

## **This is study section 1 of the course, Bible Geography and Near East Studies**

### **The Nature of Geography**

Have you ever wondered what the earth was like when Adam and Eve were just created? Were all the continents one land mass? Why did it never rain on the earth? How did all the vegetation obtain the water needed to sustain life? Were there seasons in a year? Did the animals fight and eat one another? Did Adam and Eve only eat fruit and vegetables? Were there weeds before the fall? How about pesky bugs? Today, we might not be able to answer all these questions. Some remain unanswered. However, we will look at pre-flood geology to see what we can learn about the earth before the flood. Let's get started....

#### **What is Geography?**

Geography comes from two Greek words, "geo" which means "of the earth," and "graphia" which means "to write," and together they mean "to write about or to describe the earth." To the ancient Greeks, geography was a scientific method of describing the earth, its lands, and all of its contents and details. Since then, it even deals with topography.



#### **What is Biblical Geography?**

Biblical Geography is the study of Bible lands, the places and features of the land in which the various characters of the Bible walked and lived. It includes a study of not only the Middle East, but the lands of Asia Minor to the mountains near Rome – places that Bible characters walked. It is important to become familiar with the geographical background of those places for a better understanding of the Bible. The Bible mentions gardens, cities, rivers, mountains, details about topography, and even nations and empires that all had geographical boundaries. While the geography of the earth has changed drastically since the beginning of the Bible, much of the Bible cannot be fully understood without relating the persons and events in the Bible to the places where they happened.

#### **The Importance of Biblical Geography**

Biblical Geography is important because history is HIS STORY. It is God placing people in a place and asking them to move to another place to bless them. God moved through the history of man to unfold to his creation who He was, and how He would redeem mankind from sin. All the events in the Bible happened in time, and happened in a certain place, on a mountain or near a river, on a boat in a lake, in a valley, or on the seacoast. In fact the God of history also fashioned geography, because God is in control and even "the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of the water he turns it wherever he wills." (Proverbs 21:1). God reveals in the Bible that he led Abraham to a certain land, and that he fashioned that land in a very special way. God made promises to people to give them a physical land, a geographic location that would nourish them if they would remain faithful. Geography is also important when studying the Bible because it brings more understanding and insight into the context of Scripture. The LORD illuminates our heart as the geographical understanding of the Scriptures make the study of the word more beautiful. It brings clarity to passages that may be unclear.

## A Personal Story from Dr. Bjorgen....

*A few years back I had the privilege of standing on the same mountain that Moses stood when he viewed the promise land from Mt. Nebo. It was one of the most amazing sights I have ever seen. To the far left was the vast Dead Sea and to the far south buried under tons of salt were the remains of Sodom and Gomorrah (blue arrow).*

*The falls of En Gedi, where David hid from King Saul were visible just south of the caves of Qumran on the other side of the sea (dark orange arrow). Straight across the northern tip of the Dead Sea, far in the distance, I could see Jerusalem and the Dome of the Rock. Below me was the Jordan River, emptying into the Dead Sea. That was about where Jesus was baptized (purple arrow). Directly below and to the right, across the Jordan River were the ruins of Jericho. Above them was the Judean desert, where Christ was tempted (green arrow). To the north, I could see miles up the Jordan River Valley, but could not quite see the Sea of Galilee. You could barely make out the location of the city of Adam, where the Jordan River was cut off so that the children of Israel could cross the river (red arrow). All this was observable from one mountain location.*

*Thousands of years of history lay before my feet. And it finally made sense why God took Moses to this very spot so that he could view the future promises to Israel, which included a land. He looked ahead and I looked back, both of us standing at the same geographic spot, separated by time! My mind was flooded with dozens of Biblical stories as I started relating one site to another. It was truly an amazing experience!*



And, of course, God came to earth and set his earthly body in a land of promise. The Bible says Jesus came to his home (John 1:11 - RSV). Jesus was born in the land of Israel in a specific place called

Bethlehem. He grew up in Nazareth, ministered in Galilee, walked through Samaria, and went to Jerusalem for the Passover. He was baptized in the Jordan River and ministered throughout geographical areas within the land of Israel. He walked throughout the same land where the Patriarchs journeyed. Geography plays an important role in the life of

Christ, and He was very aware of the rich history of each and every place He went in his life.

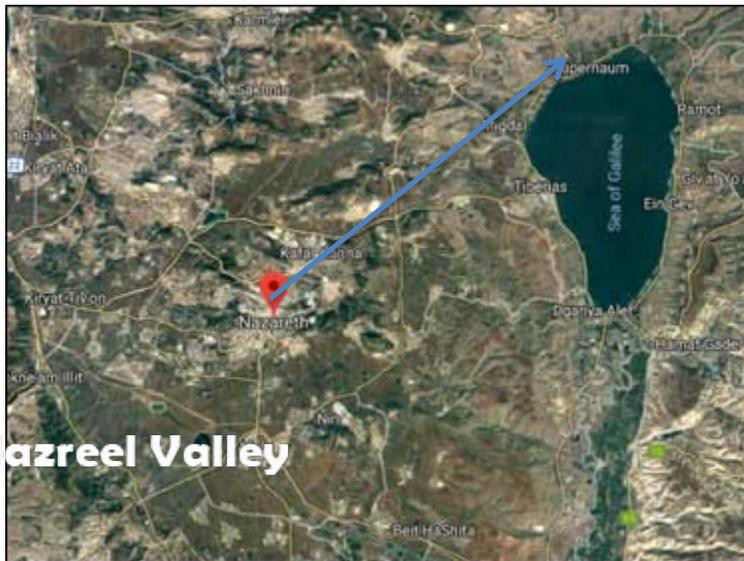
No other religious text offers such a rich geographical background as the Bible. In fact, most of the world's "holy books" offer only rules or general teaching for living. They might have a list of things a person must not do, and/or a list of things a person must do in order to be in a right relationship with God. The Bible, on the other hand, tells a story that claims to be actual history. And as they tell the

history, the writers of the Bible tell us where stories took place. These places are points of information that can be verified. If you have those in your circle of influence who don't know if they can believe the Bible's story, the consistent accuracy of geographic reference points might well convince them of the Bible's truth. And there are thousands of these places mentioned in the Bible!

### **An example from the life of Jesus**

In Luke 4, Jesus journeyed from Judean wilderness north to Nazareth. That's a journey of roughly 85 miles, and Jesus was walking! Have you ever thought about the difficulties of that journey geographically? He addressed those in the synagogue there who became incensed that He declared Himself as Messiah. He was taken to a precipice to be thrown headlong to his death. From this

precipice everyone could see the entire Megiddo Valley (Valley of Jezreel), where someday a final battle will occur. It is a breathtaking view. But Jesus passed through the crowd and the Bible says, "And he came down to Capernaum." (verse 31).



If you journey from Nazareth (elevation 1,138 feet), a city on the far eastern side of the Valley of Jezreel, to Galilee, you will have to travel 48 kilometers or about 21 miles, and you would drop in elevation approximately 1824 feet in elevation. You would be definitely going DOWN from Nazareth to Capernaum. Understand the geography of the two locations helps one

understand why the Bible says, "he came **down**..." Knowing the distances between these two locations also helps you realize that the journey on foot probably took at least two days. Knowing the geography helps the reader of Scripture understand the time it takes to move from place to place and to visualize the journey in distances.



**View from Mt Precipice near Nazareth, Israel of the Valley of Megiddo**

So it all comes down to this: a study of Biblical geography helps BRING THE SCRIPTURES to LIFE in your mind and helps you comprehend to a greater extent the truths of God's Word. That is why it is so important for us to embark on this study. So let's get started!

### **Pre-Flood Geography**



We know very little about the geography of the earth before the flood. From the Bible, we do know that there was no rain, but God watered everything by sending the morning dew. We know that the entire earth was covered with lush vegetation. We know that the mountains held precious metals which were mined to form metal tools for farming. We know that there were massive numbers of animals, some very large. The dinosaurs along with man populated the earth before the flood. Perhaps Noah had a few pet dinosaurs that helped lift beams to build the ark. There may have been an ice canopy around the earth high in the sky. It probably prevented damaging rays from the sun to penetrate and kept animal life protected and allowed for longer life spans. It

would have formed a greenhouse effect on the earth, making the temperatures and climate stable and moderate. But man's heart was filled with wickedness and God decided to destroy the earth and all that breaths air, except Noah and his family.

The tremendous amount of water that caused the flood was a result of water falling from the sky, perhaps melting the canopy, as well as deep fountains of the earth being broken up ( Genesis 7: 11-12). According to Genesis 7:20, the waters submerged the world's highest mountains under 22 feet of water. That means that the flood covered the highest pre-flood mountains. In order for the volume of water to flood the entire earth, an enormous amount of water came down on the earth and out of the earth in a

very short time. The hydrological effects on land masses, beside the loss of life of all air breathing animals, totally changed the landscape of the earth. Scientists call this a cataclysm. Mountains were destroyed, tons of earth was moved from one location to another, and massive graves of all forms of life were created all in a matter of days!

The Flood destroyed the Garden of Eden. The beautiful Garden specially created by God may have been located somewhere in southern Mesopotamia, because the Tigris and Euphrates rivers were mentioned.

Genesis 2: 10-14 *And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became four heads. <sup>11</sup> The name of the first is Pishon: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; <sup>12</sup> and the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone. <sup>13</sup> And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Cush. <sup>14</sup> And the name of the third river is Hiddekel (the Tigris): that is it which goeth in front of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.*

It is important to remember that the flood probably changed the entire geography of the earth and the rivers mentioned before the flood may have taken a different route to the sea after the flood. The geological violence of the flood was overwhelming. As the waters receded from the continents they would have eroded the land leaving shapes that form the landscapes we see today and altered pre-flood geography. Thus, today's landscapes should provide powerful evidence for the effects of Noah's Flood as well as a way of relating geological formations to the timing of the events of the Flood—provided you know what to look for.

To answer the question, "Where was the Garden of Eden?" the answer is, "we have NO IDEA specifically where it was. We can presume upon a general location in the Mesopotamian Valley, but cannot be dogmatic. Obviously, the flood destroyed all the vegetation and the beauty of the original garden.

**CHECK THIS OUT!** **God's Destruction of the Earth with a flood.**

