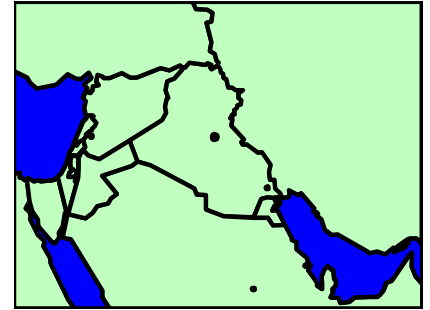


**Let the
ROCKS
CRY OUT**

SPIRITUAL
LESSONS FROM
ISRAEL'S
GEOGRAPHY &
CULTURE



By **Jerry Schmoyer** Copyright © 1998
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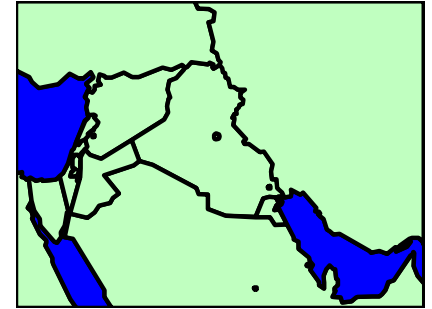
PALESTINE

- 1. IMPACT YOUR WORLD**
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Let the ROCKS CRY OUT

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1. IMPACT YOUR WORLD

Imagine yourself at a crossroads in your life. You have a difficult decision to make or a crisis to resolve. Knowing what others have done in similar situations can be very helpful in saving time, hurt and pain. Finally you get through it and learn some things in the process, things you would like to share with others coming along the same way later. You can do so by keeping a journal or some kind of written record. But what about if you lived before paper and books were available? What kind of records could you turn to for information, or could you

leave for others? The Jews had a special way of leaving records for others, called "Standing tones." They were put where others would see them, and where the Jews lived everyone could see them!



ISRAEL'S LOCATION God is in absolute, sovereign control of everything. He chose the people He planned to use -- Abraham and his descendants, the Jews. He had a plan to accomplish through them. He also chose the place where this was to happen, and the place is as important as the plan and the people in accomplishing what He wanted. He didn't choose Iowa or Florida of England, Africa or Canada. He did pick a little place called Palestine, the size of New Jersey.

What was most significant about this location is that it was the land bridge between three continents. All travel and trade from Africa to Asia or Europe and back would pass right through there! It was only 20 miles wide. The western was seacoast and marsh. The eastern side rigged mountains. All travel went up and down the main road through the middle. God didn't put His people in some private, out-of-the-way place where they wouldn't be touched by the world, He put them in a very public place. It was like living where three major interstate highways converged. Why would God put them in such a busy place? It was so others passing by would see them and their testimony for God, so they could more easily spread His word to others as they passed through (Isaiah 43:12; I Kings 8:60). God brought the world to them so they could impact their world for Him. He didn't want them hiding from the world but changing their world. He didn't want the world to change them, but them to change it. At least that was His plan.

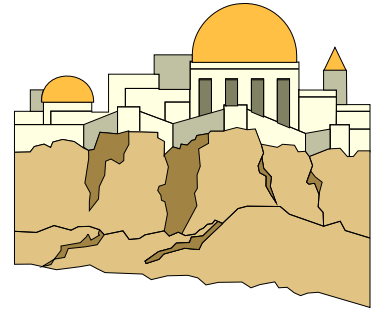
The cities of Gezer, Hazor and Megiddo were especially important for the main highway, the Via Maris, went right by them. Those cities controlled that road. The road controlled the



trade, and that controlled and influenced a large part of the whole world. Unfortunately the Jews rarely followed through and possessed those cities, thus they didn't impact their world as God wanted.

Today, too, God saves us to go into the world and impact it for Him (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8). He puts each of us in a strategic location to change those who come in touch with us. How sad when we change to be like them instead of influencing them for Christ! The key locations in our world today aren't in the hands of God's people. Thus the world is being influenced for evil by TV. Movies, fashion designers, athletes, musicians and politicians. As Christians we are to take these culture-impacting areas and use them for Him. We are NOT to have them turn us from Him!

CITY GATES As stated, the cities were the key to the control of the Via Maris which influenced the whole known world. The key to the cities were its gates. That's what made a city strong or weak. That is where enemies attacked. Thus gates were strong, well-built, elaborate affairs. They were more like a maze with rooms on each side and on top. These rooms had openings for soldiers to shoot arrows at enemies who had to enter a few at a time, thus meaning a few defenders could keep large numbers of enemies out. A city's safety, and therefore its reputation, depended on its gates. The gods they worshipped were seen as strong or as weak as their ability to protect their people, and that meant the gates. The gate was the key place in the city. Not only were soldiers always there, but it was a busy, active place. Government officials gathered there (Lot, Boaz, Eli and Mordecai and functioned there). It was the "city hall" where legal matters were settled. It was also the local farmer's market and flea market -- all shopping took place there. It was where people gathered, where announcements were made, and where the prophets spoke God's message to the people. It was the center of life.



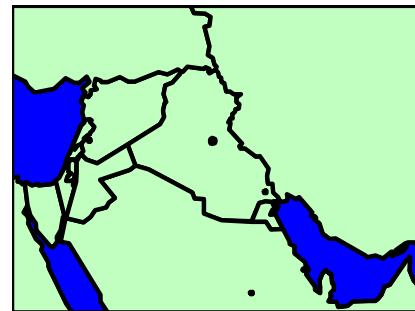
STANDING STONES That brings us to the standing stones that were used as witnesses to people passing by. They were placed by the gates where people would see them. These were erected for special events or to record a historical event. Some were written on, some weren't. They were like historical markers we see along the highway today, but had more significance. Actually it seems the practice of erecting tomb stones developed from this practice of erecting standing stones.

This was done by all cultures in Palestine. The Canaanites did it long before the Jews came. Everyone traveling through would see them and know or wonder about them. In fact, many of the stones came to be worshipped, since they testified to the help a local god had given his people. The Jews were not to worship them, of course, but to tear them down and set up their own. Jacob did this with the stone he used for a pillow after wrestling with God. Jacob set up 12 standing stones after crossing the Jordan and when he made a covenant at Shechem. Seven times Joshua set up standing stones. Unfortunately the Jews didn't continue to set up these testimonials to God. They didn't influence those whom they touched but allowed the Gentiles to influence them. You know the rest of the story: defeat, misery and captivity followed. That was all because they didn't take advantage of the place God chose for them to impact their world for Him. They wasted their opportunity.

God has put each one of us in a special place to impact others around us. We are to erect monuments of testimony to Him by what we say and how we live (I Peter 2:4-12). There are lives which we touch for God which no one else does. There is a world badly needing our light. Live in such a way as to effect those around you for God. You'll not regret it!

Let the ROCKS CRY OUT

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



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2. CROSS YOUR JORDAN



Most ancient civilizations grew up around a river. Babylon had the Tigris and Euphrates, India the Ganges and Egypt the Nile. Often these rivers were worshipped because of their importance in providing life for the people there. When God chose Palestine for the Jews He made sure they weren't tempted to do this. Their only river, the Jordan, was often more of a curse than a blessing! It didn't flood to fertilize their lands, didn't provide transportation, didn't really do anything but provide a convenient eastern boundary.

THE JORDAN RIVER The Jordan River was small, 50 to 75 feet across. It was only 3 to 12 feet deep. "Jordan" means "descender" because the river drops 3000 feet (about 3/5 of a mile) from its source to the Dead Sea. This is about 70 miles as the crow flies (in a straight line). But with all the twists and turns in it the river actually travels over 200 miles. Twenty-seven rapids make boat travel impossible.

Much in the Bible happened in this river valley. Lot moved here to be in rich farm land (Sodom and Gomorrah are now under the Dead Sea). David hid from Saul in caves in the Jordan River valley. John the Baptizer lived and baptized here at the upper and lower fords. Perhaps the most important event there, though, was when the waters parted to let Joshua and the Jews enter the land (Josh 3:15-16). The same thing happened for Elijah & Elisha, too (II Kings 2:7-8).

CROSSING THE JORDAN Many songs or poems today talk about "crossing the Jordan" as entrance into heaven. "I looked over Jordan and what did I see? Coming for to carry me home? A band of angels coming after me...." But what happened to the Jews after they crossed the Jordan and entered the land under Joshua? Was it heaven? No, that's when their battles and warfare started! I see it this way: The Jews were in bondage in Egypt (type of the world) and under Pharaoh's power (type of Satan). God had to intervene to deliver them by

innocent blood being shed (Passover) and by power (Red Sea parting). These picture salvation which is by blood (Jesus on cross) and power (resurrection of Jesus). Then God took them to Mt Sinai to give them His Word so they could know how to live



and serve Him. Thus equipped they were to enter the Promised Land by faith, but failed through unbelief. Thus they had to wander for 40 years, wasting their life. They still had their salvation but were carnal believers who lived out of God's will. When Joshua led them into the land there were again in God's will and place for them. That's when the battles with the world, the flesh and Satan began. The Promised Land was a picture of being in God's will. There is peace and rest for the soul there, but many battles must be fought to claim and settle in that land -- lifelong battles. That strange combination of peace within but battles without is what the Christian living for God faces.

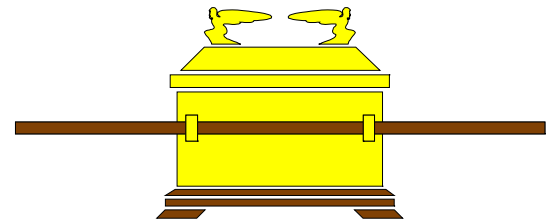
BARRIER TO BE CROSSED What stood in the way, what kept the Jews from being in God's perfect will for them, was the Jordan. At flood stage it was uncrossable and a barrier. We today have barriers that seem uncrossable, that which keeps us out of God's perfect will and place for us. These must be crossed to have peace and rest within despite battles without. We all have our 'Jordan' to cross today. It may be the opinion of others, lust (food, sex, things), fear, greed, laziness, etc. It **MUST** be crossed or we will wander in our own wilderness, not growing but wasting our lives. We must cross as the Jews did under Joshua.

HOW TO CROSS THE JORDAN There are two lessons we must learn to cross our Jordans:

First, we have to get our feet wet. The water of the Jordan only parted when the priests in front stepped into the water (Josh 3:15-16). It took total commitment to do that, for going down the steep bank and plunging into deep, swift water would have meant sure death if God hadn't stopped the water. Those going first took the greatest risk, needed the strongest faith, but received the largest reward and blessing. Not only did God stop the water, He dried up the ground so they didn't even get muddy!

As new Christians, right out of Egypt, God parted the Red Sea for them before they waded into it. Their faith was new and weak. Now, though, He expects them to step out in faith **BEFORE** He opens the way. We, too, must take that first step of faith, risking all, and trusting God to provide in order to cross our Jordan.

Second, the priests who led the way didn't go into the water alone. They were carrying the Ark of the Covenant with them (Josh 3:1-6). This was where God's Presence dwelt among them. It was the central focus of the Tabernacle and all Jewish worship. They followed the ark when they marched around Jericho, too.

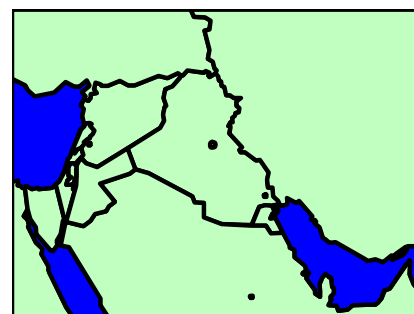


Thus they stepped into the waters making sure god was with them! We must be sure we are going where God wants us to go and entering His will and place for us. We can't do it in our own strength, and He doesn't ask us to do that. We must be in close fellowship with Him to have His presence and power with us.

Thus the way for us to cross our individual Jordan Rivers so we can be in God's will in our lives means to step out in faith, trusting God will provide as we obey Him. It also means making sure He is with us as we go His way. We can't do it on our own, we can't choose our own way. It must be His way in His timing with His presence. Then we, too, will enter that special promised land where we will find peace and rest in our spirits. The battles will begin, for sure, because then we face opposition to our commitment to serve God. But He is with us through the battles too. The giants we face now, just like the ones the Jews, will fall before the power of the Lord. Are you in the land? Or are you wandering in the wilderness, wasting your life by just existing from day to day? Cross your Jordan and get into the land of milk & honey!

Let the ROCKS CRY OUT

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3. GIVE YOUR BEST

This lesson contains all the things you wouldn't think would be in the Bible: sex (a prostitute is a main character), violence (thousands of men, women and children are killed -- by God's orders) and situational ethics (lying to help God out). What story is this? It's the story of Jericho.

JERICO'S SIGNIFICANCE Jericho is located 8 miles NW of where the Jordan River enters the Dead Sea. The climate is tropical because it is 8,000 feet below sea level (the lowest city on earth). Because of its great location it is also the site of the oldest city so far ever discovered. City after city was built one upon another on the same location. What made it so strategic was that it was located on the only east-west road in that part of Palestine to connect the two major north-south highways which went from Africa to Asia and Europe (the Via Maris and the King's Highway). It wasn't a large city, but had great walls and defenses. No one could enter Palestine from the east without their approval -- and they weren't about to let the Jews past!



JERICO'S DEFEAT The story of Jericho's fall to Joshua is well known (Joshua 6). The same ark which led them through the Jordan led the way around the city. On the seventh day God destroyed the walls and the Jews destroyed everyone in the city. Some wonder how a loving God could destroy women and children like that (Deut 20:16-18), but He couldn't let any live for their sin would spread to the Jews (which is exactly what happened). He gave them plenty of time to repent, adding 400 extra years after Abraham came to the land (Genesis 15:16). The innocent children did go to heaven, which wouldn't have happened had they grown and been taught to reject God as the adults did. God is holy and righteous and He judges sin. He did so in Eden, with the flood and at Babel as well as Sodom and Gomorrah. That's why He created hell. Judging Jesus on the cross is the ultimate statement of how He feels about sin.

JERICO'S DESTRUCTION The Jews weren't to let any alive or they would be influenced to commit the sins of the Canaanites. The city had to be leveled and the possessions destroyed, lest any of it influence God's people to sin. This was so important that God pronounced a curse on any who ever rebuilt Jericho (Joshua 6:26-27 -- eventually Ahab allowed Hiel to rebuild Jerusalem, and he paid the penalty God had stated (I Kings 16:34).

SET APART FOR GOD God had them destroy Jericho and leave it unbuilt for another reason. It was to show He was their God. The Jews owned no land and never did (only the plot

Abraham bought to bury Sarah). God is giving them all of Palestine and this is their first actual land to own. Giving it back to God shows the principle of firstfruits. As stewards we must remember that all we have is really God's. He just passes it through our hands for us to manage and use for Him, but we don't own it.

God had recently instituted the feast of Firstfruits (Lev. 23:9-14) where the first of all crops, animals or produce was taken to the tabernacle (later the temple) and offered to God there. This was hard for the first to be harvested was often the very best, and very much in demand after a long winter without enough to eat. This principle is what the Pilgrims based their Thanksgiving feast on. By claiming Jericho as His own God was showing the importance of the Jews giving the first and best back to Him.

JERICO A MEZUZAH The Jews still, to this day, put a small container with scripture verses written on paper inside (Deut. 4:4-9; 11:13-21) on their door post. Those who lived there would touch it each time they entered, remembering their commitment to God. Everyone would see this and know their home was dedicated to God. As people entered this home this would be their first impression. Whenever anyone entered Palestine

from the east the ruins of Jericho would be their first impression. It, on the doorway to Palestine, showed that all here was God's. What a strong reminder it must have been! That strong city was now just rubble because of what God did! What a visual reminder it was!



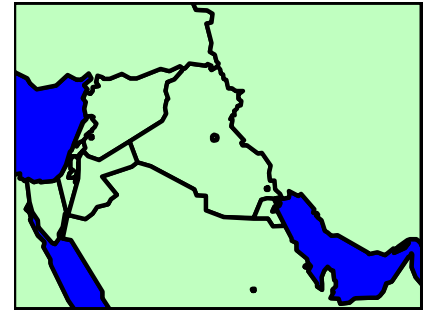
JESUS AND JOSHUA When He was going to Jerusalem to be crucified, Jesus chose to enter the land by the Jericho road (Luke 18:31-35). He came to open a new 'promised land.' Too. His was spiritual while Joshua's was physical. As you know, both Joshua (Hebrew) and Jesus (Greek) mean "God is salvation" in English. Joshua opened the land physically. Jesus followed the same road to open it spiritually. Both came in God's name and in obedience to God. For both it started at Jericho, where the first and best was dedicated to God.

GIVE GOD YOUR BEST God wants us today, too, to give God our first and our best in recognition that all is His. Before paying any bills, write out your check to God. Before eating any food, pray and bless it. Before using a new purchase, thank God for it and commit it to God's glory. Give God the best of your time, too -- not just what is left over. Sunday is His day. The first and often best time is the very start of the day. Use that time for God's glory. Give Him the first and best of your talents and gifts, too: do what you can for your church and family, friends and neighbors. Give them your first and best as unto the Lord. Always be conscious of setting apart to God the first and best of everything you have and are. This is Jericho.

Also from Jericho remember to acknowledge God in away that others can see. We need to have spiritual 'mezuzah's' hanging many places in our lives. Show you are dedicated to God's use by Christian symbols and plaques in your home, on your clothing or jewelry, and on your car. Probably YOU YOURSELF have been set apart to God by your parents. Don't take back from God what is His for there is no blessing in that as Ahab found out when He took Jericho back from God. God is a loving God, but He is also a holy God. He demands the best. He deserves the best. Give it to Him.

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4. STAND YOUR GROUND

Samson could strangle a lion, but he couldn't strangle his own lusts. He burst the fetters of his foes, but not the cords of his own flesh. He burned the crops of others and lost the fruit of his own virtue which burned with his desires. Samson is a man that would be admired today. Physical strength and fitness is greatly admired today. Unfortunately we don't view moral strength as nearly as important, and neither did Samson. To really understand his story we must understand the geography and culture in which he lived.



THE SHEPHELAH The geography of Palestine consisted of a mountain range going north and south alongside the Dead (Salt) Sea. It was rugged territory, better suited to flocks than farming. The Jews settled here. The coast was marsh land and where the Philistines lived. In between was a fertile land called the shephelah which means "foothills" or "lowland." It was the best place to farm, the most fertile farm land in the area. The main trade route between Egypt (and the African continent) and Mesopotamia (and the continents of Europe and Asia) went right up the middle of the shephelah. It was called the Via Maris. Thus many battles were fought for the shephelah for it was not only the best land around, but also the key to controlling the Via Maris and its trade and therefore influencing the known world. The two nations which battled for this land were the Jews and the Philistines.

THE PHILISTINES The Philistines are mentioned often in the Bible, almost 300 times. We tend to think of them as the barbarian enemies of the cultured Jews. Actually the opposite is true. The Jews were the barbarians living in the hills while the Philistines were much more refined, artistic and civilized.

The Philistines were not Semites like the other nations in Palestine. They were Aryans, Hellenic peoples from the area of Greece, some of whom migrated to the coast of Palestine. They brought their Greek armor and ways with them. Their very name means 'migrant.' The name 'Palestine' comes from their name.

They developed five great cities on the coast: Gaza, Ekron, Ashdod, Ashkelon and Gath. They produced the finest pottery in Palestine. Ekron alone produced a thousand tons of olive oil a year (30% of what the whole nation of Israel produces today). But it was the use of iron that set them apart. They brought the secrets of iron working with them and with that were able to dominate the whole area.

PHILISTINE RELIGION The Philistines worshipped a god they named Dagon who was a god of fertility. His consort, the female Ashtaroth was their goddess of fertility. As can be imagined, the worship of these gods was very immoral. By the way, the European fertility goddess 'Easter' was her equivalent (rabbits and eggs are fertility symbols). These gods were worshipped by sacred prostitution and child sacrifice. Sex was focused on and worshipped in their culture, even more than in ours today. When the ark of the covenant was taken by the Philistines and put in the temple of Dagon, though, the statue fell down in worship before the ark (1 Samuel 5:1-7).

The Philistines also had a god named Baal-zebub, meaning "lord of habitation." His name in Greek became Beelzebub, "the ruler of the demons." The Jews, recognizing the demonic nature of the Philistine gods, changed his name to Beelzebub, 'lord of the flies.' Flies gather on dung heaps, and that is what they said Satan was lord of --not exactly a complement!

ENTER SAMSON Samson was chosen by God before birth to defeat the Philistines and bring relief for the Jews. Our purpose here isn't to show all about Samson's life but how the culture and geography of the area affected his life and ministry. (For a detailed account of Samson's life see "Samson and Male Sexuality" by Jerry Schroyer.) Samson's story is in Judges 13-16.

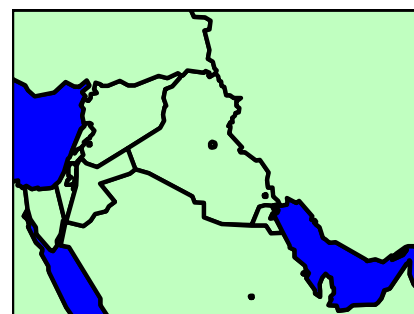
There was no border between the Jews and the Philistines for both nationalities had cities scattered throughout the shephelah. Thus Samson grew up seeing Philistines nearby. Like all Jewish boys he grew up dreaming of the day he would defeat his enemies and free the land of their oppressive presence. He was to be God's instrument to destroy the pagan culture around them so God's people wouldn't be affected, but instead he himself gave in to the fleshly attractions of that culture and its sensuality. One can only imagine the appeal a tall, blond, immodestly dressed Philistine woman who was an accomplished flirt had on Samson who up to this time only knew short, dark-skinned, completely covered and veiled Jewish maidens who gave no eye contact and barely answered when talked to. The whole sensuality of the Philistine life, the brazen in-your-face sexuality, the easy availability, and the continual impact on Samson's sensory system quickly made him want more. Thus began a life of sensuality and sexuality, ending in his destruction. While God used him anyway to break Philistine power and to destroy the temple of Dagon, it is a sad story for Samson.

Entering into this story, too, is the fact that Samson was a Nazarite (Numbers 6). That means he took a special vow to live a life totally separate from sin, even more than the average Jew. He could eat no grape products of any kind, which was hard in a place where water was scarce and grape juice the main beverage. Samson broke this when he drank at his wedding feast. Next, he could not touch anything dead, thus he had to be a vegetarian in a meat-eating society. Samson broke this by touching the dead lion. Finally, he could not cut his hair or beard, giving him a wild-man look. This was broken when Delilah cut his hair.

Like Samson, we are called to be set apart from our culture so we can bring Jesus to those caught up in it. Instead we, like Samson, often become part of the very culture we are called to destroy! Today, too, sexuality is often Satan's best tool to defeat God's people. As you live among the 'Philistine' towns scattered around you, don't be attracted to their sin. They, too, worship sex but we must be separate from that. We must raise our children to be separate, too, and equip them to be able to bring God's love to others. Learn from Samson's failure.

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5. CONQUER YOUR GIANTS

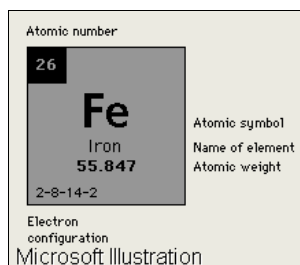
God created the nation Israel to be His people. He was to be their king and they His people, but they rejected Him as king and wanted a king "like everyone else has." Finally God gave in, not because it was His perfect will for them but because He knew there are some lessons that must be learned the hard way.

SAUL Saul was the first king. While he was a shy, insecure man before becoming king, the power turned his head and he didn't follow God's ways. He lived by selfishness and fear, not submission and faith. This is clearly seen in the story of David and Goliath.

GOLIATH The Philistines and Jews continually fought for control of the shephalah, the fertile lowlands between Philistia (on the coast) and Israel (in the mountains by the Dead Sea). One such encounter was near Succoth in the shephelah (I Sam 17:1-3). The Philistines practiced a tradition from their Hellenistic past in having their best warrior fight their enemies best warrior to see which nation would win (4-11). This way armies and manpower weren't being constantly destroyed. The champion of the Philistines was a giant (9 foot tall) named Goliath. His spear weighed 125 pounds and the point of it 15 pounds. The Philistines had state-of-the-art weapon technology which the Jews didn't (I Sam 13:16-22). They could work iron, a secret they brought with them when they came from Greece. The secret was using charcoal to get a fire hot enough to form the metal. Thus the Philistines could form weapons that were far superior to the Jews' wooden and stone implements. Plus the Philistines, being Aryans, were far taller than the Jews. Goliath himself was probably a descendant of the giants which were in the land when Joshua first conquered it (and why the Jews had been afraid to enter the land earlier).



ENTER DAVID David was the youngest boy in his family, not old or large enough to be in the army. When he brought food to the army he found out about the challenge to God (I Sam 17:12-30). He was highly indignant and saw it all, not as a challenge to the Jews by the Philistines, but to God by Satan (v. 26, 45-47). David was right, it was spiritual warfare in the heavenlies which also affected events on this earth like ripples in a pond. The battles between good and evil on this earth, between light and darkness down here, really are heavenly battles between angels and demons, between God and Satan. David recognized the immense implications of what was happening and knew his God could not be



defeated. Perhaps God would let the Israel army loose battles, as they often did, but when the challenge was against God Himself there could be no doubt as to the outcome! The same is true for us today.

The Jews only had one set of armor which Saul owned, probably taken from a dead Philistine. Since Saul was a head taller than any of the Jews (I Sam 9:2) he was the same size as the Philistines. Being the biggest Jew as well as the commander of the army and king, it should have been his role to fight Goliath but he was afraid to. That's why he jumped at the chance to let a boy only about 10 or 12 years old fight the giant unarmed. Now David had faced 'giants' before -- a bear and a lion. God had delivered him then and he knew God would do so again (v. 31-38). God keeps increasing the size of the 'giants' we face as our faith grows.

THE SLING The only weapon David took was a sling. This would have been a strip of leather with a larger spot in the middle which could be folded around a stone. When swung over one's head it gained great force and when one string was released the stone when flying out at tremendous speed. It was hard to be accurate with such a weapon, but it worked fine for boys flinging stones in the general direction of lions or wolves who might get too close to the sheep they were watching. David, as any bored boy in the out-of-doors, spent lots of time flinging stones and was pretty good at it. We may wonder what skills we have that God can use, but even those which seem insignificant to use can do wonders when used for God. We, like David, must do our best to develop them and then make them available for God's use.

THE 'BATTLE' When Goliath saw a young boy was coming at him he evidently ripped off his helmet and threw it in anger (v 41-44). Throwing things in anger is a terrible habit to develop. David approached him unafraid, trusting in God. What if his stone would miss? What if others would rally to Goliath's defense even if David did hit his mark? Goliath did have 4 brothers, is this why David brought along 4 extra stones (v 40)?

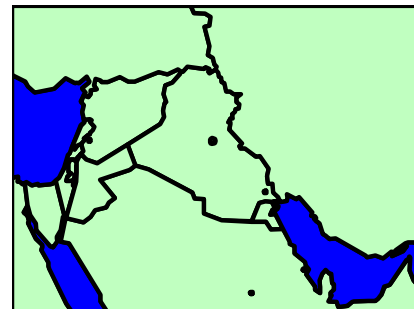


No matter how good someone became with a sling shot, it was still a crude, inaccurate instrument. A moving target was quite hard to hit, and David himself was running as he shot (48-49). In fact the chances of David hitting, much less killing Goliath were slim. David used his skill to the best of his ability, knowing any success he had would come from God (45-47). God directed the stone right to its mark, killing Goliath and winning the battle for Israel (50-54).

GIANTS WE FACE David won against impossible odds. Humanly speaking there was no way he could win. Still, God used a weak person and an insignificant skill to bring about a miraculous victory. God still does that today. He puts you and me against an impossible situation, a 'giant' we cannot possibly overcome on our own. He tells us to use our small, puny skills to the best of our ability and He will make sure of the victory. Remember, the battle is His. It is not the world, the flesh or the devil against us. It is God they challenge, and He has never lost a battle yet. To help you with your battles, read and memorize the wonderful words of David's and use them over and over. *"You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands."* (I Samuel 17:45-47).

Let the ROCKS CRY OUT

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



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6. PURIFY YOUR PRACTICES

Christians are in a battle today. Christian values battle with secular. Much is at stake. Israel faced the same thing in its day. The Bible's world view was being challenged by the world's in the form of Baal worship. It doesn't matter what form the anti-Bible world view takes, they are all basically the same. By understanding Satan's schemes to defeat God's people 3,000 years ago we can better equip ourselves to defeat God's enemies today, too.

BAAL WORSHIP The central pagan deity was a male god named Baal (or sometimes Molech). He was worshipped by different names from Rome to Egypt and Mesopotamia. He was seen as the creator-god who had defeated all other gods. He was seen as the god of rain, sea, storms, thunder and death. As supreme god over the lush Palestine area, he was especially worshipped as the god who brought fertility to the area. It was believed that death was defeated each spring when he returned to fertilize the land, animals and people. Baal was worshipped in the form of a bull to portray his fertility and power.

Asherah was the main female deity, Baal's mate. She was also called Ashtoreth, Astarte, Aphrodite (by the Greeks), Venus (by the Romans) and Eastre. Eastre was the Anglo-Saxon name of a Teutonic goddess of spring and fertility, to whom was dedicated a month corresponding to April. Her festival was celebrated on the day of the vernal equinox; traditions associated with the festival survive in the Easter rabbit, a symbol of fertility, and in colored Easter eggs, originally painted with bright colors to represent the sunlight of spring, all symbols of fertility which come down to us today in our traditional 'Easter' celebration.

In the spring the worshippers of Baal and Asherah would bring offerings to entice them to come and bring fertility to their land. Grain, animal blood, and even human blood was sacrificed. Children, usually babies, were placed on the white-hot outstretched arms of Baal's statue and rolled into the blazing fires within. Archaeologists have found sites in the ancient world where thousands and thousands of sacrificial victims have been buried. The purpose was to get Baal's attention and encourage him to bring fertility to the land.

Another method used to motivate Baal and Asherah to mate and thus ensure fertility for their people was to use public acts of sexual intercourse in their worship. This would start with a priest and priestess but soon spread to the worshippers. This was a very common part of Baal worship and one of the reasons God so condemned it.

IMPACT ON THE JEWS Baal worship was in full bloom when **Abraham** entered the land. When Jacob's children started marrying into and accepting the beliefs of the Baal-worshippers



in Palestine God took them to Egypt to develop into a pure nation. God gave the Canaanites 400 more years to repent, but they didn't.

When Moses led the people out of Egypt and went up Mt Sinai to get the law from God, **Aaron** built a golden calf for the people to worship. This was an idol of Baal. They even included the sexual orgy (Ex. 32:6). God severely judged the people for their sin (Ex. 32:19-28).

Because he couldn't curse God's people to stop them, **Balaam** suggested exposing them to Baal worship so God Himself would discipline them and destroy many of them, and that is what happened (Num 25:1-13).

After entering the promised Land, a land so fertile it was said to flow with milk and honey, the Jews were fully exposed to Baal worship. They were told to destroy all the people so they would be influenced by them, but refused to do so. Thus there was much temptation to sin (**Judges** 2:10-15; 3:7; 6:24-27; 10:6-7). Even **Solomon** built altars to pagan wives (I Kings 11:1-11).

The **Northern Kingdom**, Israel, went into captivity because of this sin (I Kings 16:29-33; II Kings 17:7-20). Jezebel (who is even named after Baal - 'bel') brought Baal and Asherah with her. The Jews never abandoned worship of YHWH, they added Baal worship to it and worshipped both. Prophets like Elijah, Elisha, Hosea and Amos strongly condemned this practice but weren't listened to.

The same thing happened to the **Southern Kingdom**, Judah (II Chron 28:1-4; 33:1-6; 36:11-14). Jeremiah (7:30-34; 19:3-9; 2:20-25) and Hosea (11:1-4) warned the people. Hezekiah instituted reforms so the Jews weren't destroyed (II Chron 31:1) and escaped Assyria's capture (Isa 36:1; 37:1,5-18,36-37). The reform didn't last long, for Manasseh, Hezekiah's son, turned the people back to Baal worship (II Chron 33:1-6). His son Amon continued in his way (II Chron 33:21-22) but Amon's son Josiah led the people back to worship God (II Chron 34:1-33). Twenty-three years later, though, Judah was captured by Babylon because of its Baal worship and other sins (II Chron 36:15-20; Ezek 23:36-39).

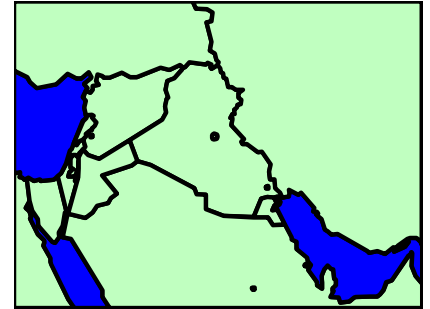
BAAL WORSHIP TODAY We consider ourselves today much too sophisticated and intelligent to ever get into anything like Baal worship today, but Satan and cleverly brought about the same kind of worship through other means. We, too, worship sex today. Ours is a sex-saturated, sex-oriented society. Sex is often seen as the most important thing in life, the thing we worship. The focus is off of God and onto sex, as in the times of Baal worship.

The other similarity today to the worship of Baal is the practice of sacrificing children for our own material benefit. Isn't that why most people get abortions? The baby would inconvenience their life and take time and money. Therefore the baby is sacrificed for the benefit of the parent -- the same as babies sacrificed to Baal. At least they then buried the babies recognizing they were real human beings. Today people even deny that!

Satan's tools are the same then as now: emphasis on sex and putting self before others. Sex and self-centered materialism are his tools today as well. We look down at those who worshipped Baal by sex and child sacrifice, but we today aren't much different! How could they do that we ask? But aren't we desensitized to sex and abortion today? Don't we allow violence, profanity, off-color jokes and overt sensuality come into our living rooms daily by means of the television? We learn to ignore it, even compromise with it, then think we are better than them because we aren't into overt Baal worship. Satan doesn't care how he does it, just so he gets our focus off of God. Self and selfishness are two of his best tricks. They worked then, unfortunately they still work today. Make sure they aren't working in your life!

Let the ROCKS CRY OUT

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



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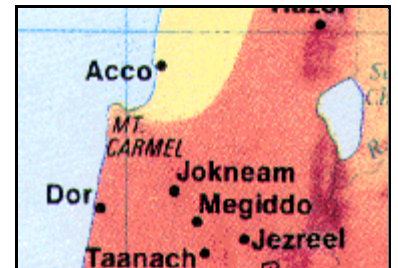
7. PROCLAIM YOUR ALLEGIANCE

Despite our best intentions, it is usually fear that keeps us from taking a stand for God. Fear can do awful things (Prov 28:1) but it never comes from God (II Tim 1:7). Courage is needed to take a stand for God. Noah took such a stand, so did Moses and Joshua. Gideon did it as did Ester and Daniel. Peter and John did so, as well as David, Joab and Paul. Elijah took a courageous stand, too.

“CHASTE” JEZEBEL The story of Elijah starts with Jezebel, whose name means “chaste.” Raised in a pagan culture as the daughter of the king of Tyre, she was strongly into Baal worship before marrying weak Ahab, king of Israel. In him she has a husband and kingdom she could control. In her he found a mother substitute, someone strong enough to not need him to be strong. In addition she brought a good political alliance. The story of Naboth’s vineyard (I Kings 21) shows a lot about them. Because he could not have the vineyard he went to bed and pouted until she got him the vineyard (by deceit, lying and murder). Then he was happy again.

WEAK AHAB Ahab became the worst king Israel had (I Kings 16:29-33) because of her influence (I Kings 21:25-26). The worship of Baal and Ashoreth caused God to announce, through Elijah, a drought. After 3 1/2 years God sent Elijah to challenge the prophets of Baal to see who was the greatest (I Kings 18:16).

COURAGEOUS ELIJAH Elijah, whose name itself is a challenge to Baal (“My God is the LORD”), risked his life by challenging Ahab and Baal, but he obeyed God and called for a showdown on Mt. Carmel. This mountain was the perfect stage for all to watch this historic confrontation. Baal was the God of rain and fertility, and for almost 4 years had been silent. Everyone was anxious to watch this battle to the finish (v. 20).



WAVERING PEOPLE When Elijah challenged the people to take a stand for God they didn’t (v. 21). They didn’t turn from God, but they didn’t turn from Baal, either -- they wanted both. How dangerous it is for anyone to have anything in life that in any challenges God’s total control.

DEAD BULLS Elijah told the prophets of Baal to choose a bull, sacrifice it on their alter, and let their God show his power by accepting his sacrifice by burning it with fire (v. 22-25). The 450 prophets of Baal spent most of the day doing pagan dances, screaming their chants and mutilating themselves with knives (all things Satan loves, ways of getting his attention and approval). When they failed (v. 26-29) Elijah took his turn (v. 30). While rebuilding the neglected altar to God, he preached to the people about God (v. 30-33). To make sure no one thought he

hid a spark in the wood or in any way rigged the outcome, he drenched it all with water (33-35). Then he prayed and asked God to accept this offering (36-37; James 5:16-18).

AWESOME GOD Then God sent fire and burnt the wood, sacrifice, stones, ground and even the water (v. 38). There's nothing subtle about God's answer! This isn't the first miracle God did through Elijah but it is certainly the most dramatic. Elijah's courageous stand was rewarded.

REPENTANT PEOPLE When they saw this, everyone recognized God's greatness and turned back to Him (v. 39). They realized that fire could have (should have) hit and destroy them instead! They then killed all of Baal's prophets (v. 40).

RAINY WEATHER God then ended the drought by bringing rain (v. 41-46). Everything was going great -- but there was still Jezebel for she didn't come to the showdown.

ANGRY JEZEBEL Instead of repenting as the others did she threatened Elijah's life (19:1-2). Even though she lost her power and influence (temporarily) Elijah lost his courage and fled. (3).

DEPRESSED ELIJAH Despite seeing such a great victory by God, Elijah ran in fear. He said he wanted to die (v. 4). He isolated himself from everyone (v. 4). He felt sorry for himself (v. 10). Why did he react this strange way after such a great display of God's power? Well, he was human (James 5:17) and susceptible to depression. There are other in the Bible who were so depressed they wished they were dead (Job 7:3-11; Moses Num 11:11-15; Jonah 4:3; Jeremiah 15: 10-18). These were all introverts (Melancholy temperament) for they are more open to this. Elijah was drained emotionally and physically after his ordeal on Carmel. He climbed to the top and down twice, built an alter and preached, then ran 20 miles to see Jezebel. Emotionally he was drained by the whole experience, as is common after a mountain-top experience.

RESTORED ELIJAH How God handled this is very worthy of note. He made sure Elijah ate, slept and ate again (v. 5-8). Then He let Elijah talk -- get it all off his chest (v. 9-10). God then revealed Himself to Elijah. Perhaps Elijah was thinking that the Mt. Carmel experience was the norm and God wanted to correct that misconception. Sometimes we assume that God should be working in our lives in a dramatic, supernatural way like we think He does for others. Sometimes we do things to manufacture such experiences. God showed Elijah this is not so. A wind, earthquake and fire (as on Mt. Carmel) appeared and God clearly showed He was not in any of them (v. 11-12). Instead, God revealed Himself in a gentle whisper (v. 12-13). Elijah, like us, had to learn where/how to look for God. When He did that he could listen to God again.

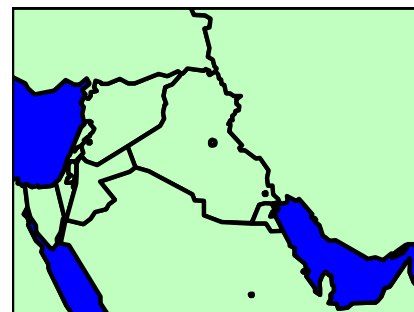
God then gave him directions to get back to work (v. 13-18). Sitting around feeling sorry for himself was no way to get out of his depression. He also provided a companion, Elisha, that helped him, too.

Thus we see that even those who show courage in standing for the Lord have times when they fail. It's what happens then that matters. Getting back into obedience to God is what is most important.

COURAGEOUS YOU God needs people like Elijah today -- not perfect people but people willing to obey and serve Him no matter what, people who will take a courageous stand no matter what the cost, people who know where and how to look for God, and people who will get up when they fail and fall. Are you such a person? Start by taking a stand against the things in your life that draw you away from God, the idols that compete for first place in your heart. Be alert to them and turn from them. Remember our amazing, marvelous God and how much greater He is than anything else. He took a stand for you, take your stand for Him!

Let the ROCKS CRY OUT

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



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8. STRENGTHEN YOUR OUTPOSTS

Imagine you and your family are trapped in the ancient city of Lachish as it is besieged by one of the cruelest armies the world has ever known -- the army of Assyria. Your walls are strong, but you are vastly outnumbered. You have lots of food and water, but it won't last forever. Up in the hills to the northeast, 40 miles away, is the capital city you are guarding -- Jerusalem. The royal army is there. The Assyrians must destroy you to open the way to the hills and wait for deliverance, for that is where your hope is. "I lift up my eyes to the hills -- where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1-2).



LACHISH was first settled 4000 BC (2000 years before Abraham entered the land). It has been destroyed and rebuilt at least 6 times. It was strategically located to protect Jerusalem from access from the south. No army could get to Jerusalem from that direction without first having to destroy Lachish. It was a very strategic outpost. Most armies who marched on Jerusalem tried to approach from this direction, so Lachish was of key importance. Other outpost cities were Micmash, Gezer, Beth Shemesh and Azekah. Jerusalem

depended on these for its survival.

ASSYRIA Located in what is now Iraq, Assyria was the strongest power in that whole area from 800 - 600 BC. Ninevah was its capital. Their army was strong and cruel, with a demonic lust for blood and torture. No wonder Jonah ran the other way when told to bring them God's message! Having destroyed Israel (the northern 10 tribes), Assyria now moved on the south.

HEZEKIAH When Assyria made its move toward Jerusalem, Hezekiah was king. He was a godly man who did much to turn the people back to God. He removed Baal worship and brought spiritual reform and revival to Judah. When faced with death from a serious illness, he prayed for God's mercy and God granted him another 15 years of life. God also gave him a sign that would happen, to sun's shadows moved backwards 10 degrees (Isa 38:1-8). Isaiah was very

influential in Hezekiah's life, and together they were one of the few lights in a very dark time in Jewish history.

When he was told the Assyrians were coming Hezekiah did what he could to defend himself. He dug a 1,700 foot tunnel through solid rock to supply the city with water. He did what he could but knew that only God could deliver them. When Lachish fell and the Assyrian army surrounded Jerusalem, Hezekiah and Isaiah prayed and God killed 185,000 at night (II Kings 19:15-36). The rest of the army fled in humiliation and defeat. Even though the outpost of Lachish fell, God Himself defended His capital.

OUTPOSTS TODAY There are some very good spiritual lessons to be gained from this today. There are core issues to be protected, as Jerusalem. These included the existence of God as a loving, sovereign creator and the inspiration of the Bible as God's revelation to man. Also included is the fact that God came to earth as the man Jesus and was fully God and man, He provided salvation by His suffering on the cross and proved that by His physical resurrection from the dead. Salvation is only by acceptance of His finished work on the cross. These are central, core truths that must be defended and maintained at all costs. As with Jerusalem, God Himself defends these truths when the outposts fall. If these are core issues to defend, what are the outposts which our enemy attacks first?

Outposts issues today would include moral issues (sexual practices, honesty, character), the role and purpose of the church, spiritual growth, unity among believers, evangelism becoming salt and light to a world of darkness, worship, spiritual gifts, family relationships, and so forth. These areas where the enemy is attacking today. These aren't core issues, but their fall leaves the way open for our enemy to attack the core values.

This principles applies to other areas in life. Take sexual faithfulness in marriage (for those married) and sexual abstinence (for those unmarried). That is the core issue. Outposts issues, where we need to have victory to protect this core issue, include things like looking at or thinking about that which is immoral and "innocent" flirting. We must have victory at these key outposts in order to keep our core values pure.

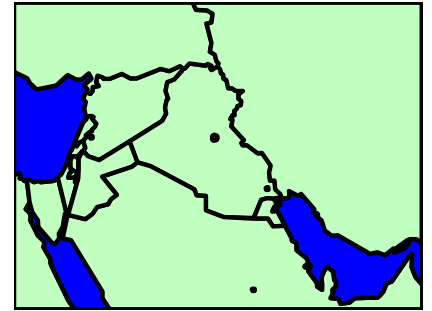
Another example would be marriage. We all want to have good, solid, growing relationships with our mates. This happens only when we win the outpost battles that hit our self-centeredness and pride. Apologizing, forgiving, not answering in a short or sarcastic tone, going out of our way to put the other first, doing little things we don't feel like doing or things we should have to do -- these are where the battle for a growing marriage is won or lost.

This is also true of our own individual walk with the Lord. We all want to be more like Jesus, but that only happens as we spend time in prayer and Bible study each day, and we seek His will in all things, as we learn to overcome temptation, as we confess all known sin and as we trust in His Spirit to fill and use us. Again, the battle is won or lost in the outpost conflict. Not realizing this means we don't take these areas as seriously as we should. We think that as long as we win in the major issues the minor ones don't matter. However our enemy knows that if he can defeat us in one of the minor issues, the major ones lies open and vulnerable to attack and defeat.

How can you win these outpost battles? Not in your own strength. Lift up your eyes to the hills, to the Protector of all of us. Where does your help come from? Your help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth (Psalm 121:1-2). Look to Him for deliverance and victory. He will surely come to your aid. Don't wait until the battle rages around the core issues, make sure you have victory at the outposts!

Let the ROCKS CRY OUT

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



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9. FOLLOW YOUR SHEPHERD

One of the most common mistakes we make is thinking people in Bible times thought like we do today. We interpret Bible truth as if it were written by and for us in America today. Unless we see it through their eyes we won't be able to accurately interpret the Bible. It's not so much a time issue, it's more a geographical problem. Even today Eastern and Western thought is quite different. We in the West like to have things clear, black and white, outlined in technical form, and all scientifically taken care of. Eastern thought moves in shades of gray, focuses more on feelings and emotions than technical content, and doesn't concern itself as much with organized flow.

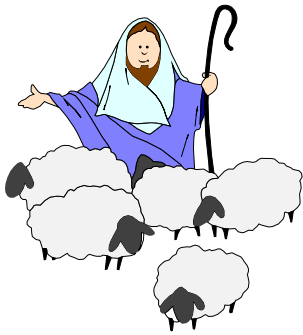
For example, suppose I was to ask you to describe God. How would you do it? What words would you use? As a typical Westerner you'd probably use words like sovereign, love, compassion, omnipotence, mercy, justice, etc. Each of those terms have specific definitions and implications, and in our mind we have this very accurate and very technical description of God. There is nothing wrong with that. However, if the question were asked of an Easterner like the Jews, one would get a different answer; one perhaps more personal and intimate. Describe God? Easy: the Lord is my Shepherd.

Do you see the difference? Now we wouldn't think of putting it that way because we don't think in those kinds of terms. Even if we did, the idea of a shepherd isn't part of our life today. We don't have shepherds among us, and none of us ever was a shepherd. Yet that was part of life for the Jews in Bible times.

A WILDERNESS PEOPLE The Jews were shepherds, not farmers. Abel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Amos and on down were shepherds. In Palestine, they didn't have the good, rich land needed for farming. They were confined to the wilderness (a desert area). They lived there during their wanderings, too. John the Baptist grew up there, and Jesus was tempted there. That formed and defined their life style. They weren't city-dwellers, they weren't farmers, they weren't sailors, they were shepherds.

DUTIES OF A SHEPHERD The shepherd was totally responsible for the care of his sheep. Sheep are defenseless, helpless animals. They can't find their way home. They can't find water or food on their own. They can't clean their own wounds. They will wander off following the wrong sheep if not constantly watched. They are totally dependent on their shepherd. The





shepherd protected and defended the sheep from danger, even at the risk of his own life. David fought a lion and a bear to protect his sheep. The shepherds faced danger from the elements, too: flood, drought, extreme heat or cold, or even fire. There were robbers who would kill him for the sheep.

Shepherds would put their sheep in an enclosure at night, then lay their own bodies across the opening. Thus they it was literally true that any danger which came would have to come “over their dead body.”

Each sheep was known by name, and each healthy sheep knew and followed his shepherd. If a sheep continued to go its own way, often it was left to learn the error of its ways the hard way. Its life was protected, but often it took pain and suffering to teach it obedience.

Thus when an Easterner thought of a shepherd they thought of someone who loved and cared, someone who was in charge and control, someone who did what was best for the sheep no matter what they deserved, someone who was motivated by compassion. The shepherd was thought of as sovereign, love, compassion, omnipotence, mercy, justice, etc. The shepherd was to his sheep as God is to us. Thus truly the Lord is my shepherd.

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD Now isn't that a nicer, more personal and intimate way of describing God? No wonder God is referred to as a shepherd over 200 times in the Bible (15 in the New Testament). God Himself used the term to describe His relationship to His people because He knew they would understand and respond to it (Ps 80:1; Ezek 34:14). “The Lord is my shepherd” (Psalm 23) and “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11) are among the most familiar and comforting passages in the Bible.

When He called His prophets and pastors ‘shepherds’ He knew everyone would understand (John 21:15-17; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2-4). Pastors today are undershepherds, assigned to care for God's flock as He would were He here. Woe to those who didn't do so (Jeremiah 23:1-4). One day He will return and gather His flock under His control once again (Matthew 25:31-33).

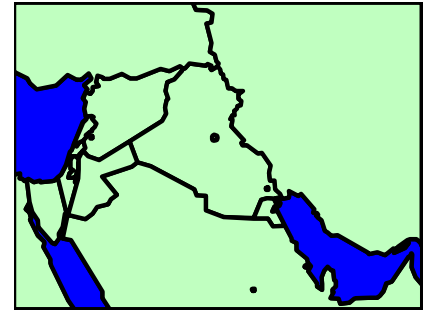
IS THE LORD YOUR SHEPHERD? When you think about God, try thinking of Him as a shepherd. Sovereign, love, compassion, omnipotence, mercy, justice, etc. describe God, but seeing Him as your shepherd make Him more personal and your relationship more intimate. However it takes more than just saying the words, we have to obey and follow Him as a sheep does a shepherd. Do you follow Him and allow Him to lead and protect you? Or are you more like a rebellious sheep who will have to learn to trust their shepherd the hard way. Our pride and self-sufficiency often stand in our way.

What a wonder it is that God is sovereign, love, compassion, omnipotence, mercy, justice, etc. What a privilege it is to have Him willing to shepherd us, to take on our care and welfare. What a privilege to be a sheep in His fold! How foolish it is to think we know better. Is He your shepherd? Do you follow and obey Him? You can't go wrong if you do!



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SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



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10. SERVE YOUR KING

Herod was one of the greatest men of his day. That's why he was called Herod THE GREAT.

HEROD'S FIGHT FOR HIS KINGDOM His father, Antipater II, was made ruler of Palestine when Rome again took control of that whole region. He was soon killed and Herod ruled for 33 years. They weren't easy years, though. Herod was always fighting for his kingdom. He backed Pompey when he fought Crasius and Julius Caesar and thus lost his kingdom, then won it back by helping Julius Caesar escape the Egyptians.



HEROD THE GREAT

When Mark Antony and Octavius fought Crasius and Brutus, he caked his long-time friend Mark Antony and again lost everything. He was given his kingdom back and set about rebuilding his fortune. When the Hasmoneans revolted he almost lost his kingdom again. He married the last of their line, Mairamne, to bring reconciliation. Then Antony, who had fallen in love with his rival to the south, Cleopatra, took much of Herod's land and gave it to her. Herod went to Antony and got it back, again fighting for his kingdom. When Antony was defeated by Octavius, Herod again lost everything.

Five times he won his kingdom back and rebuilt his lost fortune. Palestine became the largest kingdom in the Roman empire and Jerusalem one of the greatest Roman cities. Herod built the hippodrome and restarted the Olympics in Jerusalem. He built public buildings and palaces everywhere. He freed Galilee from bandits and rebuilt it. He also rebuilt Caesarea, Decapolis and Athens. He was the greatest builder of his day. Many of his buildings still stand as attraction for tourists.

He was considered the greatest politician of his day. He was intelligent, very athletic, strong and popular. That is he was popular with everyone but the Jews he had to rule.

He was fair to them and brought them peace and prosperity, but they hated him and opposed every move he made because they wanted their own freedom. He started hating them back. When there was a very severe famine in Palestine, he used his whole fortune to fee the people to keep them alive. When it was over, they again revolted against him anyway.

HEROD GOES WILD! Toward the end Herod started losing his mental balance. For the last 10 to 15 years of his life, he had Arterio Sclerosis, Psychosis, rapid mood changes, delusions of persecution, heart and kidney function deterioration and ulcers in his mouth. The last tow years he had constant pain and diarrhea. His lower bowels became gangrenous and were full of maggots. He attempted suicide but failed. All this caused him to act crazy. He was paranoid about losing his kingdom and having to build it up again. He began killing anyone whom he thought was trying to take it, including his wife, sons and any political rivals. He killed thousands, many of them his near relatives. Oh, yes, he also killed about a dozen young boys who lived around Bethlehem just before he died.



That wasn't a major crime of his. He was motivated by fear of losing his kingdom to another king. He responded in a typical fashion by killing any threat.

ENTER KING JESUS But was Jesus really a threat to him? Yes and no. Herod certainly thought He was. That forms the backdrop for Matthew's short statement: "during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem" (Mt 2:1). Why did God have it that Jesus was born during Herod's reign? There was no one nearly as great before or after him for centuries. Why wasn't Jesus born in Herod's palace instead of a cave? If you or I had been a bystander when Christ was born, we certainly would have thought Herod seemed much more like a king than Jesus!

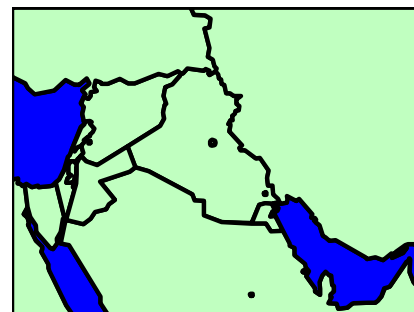
CONTRASTS: KING HEROD AND KING JESUS The lives of Herod and Jesus crossed in Jerusalem shortly after Jesus was born and before Herod died. It's almost as if God wants us to compare and contrast Jesus with Herod, and what he built for himself. What he built was made of stone to last for centuries. However he died in misery and pain, losing all he had given his life for. He built to honor himself, and today all that remains are some tourist attractions.

Now think of Jesus. He built no earthly kingdom. He left no fine buildings, no large empire. He didn't own a home or even a grave site. Jesus didn't try to build for himself, He was committed to honor His heavenly Father and build His spiritual kingdom. It is alive and continues to grow, changing lives and the very world we live in. Jesus, too, died in misery and pain, but it was because of the consequences of the sins of others, not consequences for His own sin. In His death and resurrection He gained everything for those who would accept Him as Savior and follow Him as Lord. He came in humility, as a servant, and didn't try to exalt Himself. God lifted Him to glory and greatness.

THE CHOICE IS OURS Which do you honor today? Oh, I know you'll say "Jesus," but down inside, by your values and goals, which life style do you embrace? Do you live for yourself, trying to build your own kingdom (with God's help, of course), or even God's servant, ready and willing to do whatever it takes to advance His kingdom? Is what you're spending your life on going to last or decay? Are you living a self-centered, self-gratifying life like Herod, or a life of humble service for God and others like Jesus? You only have one life, so make sure you live it right!

Let the ROCKS CRY OUT

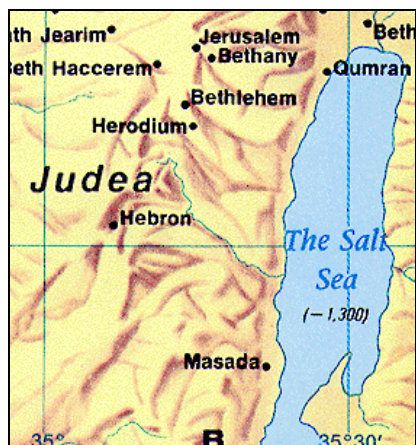
SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



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11. GIVE YOUR LIFE

The story is told of a monastery in Portugal, perched high on a 3,000 foot cliff and accessible only by a terrifying ride in a swaying basket. The basket is pulled with a single rope by several strong men, perspiring under the strain of the full loaded basket. One American tourist who visited the site got nervous halfway up the cliff when he noticed that the rope was old and frayed. Hoping to relieve his fear he asked, "How often do you changed the rope?" The monk in charge replied, "Whenever it breaks!"



GOD OUR ROCK Discovering halfway up a cliff that you're being held by a frayed rope doesn't make for much security! Unfortunately, many people believe they can have no better security in their relationship with God. They don't understand that God is a rock. The Jews knew this aspect of God, and by calling Him a Rock were identifying Him as Someone secure, dependable, safe and trustworthy. Deut 32:4 "He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he." 2 Sam 22:32 "For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the Rock except our God?" 2 Sam 22:47 "The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God, the Rock, my Savior!" Ps 18:2 "The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation,

my stronghold." 1 Cor 10:4 "They drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ."

The Jews were wilderness people, living among rocks and sand. David hid from Saul there, and John the Baptist grew up there. They were shepherds roaming there. They knew rocks and sand. Sand was shifting and dangerous. Rocks were stable and secure. Thus rocks were like God (II Sam 22:1-7). One could flee there for protection and safety, one could hide and find refuge, they were an anchor amidst a shifting sea of sand.

MASADA ROCK One of the larger outcroppings of rock in the Judean wilderness was named "Masada" which means "stronghold, fortress." David hid from Saul in this area, maybe on this very same mountain. In fact he called God his "masada" ("fortress").

Masada was large: 21 acres in size and 1,300 feet above sea level. The only ascents were a snake path on the east and an even more difficult path on the west. On top of this rock Herod built a magnificent fortress with a huge wall and 30 defensive towers. There was a Northern Palace with mosaics and frescoed walls. Its balcony provided spectacular views of the

Dead Sea. The Western Palace was Herod's main living quarters on Masada. It was 37,000 square feet and richly furnished. There were bathrooms and a pool. A separate Bathhouse contained hot, warm and cold baths. Cisterns underground could hold 1,500,000 cubic feet of water which was brought there to hold them in time of siege. Storehouses, quarters for soldiers and many other buildings completed the beautiful complex. It was especially prepared in case he needed to flee there to defend himself. Thus it was a great fortress, a perfect picture of God our Rock.



BETTER DEAD THAN ROMAN Almost 70 years after Herod died the Jews revolted against Rome. Eventually Rome's army destroyed Jerusalem and killed one million Jews while taking 100,000 into slavery. The Zealots who had led the revolt were defeated. A few who escaped took refuge at Masada. Here they hoped to outlast the Romans. They thought they and their families would be safe to live their lives on this mountain fortress. The new Roman governor, Silva, wasn't about to let any of them live, though. He sent the tenth legion in 72 AD to lay siege to Masada. A wall was built by Jewish slaves

around the base of the enormous mountain plateau, six feet high and more than two miles in length. Because of Herod's extensive storehouses which were still filled with food and weapons and his cistern with water, there was little chance of starving the defenders out. The Zealots felt safe there.

Over the next seven months the Romans built a siege ramp against the western side of the mountain. When the ramp was finished, a battering ram was winched to the top, and Roman soldiers smashed a hole in the fortress wall. The Zealots fortified their wall with timbers, but these were set on fire. That night the Zealots got together to plan. Their leader, Eleazar from Gamla, argued forcefully that suicide was the only honorable action. They had seen what the Romans would do to them, their wives, and their children. They had lived their lives for freedom and the opportunity to serve God alone. Now they must remove all possibility of serving anyone else.

Every man killed his family. Ten men were chosen to kill the Jewish soldiers; one killed the other nine and then committed suicide. In so doing, the Zealots stole the final victory from the Romans. But the revolt was ended. Two old women and five children survived to share the story with the world.

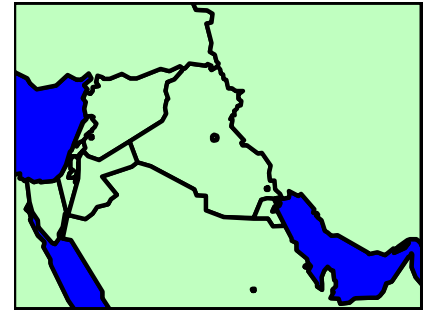
FREEDOM MORE IMPORTANT THAN LIFE To these Zealots, this rock did not bring the security they needed. Only God can really bring that. The rock Masada brought better protection and security than the uncertain sand around it. Real security is only found in Christ. These people wanted freedom, but no earthly rock can provide that. Only the Rock of Ages can provide that. These Zealots felt it was better to die than live in bondage. Freedom was that important to them. They turned to an earthly rock for deliverance but it failed. Only God the Rock can truly protect and deliver.

There is a story about a young boy who was always catching and caging wild things. He particularly loved the sound of the mockingbird, so he decided to catch one and keep it so he could hear it sing any time. He found a very young mockingbird and placed it in a cage outside his home. On the second day he saw a mother bird fly to the cage and feed the young bird through the bars. This pleased the young boy. But then the following morning he found the little bird was dead. You see, a mother mockingbird, finding her young in a cage, will sometimes take it poisonous berries. She evidently thinks it better for one she loves to die rather than live in captivity. That's what the Zealots on Masada thought, too.

What about you? Do you find your freedom in God your Rock? There is no other.

Let the ROCKS CRY OUT

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



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12. RESIST YOUR CULTURE

Monkey trappers in North Africa have a clever method of catching their prey. A number of gourds are filled with nuts and firmly fastened to a branch of a tree. Each has a hole just large enough for the unwary monkey to stick his forepaw into it. When the hungry animal discovers this, he quickly grasps a handful of nuts, but the hole is too small for him to withdraw his clenched fist. And he doesn't have enough sense to open up his hand and let go in order to escape, so he is easily taken captive. This is a picture of many Christians. The devil with his crafty devices tried to ensnare them. He appeals to the appetites of the flesh which can lead to their spiritual downfall. As long as they hold on to worldly bait, they cannot escape from Satan's trap. But he keeps on urging, "Don't let go! Enjoy the pleasure of your sin just a little bit longer!" So, listening to the tempter's alluring voice, they continue in their evil way.



ISOLATION STRATEGY What is the way to victory over sin? To some it is to get as far away as possible from the worldly attraction that ensnare. It is to isolate themselves from their culture in hope that they will be safe from such temptations. There have always been those who have tried this solution. We are quite familiar with the monastic movement from the middle ages even down to the present. There are the Amish and others who try to withdraw from their society. In Jesus' day there were the Essenes who did this same thing.

THE ESSENES Seeing the corruption in the world around them, even in their fellow Jews, the Essenes were a group of people who withdrew to live in the wilderness by the Dead Sea. They reacted against the Hellenistic world view so prevalent in their time. It glorified the human being through culture, philosophy, athletics and religion. It really wasn't much different than New Age philosophy today. In order to prepare themselves for the coming Messiah and His great battle in which He would lead the sons of light against the sons of darkness, they lived a very esthetic life. Their whole purpose was to be pure. They held all their property in common, wore white, and had ritual washings similar to baptism. They even avoided marriage. While never being an Essene, John grew up near them and probably had some contact with them. They would have rejected him as well as Jesus, though, because of their contact with corrupt Judaism. They felt all should withdraw as they did.

Similar to John the Baptizer, the Essenes lived in the wilderness (Lk 1:80) and dedicated their lives to preparing the way for the Lord (Isa 40:1-5). They used baptism as a sign of repentance and inner cleansing (Mk 1:4) and proclaimed that the one to come would baptize with fire (Mk 1:7-8). Society rejected them and their message (Mt 21:32). They spent their time fasting and praying (Mk 2:18; Luke 11:1). They sold their possessions and shared everything (Acts 2:44-45). They even had a ceremonial meal with bread and wine anticipating the future great messianic banquet. Still, they weren't Christians and didn't accept Jesus as the Messiah. They differed with Jesus and the early Christians over Sabbath observance (Mt 12:1-13) for they were even more strict about keeping the law than the Pharisees. They rejected marriage and sex. They felt the only way to live for God was to be separated and isolated from the world while Jesus sent His followers into the world to be salt and light (Mt 28:19-20).

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS Although small in number, they did have a great impact on the world in their day. That impact even continues to today, for they spent much time copying Bible books. When the Romans came through to put down the revolt in 68 AD, Qumran, their community, was destroyed and they scattered. Some may have joined the zealots, others became Christians, and the rest reentered society. Before being scattered, though, they hid their precious scrolls in caves near the Dead Sea. These weren't discovered until 1947, but they gave the world copies of the Old Testament 1,000 years earlier than were previously available. Because there were no major differences in the Bible over that time, they helped prove that the Bible has come down to us in a totally reliable form.

IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF THE WORLD What is the solution to this dilemma of living in the world but not being influenced by it? We know we aren't to conform to the world. It is under Satan's control (I John 5:19) and following it is wrong (Exodus 23:2). When we live for God the world opposes us (John 15:19; 17:14) because when we follow God's way we show that the world's values and motives are self-centered and sinful. Satan is the one behind the world system today (II Cor 4:4) and we are not to be apart of it (Deut 18:9-14; II Cor 6:14-17).

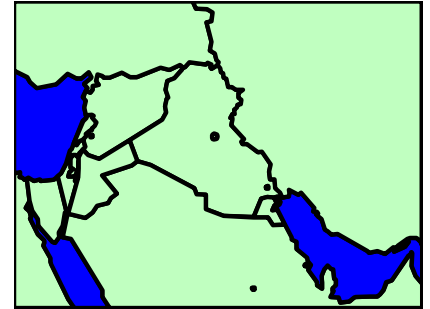
We as Christians are to be salt and light. Jesus sends us into the world as His messengers. Still we must not conform to the world or participate in its sin. Where to draw the line is hard and takes God's wisdom and guidance in every real way. Sin is deadly.

Radio personality Paul Harvey tells the story of how an Eskimo kills a wolf. The account is grisly, yet it offers a fresh insight into the consuming, self-destructive nature of sin. "First the Eskimo coats his knife blade with animal blood and allows it to freeze. Then he adds another layer of blood, and another, until the blade is completely concealed by frozen blood." "Next, the hunter fixes his knife in the ground with the blade up. When a wolf follows his sensitive nose to the source of the scent and discovers the bait he likes it, tasting the fresh, frozen blood. He begins to lick faster, more and more vigorously, lapping the blade until the keen edge is bare. Feverishly now, harder and harder the wolf licks the blade in the Arctic night. So great becomes his craving for blood that the wolf doesn't notice the razor sharp sting of the naked blade on his tongue nor does he recognize the instant at which his insatiable thirst is being satisfied by his own warm blood. His carnivorous appetite just craves more -- until the dawn finds him dead in the snow!"

However we choose to deal with the temptations of this evil world, they must be seen as evil and destructive -- nothing to play around with. They are deadly and will destroy those who get involved with them. I don't know where you draw the line between separation from the world and involvement as salt and light, but make sure you draw it on the safe side. Satan is deadly serious about his purpose. Watch out!



SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



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13. AWAIT YOUR BRIDEGROOM

“Any Jew who has not a wife is no man” so declared the Talmud, recording how Jews felt about marriage. To them the marriage event was even more important than the event of birth or death. In order to understand many passages in the Bible we must understand Jewish marriage practices. Over and over Jesus used marriage and family illustrations to show our relationship with God: ‘born again,’ ‘family of God,’ ‘bride of Christ,’ etc. Let’s talk about marriage as Jesus and the Jews knew it.

CHOOSING A MATE: God’s people could only marry within the body of believers. Marriage usually came soon after puberty: about 13 for a girl and 18 for a boy. Parents chose the mate for their son or daughter, but usually consulted with their children to make sure they approved. Romance before marriage was no unknown, but it played a very minor role in the life of teenagers of that era. They did not marry the person they loved; they loved the mate they married. They didn’t let themselves fall in love until after being married. Love began at marriage (Genesis 24:67).

BETROTHAL: When a match was being made, a price was agreed upon. This was paid in money or services (Jacob worked 7 years for Rachel) to the father of the girl to compensate him for the loss of her services to the family. This was accompanied by a written agreement. A cup of wine was used in the ceremony. The young man first took a drink then handed it to the future bride. If she accepted it and drank from it, she was showing a willingness to be his bride. This made the betrothal binding. The wife had all the rights and privileges the law provided for a married woman. It was a legal contract, broken only by death or divorce. It was during this period that Joseph discovered that Mary had become pregnant. (Mt 1:18-25).

This betrothal period lasted one or sometimes even two years. It assured the groom of the bride’s virginity and that any children born to them would be his. This was very important to keep the line of each Jewish family pure and true. Although legally one, each of the young people continued to live with their own families. The groom would spend the time building a room for himself onto the family insula. You see, when a woman married she moved in with her husband’s family and became a member of that family. The whole family lived together in one large complex. Even if her husband died, she was still part of that family and one of her husband’s brothers would take her as a wife to provide for her physical, emotional and sexual needs. The groom’s father remained head of the insula. The family was a little kingdom of which the father was the king.

The insula consisted of a central courtyard where the daily activities of life took place. Around this would be various rooms, one for each family who lived there. Each brother would bring his wife home after building a room for them. Their sons would do the same thing. Since many of Jesus’ disciples were extended family, perhaps he moved into their insula when he moved to Capernaum (Mt 8:14; 12:46-13:1; Mk 2:1-2; 7:17). This family compound concept was used throughout the times and lands of the Bible.



While the young man was building their home, the bride was preparing herself to be his wife. She was keeping herself pure, learning skills needed to be a good wife, gathering necessary household items, and awaiting the time they could be together.

THE WEDDING PROCESSION: When the groom's father felt it was time, he told his son he could go fetch his bride. He would gather his attendants (Jn 3:29) and head for her insula. As they approached, one of his friends would blow a Shofar (trumpet) announcing their coming. As they got closer the bridegroom himself would call out so the bride knew she was the one being called. Perhaps there were other brides awaiting their groom who also heard the trumpet call. Usually this happened in the evening so adults were not working and could come join the celebration. This torches were needed, as in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins. The groom would get his bride and bring her back to his new room in the insula.

THE WEDDING SUPPER: Meanwhile the woman of groom's family had been busily preparing a feast and decorating the rooms of their insula for the marriage celebration. Guests were invited. It was a great privilege to be invited and a terrible insult to not come. Usually some advance warning was given, but no specific time set until the event was to take place. There was no formal religious ceremony back at the groom's insula, but it is probable that some ratification of the espousal with an oath took place (Prov 2:17; Ezek 16:8; Mal 2:14) and that a blessing was pronounced (Gen 24:60; Ruth 4:10-12). The essence of the ceremony consisted in the removal of the bride from her father's house to that of the bridegroom or his father. Thus the expression "to take" a wife is often used (Gen 21:21; 24:3, 38: 26:34).

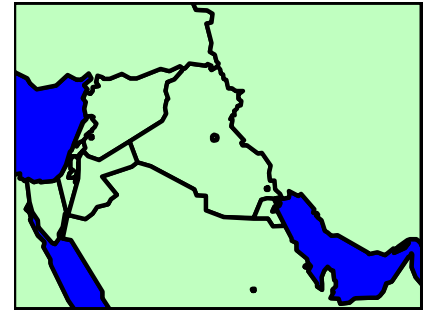
Concluding this short ceremony the bride and groom would go into their room (the bridal chamber) and the marriage would be consummated. This made them officially husband and wife. The head groomsman would be waiting by the door to announce the consummation of the marriage and the celebration would begin, lasting from 7 to 14 days (John 2; Judges 14:12).

MARRIAGE USED FIGURATIVELY: Marriage is illustrative of Jehovah's relation with Israel (Isa 54:5; 62:4-5; Jer 3:1; Hos 2:16-20). In the New Testament the image of the bridegroom is transferred from Jehovah to Christ (Mt 9:15; Jn 3:29) and that of the bride to the church (II Cor 11:2; Eph 5:23-24, 32; Rev 19:7; 21:2,9; 22:17). The most striking analogy, though, has to do with the rapture. Understanding Jewish marriage customs sheds new light on the rapture.

The Father (God) chooses His Son's bride (election of believers to be the bride of Christ). The groom (Jesus) leaves His Father's house to go to the home of the bride and pay the price for her (redemption, His blood on the cross). The covenant (salvation) was legally established forever. The cup was drunk by the Groom (Mt 20:22-23; 26:27, 39-42). Then it was handed to the bride to accept or reject (as pictured by the Lord's Supper). Upon acceptance the two are legally one forever. However, they are not living together yet. The Groom returns to His Father's home (ascension) to build his insula. "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you." (John 14:2) Meanwhile, we are still at our 'home' on earth preparing ourselves for our coming union with our Groom (Eph 5:25-27). We are to be pure and holy, worthy for and awaiting His coming. As a bride anxious for her groom, we are to be awaiting the trumpet that will announce our groom's coming for us (II Thes 4:13-18). When the Father decides it is time, He will tell His Son to go fetch His bride. Then the Son and His attendants (angels II Thes 4:16) will come get us and take us to His home. We'll hear the trumpet and the shout of the Bridegroom (II Thes 4:16). The Groom will take us to His insula in the sky where the marriage will be consummated and we'll celebrate the Marriage Supper of the Lamb for seven years (Rev 19:9). Sound great! It'll be much better than it sounds! Our Groom has done it all: come to our dwelling, paid the bride price, built the insula and now is awaiting the go-ahead to come get us. Our part: live in holiness and purity to be worthy of Him. Is that asking too much?



SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



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14. SPEAK TO YOUR TIMES

UNDERSTAND YOUR CULTURE Compared to how it is in many parts of the world today, it's relatively easy to get someone to listen to the claims of the gospel in the United States, and even make a commitment. The percent of those who do claim to have accepted Jesus as Savior and then go on to spiritual maturity is relatively low, though. In countries where it is much harder to get a commitment for Christ, though, there is usually a much higher percentage of those who go on to spiritual maturity. Why is that? Understanding the cultures of each place explains why.

Even within the United States there is a world of difference. Response to the gospel in the northeast is much different than the south. The midwest differs from the west coast. Even within the culture of the United States there are many different subcultures. To effectively minister to them these differences must be understood.

When a missionary goes to a foreign country there is not only a new language to learn, there is also a new culture to learn. Their eventual effectiveness will be determined by how well they grasp their new culture. France, China, Egypt, India -- all are very different. Believers there must understand their culture to be able to reach the people for Christ.

Jesus understood His world and culture. He ministered in the midst of it and identified with it. He spoke their language, not just by His mouth but also by His actions. We must do the same. Wherever God places us we are to minister to that culture for Him.

UNDERSTAND JESUS' CULTURE This same principle applies in another way, too. In order to really understand what Jesus said and did we must interpret it in light of His culture. Had He been born and raised in China 1,000 years earlier or England 1,000 years later His life would have been much different. We cannot separate Jesus' words and actions from His culture and accurately understand them. He must be listened to and seen through the eyes of those He spoke to and lived with. We must put ourselves in the shoes of the ones He directed His words and actions to in order to accurately understand them. Let me give you some examples.

Archaelus and Luke 19 When Herod died in 4 BC his will divided his kingdom between his sons Antipas, Philip and Archelaus. Some contested the will and went to Rome to get a larger portion. Because the Jews in Judea and Jerusalem did not want evil Archelaus ruling them, they sent a delegation to Rome to ask that he not be made their ruler. Rome allowed Herod's will to stand as it was, so Archaelus came back, rounded up all the Jews who opposed them, killed them and their families and took all their property. Jesus talks about this very thing in His parable in Luke 19:11-27. While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. He said: "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself

appointed king and then to return. But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.' He was made king, however, and returned home. He said, 'those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them-- bring them here and kill them in front of me.'" Jesus was using part of their culture to teach them a lesson.

Jesus grows up in Nazareth Because God allowed this same Archaelus to be king of Judea, Joseph and Mary had to go to Nazareth to raise Jesus instead of Bethlehem which they preferred. Thus the prophecies were fulfilled that Jesus would be a Nazarene.

Jesus' salary paid by Herod? Where Jesus grew up, in Nazareth in Galilee, Herod Antipas ruled. He was sly and immoral, taking his brothers wife for himself (she was the daughter of another brother). John the Baptizer condemned this and died for it. Antipas did have a major building program just a couple miles north of Nazareth in a place called Sepphoris. It became his special city and one of the most glorious cities of the day. He hired many builders to work on this city. This is where Joseph and Jesus enter the picture.

The Bible says Jesus was a 'tekton' (Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3), a word used for a builder of buildings, a craftsman. Buildings were mainly made of stone because wood was so scarce. It was used for window or door frames in nicer houses. Jesus as a carpenter would have worked in wood, but he probably worked more in stone and perhaps even metal. Perhaps Joseph and Jesus made the short walk to Sepphoris or some other local building project funded by Herod, and thus Herod's money actually went to the support and raising of Jesus. It does seem that Jesus was away from Nazareth working when Mary became pregnant for she wasn't able to talk to him and he didn't find out until later about the pregnancy.

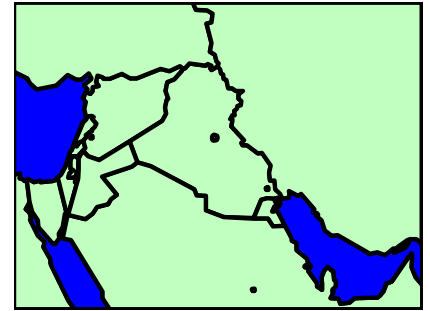
Jesus and disciples supported by Herod We do know that Joanna, who traveled with Jesus, helped pay the disciples' bills. She got her money from her husband, who was the manager of Archaelus' household. Again we see Herod's money supporting Jesus.

Jesus the builder Think of Jesus as a builder of buildings. That sheds new light on much of what He talked about. He called Peter the rock He would build His church on (Mt 16:18). Because He was known as a builder when He said that if they destroyed "this building" He would build it in 3 days, they assumed He meant building the temple (Jn 2:19-22; Mk 14:58). He told a parable about building a tower and the importance of first counting the cost (Lk 14:28-30). He referred to Himself as the capstone of God's building (Mt 21:42; Acts 4:11-12). Peter picked up this analogy and further developed it (I Peter 2:4-8).

Thus these examples clearly show how directly Jesus related to His culture. They also show how important it is for us to understand Jesus' culture so we can accurately understand His words. History, culture, geography -- they are all essential to accurately interpret the Bible. For example, after Herod Antipas had beheaded John for criticizing his marriage, the religious rulers followed Jesus and waited until he entered Antipas' territory. Then they asked Him His views of divorce (Matthew 19:1-3). They were trying to get Him in trouble with Antipas so Antipas would kill Jesus and get rid of Him for them. Jesus knew this. Our interpretation of His answer must take this into account. This shows why Jesus' words on the same subject aren't always exactly the same. Different aspects are emphasized depending on the audience. We can't interpret everything Jesus said as if He were in a pulpit of a 20th Century American church talking to committed Christians. It takes work to learn history, culture and geography, but the rewards are worth it! What better way to make the Bible come alive? Where better to invest your time and energy than in understand Jesus and His Word?

Let the ROCKS CRY OUT

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



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15. CONFRONT YOUR ENEMIES

JESUS NEVER BACKED AWAY FROM CONFRONTATION When confronted by demonic forces he rebuked them (Mark 5:1-10; Matt 15:21-28). When tempted by Satan himself to avoid the cross he moved resolutely ahead (Matt 16:21-23). Jesus never backed down from a confrontation with evil.

Yet at the same time Jesus gave strict guidelines for confronting evil. He said we are to be meek and merciful (Matt 5:5-7). He told us to be light in the darkness (Matt 5:13-16). He commanded us to do whatever we did out of love (John 13:34-35). These are strict guidelines for confrontation, yet Jesus practiced what He preached. They are hard standards for us to follow today, though. We tend to either avoid the confrontation, or to confront in anger and hate. Neither of these are acceptable. It's hard to have a correct balance.

EXAMPLES FROM HISTORY Perhaps the most outstanding example in history of Christians not confronting evil in love and meekness was the time of the Crusades. Christians then just didn't act like Jesus had acted. While we shouldn't and really can't judge their motives, we can clearly see that the methods they employed did more harm than good to the cause of Christ. Much of that harm still continues today, especially among Jews and Muslims.



THE CRUSADES The goals of the Crusades seemed noble enough: free the land of Israel and the home of Jesus from the control of unbelievers. The pope promised full forgiveness of past sins to those who would either go fight or would stay home but give money to finance the Crusades. Often a man was commanded by a priest to go on a Crusade as a show of the sincerity of his penance. It must have been tempting in those days to find an excuse to get away from life on the manor for it was a hard, boring, unrewarding life. Famine and economic problems were common. Excitement and free plunder appealed to many. Plus, going on a Crusade was often a way to avoid punishment for crimes.

THE FIRST CRUSADE The First Crusade began at Clermont, France. Only a few knights went with mobs of farmers, shop-keepers and other fortune seekers as they traveled from France to Germany and then to the holy land. Europe had many very old communities of prosperous Jews. These ignited a hatred among the Crusaders. Why should the “killers of Christ” be allowed to live in peace and good fortune at home while the soldiers of the cross traveled across Europe to their probable deaths? Some of the clergy tried to reason with the mobs, but frenzy of hatred was unstoppable. In Speyer, Worms, Mainz, Cologne and many other German cities Jews were slaughtered. Men and women, young and old -- all were brutally killed. Jews would try to find refuge in their synagogue, but the doors would be locked and the building set on fire. Many committed suicide as the unruly mob came into town. All were viciously killed, often after torture. Women were raped. Property and possessions were taken as plunder of war. All across Europe one massacre followed another. The Crusades were launched in blood!

This slaughter didn't stop with European Jews. Any and all Muslims suffered the same fate. Even Orthodox Christians who dressed or looked like Muslims were killed. Tens of thousands were killed. When they arrived in the holy land, the same thing happened. All Jews and Muslims that fell into the hands of the Crusaders were killed or sold into slavery. Many large castle forts were built, many of which still dot the Palestine landscape. Much harm was done to those who lived in the holy land. All this was done under the sign of the cross and in the name of Jesus. Christianity earned a reputation then that it still hasn't lived down.

THE REST OF THE CRUSADES The Second Crusade wasn't much different than the first. It, too, focused on destroying Jewish communities in Europe. A few brave people raised their voice against this destruction but their cries were ineffective. The Third Crusade went against the Jews in Europe, for they had been spared in the first two. So it went. For nearly 200 years this continued. Even after the Crusades ended, the Inquisition continued this same way.

RESULTS OF THE CRUSADES Certainly there were godly Crusaders, and some good things did come from them, but the greatest legacy of the Crusades was the legacy of death and destruction. Many today still see Christianity as the hideous monster they saw in the Crusaders. Certainly this was NOT the way Jesus taught to confront evil. This was not done in love and mercy.

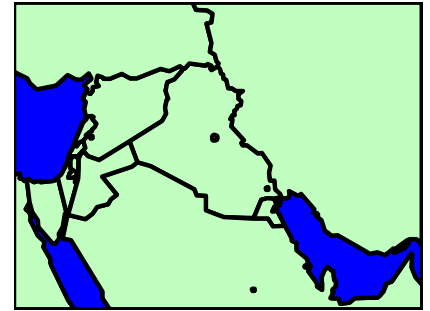
CRUSADES TODAY Still, sometimes it gets very easy to sit back and condemn the Crusaders for their extremes. Instead we must see what we can learn from them for us today. How do we confront the evil we face? How should we be confronting it? Do we compromise and ignore?

We are faced with evil we must confront in the name of Jesus: abortion, drugs, homosexuality, pornography, cults and New Age philosophy, and many others. We aren't to ignore or avoid confronting these evils. We must bring the light of Jesus to bear against this darkness. However we must do it with love and mercy.

What is your heart attitude to those who push abortion, who promote homosexuality, who sell pornography? Can you confront them in love? Do you secretly delight when evil overtakes them? Do you find pleasure in their pain? Do you do what little you can to punish them by the way you treat them or criticize them to others? The sin must be condemned and totally rejected, but the sinner still needs Jesus' love as reflected through us. This can be very hard to show at times. Still, if we are to be Christ's representatives on earth we must be like Him in all these things. We must exhibit love and mercy while confronting evil. We must be like Jesus.

Let the ROCKS CRY OUT

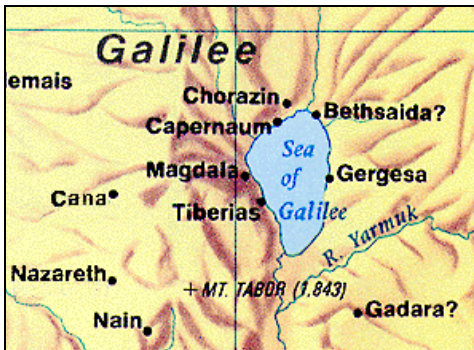
SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



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16. CAST YOUR NETS

Residents of Palestine have always been exceedingly fond of fish and pay double to triple the price for it that they do for meat. The fish come from the Sea of Galilee.



SEA OF GALILEE The Sea of Galilee is very beautiful. It is about 8 miles wide and 12 miles from top to bottom, shaped like a pear. It is 700 feet below sea level and 150 feet deep. Mountains around it raise up to 1400 feet above sea level (the Golan Heights is 2500 feet above sea level). All of the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee can be seen from any point on its shore. It is a very breathtaking sight!

Jesus spent most of His ministry on the northern shore of this Sea. Most of His miracles and teaching took place there.

Here he walked on the water (Mk 6:47-50; Mt 14:22-33; Jn 6:16-20) and calmed the storm (Mk 4:35-41; Mt 8:23-27; Lk 8:22-25). The soil nearby was very rich and fine for agriculture. Fishing on the Sea was a main industry in Galilee. Thus the northern shore line was heavily populated. The Via Maris (Way of the Sea) ran through this area near Capernaum.

FISHING They were caught by various means: hooks, spears or nets. Fishing with hooks was slow and difficult, thus not too common. The same was true of using barbed spears along the coast line. Net fishing was the most profitable and is what men like Peter, Andrew, James and John used.

There were three kinds of net fishing that was done. Some used a circular net with small meshes and leaded weights around the edge. It was cast from shore in shallow water in such that the leaded edge forms the base of a cone, the apex being formed by the fisherman holding the center of his net in his hand. The cone thus formed encloses such fish as cannot escape the quick throw of the fisher. This was too limited and slow for commercial fishing, though. For this a long net or seine of one or two fathoms deep, leaded on one edge and provided with floats on the other, is played out in such a way as to surround a school of fish. Long ropes fastened to the two ends are carried ashore many yards apart, and men on each rope gradually draw in the net. The fish are landed from the shallow water with small nets or by hand. This is commonly practiced even today on the Sea of Galilee.

In deeper waters a net similar to this is cast from boats and the ends slowly brought together to form a circle. Men then dive under the water to bring one portion of the weighted edge over the rest so as to form a bottom. This is hauled into the boat so that the net is emptied into the boat. This is the method the disciples used (Mt 4:18; Mk 1:16; Lk 5:2-10; Jn 21:3-11).

This was hard, long work: cold in the winter and hot in the summer. It took patience, strength and skill. The majority of a fisherman's life was spent making and mending nets.

FISH Various species of freshwater fish were caught in the Sea of Galilee with the different types of nets. There were Musht (also called St. Peter's fish because, according to tradition, this is what he caught). This fish was in the northern end of the Sea and grew up to 15 inches and three pounds. It has relatively few bones and is very tasty. This is probably the kind of fish Jesus used to feed the 5,000 (Mt 14:13-21), and which the disciples caught when Jesus told them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. Biny was another kind of fish, a member of the carp family. It was used for feasts and banquets. Sardines were small fish that were caught in enormous numbers. Drying and pickling them was the main industry of Magdala, home of Mary Mgadalene. These were probably the 'small fish' referred to in Matthew 15:34 and Mark 8:7.

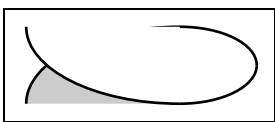
FISHING FOR MEN Four of the 12 men Jesus chose to be His disciples were fishermen: Peter, Andrew, James and John (Mt 4:18-20). That is 1/3 of the disciples, and all of the inner three. What traits were there in fishermen that made them good disciple material? What would fishermen look for in someone to follow?

For one thing, fishermen would stick when the going got tough. They had to have perseverance, patience and stability. Fishing for men as well as fishing for fish requires this. There are many parallels between fishing for fish and men, which is why Jesus used this analogy when He called these men to follow Him (Luke 5:1-11). Fishermen had one goal in mind: to catch fish. Now Jesus wants them (and us) to catch men. This takes hard work, patience and perseverance. There is skill that comes through practice. Knowing when, where and how to fish for fish and men is an acquired skill. The fish didn't come to the men, they had to go to where they were. They had to use bait that was attractive, they knew they wouldn't always be successful. They knew that much of their time would be spent making and repairing nets. Fishers for men must spend much time in prayer and Bible study preparing their 'nets' and mending their lives so they can be effective for God.

Fishermen worked together, they were much more effective that way. Jesus always send out the disciples by twos. Fishing for men today is much better done in companionship with another person.

Once fish were found and trapped in a net they had to be landed. This took skill, timing and sensitivity. The same is true in fishing for men. One place where the analogy breaks down is that fish were taken against their will, for their destruction. Still, that is why they were created. God created all men to come to Him for salvation, but because of their free will we can't bring any against their will. What we are doing is preserving them from destruction. Think of witnessing for Jesus as fishing for men and you'll be able to do a better job for Jesus.

One final parallel between fish and Christians is the use of the Greek word for fish, **ΙΧΘΥΣ**. In English it would be "Ixthus." It is pronounced "Ick'-thus." The early

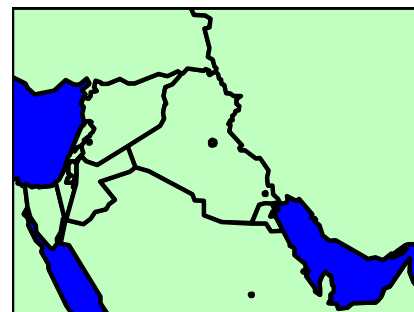


Christians used it because they were to be fishers of men, but even more because of what the letters stood for. It was an acrostic that spelled "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior." The first letter of each of these Greek words, in this order, spell "ΙΧΘΥΣ", or "Ixthus," meaning "Fish" in English. Before the cross became the symbol of Christianity the fish was used.

I = Jesus
X = Christ
Θ = God's
Y = Son
Σ = Savior

Let the ROCKS CRY OUT

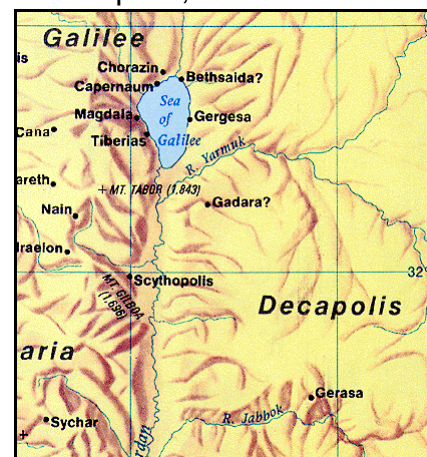
SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



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17. CHALLENGE YOUR DARKNESS

THE DECAPOLIS The Decapolis was a district of northern Palestine with a large Greek population, mostly on the east side of the Jordan River. As the name 'deca' implies, it consisted of ten large cities. They formed a league of free city-states, accountable only to Rome. They were independent and autonomous, even minting their own coins. The area was very Hellenistic. As such the human mind was seen as the ultimate source of truth and human pleasure the ultimate goal of man. The people were descendants of Baal-worshippers and kept many of their same practices. They glorified sexuality, violence, wealth and the human body. They even raised pigs as a sacred animal. As you can imagine, the Jews hated and rejected them. They looked down on the Jews as unenlightened and primitive. This was probably the area the prodigal son went to (Lk 15:11-32).



JESUS IN THE DECAPOLIS Actually Jesus spent most of His ministry very near to the Decapolis. He spent most of His ministry in the Capernaum area. From time to time He would cross the Sea of Galilee and teach or preach in the Decapolis. One time He went across to Gerasenes, one of the 10 cities, to heal a demonized man. Satan had free reign in this territory, as he had had in all the Canaanites before the Jews moved in. Naturally Satan didn't want Jesus coming to bring deliverance to the land he ruled, so he sent a terrible storm to drown Jesus and the disciples before they could get there (Matthew 8:23-27). Jesus calmed the storm with a word, though, and they were able to land. The disciples must have really been wondering about what was happening, and about why Jesus wanted to go there so badly. Jesus didn't sit back and let others come to Him, He went and sought them out. He didn't avoid conflict but confronted evil wherever He found it.

When the boat landed two **demonized men** approached them (Matthew 8:28-29). One was the spokesman. These men lived in the graveyard, being attracted to the darkness and death because of the demons that controlled them (Mark 5:3). They were naked and very self-destructive. They had supernatural strength and acted like animals. They would go into fits of rage (Mark 5:4-5). Quite obviously they were not in their right minds.

Demons can and do cause **mental illness**:

- They can make a person be not in his 'right mind' (Mark 15:15).
- They can cause screaming and convulsions, foaming at the mouth (Luke 9:39).

- They can cause self-destructive thoughts and actions (Mark 9:22).
- They can make a person appear to be 'raving mad' (John 10:20).
- They can cause immoral, anti-social behavior that makes the person seem not right mentally (Mark 5:15; Luke 8:35).

It cannot be said with certainty if all mental illness is demonic or not. Other factors are involved such as chemical imbalances, birth defects, damage from injury or drug usage, etc. Demonizing must always be considered until completely ruled out. One way to tell if it is demonic or not is the person's willingness to listen or talk about Jesus. If they fall asleep, change the subject constantly, don't seem to be hearing you, get violent, want to leave in a hurry, etc., you have good reason to suspect demons are involved. The demons in the man at Gadarsenes were unable to challenge or resist Jesus' power. though.

Immediately they recognized who Jesus was and begged to not be tortured yet (Mark 5:6-7). Jesus commanded them to **come out** of the man (or men, if both desired deliverance). The ruling demon was named "Legion" for he was leader of many demons (a legion is 6,000 soldiers). No matter how many, though, Jesus was stronger (I John 4:4).

This wasn't the first nor the only time Jesus did this. At the start of His ministry He cast out many demons (Matthew 4:23-24 Mark 1:39,34). In the Gadarenes He cast demons out of two men (Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-17; Luke 8:20). He cast demons out of the daughter of a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21 Mark 7:20), and cured a demonized man (Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:31-36). He healed a boy with seizures and demons (Matthew 17:14-20). He cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene as well as out of other women followers (Luke 8:2; Mark 16:9).

How did Jesus cast demons out? Before casting them out He rebuked them (took their power away) (Matthew 17:18; Luke 9:42). Then He "drove" them out (Mark 1:39). He did it verbally (Matthew 8:16), not by a certain ritualistic procedure. He didn't let the demons speak (Mark 1:34; Luke 4:41), expect Legion and that was just to give his name so others would know what was happening (Mark 5:9). He never let them say who He was (Mark 1:25; Luke 4:35; Mark 3:11-12). He told them to "be quiet and come out" (Luke 4:35; Mark 1:25). Other times He told them to "go" (Matthew 8:32). Sometimes He was quite far from the person whom He was delivering (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30). When He cast them out He forbid them to ever return again (Mark 9:25).

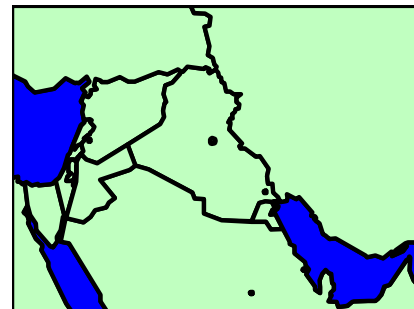
The demons in the Gerasenes man (or men) begged to go into pigs instead (Mark 5:10-13), for demons would rather inhabit animals than have no body to indwell. Their evil presence so panicked the pigs that they immediately became self-destructive themselves and drown.

It is sad, though, that the **people there rejected** Jesus and His power instead of coming to Him for deliverance. They begged Him to leave them (Mark 5:14-17). The man who was delivered wanted to go along, but Jesus made him stay as a witness to his people (Mark 5:18-20). He stayed, but Jesus and the disciples left. Evidently Jesus' whole purpose in coming was to bring deliverance to that one man! Nothing could stand in His way: not nature nor Satan. Nothing can stop His power.

That isn't the end of the story, though. At later times Jesus returned to the area of the Decapolis to find people who were interested and open (Mark 7:31-37; Matthew 15:29-31; etc.). Evidently the man did a good job of being a witness for Jesus, telling others what Jesus had done for him. Jesus can do the same today for us, too. His power is no less great today. We must be willing to come to Him (as the demonized man did) not send Him away (as the people did). Which are you doing? Your life in this world as well as the next is determined by what response YOU take to Jesus. Don't sent Him away!

Let the ROCKS CRY OUT

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



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18. DEFEAT YOUR DEMONS

CAESAREA PHILIPPI Caesarea Philippi is one of those places you have to see to believe. It was originally called Paneas because it was a center of worship for the pagan god 'Pan.' Pan, also called 'Hades', was considered the god of fertility of the mountains and forests, as Baal was the god of fertility in the flatter lands of the Philistines. The most outstanding feature of Paneas was the large cave from which flowed a small river. Especially in the spring, when fertility was needed, the spring burst forth bringing life-giving water. This was one of the main sources of the Jordan River. Thus they believed this was where Pan spent the winter. They had all kinds of immoral and demonic worship to Pan at the opening of this cave to entice him out. This was what the city was known for, much as Niagara Falls dominates the area where it is located.

Philip, a son of Herod, modernized and beautified the town. He renamed it Caesarea as a complement to Augustus. He added his own name to it to distinguish it from Caesarea on the coast of Sharon. Located 120 miles north of Jerusalem, it marked the northernmost extent of Jesus' ministry. It was in this direction Jesus often went to escape crowds and find some privacy with the disciples. It was near here that He was transfigured.

JESUS' INQUIRY One day Jesus took the disciples to the area of Caesarea Philippi to get away and talk (Matthew 16:13). While there naturally their minds were on the spring of water with the idols and demonic worship of Pan. Perhaps they were even in sight of the cave and the idols that were around it. With the influence of the god Pan fresh in their minds, Jesus asked the disciples a series of questions to lead them to reveal who they thought He was. Did they think He was as great as Pan and the other pagan gods, or did they realize He was the only true God? Peter came through with the right answer: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16). That really thrilled and encouraged Jesus, and he highly commended Peter for his faith. He then went on to say "On this rock I will build my church" (Mt 16: 18). While Catholicism says that Peter himself is the rock the church is built on, and thus the first pope, Protestants traditionally interpret Jesus' words as referring to Peter's profession of faith. The church is built on the faith of its members in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God.



THE GATES OF HADES! Then Jesus made His famous statement: "and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." 'Hades' is the New Testament word for the grave, the place of the dead. That's what is referred to in the Apostles Creed when it says that Jesus "descended into Hades." 'Sheol' in the Old Testament is similar. That is what Pan was thought of as being the god over - Hades, the place of the dead, the underworld. By the time Jesus sat and talked at Caesarea Philippi, Baal and even Pan were 'old fashioned.' They were replaced by the newer, more modern gods of the Greeks and Romans. Zeus

(Jupiter to the Romans) took the role of the lead god (Baal) the god of weather or storms. Artemis, the goddess of fertility and Aphrodite, the goddess of love, continued the Asherah cults under a new name (Acts 19:35). The names changed, but the worship practices were as immoral as other. It is said that in Corinth alone there were more than 1,000 prostitutes in Aphrodite's temple.

Pan was depicted as an ugly man with the horns, legs and ears of a goat -- a regular picture of Satan himself! Most stories about him refer to sexual affairs. The worship practices of his followers were no different. He was associated with Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and orgies. His worshipers continued many of the sexual rites of the Old Testament gods of the Baal cult, although human sacrifice had been outlawed.

Hades, the Greek god of the underworld, became the namesake for the place of the dead and even for hell itself. Thus Jesus, in the very shadows of the earthly dwelling place of Pan, later called Hades, states that "the gates of Hades cannot overcome" the church He will build on the faith in Jesus that its members will have. Even these great, prominent gods of the underworld cannot destroy what He builds.

WHAT ABOUT "GATES"? The gate of a city was its strongest, most defensible part. It was the source of its power. Also, inside the gate was where officials gathered to exercise authority and make decisions. The gate was the center of power and control. Thus Jesus is saying that power on earth or under the earth can stand against what He will do. This, of course, includes Satan and is a direct challenge to his authority.

SATAN & HELL Actually Satan's gate (control center) isn't in hell. Hell itself (from the Greek word "Gehenna" referring to the garbage dump outside Jerusalem) is unoccupied at the present. Satan's control center is on this earth, he is the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph 2:2). Satan and the Antichrist will be the first cast into hell, but not until the end of Armageddon (Rev 20:10).

Where do those who now die without the Lord go? In Luke 16:23 Jesus describes a place called which is divided into two parts. One is Abraham's bosom (paradise), the other a place of torment called Hades. Perhaps this is the same as the Abyss often referred to in the Bible (Rev 9:1,2,11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1-3).

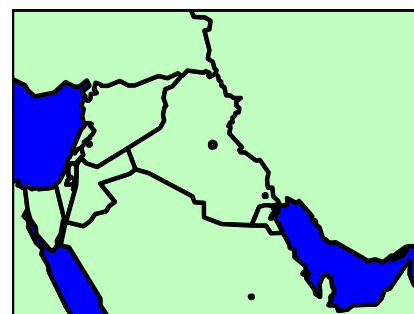
JESUS' POWER OVER SATAN What a tremendous statement Jesus was making when He said that nothing could stand against those who put their faith in Him, not even the power of the evil demonic gods that counterfeited God. Not even the top gods, the ones who ruled the underworld, not even Satan himself, nothing (Romans 8:31-39) can stand against us (I John 4:4). What a tremendous statement! Jesus walks right up to that which stood for the control station, the power center, for Satan and his forces, and clearly states that His followers are immune to its powers because of their faith in Him as God! What a tremendous promise to claim!

The existence of the church through 2,000 years of persecution and opposition is proof of that. The emperor Diocletian set up a stone pillar on which was inscribed these words: For Having Exterminated The Name Christian From the Earth. If he could see that monument today, how embarrassed he would be! Another Roman leader made a coffin, symbolizing his intention "to bury the Galilean" by killing His followers. He soon learned that he could not "put the Master in it". He finally surrendered his heart to the Savior, realizing that the corporate body of Christ and its living Head, the Lord Jesus, cannot be destroyed by the onslaught of mortal men. Hitler intended for the swastika to replace the cross, but the cross still stands!

The history of the church has been represented by the Waldensians in a picture of an anvil with many worn-out hammers lying all around it. Beneath this scene are the words: One Anvil -- Many Hammers. Organized religion may fail; but the living organism composed of all born-again believers will stand forever. God is calling out of this world a people for His name who will dwell with Him throughout eternity. Isn't it great to be on the winning side? What a wonderful, powerful God we serve!

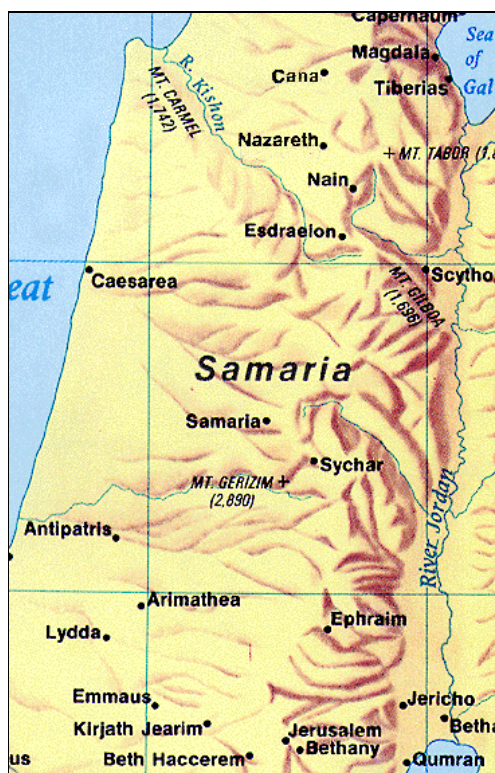
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SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GEOGRAPHY & CULTURE



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19. BUILD YOUR FUTURE



HEROD & JESUS The lives of Jesus and Herod seemed destined to be intertwined from the very beginning. Both were kings of the Jews, both called 'great' by their followers. Both were rejected by the people they tried to help. Both lived during the same time frame in the same location. Jesus' life was just beginning, however, as Herod's was winding down. Jesus was born just five miles from Herod's main palace in Jerusalem and less virtually within the shadow of his greatest palace at the Herodion. For anyone who saw them, though, it was hard to think of Jesus on the same plane as Herod. In life circumstances and personality they were opposites. Herod was ambition, pushy, wealthy and self-centered. Jesus was born in a cave among animals and didn't even have a home during His ministry. He was humble, meek and self-sacrificing. The contrast between the two is seen in many ways and places. The city of Caesarea is a good example of this differences.

CAESAREA In order to make money from his perfect location where east and west met, Herod needed a harbor. Caravans and ships could exchange goods and the economy would boom. However there was no harbor on the Palestine coast,

and no natural place to build one. Herod took a small town and made it into a city to rival Jerusalem in importance and grandeur. He renamed the city after Caesar - Caesarea. He built sumptuous palaces, public buildings, a theater, an amphitheater and much more. There were even sewers to keep the city clean and a fresh-water system that brought running water into the city from as far as 15 miles away. The greatest achievement, though, was the harbor. It was the largest man-made harbor in the world and one of the wonders of the ancient water.

First breakwaters were constructed. One to the south was 600 yards long and to one to the north 300 yards long. The base for these breakwaters was made of concrete blocks, poured under water (sometimes over 100 feet deep). They measured 40 by 50 feet in size and were more than five feet thick. Archaeologists have discovered some of them with the wood forms still in place. Hydraulic concrete was a new invention in Herod's time. The concrete was made of volcanic sand imported from Italy. Towers, a lighthouse, and huge vaulted storage rooms were built on the breakwaters.

CAESAREA AND THE EARLY CHURCH God allowed this and used it for His own plan and purpose. Many fine Christians spread the gospel here, including Philip the Evangelist. Peter went to Caesarea to minister to the Roman centurion Cornelius. Paul passed through there several times: sailing to Troas, returning from his second and third missionary journeys, and when he sailed for Rome in chains. He spoke to Felix, Festus and Herod Agrippa II while there. God used this city in a special way as a sending-off spot for missionaries taking the Gospel to foreign lands. It was an important place in the life of the early church.

CAESAREA THROUGH THE CENTURIES Riots between Gentiles and Jews in Caesarea gave rise to the Jewish war for independence from Rome. Terrible cruelties were practiced on the Jews under Felix and Florus. Here the Roman legions landed on their way to destroying Jerusalem in 70 AD and ultimately Masada to end the revolt. Here Vespasian was hailed emperor by his soldiers. Titus here celebrated the birthday of his brother Domitian by setting 2,500 Jews to fight with beasts in the amphitheater. Eusebius was bishop of Caesarea (313-40 AD). In 548 AD a massacre of the Christians was organized and carried out by the Jews and Samaritans. The city passed into Moslem hands in 638. In the time of the Crusades it fell, now to the Christians and now to the Moslems; and was finally overthrown by Sultan Bibars in 1265 AD. Today the fine harbor and splendid buildings are in ruins. Nothing is left but the rough outline of Herod's buildings and millions of small pieces of broken marble.

MARBLE & LIMESTONE Herod, you see, built in marble. He imported it from Italy and used it everywhere. He wanted to make what he built so magnificent and unforgettable that he would be remembered and honored forever. He wanted to make an impression that would last for all time. Today nothing is left but pieces of marble that litters the land and is buried under the sea.

There was another king of the Jews who also was known for his greatness in empire-building. Jesus Himself is often referred to as a descendent of his. He was the greatest king the Jews had, and will only be superseded by his descendent, Jesus the Messiah, when He rules and reigns in Jerusalem. While David built, it wasn't mainly with stone. The legacy he formed was of stuff that lasts much longer and better. The stones he is remembered for were the sling-stones he picked up to kill Goliath. That was common field stone, probably limestone. He said he was doing what he did so "the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel" (I Samuel 17:46). David wasn't using the stone for himself but for God. He was building for God, and what he built has lasted through the ages.



One of the first Bible stories children learn is about David and Goliath, and it still stirs hearts to obedience to God no matter the odds. Meanwhile all Herod is remembered for is for killing baby boys in Bethlehem. What he built has not lasted because he built for himself. What David built endures because he did it for God and not himself.

Both David and Herod were great kings. Both loved and used stones. Herod built for himself and people today pick up the ruins of what he left behind. David acted for God and we will never forget his great legacy.

WHO ARE YOU BUILDING FOR? Are you building for yourself or for God. It doesn't matter how beautiful your marble buildings are, if you build for yourself it will soon crumble. Only what is built for God will last the test of time. Build for eternity!