign people living in the area and oppressing the Jewish people.

Jesus healed a Roman Centurion’s Servant. He asked Matthew the Roman tax collector to be his disciple, He proclaimed that the Kingdom of Heaven was not only for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles. This made the religious leaders furious, they even looked past their differences between the three groups and joined together against Jesus. This did not stop Him though. He taught in the largest synagogue in the area to people truly living in darkness, he healed both Jews and Gentiles, He brought hope and good news, He was a light to those living in the shadow of death.



Chapter 15

Kinneret Trail

The Parables

“All these things Jesus said to the crowd in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable...(Matthew 13:34)”

A common teaching method for a Jewish rabbi was the use of parables. There are two parts to a parable: the Mashal and the Nimshal. The Mashal asks the question, “to what can this be compared?” The Nimshal is an explanation of the parable that ends with a quote from the Old Testament (Bacher, 2011). A few parables are found in the Old Testament, but many more are found in the Talmud and Midrash. As Jesus walked and talked with His disciples, He told many parables that incorporated comparisons that they would have been very familiar with and understood. For us reading these parables, it is easy to take them out of context because we don’t have a 1st century understanding of the things Jesus compares to in the Mashal.

“He put another parable before them saying that the Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in the field only to have his enemy come and sow weeds...(Matthew 13:34)”

In this parable, the good seed that this man sowed was wheat. In Israel there is a type of weed called a tare that grows abundantly. The wheat and the tares look strikingly similar with the exact same bases, but different tops. Tares or “zonen” are actually not a completely different plant from wheat, but just a degenerate form. The root of the word “zonen,” “zona” means prostitute. This is an illustration to describe the people of Israel that turned away from God (Bacher, 2011).

“In gathering the weeds you may root up the wheat along with them...(Matthew 13:29)”

When the master is told by his servants that there are weeds in his field, he knows that there is no way to pull them out without risking the loss of his wheat crop because the two plants look the same growing up.



“Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field...(Matthew 13:36)”

Jesus begins the Nimshal of this parable by explaining that He, the Son of Man, is the sower. The good seeds are the children of the Kingdom of Heaven and the enemy is the devil. The tares are things that aren't as they should be, but are too risky to remove. Additionally, any effort made to

remove them would only cause more damage. Jesus continues to explain that at the harvest is when things will be made right with the wheat and the tares. The weeds are gathered and thrown into the fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth and the wheat is gathered and will



shine like the sun in the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matthew 13:42-43) The weeping and gnashing of teeth is defined by Jewish scholars as “a completely ineffective activity that results as a failure of a wicked person’s evil intentions resulting in a useless action.” (Fiebig, 1904) At this point, the righteous shine like the sun because they didn’t take the tares into their own hands, they trusted God with the tares.



Chapter 16

Caesarea Philippi

The Rock

*“Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi...
(Matthew 16:13)”*

Caesarea Philippi was a Roman city that laid at the southwestern base of Mount Hermon in the Golan Heights region. The city was adjacent to a spring, a grotto, and a number of shrines that were dedicated to the Greek god Pan. Pan was the god of fertility and is famous for his sexual powers. Pagan worship of this god took place in Caesarea Philippi at Pan’s Temple. Lust, sex, greed, and drunkenness were celebrated and carried out in some very extreme ways (Josephus, 1995). The water from the spring flowed into a hole in the side of the cliff near Pan’s temple, this hole was thought to be the entrance into hell. This city was 25 miles North of Capernaum, meaning this wasn’t a coincidence that Jesus came here, it was a deliberate trip. He brought his disciples, adolescent Jewish boys here. They were most likely taught at a young age by their parents and rabbis to stay as far away from Caesarea Philippi as possible because the things that were taking place there were not good.



“Who do you say that I am?... (Matthew 16:15)”

It is in this strange, shocking setting that Jesus asks His disciples quite possibly the most important question He asks any of us, “Who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replies and says, “You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16) This is a big deal, the first time that Jesus’ disciples are made aware of the fact that Jesus is so much more than their rabbi, but that He is in fact, the promised Messiah, the Christ, God in the flesh. After they tell Jesus who they think He is, Jesus responds by giving Simon Peter a new name and saying, “you are Peter and on this rock, I will build my church.” (Matthew 16:



18) In ancient Jewish culture, your name always had a meaning and was an essential part of who you are and what your mission was to be in life. Here Jesus gives Simon Peter a name that means “rock,” giving Peter a new purpose, identity, and destiny. I can’t help but wonder what Peter was thinking when he was standing with Jesus, looking at a gigantic rocky cliff which was known to hold the entrance to hell as Jesus said, “on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hell shall not overcome it.” (Matthew 16:18) He brought His mission to some of the darkest places like Caesarea Philippi and entrusted His disciples to continue that mission by giving them a new identity and purpose in Him.

Chapter 17

Decapolis

The Abyss

“On that day when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side”...(John 21:4)”

Jesus and His disciples journey from Tiberias over to the Decapolis across the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee and any body of water for that matter was not something that people willingly volunteered to go across very often. In this time, the Canaanite god Yam was believed to control the sea because he ruled over the sea, death, disorder, and chaos. The sea was known as “the abyss” and was believed to be the source of all evil and chaos. The lake has a low elevation (at least 212 meters below sea level) which is good for providing mild year round temperatures. However, since it is encompassed by mountain ranges to the east and west that rise up 2,650 feet up over the lake, it is susceptible to violent storms and downdrafts from the eastern “shakira” winds that can easily produce waves up to seven feet tall (Post, 2015). As Jesus was sleeping on this journey over to the Decapolis, one of these massive storms began. The Decapolis was also the region of intense pagan worship including the worship of the god Yam. So, the disciples know they are going to this area where everyone believes in Yam and they know they are in the middle of the lake that is the source of chaos and death in a storm, and Jesus is sleeping.



“Peace! Be still!”...(Mark 4:39)”

The disciples awake Jesus in a panic and watch in amazement as He rebukes the wind and the waves. The seven foot waves disappear. The eastern winds quiet. They find themselves completely still in the middle of the water. Jesus demonstrates His power over the very things that they feared most: chaos, death, and disorder. He asserted that He is bigger than all of that, than the wind and the waves, and the god Yam.

“They came to the other side and met a man with an unclean spirit!”...(Mark 5:2)”

As if that adventure weren't enough, the disciples land in the Gerasenes in the Decapolis and meet a naked, bloody, possessed man. The demon inside of him was called legion which equated to 5400 foot soldiers and 120 horsemen in Roman terms (Josephus, 1995). No one from the Decapolis had the strength to subdue this man and they were all terrified to go near him. He lived among the tombs, cried day and night, and cut himself with stones. As soon as the spirit saw Jesus, it fell down and cried out before Him. Jesus then sent the spirit out of the man into a herd of pigs that then plummeted to their death over the mountainside. The people of the Decapolis found the man in his right mind and 2000 dead pigs and were terrified of Jesus and begged Him to leave. The pagans in this area had no regards for the Torah. In fact, Antiochus Epiphanes oppressed Jews and tortured them while forcing them to eat pig (which was strictly against the Torah laws. In addition, pigs were a sacrificial animal for the pagans and the symbol on Rome's currency. Jesus again demonstrates His power over not only a demon with the strength of a legion, but pagan worship, Roman rule, and the area's economy and security (2000 pigs was enough to sustain the economy of the city). In power, Jesus shows that absolutely no one is beyond redemption and that He has control over all of the things that people believed had the most power.



Chapter 18

Gamla

The Synagogue

“He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day”...(Luke 4:16)”

Synagogues were not only places of study and learning for rabbis and their disciples, but also a cultural gathering place with a school, courtroom, and community center. People came here to pray, read, learn, and worship. The “Hazan” oversaw the synagogue. Every week Jews observe shabbat from Friday evening until three stars are visible in the sky on Saturday evening. They have a big family dinner and then in the morning go to the synagogue to have a Mikveh, or ritual bath, and to hear the Torah read. The Hazan brings the Torah from the Torah closet to the Bema, or reader. Different people were assigned to read different portions of the Torah every week. They read an excerpt from the Torah and then something from the prophets (Josephus, 1995). After the reading, the Bema put the scroll back, sat in Moses’ seat and gave a short snippet of a sermon. The priest then offers a blessing and the “service” ends.

“He stood up to read and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Him”...(Luke 4:16-17)”

Rabbi Jesus was scheduled to read Isaiah 61 on this day. He took the scroll from the Hazan, unrolled and read:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bring freedom to the captives and recovering sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to preach the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Isaiah 61:1-2)

The Hebrew in this passage shares a common word, “basar,” which means meat, flesh, or skin but is interpreted as literal embodiment. It is the same word used in John 1:1, “the Word became flesh.” The words “proclaim,” “bring,” and “preach” all share the common root of “basar.”

This is a prophetic description of the awaited Messiah who was going to be and embody freedom, good news, hope, and healing to the Jewish people. Jesus reads this, sits down in Moses’ seat and says, “Today this is fulfilled in your hearing,” (Luke 4:21)



Beth-Shan

The Hellenistic Tension

“There’s an old story about Akiva, the rabbi, who had been in the village to gather some supplies. Walking back to his cottage, he absentmindedly took the wrong path. Suddenly, a voice came through the darkness:

“Who are you, and why are you here?”

Shocked to awareness, Akiva realized he had wandered into the Roman garrison, and the voice had come from the young sentry keeping guard.

But being a rabbi, he answered the question with another question:

“How much do they pay you to stand guard and ask that question of all who approach?”

The sentry, now seeing that this was not an intruder but a rabbi, answered meekly, “Five drachmas a week, sir.”

At that point the rabbi offered, “Young man, I will double your pay if you come with me, stand in front of my cottage, and ask me that question each morning as I begin my day: ‘Who are you, and why are you here?’”

Beth-Shan is the only Decapolis city on the west side of the Jordan. It is in the area that is a part of the allotment for the tribe of Manasseh who settled there but never really kicked the Canaanites out. This area was where the highest tension between Judaism and Hellenism was felt. Hellenism promoted self-indulgence, all about man mentality, the fact that “god” is made in the image of man, polytheism as the only way, and that bigger buildings and more stuff meant more success. Judaism valued obedience to the Torah and knowing that God is God alone.

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few...(Matthew 7:13-14)”

Jesus says these words in the middle of this Judaism-Hellenistic tension. Broad roads in this area were Greco-Roman built, 75 feet wide, and used by pagans and foreigners for easy travel. Narrow roads were considered any well worn path. Pleasure seeking, time killing Hellenists built their cities around their desire for pleasure. They believed that it didn’t matter if you were perfect, but it was always about looking perfect. Jews in this tension had



to choose a road, they couldn't take both, and the same is true today. They must answer "Who are you and why are you here?" amongst very strong Hellenistic influences.

"See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess...(Deuteronomy 30:15-16)"

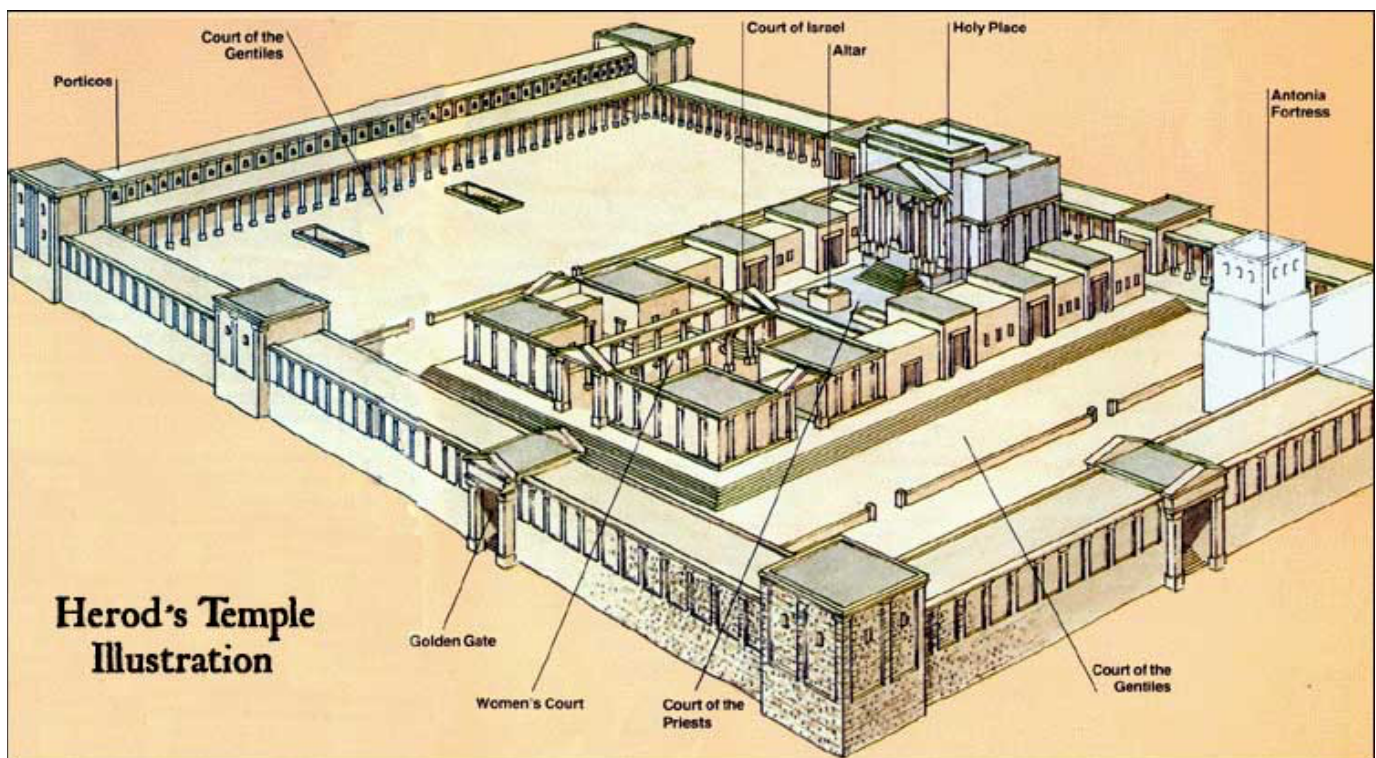
Chapter 20

Jerusalem

The Temple

“Thus Solomon finished the house of the Lord...(2 Chronicles 7:11)”

When God gave the ten commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai, they were etched into stone tablets that were then stored and carried in the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was specifically constructed based on God’s instructions and then viewed as the Lord’s dwelling place among the people. The priests carried the Ark wherever the Israelites went. When Solomon finished constructing the temple, the Ark of the Covenant was brought from the City of David to the temple. On multiple occasions, God calls the temple his house, or “beit,” where all people could come to worship Him. God’s temple was destroyed by the Babylonians when they attacked the Northern Kingdom in 598 (2 Kings 24:13). After the return from the Babylonian exile the prophet Nehemiah worked to rebuild the temple to what was known as the “Second Temple.” Then King Herod came along and made massive renovations to the Temple in the 1st century BCE (Shick, 1896).



“Not one stone will be left on top of the other...(Matthew 24:2)”



As we know, Herod was a builder, and the common belief was that the bigger the building, the more impressive the god. So as Herod worked to restore this temple, he named it after himself wanting to be known as a god to the people of Israel. It took Herod 46 years to complete his masterpiece. His labor force would chisel out rocks from a quarry, his oxen would carry 50 ton stones, and a pulley system was used to lift the stones. Most stones were 5-6.5 feet tall with the

largest known stone being 45 feet long, 11.5 feet high, 15 feet deep, and weighing 570 tons. It took 8 years for all the stones to be prepared. The stones were carved and placed so precisely on top of each other that you can't even swipe a credit card through the cracks where no cement or mortar was used (Sanday, 1903). As Jesus enters the scene he makes radical statements about what Herod has done to his Father's temple. He claimed that not one stone will be left on top of the other and what Herod took 46 years to build, He would rebuild in 3 days.

“And the curtain was torn in two from top to bottom...(Mark 15:38)”

During the crucifixion, the temple curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place in the temple was torn in two. This curtain was 60 feet tall and 4 inches thick (Sanday, 1903). It was a symbolic reminder of sin and separation that separated even the most holy High Priest from where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. This was God's dwelling place. However, the death and resurrection of Christ changed everything.

“Look at the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug...(Isaiah 51:1)”

The tearing of the temple curtain symbolically represents that we are no longer separated from God's presence. Not only can we now come into God's presence, but His presence can come out. So where is God's dwelling place now?

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit...(Ephesians 2:19-22)”

“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...(1 Peter 2:4-5)”

“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple...(1 Corinthians 3:16-17)”

You are the temple. I am the temple. We are God’s new dwelling place, His house, His “beit.”

Herod spent a ridiculous amount of time carving his stones to fit in the right spot to build up his temple that says something about who he is. God is doing the same for us, carving us and shaping us so that we fit together with other believers to create a beautiful picture and reflection of Who our Creator is.



Chapter 21

Mount of Olives

The King

“As He was on His way down the Mount of Olives...(Luke 19:37)”

When standing on the Mount of Olives looking out, you can see the Kidron Valley and then the Temple Mount. It is here that Jesus sent two of His disciples ahead to bring Him a colt to ride into Jerusalem on. Now, this happened right before Passover where the Jewish people were celebrating their freedom from slavery in Egypt. However, there was a lot of unrest because they felt like they were again becoming slaves to Rome and they wanted more freedom. Many people believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah and that He was the one that was going to save them from Rome and set them free from that reign, they wanted Him to be King of Israel in an earthly sense. So when Jesus enters into Jerusalem, they create an entrance that was typical for that of a king. They laid out palm branches, symbols of freedom, rising up, and zealots, for Jesus to ride over. They shouted “Hosannah” which literally meant “save please.” The people wanted help, freedom, essentially a revolution (Psalm 118:26).

“He drew near, saw the city, and wept over it...(Luke 19:41)”

The Greek word for “weeping” means to sob uncontrollably. This is quite an image of Jesus who the people wanted to make King. That’s not the only thing they wanted though. The people wanted revolt and uprising to overthrow Rome. Jesus knew that the only thing that they really needed was Him, not to rule as King, but to be their personal Savior and Lord forever.



Chapter 22

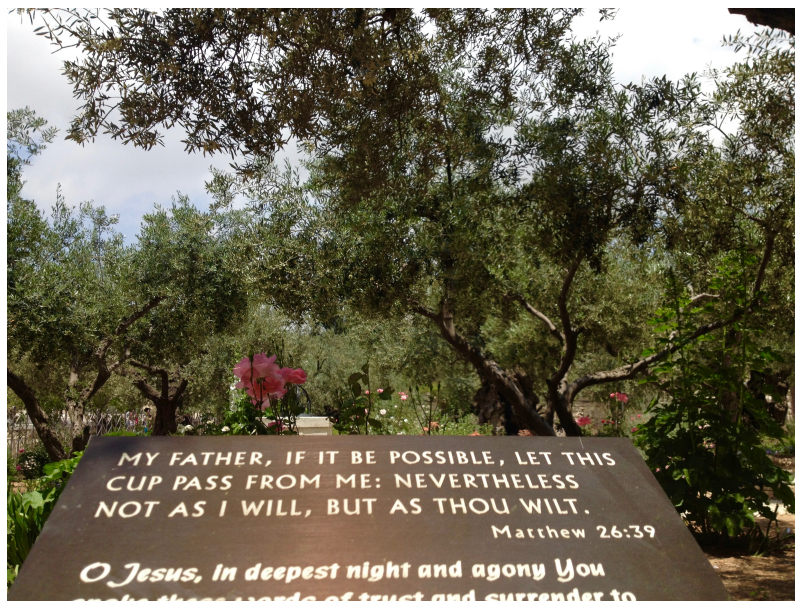
Gethsemane

The Garden

“Then Jesus went to a place called Gethsemane to pray...(Matthew 26:36)”

After Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, things took a turn for the worse. The Romans were upset with the people proclaiming He was Messiah and King so they escalated their plot to kill Him along with the religious leaders. After celebrating a Passover meal with His disciples, Jesus withdrew to the garden of Gethsemane to pray because He knew what was coming.

Gethsemane was an olive grove where olives were pressed to make oils. The process included first heating the olives and then



crushing them again and again to get the virgin olive oil out. This process took place in three steps and in each step more weights were added to get even more oil out. The first oil that came out was the cheapest and was used for heating. Next came the oil used for perfumes followed by the virgin oil drawn out only after the full weight is pressed on the olives (Josephus, 1995). In Matthew 26:36-46 Jesus goes out to pray three separate times before he is arrested, making sure he gets all the weight of the sin of the world on His shoulders much like olives are pressed three separate times to get every last drop.

Church of Holy Sepulchre

The Crucifixion

“The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, “Hail, king of the Jews!” Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get. It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: the king of the jews.

They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!” In



the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"). When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah." Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down," he said. With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said,

"Surely this man was the Son of God!...(Mark 15:16-39)"

The Resurrection

"When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"



Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.

Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them

either.

Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.

He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.”

After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it...(Mark 16)”

Chapter 24

Tabha

The Fish

“Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore while His disciples were fishing...(John 21:4)”

Who: Jesus and 7 fishermen (Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, Zebedee’s two sons, and two others) were present.

Where: They were fishing on the Sea of Galilee 100 yards away from Jesus on the shore.

When: This took place in the morning a few days after Jesus’ resurrection.

How: The fishermen were in two boats. First, they needed to spot a school of fish. Then they drop a weighted net in a big circle to surround the fish. The second net with reeds on the top is then dropped on top of the first net to create an enclosed barrel. Lastly, the cast net is thrown into the enclosed barrel and one of the fishermen jumps in and swims down to tie the net.

Why: During the last moments of Jesus’ life, Peter denied Jesus three times and probably thought that he threw his shot away, so he goes back to what he knows how to do.

“Do you have any fish...cast your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some...(John 21:5-6)”

Fishermen did their fishing through the night so that they could bring their fresh catch to the market first thing in the morning. These guys still do not know that Jesus is alive. They went back to what they were doing before they started following their rabbi and weren’t having much luck. When Jesus tells them to switch sides of the boat they end up catching 153 large fish which ironically is the same number of how many different kinds of fish were



known in the world at that time (St. Jerome). Immediately, Peter recognizes his Lord, jumps in the water, and swims to Jesus. Jesus invites him to have breakfast with their newly caught fish.

“When they got on land, they saw a charcoal fireplace with fish on it...(John 21:9)”

In John 18, Peter denies Jesus three times while standing around a fire. Here in John 21, Jesus builds a fire and invites Peter to it and asks him a question three times:

Jesus: “Simon, do you love me more than these?” Peter: “Yes, Lord, you know I love you.”

Jesus: “Simon, do you love me?” Peter: “Yes, Lord, you know I love you.”

Jesus: “Do you love me?” Peter: “Lord, you know everything, you know I love you.”

In the Hebrew language there are many different words for love. In this conversation two of them, “agape” and “phileo,” are used. “Agape” is a selfless, unconditional, self sacrificing type of love that is used to describe God’s love for us. “Phileo” is more of a brotherly or friendly love. In Hebrew, the above conversation went like this:

Jesus: “Simon, do you *agape* me more than these?” Peter: “Yes, Lord, you know I *phileo* you.”

Jesus: “Simon, do you *agape* me?” Peter: “Yes, Lord, you know I *phileo* you.”

Jesus: “Do you *phileo* me?” Peter: “Lord, you know everything, you know I *phileo* you.”

In Peter’s shame and guilt of the denial, Jesus calls him back in grace and forgiveness. Even though Peter cannot love Jesus the way that Jesus loves him, Jesus comes down to his level to bring him back to himself.

Chapter 25

Southern Steps

The Pentecost

“Man does not live on bread alone...(Deuteronomy 8:3)”

The three main feasts and festivals in the Jewish culture are Succot “the Feast of Booths,” Pesach “Passover,” and Shavuot “Feast of Weeks.” Shavuot happened right after the harvest was brought in and it expressed the Israelites gratitude to God for that. It is also when they rested from their labor. The main tradition is making leavened bread with the harvested wheat. The feast eventually came to celebrate the day that God gave the Torah to Moses (Exodus 19). The Israelites treasured the fact that “Man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord (Deuteronomy 8:3). They presented two loaves of bread as a sacrifice in signifying their gratitude for the two tablets that God gave to Moses.

“Man does not live on bread alone...(Deuteronomy 8:3)”

A typical Shavuot drew Jews from all ends of the world. People would come and fill the temple courts where portions of biblical text were read aloud (Josephus, 1995).

“On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently. As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him. The Lord descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up...(Exodus 19:16-20)”



“I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal...(Ezekiel 1:4)”

“The appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire or like torches. Fire moved back and forth among the creatures; it was bright, and lightning flashed out of it. The creatures sped back and forth like flashes of lightning...(Ezekiel 1:13-14)

“I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him...(Ezekiel 1:27)

“Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a loud rumbling sound as the glory of the Lord rose from the place where it was standing...(Ezekiel 3:12)”

While the above texts were being read during a Shavuot in 34 AD, something amazing happened.

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and

Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!...(Acts 2:1-11)”

As these people celebrate God descending on Mount Sinai in thunder, lightning, and fire giving the people His voice, He sends His Holy Spirit that descends in wind and fire and gives all people voices and tongues. Many similarities between the recited biblical texts and what was actually happening at Pentecost are found in the Hebrew language:

Kolot “thunder” or “voices” also means “tongues” or “languages”

Baraq “lightning”

Ruach “wind” or “spirit”

This propelled the spread of the Gospel because all these people who came to Shavuot were leaving to go back to their home countries being baptized in the name of Jesus. This is where the church began. In 70 AD, the temple was destroyed again, but it didn't matter because God sent His spirit to live in those who believe in Him.



Chapter 26

Israel Today

The Land Between

Late Antiquity and Middle Ages (70-1517)

Bar Kokhba Revolt

Jews revolted against Rome. Rome exiled Jews from Judea, but those in Galilee stayed.

Byzantine Rule

The Roman Empire split in 390 and the Byzantine Empire ruled over Israel.

Caliphates

In 620, Muhammad was taken on his spiritual journey to Jerusalem. In 705, the Al-Aqsa Mosque was built

Crusades

The Crusaders took Jerusalem in 1099 establishing a Catholic Kingdom.

Mamluk Rule

Egyptian Mamluks captured Israel and ruled until 1517

Ottoman Rule (1517-1920)

Old Yishuv

Jewish migration continues to select Israeli cities.

Zionism

In 1896 Theodore Herzl coined Zionism as a response to growing anti-semitism in Europe.

World War I

Zionist Jews supported Britain.

British Mandate of Palestine (1930-1948)

Increased Jewish Immigration

In 1933, the Jewish Agency and Nazis agreed to transfer Jews to Palestine.

Arab Revolt

The Jewish immigration and Nazi propaganda led to Arabs living in Palestine to revolt.

World War II and Holocaust

Illegal Jewish Immigration

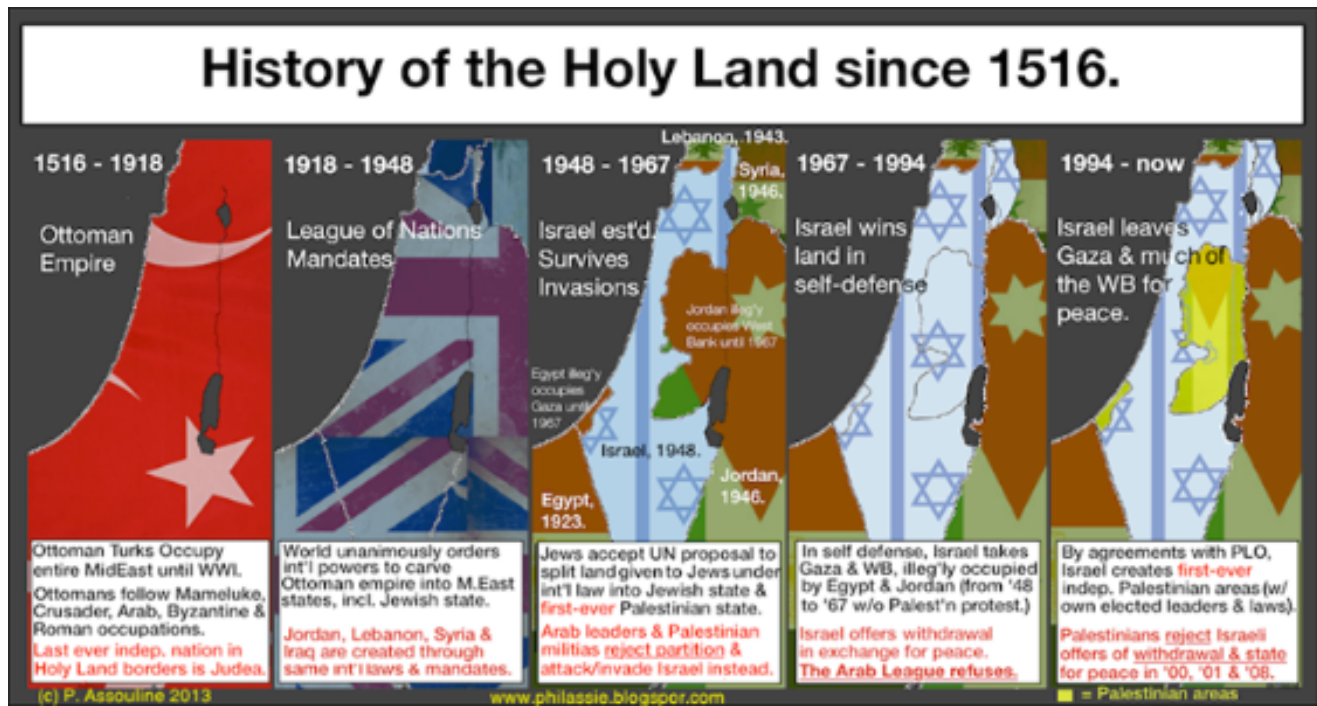
United Nations Partition Plan

Plan proposed an independent Jewish state, independent Arab state, and Jerusalem.

Civil War

From 1947-1948 Jews fought Palestinian Arabs and Britain until they established the Jewish State of Israel in 1948.

State of Israel (1948-Present)



Since the earliest mention in the Bible to today, tension and conflict are constant in the land of Israel. Long ago, God chose to set His story to unfold in this place, the middle of the middle of the world that empires fought to control because owning that land meant wealth, power, and security. Today, the land is still being fought over by Palestinians, Israelis, and the rest of the middle East.

Within a population of about 8 million people, 6 million of those are Jews. The other 2 million are mostly Arab Muslims. A very small percentage of people living in Israel are Christians. The tension between these three groups can be felt very clearly especially in the city of Jerusalem. Within the old city there are four different quarters: Jewish, Armenian, Muslim, and Christian. All four of these groups hold beliefs that tie significantly to the Temple Mount and therefore, they have settled within the old city walls in order to be close to it. The Jewish people's Holy place is the Western (Wailing) Wall, which is the part of the temple that is still standing that is closest to where the Holy of Holies would have been. Jews go there sometimes multiple times a day to pray and worship. On top of the Temple Mount the Al-Aqsa Mosque was built. Muslims hold this place as holy because it is where the prophet Muhammad ended his night journey in the Islamic tradition. For Christians, the whole city of Jerusalem holds significance in that it was the scene where Jesus spent His last week before being crucified. The temple mount is a reminder that Jesus allowed the veil to be torn and us to enter into God's presence and vice versa, the Garden of Gethsemane is the place of the arrest and prayerful agony of Jesus, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre commemorates the ground on which Jesus was crucified and the empty tomb.

Not only is the tension between the three religious groups present, but also that between the Israelis and Palestinians is very high. When Israel was established as a nation in 1948 things began to change for these two groups of people. Many government plans were put into place to create areas for both of them to live side by side in the land (refer to images above). The tension and conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians has been heated, growing, and violent at times. In strict Palestinian areas, for example the West Bank containing Bethlehem, it is unsafe for Jewish Israelis to enter. Additionally, those Palestinians living within those areas are not allowed to leave making it very difficult for them to even see family that is not even 1 mile outside of their Israeli army contained zone.

Although the tension is high and the violence between these two groups seems to be on the news every day, there are many people on both sides of the conflict that are working to bring about peaceful resolutions. Many of these individuals have lost a loved one, family member,

or friend to the violence of this conflict and they have decided to keep that from happening to other individuals.

Growing up as a Christian, the Bible and its stories became very passive to me. I could tell you the story of Noah, Joshua, King David, Jesus calming the storm, or Saul being converted to Paul easy but none of those really held a lot of meaning for me personally. After learning the entire order of the Bible and how it fit into the history of the world things began to make more sense. I saw God's plan from the beginning to redeem His people from their despair and how everything fits together to prepare the way for Jesus the whole point of the story. As I traveled to the place where all these things happened, I didn't really know what I expected. What I experienced changed my perspective on the Bible, on religion, and on my faith. The stories that I read were alive, I was the one that was dead to it. As I walked through the places where these things happened the stories came to life and I began to ask questions about them. Through that exploration I have learned an immense amount about the culture, geography, and history of the places that set the stage for God's story and how those things add so much more meaning to it. I began to understand how radical Christianity is, especially in the aspect of loving your neighbors in a Middle Eastern culture where revenge is second nature. Most of all, I began to grasp how my seemingly insignificant story fits into God's story alongside of all of the others that have unfolded in that land before me.



Acknowledgements

Thank you to Ben and Stacie Post who took me to Israel, taught me all I know about the land, and follow Christ fearlessly. Thank you for sharing your knowledge and instilling your love for the land of Israel in me.

Thank you to Professor Maodush-Pitzer who allowed me the freedom to grow as a person and in my faith with my senior project by supporting me, cheering me on, and advising me through the process.

Above all, thanks be to God!

“Five gospels record the life of Jesus. Four you will find in books and one you will find in the land they call holy. Read the fifth gospel and the world of the four will open to you.” -St. Jerome, 4th

References

- Baly, D. *The Geography of the Bible*, (1957); J. Simons, *Geographical and Topographical Texts of the Old Testament* (1959). <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/oak-moreh#sthash.L5w8pooE.dpuf>
- Burton, Sir Richard, (1878). *The Gold Mines of Midian*, London, 1878.
- Bacher, W., & Lauterbach, J. (2011). Parable. In *Jewish Encyclopedia*. Retrieved April 19, 2016, from <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11898-parable>
- Bell, M. (2016). Daily Life and Rituals. In *Jewish Online Museum*. Retrieved February 20, 2016, from <http://jewishonlinemuseum.org/daily-life-and-rituals>
- Clarke, A. (1831). Clarke's Commentary Exodus 17. In *Bible Hub*. Retrieved February 20, 2016, from <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/clarke/exodus/17.htm>
- Feiler, B. (2004). *Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths* (pp. 1-226). New York City, NY: HarperCollins.
- Freeman, Tzvi. (2016) "What is Emunah? Beyond Belief." *Chabad*. N.p.,. Web. 20 Feb. 2016. <http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1398519/jewish/Emunah.htm>.
- Gladwell, M. (2013). *David and Goliath*. N.p.: Little Brown & Company.
- Hareuveni, N. (1989). *Tree and Shrub in Our Biblical Heritage*. Kiryat Ono: Kedumim.
- Jacobs, Joseph; Seligsohn, Max; Bacher, Wilhelm. "Mount Horeb". *Jewish Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 23 December 2013.
- James L. Kugel, *The Traditions of the Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 856–859, 885–887; S.E. Loewenstamm, "The Death of Moses," in G.W.E. Nickelsburg, Jr., ed., *Studies on the Testament of Abraham* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), pp. 185–217.
- Josephus, F. (1995). *The Complete Works of Flavius Josephus*. (W. Whiston, Trans.). N.p.: Hendrickson Publishers
- Kenyon, K.M. (1981) *1957 Digging Up Jericho*. London: Ernest Benn. *Excavations at Jericho*, Vol. 3. London: British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem.
- Kramer, Joel (2010) *Jericho Unearthed*. SourceFlix Living Hope Ministries.
- Mark, Joshua J. *Egyptian Culture*. N.p., 13 Jan. 2013. Web. 7 Dec. 2013.

<http://www.ancient.eu.com/Egyptian_Culture/>.

Mason, S. (2016). History of Bethlehem Documented by the Second Temple Period. In Biblical Archeology Society. Retrieved April 19, 2016, from <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/earliest-history-of-bethlehem-documented-by-first-temple-period-bulla-from-the-city-of-david/>

Parsons, J. J. (2015). Parashat Bo-The Sequence of Plagues. In Hebrew For Christians. Retrieved February 16, 2016, from <http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Scripture/Parashah/Summaries/Bo/Sequence/sequence.html>

Petro, B. (2014). History of Christmas: King Herod. In Holiday History. Retrieved April 19, 2016, from <http://www.billpetro.com/HolidayHistory//hol/xmas/herod12.html>

Sanday (1903). Sacred Sites of the Gospels, pp. 58-63, 107-117.

Schick, Die Stiftshütte (1896), der Tempel in Jerusalem und der Tempelplatz der Jetztzeit.

Steckoll, Solomon. (1972). The Temple Mount, Tom Stacey Ltd., London.

Vilnay, Zev. (1973). Legends of Jerusalem, Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia.

Wooley, C. & Lawrence, T. (1914) The Wilderness of Zin (Archaeological Report)

London : Harrison and Sons, Palestine Exploration Fund DS111.A1P28 vol 3 cop1