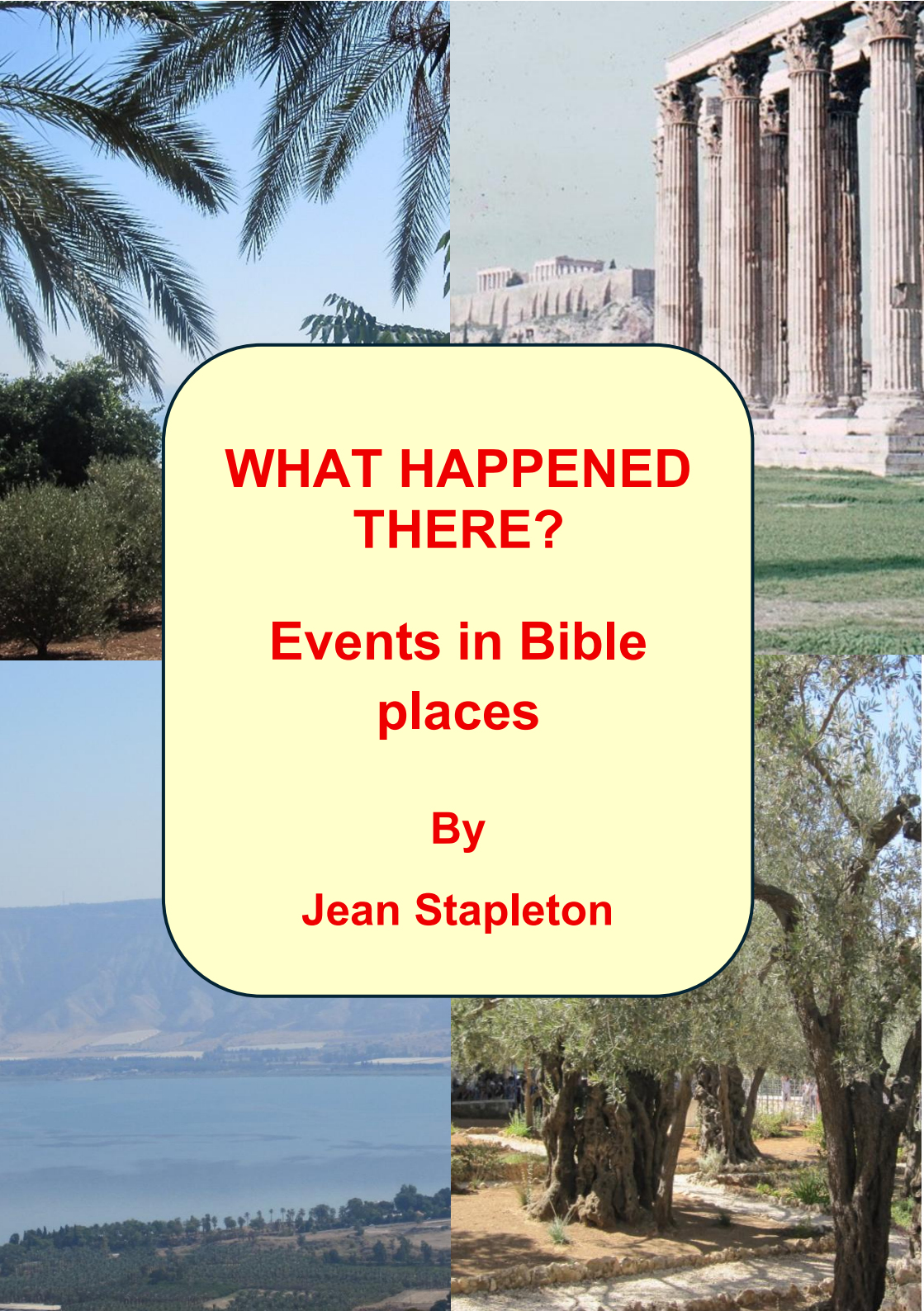




WHAT HAPPENED THERE?

Events in Bible places

**By
Jean Stapleton**

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INTRODUCTION

As we read our Bibles, knowing a little about the places where events take place can add both interest and understanding. You may have read the Book of Acts, but have you noticed when and where the gospel first came to Europe? You may have read about Elijah challenging the false prophets on Mount Carmel, but do you know where Mount Carmel is?

This book introduces thirty places mentioned in the Bible. There will always be more information to find about them, and many more place names you will come across. Sometimes it is good to pause when reading and consider the different events that happened at one particular place. How could a place named “Bethel”, which means “house of God”, become in later years a centre of idolatry? How many miles (kilometres) were travelled by characters such as Abraham and Jacob? In the New Testament days, how far did Mary and Joseph have to travel?

“Where do we read about it?” gives a list of Bible verses where the main events that happened at the particular place, are recorded. Not every verse that mentions the name of the place is listed.

A short introduction to the Empires of Bible times is included at the end of the book.

Points of a Compass



Athens

What does the name mean?

Named after the goddess (idol) called Athena.

Where is it?

In the New Testament days, the area where Athens was located was known as Achaia. (Athens is the capital city of present-day Greece.)

Athens is close to the Mediterranean coast and its seaport Piraeus was connected to Athens by a 2 mile (3.2km) road.



Where do we read about it?

Acts 17: 15-34

1 Thessalonians 3: 1

What happened there?

The apostle Paul visited Athens on the second of his three missionary journeys. He had entered Europe, travelling from Philippi to Thessalonica and Berea. So much trouble was stirred up at Berea by Jews from Thessalonica that Paul's friends sent him away by sea. He waited at Athens for Silas and Timothy to join him.

As he waited, Paul was distressed to see so many idols. He also saw an altar with the words "to the unknown god" inscribed on it. He spent time speaking to those who attended the synagogue. He also spoke each day to people he met in the market place. The Athenians liked to hear new things, and so they took Paul to the Areopagus (Mars Hill). Here, the philosophers of the day were ready to listen to him.

Paul remembered the altar "to the unknown god". He told the people about the true God who they did not know, but who was the Creator of the world. He spoke about the foolishness of worshipping the idols they had made. Paul also spoke of the day when God will judge the world by the One who rose from the dead, the Lord Jesus.

Some mocked when Paul spoke about the resurrection, others said they would like to hear him again. But there were some who believed in the

Lord Jesus Christ. After this, Paul left Athens and travelled to Corinth.

Read:

Acts 17: 15-34

1. What did some of the Athenians think when Paul spoke to them about the Lord Jesus? (verse 18)
2. What was wrong with the religious worship in Athens? (verses 24-25 and 29)
3. What was it that caused the people to mock Paul? (verse 32)
4. Name two people at Athens who became Christians. (verse 34)

Babel

What does the name mean?

The name means Confusion.

Where is it?

It is generally accepted that Babel became the ancient city of Babylon. Babylon was situated on the Euphrates River, about 50 miles (80 km) south of modern Baghdad in Iraq.



Where do we read about it?

Genesis 10: 8-10

Genesis 11: 1-9

What happened there?

After the great flood, God told Noah and his sons that as their families grew, they should “fill the earth” (Genesis 9: 1). Noah’s descendants obviously understood that it was God’s intention that they should move to different parts of the world.

We read in Genesis chapter 11 that the people did not want to be scattered, they wanted to stay together and become a powerful nation. They planned to build a city with a great tower in it. It may be that this tower was to be a temple given to the worship of idols or of the sun, moon and stars. This chapter of Genesis is all about a rebellion against God.

It was God’s plan and purpose that mankind should take charge of the world He had made (see Genesis 1: 27-28). It is not possible to stop God carrying out what He has purposed to do. God put a stop to the rebellion in the land of Shinar by causing people to speak in different languages. This caused the building work to cease. People must have got together with those who spoke the same language (probably family groups). These groups moved away from one another, beginning the separate nations who lived in different lands.

The name “Babel” means confusion: the confusion of many languages instead of the one language previously spoken.

Read:

Genesis 1: 27-28, 9: 1

Genesis 11: 1-9

1. In what way did the people plan to disobey God? (chapter 11 verse 4)
2. What brought the building project to an end? (chapter 11 verse 7)
3. How did this cause God's original purpose to be carried out? (chapter 11 verse 9)

Beersheba

What does the name mean?

Beersheba means “the well of the oath” or possibly “the well of seven”. The modern city is Beer Sheva.

Where is it?

48 miles (77 km) south-west of Jerusalem and 25 miles (40 km) west of the southern end of the Dead Sea.



Where do we read about it?

Genesis chapters 21; 26; 46

Joshua 19: 2

1 Kings 19: 3

Nehemiah 11: 27, 30

Amos 5: 5, 8: 14

What happened there?

Beersheba was an oasis in a dry area. In the time of Abraham, who owned many flocks and herds of animals, a good water supply was very important. We read of disputes over the ownership of wells during Abraham's lifetime and his son Isaac's time also.

In Genesis chapter 21 we read about a Philistine named Abimelech, whose servants had seized a well belonging to Abraham. The two men entered into a covenant, or treaty. This treaty was confirmed by Abraham handing over seven ewe-lambs to Abimelech. It was at that time that Abraham named the place "Beersheba".

In spite of Abraham's treaty with Abimelech, there was more trouble over wells which Isaac had to deal with, after his father's death. Isaac had many animals to provide for. He became so prosperous that the Philistines were envious. They filled the wells that Abraham's servants had dug, with earth (Genesis 26: 15). Isaac set his servants to work clearing the earth so that the wells were put back into use. Sadly, quarrels broke out with other

herdsmen in the area. They claimed that the water supply was theirs. This was in the Valley of Gerar, on the border of Philistine territory. Isaac moved back to Beersheba and his servants successfully dug a well there. He entered into a treaty with the Philistines as Abraham had done. They agreed that they would not harm one another.

Isaac and his family were still living at Beersheba when his son Jacob left home, to go to his Uncle Laban at Haran. Much later in Jacob's life, when he travelled to Egypt to be re-united with his son Joseph, he stayed overnight at Beersheba. God spoke to Jacob there, promising He would be with him and also bring his descendants back to their own land.

Read:

Genesis 21: 22-32

Genesis 26: 12-33

Genesis 46: 1-4

1. What complaint did Abraham make to Abimelech? (Genesis 21: 25)
2. What two difficulties did Isaac face over water supply? (Genesis 26: 15, 20-22)
3. What promise did God give to Jacob when he stayed in Beersheba? (Genesis 46:1-4)

Bethany

What does the name mean?

House of figs.

Where is it?

1¼ miles (2.8km) from Jerusalem, on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. In modern times, the village has the Arabic name of el-Azarîyeh (meaning Lazarus village).



Where do we read about it.

Luke 10: 38-42

John chapter 11

John 12: 1-11

What happened there?

Two sisters, Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus, lived in the village of Bethany. Mary and Martha welcomed the Lord Jesus into their home. They believed that He was the Son of God at a time when few people understood this.

On one of the visits that the Lord Jesus made to their home, Martha was busy preparing a meal. She saw her sister sitting listening to Jesus. She became upset and asked Jesus to tell Mary to help her. The Lord Jesus explained to Martha that Mary had made the right choice. Listening to His words was more important than being busy in the kitchen.

At a time when Lazarus was very ill, his sisters sent a message to the Lord Jesus. Jesus did not go to Bethany straight away but waited two days. When He did set out with His disciples, He knew that Lazarus had died. First Martha and then Mary, told Jesus that their brother would not have died if He had been there. They both believed that the Lord Jesus had power to heal.

The body of Lazarus had been placed in a cave with a stone across the opening. Jesus asked for the stone to be taken away. He prayed to His Father and then called Lazarus to come out of the grave. Lazarus did so: he had been raised from

death. Mary and Martha had seen a greater miracle than healing. Some of the Jewish people believed in the Lord Jesus when they saw His power to give life. But the leaders began to plan how they could put Him to death.

It was also at Bethany that Mary showed her love for the Lord Jesus by anointing His feet with some beautifully scented oil called spikenard. Judas Iscariot complained about the “waste” of the expensive oil, but Jesus accepted Mary’s action. He said that what she had done was very suitable. He knew that His death and burial were soon to take place. In a country where perfumes and spices were used to prepare the body for burial, Mary’s action was in keeping with this, even if she did not fully understand at the time.

Read:

Luke 10: 38-42

John chapter 11

John 12: 1-8

1. What was the good thing that Mary chose? (Luke 10: 38-42)
2. Do we know for certain that Martha knew who Jesus was? (John 11: 25-27)
3. Who did not approve of what Mary did when she poured expensive oil on Jesus’s feet? (John 12: 4-6)

Bethel

What does the name mean?

House of God.

Where is it?

In the land of Israel 12 miles (19 km) north of Jerusalem. A Palestinian village called Beitin is the site where Bethel is thought to have been.



Where do we read about it?

Genesis 28: 10-22

1 Samuel 7: 15-16

1 Kings 12: 26-33

1 Kings 13: 1-6

2 Kings 23: 15

What happened there?

Jacob was going away from his home. He had set off in haste because his brother Esau was so angry with him that he was threatening to kill him. He had his father's advice to go to his mother's relations at Haran and there find the right person to marry. The journey from Beersheba to Haran was about 500 miles (804km). Looking back many years later, Jacob said that all he had when he left his home, was his staff in his hand.

One night Jacob lay down to rest, with a stone for his pillow. The place where he rested was called Luz. Jacob had an amazing dream that night: Read Genesis 28:11-15. When he awoke, he had a great sense of awe: God was in the place where he had spent the night. Jacob promised that if God did all that He said, then He would be his God. He also promised to set aside for God one tenth of all that God gave him, Jacob then renamed the place where God had spoken to him. He called it Bethel because of its meaning: house of God.

About 650 years later when God chose Samuel to lead the people of Israel, we read that he regularly visited Bethel. Then more than a century after that, we read of something very wrong that happened there.

The first three kings of Israel were Saul, David and Solomon. After the death of Solomon, the ten

tribes in the north part of Israel rebelled and had their own king, Jeroboam. In the southern part of the land, the tribe of Judah with the tribe of Benjamin and probably some people from the tribe of Simeon, remained loyal to Solomon's son Rehoboam.

Jeroboam was afraid that if the people he ruled over travelled to the temple at Jerusalem, they would want Rehoboam to be their King. So he set up two golden calves, one at Bethel (near the southern border of his kingdom) and one at Dan (near the northern border). He told the people that it would be too much for them to go to Jerusalem with their offerings. They could worship at Bethel or Dan. Of course, the golden calves were idols, false gods which the people of Israel had been taught they must not make or worship (see Exodus 20: 4 - 6).

Jacob had named Bethel because God had met with him there. How sad that the place that had been "the house of God" became a place of idol-worship.

A man from Judah brought a message from God to Bethel, as King Jeroboam stood by the altar he had made there. The man prophesied that a King named Josiah would burn the bones of the false priests on that altar (1 Kings 13: 1-2). In 2 Kings chapter 23 we read that this happened, as Josiah went through the land destroying the places where the people had worshipped idols.

Read:

Genesis 28: 10-22

1 Kings 12: 26-33

1. Can you find 4 promises that God made to Jacob at Bethel? (Genesis 28: 13-15)

2. What was Jeroboam afraid of? (1 Kings 12: 26-27)

3. What did he do to solve this difficulty? (1 Kings 12: 28-29)

Bethlehem

What does the name mean?

House of bread.

Where is it?

In the land of Israel, 5 miles (8 km) south of Jerusalem.



Where do we read about it?

Genesis 35: 19

Ruth chapters 1-4

1 Samuel 16: 1-13
Micah 5: 2
Matthew chapter 2
Luke chapter 2

What happened there?

Bethlehem is best known as the place where the Lord Jesus was born. However, we first read about it in the Book of Genesis. At that time it was known as Ephrath and was near to the place where Jacob's much loved wife Rachel died. This was after Jacob had returned to the land of Canaan following his twenty years with his uncle Laban in Paddan-aram.

In the Book of Ruth we read of how Elimelech and Naomi with their two sons, left Bethlehem at a time of famine. They travelled to the country of Moab and both sons married women of that country. While Naomi was in Moab, her husband and both her sons died. She made the journey back to Bethlehem with her daughter-in-law Ruth, who refused to leave her to return alone. The Book of Ruth tells the wonderful, true story of how Ruth married Boaz, a wealthy man who was a relative of Elimelech's. They had a son named Obed who became the grandfather of King David. We know that Ruth and Boaz's family continued to live in Bethlehem for several generations: God sent Samuel there to anoint David to be king of Israel after King Saul.

In the Book of Micah we find a prophecy that the promised Saviour would come from Bethlehem. When the Roman Emperor gave an order for people to be registered in the place their family came from, he did not know that he was fulfilling this prophecy. Mary and Joseph were descendants of King David and so had to travel from their home in Nazareth to Bethlehem, the city of David's family. This was a journey of about 75 miles (120 km). Here the Lord Jesus, the promised Saviour, was born about 700 years after Micah's prophecy.

When the wise men came seeking the "King of the Jews", King Herod made enquiries about where the Messiah would be born. The priests and scribes were able to tell him that it would be Bethlehem, and they quoted the words Micah had spoken so many years before (Matthew 2:6).

When we think of Bethlehem, "the house of bread", we remember the words of the Lord Jesus, "I am the Bread of Life" (John 6: 35). Bread used to be called the "staff of life" and it is spoken of in the Bible as something that sustains life. It is not a coincidence that the One who came to give us life, came to "the House of Bread".

Read:

The Book of Ruth

Micah 5: 2

Matthew 2: 1-6

Luke 2: 1-16

1. What do Ruth 1: 16-17 and 2:12 tell us about Ruth, apart from her kindness to Naomi?
2. Which word at the end of Micah 5: 2 makes it clear that the Ruler he speaks of must be God?
3. Why did Mary and Joseph have to travel to Bethlehem? (see Micah 5: 2 and Luke 2: 1-4)

Cana

What does the name mean?

Probably “place of reeds”.

Where is it?

In the area known as Galilee. The site cannot be definitely identified. One possible site is about 10 miles west of the Sea of Galilee and 9 miles (14.5 km) north of Nazareth. Another possibility would be about 12 miles (19 km) north of Nazareth.



Where do we read about it?

Only in John's gospel:

Chapter 2: 1-11

Chapter 4: 46-54

Chapter 21: 2

What happened there?

It was at a wedding at Cana that the Lord Jesus performed His first miracle. Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. Mary, the mother of Jesus was there as well. When the wine ran out, Jesus told the servants to fill the six waterpots with water. He then told them to take some to the man in charge of the feast. When this man tasted it, he found that it was better wine than had been served earlier. In this miracle, the Lord Jesus showed His power to create.

John chapter 4 tells us of a second visit that Jesus made to Cana. At that time, a nobleman from Capernaum came to Him. He had a son who was seriously ill and likely to die. He pleaded with Jesus to come and heal his son. We read of how the Lord Jesus tested this man's faith in Him: that He could heal by just speaking the words "your son lives". When he arrived home the following day, the nobleman learned that his son was made well just at the time that Jesus had spoken those words. The Lord Jesus had shown His power over sickness.

Read:

John 2: 1-11

John 4: 46-54

1. What does the miracle of turning water into wine teach us about the Lord Jesus?
2. What did the nobleman ask the Lord Jesus to do? (John 4: 47 and 49)
3. In what way did his faith in the Lord Jesus grow stronger? (John 4: 50)

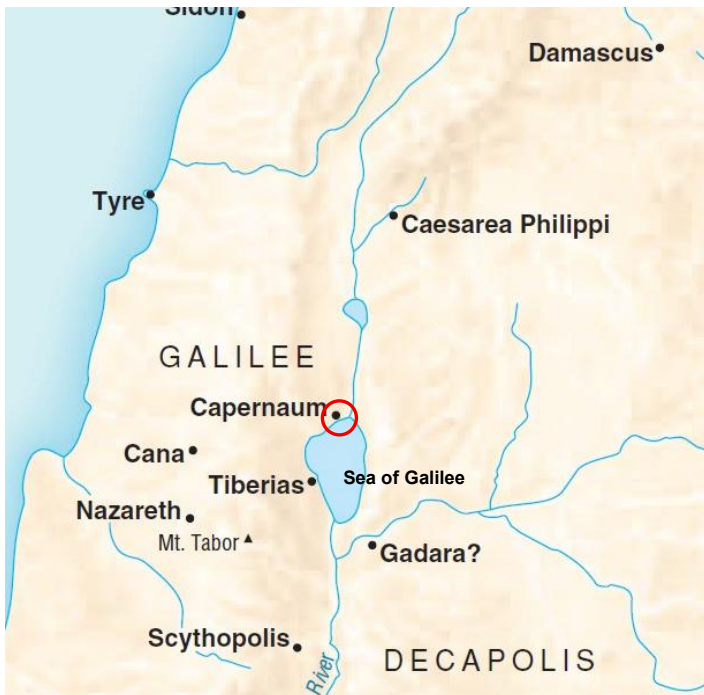
Capernaum

What does the name mean?

Village of Nahum.

Where is it?

On the north-west shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was on the road from Damascus to Jerusalem that went through Galilee. The site is now known as Tell Hum.



Where do we read about it?

Matthew 4: 13

Matthew 8: 5

Matthew 11: 23

Matthew 17: 24

+ other references in Mark, Luke and John.

What happened there?

Capernaum was the home of the disciple Peter, although we know from John 1: 44 that he had also lived in nearby Bethsaida. The Lord Jesus grew up in Nazareth, but during the years of His ministry, when He was in Galilee, He was based in Capernaum which is referred to as “His own city”.

Many events at Capernaum are recorded in the Gospels. One concerned a centurion who showed great faith in the Lord Jesus. This man had a servant who was very ill. He went to the Lord Jesus for help. Jesus said he would come and heal the servant, but the centurion said that Jesus need not come to his home. He believed that Jesus only needed to speak and there would be healing. Here was a Roman soldier showing more faith than most of the Jewish people had shown. When he returned home, the centurion found that his servant had been healed at the time he had spoken to the Lord Jesus (Matthew 8: 5 -13).

A paralysed man was also healed at Capernaum. Four men carried this man to the house where Jesus was. The house was too

crowded for them to get near to Jesus, so they moved some tiles on the roof and lowered their friend to where Jesus stood. The Lord Jesus told the man that his sins were forgiven. Some of those watching thought that it was wrong for Jesus to say that He could forgive sins. They did not understand that Jesus was the Son of God. After this, Jesus told the paralysed man to get up and go to his house. He did so, completely healed straight away.

These are just two of the events during the ministry of the Lord Jesus at Capernaum. We read about all that happened in one day at Capernaum in Mark chapter 1. This included teaching in the synagogue and many miracles of healing.

Read:

Mark 1: 21 – 34.

Find the events of one day in Capernaum (Mark 1). Use your own words to describe each event.

1. Verses 21-22
2. Verses 23-26
3. Verses 29-31
4. Verses 32-34

Damascus

What does the name mean?

The meaning is unknown.

Where is it?

In the land of Syria. Positioned on trade routes to Egypt, Arabia and Mesopotamia. Now the chief city of modern Syria. Said to be the oldest continually occupied city in the world. Damascus is about 65 miles (104 km) north-east of Tyre.



Where do we read about it?

Genesis 14:15; 15: 2

2 Samuel 8: 6

1 Kings 11: 23 – 24

2 Kings 5: 12, 8: 7

Isaiah 7: 8

Amos 1: 3-5

(There are other verses in the Old Testament that mention Damascus.)

Acts chapter 9

What happened there?

When David was King of Israel, he conquered Damascus. During the reign of his son Solomon it was restored as the capital city of Syria (1 Kings 11: 24). Damascus was also involved in war between Israel and Syria at other times. In 2 Kings chapter 8 we read that the prophet Elisha went to Damascus at a time when the King of Syria was ill. Eventually Damascus was conquered by the Assyrians: this had been foretold by the prophet Amos (Amos 1: 3-5).

In the New Testament (Acts chapter 9), we read about Saul's journey to Damascus. He was on his way there to arrest Christians and bring them to Jerusalem. A light from heaven caused him to fall to the ground. He heard the voice of the Lord Jesus speaking to him. Unable to see, Saul was led into the city of Damascus. A Christian named Ananias, who lived there, was sent by God to the place where Saul was staying. Saul's eyesight was

restored and he was baptized. Saul the persecutor of Christians had now become a Christian himself. Those who heard him preach in the synagogue were amazed to hear him speaking about the Lord Jesus.

The Jews at Damascus plotted to kill Saul and were waiting for a good time to take him. The Christians helped him to escape, by letting him down the city wall in a large basket. (Saul was a Jewish name and when he began to travel to other parts of the empire, he used the name Paul.)

Read:

Acts 9: 1-25

1. Why was Saul on his way to Damascus? (verses 1-2)
2. What was Saul's response to the words of the Lord Jesus? (verse 6)
3. Was it easy for Ananias to visit Saul? (verses 13-14) How did he address him when they met? (verse 17)
4. What was Saul's message to the Jews at Damascus? (verse 20)

Eden

What does the name mean?

Pleasure or delight.

Where is it?

We cannot be sure exactly where the Garden of Eden was. We know that a river flowed through the garden and then divided into four. Two of those four rivers were the Hiddekel (also called the Tigris) and the Euphrates, and these names are still in use, but cannot be used to place Eden on a map. This is because of the great changes that took place at the time of the great flood when only Noah and his family were saved.



Where do we read about it?

Genesis chapters 2 and 3

What happened there?

After the creation of the world, the Garden of Eden is the first place we read about in the Bible. This garden must have been a delight as it was planted by God and would have been very beautiful. It was prepared by God to be man's first home. The fruit of the trees provided sufficient food for man. Two trees are especially named: The Tree of Life, and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This second named tree produced the only fruit that Adam was told he must not eat. He was clearly told that eating the fruit of that tree would result in death.

It was in the Garden of Eden that God created the first woman to be a wife for Adam. Eve was created in a special way (read about this in Genesis 2:18, and 21-25). The creation of Eve teaches us about God's design for marriage. The Lord Jesus quoted the words from Genesis chapter 2 when He answered a question about marriage. He confirmed God's design for marriage between a man and a woman for life (Matthew 19: 3-6).

The Garden of Eden was a perfect place when God created it: no sin, suffering or death. But it was in that beautiful place that sin came into the world, when Eve gave in to temptation and ate the fruit of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and also gave some to her husband. She had listened

to the voice of the serpent which the devil used to tempt her. God had given just one simple command to test the loving obedience of Adam and his wife. God had given them life and everything they needed, and yet they began to doubt His goodness to them and then disobeyed His command.

Adam and Eve did not die physically that day, although their bodies began to grow old and would die eventually. That day, they died spiritually: that part of them that could know God and enjoy His presence, died. For the first time, when they heard God's voice, they tried to hide from Him. Their sin became a barrier, or wall, between them and God, who is holy.

Adam was the representative of the human race. All his descendants have been, and are, sinful people. Only the Lord Jesus, God's own Son, lived in this world without sin. He gave His life on the cross, as a perfect sacrifice, so that sinners could be forgiven.

The world as we know it, is very different from when God made everything perfect. We still see something of the beauty of God's creation, but we also see sadness, sickness, sin and death. Those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ will one day be with Him in the new heaven and the new earth God is preparing for all who love Him.

Read:

Genesis chapters 2 and 3.

1. How did the serpent persuade Eve to doubt God's goodness? (Chapter 3: 4-5)
2. How did their disobedience affect them in God's presence? (Chapter 3: 8)
3. Who did Adam blame and who did Eve blame, for their disobedience? (Chapter 3: 12-13)
4. What would life be like after sin entered the world? (Chapter 3:17-19, and 23)

Ephesus

What does the name mean?

Not Known.

Where is it?

It was on an important trade route and was an important city in Roman times, on the Cayster River about 3 miles (5 km) from where it flowed into the Aegean Sea. Due to the harbour silting up, the site of Ephesus is now 6 miles (10 km) inland from the sea.



Where do we read about it?

Acts 18: 19-21, 24-26

Acts 20: 16-21

1 Timothy 1: 3

2 Timothy 1: 18

Revelation 2: 1-7

What happened there?

Paul visited Ephesus on his second missionary journey but did not stay there long. He left his trusted friends Aquila and Priscilla there, and Christians were able to meet in their house. On his third journey, Paul stayed in Ephesus for 3 years. For three months he taught in the synagogue, but some of those who heard him began to speak against his teaching. Paul then moved to another place known as The School of Tyrannus, where for two years he spoke to the people each day. Both Jews and Gentiles, from a wide area, came to hear Paul's teaching. Many people became Christians.

Ephesus was famous for its temple to the goddess Diana. Some silversmiths made a good living by selling silver shrines to Diana. As more people turned from idolatry to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the silversmiths found their business less profitable. One of them, named Demetrius, stirred up the people against Paul, so that a great crowd rushed into the theatre, which could hold twenty-five thousand people.

Some of Paul's travelling companions were seized and for two hours the crowd kept chanting

“great is Diana of the Ephesians”. Christian friends would not let Paul enter the theatre, where he would have been in great danger. At last, the city clerk managed to quieten the people and send them away.

After the riot, Paul set off on his journey through Macedonia and Greece. This time he left Timothy at Ephesus, to continue teaching and helping the Christians there. After visiting other towns in the area, Paul and his companions sailed past Ephesus, on their way to Jerusalem. They did spend some time at Miletus, a town about 50 miles (80 km) south of Ephesus. There Paul met with the leaders of the Ephesian church. He talked with them and prayed with them, before continuing his journey.

Read:

Acts 19: 23-41

1. What was the cause of trouble at Ephesus? (verses 23-28)
2. What did the people of Ephesus believe about their goddess? (verse 35)
3. What two things did Paul say he had taught the Ephesians? (Acts 20: 21)

Gaza

What does the name mean?

Gaza means “strong”.

Where is it?

About 50 miles (80 km) south-west of Jerusalem and 4 miles (6 km) east of the Mediterranean coast. It was the furthest south of the 5 Philistine cities. The area known in Old Testament times as the land of the Philistines is now known as the Gaza strip.



Where do we read about it?

Joshua 15: 47

Judges 16

Jeremiah 47: 1 - 5

Amos 1: 6-7

Zephaniah 2: 4

Zechariah 9: 5

Acts 8: 26

What happened there?

One of the leaders of the Israelites after the time of Joshua, was Samson. God gave Samson great strength. Before his birth, his mother was told by the Angel of the Lord that her son would begin to deliver Israel from their enemies, the Philistines. She was also told that he would be a “Nazirite”, someone whose life was especially set apart for God. This would be shown by him not drinking wine or cutting his hair.

One day Samson visited a woman in Gaza and the men of the city found out that he was there. They lay in wait for him all night, thinking that they would kill him in the morning. Samson went at midnight to the gate of the city, which would have been locked. With his great strength, he pulled up the gate and the gate posts and carried them away on his shoulders.

Eventually Samson was captured by the Philistines. They blinded him and took him to Gaza where he was put in prison. Many of the Philistines met together to praise their god Dagon, who they

said had helped them to capture Samson. They had Samson brought from prison and stood him between two pillars of the temple. Samson prayed that God would help him. He pushed against the pillars with all his strength, and the temple fell, killing the many people who were there. Samson died with the Philistines at Gaza.

In the New Testament, we read about something that happened on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. An angel told a Christian named Philip, to take this road towards Gaza. On the road Philip saw a chariot and he knew that God's Holy Spirit was telling him to go up to it. The man in the chariot was an Ethiopian, the Queen of Ethiopia's treasurer. Philip heard him reading from the book of Isaiah. He asked whether he understood what he was reading. The Ethiopian said that he could not understand without help and he asked Philip to sit with him.

Isaiah chapter 53 which the Ethiopian was reading, tells us of Someone who died because of the sin of others. Philip was able to explain that this chapter was all about what the Lord Jesus had done. As Philip talked to him, the Ethiopian understood that Jesus is the Son of God. He was baptized to show that he had become a Christian.

Read:

Judges 16: 4-31

Acts 8: 26-40

1. What part of Samson's broken vow began to change while he was in prison in Gaza? (Judges16: 17-19, 21-22)
2. Why did the Philistines regard Samson as their enemy? (Judges16: 24)
3. How did Samson cause the death of many of the Philistines, even though it would mean his own death? (Judges16: 28-30)
4. Look up Isaiah chapter 53. Which verses was the Ethiopian reading? (Acts 8: 32-33)

Haran

What does the name mean?

Possibly “mountainous”.

Where is it?

In Northern Mesopotamia, North-east of the land of Israel. It was situated on the Balikh river, a tributary of the Euphrates. It was an important trading centre in an area called Paddan-Aram (now north of Syria). It is sometimes referred to as Nahor: both names Haran and Nahor are the names of Abraham's brothers.



Where do we read about it?

Genesis 11: 31-32

Genesis 12: 4

Genesis chapter 24

Genesis 27: 43

Genesis 29 to 31:21

2 Kings 19: 12

Isaiah 37: 12

What happened there?

Abraham travelled from the city of Ur to Haran, together with his wife Sarah, his father Terah and his nephew Lot. God had told Abraham to leave the place where he was living and go to a land which God would show him. That land was Canaan, but before arriving there, Abraham and his family settled for a time in Haran.

The Bible does not say that Abraham's brother Nahor travelled with the family to Haran. But at some time, he and his family settled there. As Abraham grew older, he was concerned that his son Isaac should find the right wife. He did not want him to marry a woman from Canaan who worshipped idols. He sent his most trusted servant to Haran, to bring a wife for Isaac from his own relations.

Genesis chapter 24 tells us the wonderful way in which God guided the servant to the right place and the right person. Rebekah was the granddaughter of Abraham's brother, Nahor. She was also willing

to leave her home and travel into Canaan to become Isaac's wife.

Isaac and Rebekah had twin boys, Jacob and Esau. As the first twin to be born, Esau was considered the oldest, and it would be expected that he would become head of the family after Isaac. God had made it clear to Rebekah before her sons were born, that in this family, it would be the youngest son, who would take that place.

There came a time when it was necessary for Jacob to leave his home in Canaan. His brother Esau was very angry with him. (Read Genesis chapter 27 to find out why.) Isaac told Jacob to go to Haran and find a wife from Rebekah's family.

It was a long journey to Haran from Beersheba in the south of Canaan (at least 450 miles [724 km]). Looking back on that time later in his life, Jacob said that he had set out with just his staff in his hand. The journey must have been very hard.

In Haran, Jacob fell in love with his beautiful cousin, Rachel. However, his uncle Laban deceived him and gave him his older daughter Leah as his wife. As was often the case in those days, Jacob married two wives, both Leah and Rachel. He remained in Haran for 20 years. He had eleven sons and one daughter there. He also became a wealthy man with servants and many animals: sheep, goats, camels, cows and donkeys.

Read:

Genesis 11: 31-32; 12: 1-5

Genesis chapter 24

Genesis 29: 1-6

1. How did Abraham's servant make sure that Rebekah was the wife God had chosen for Isaac? (Genesis 24: 10-20)

2. How did Rebekah's father and brother react when the servant told them what had happened at the well? (Genesis 24: 50-51)

3. Was Jacob made welcome in Haran? (Genesis 29: 12-13)

Hebron

What does the name mean?

Confederation or association.

Where is it?

20 miles (32 km) south of Jerusalem, and 18 miles (29 km) west of the Dead Sea.

It was also known as Kirjath Arba.



Where do read about it?

Genesis 13: 18

Genesis 23: 2

Genesis 35: 27

Joshua 14: 13-15

Joshua 20: 7

2 Samuel 5: 3-5

What happened there?

We first read about Hebron in Genesis chapter 13. After moving to the land of Canaan at God's command, Abraham had to separate from his nephew, Lot, who had travelled with him. They both had many animals, too many for the land to support. Lot moved to the good pasture land in the south near the city of Sodom. Abraham then settled at Mamre, close to Hebron.

It was while he was living in this district that Abraham heard that Lot had been taken captive during a battle between nine local kings: four of them against five. Abraham was able to arm his 318 servants and set off in pursuit. He succeeded in rescuing not only Lot, but also all the property that had been taken as well as other people who had been captured.

After all this, God renewed His promises to Abraham: he would certainly have a son and many descendants. To his descendants, God promised to give the land of Canaan (Genesis 15: 4-5, 18).

In Genesis 23: 1-2 we read that Abraham's wife, Sarah, died in Kirjath Arba (an early name for

Hebron). In Genesis 23: 3-18 we have a very interesting description of how business was carried out at this time (about 2000 B.C.) (verses 3-18). The business was concluded with Abraham owning the field and cave of Machpelah as a burial place, in the district of Hebron. Here Sarah was buried, as were Abraham, his son Isaac and his wife Rebekah, his grandson Jacob and his wife Leah.

In the time of Joshua, when the land of Canaan was being divided between the twelve tribes of Israel, a man named Caleb claimed Hebron as his possession. He was 85 years old and he reminded Joshua that this part of the land had been promised to him by Moses forty-five years before. Caleb had been one of the twelve spies that Moses sent into Canaan after the Israelites had left Egypt. Only Caleb and Joshua had faith to believe that God would help the Israelites to take the land as their own, as God had promised. Ten spies made the people afraid, so that they refused to enter Canaan at that time. This resulted in 40 years wandering in the wilderness.

Moses had said that Caleb “wholly followed the Lord”. At 85 years old, Caleb showed the same whole-hearted faith in God. He believed God would help him to overcome the people in that area and take the town of Hebron as his inheritance.

God told Joshua to choose six cities of refuge for anyone who had killed someone accidentally. The person who fled there would be safe until his case was heard. No-one would be allowed to take

revenge for the death. Hebron was one of the six cities chosen. There were three cities on the west of the river Jordan and three cities on the east.

Read:

Genesis 23: 1-20

Joshua 14: 6-15

1. Why did Abraham insist on paying the full price for the land he wanted? (Genesis 23: 7-16, 20)
2. Why was Hebron promised to Caleb? (Numbers 13: 30-31; 14: 6-9; Joshua 14: 7-9)
3. Why was Caleb expecting to be able to take Hebron? (Joshua 14: 12)

Jericho

What does the name mean?

Sometimes called “Moon City” because of the worship of the moon god. Known in the Old Testament as the City of Palm Trees (Deuteronomy 34: 3; 2 Chronicles 28: 15).

Where is it?

825 feet (253 metres) below sea level and about 8 miles (13 km) north-west of the place where the River Jordan enters the Dead Sea.



Where do we read about it?

Joshua chapters 2 and 6

2 Kings 2: 4-5, 18-22

Matthew 20: 29-34

Mark 10: 46-52

Luke 18: 35-43

Luke 19: 1-10

What happened there?

The best known events at Jericho happened in the time when Joshua was the Israelites' leader. In Joshua chapter 2 we read about the two spies who were sent to view the land of Canaan, especially the city of Jericho. When the king of Jericho sent men to find the spies, they were hidden and kept safe by a woman named Rahab, who had a house on the city wall.

Rahab told the spies that the people of Jericho were afraid of the Israelites, because they had heard of all that God had done for them. She showed her understanding that the God of Israel was the one true God. Rahab obtained a promise from the two spies that she and her family would be kept safe when the Israelites came to take the city. She was given three conditions which she must keep: she must place a scarlet cord in her window, she and her family must stay inside the house, and she must not tell anyone what she knew about the two spies.

In Joshua chapter 6 we have a full account of what happened when the Israelites took the city of

Jericho. They obeyed God's instructions and the walls of the city fell down. Rahab did exactly as the spies had instructed her and she and her family were saved.

Rahab is a wonderful example of someone brought up in idolatry, coming to believe in the true God. The New Testament tells us that Rahab acted in faith (Hebrews 11: 31). We also learn that she married and became the great-great-grandmother of King David (Matthew 1: 5-6). Rahab has a place in the genealogy (family tree) which goes from Abraham through two thousand years, to the birth of the Lord Jesus.

In the New Testament we read about the meeting of the Lord Jesus with Zacchaeus (Luke chapter 19). Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector at Jericho and had used his position to gain wealth. His true repentance is shown by his determination to give away money wrongly obtained: some to compensate those he had wronged and some to be given to the poor.

Read:

Joshua chapters 2 and 6

Luke 19: 1-10

1. Where did Rahab hide the spies? (Joshua 2: 6)
2. How many times did the Israelites march around Jericho? (Joshua 6: 3-4)

3. Who else besides the soldiers, marched around Jericho? (Joshua 6: 6-9). What were they carrying?

4. How do we know that Zacchaeus was truly sorry for what he had done wrong? (Luke 19: 8)

Jerusalem – 1 - Through the centuries

What does the name mean?

City of Peace.

Where is it?

In the land of Israel, about 15 miles (24 km) west of the northern end of the Dead Sea and about 36 miles (58 km) east of the Great Sea (Mediterranean Sea) coast.



Where we read about it:

In many books of the Bible, including: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Obadiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Malachi, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Revelation.

What happened there?

In the Book of Genesis there are two possible references to the city which would become Jerusalem. The first is in 14:18 where Abraham met with Melchizedek, "King of Salem". We cannot be sure that this Salem is the same as Jerusalem. The second possible reference is in Genesis 22: 2 – the land of Moriah: we know that the temple was built by Solomon on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 3: 1).

The first definite information we have is in Joshua 15: 63. This was the time when the Israelites were taking over the land of Canaan. We learn that they were not able to drive out the people then living in Jerusalem, but lived alongside them.

It was King David who reigned about 1,000 years B.C. who finally took the city for Israel (2 Samuel 5: 6-7). It became his capital city and his son Solomon built the temple there.

The people of Israel failed to keep God's law even though they had been warned that things would not go well with them if they disobeyed God. They began to worship idols like the nations around

them and they also failed to care for the poor as God had taught them to do. Because of their sin, Jerusalem was overthrown by Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon and many of the people were removed from their land. The city walls, the houses and the temple were left in ruins. (This was in 586 B.C.)

After 70 years of captivity, those who were willing to go, were allowed to return to Jerusalem. The Babylonian empire had fallen and Persia became the great power. King Cyrus of Persia made a proclamation that the temple at Jerusalem was to be rebuilt (2 Chronicles 36: 22-23).

A descendant of King David named Zerubbabel led about fifty thousand people back to Jerusalem. They had many difficulties but did succeed in building the temple. About 80 years after Zerubbabel's journey, Ezra the priest led a second group of people back to Jerusalem. He then set about teaching the people the law of God. Nehemiah, who held an important job in the palace of King Artaxerxes, followed about 15 years later. He organised the re-building of the city walls.

In the four centuries between the Old Testament and the New Testament, the city went through many troubles. During the time of the Grecian Empire, which followed the Persian Empire, the temple was burned and the contents were plundered. At the time when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Jerusalem was controlled by the

Roman Empire. The city was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.

During His life on earth, the Lord Jesus made many visits to Jerusalem. He was taken to the temple by His mother Mary and her husband Joseph, when He was about 6 weeks old. We read about His visit to the temple at the age of 12 years in Luke 2: 41 – 50. We read of miracles of healing at Jerusalem such as the man born blind (John chapter 9) and the man at the pool of Bethesda (John chapter 5). Jesus also gave some of His teaching in the temple and twice removed the money-changers who were there.

When the Lord Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey, the crowds followed Him, calling out “Hosanna to the Son of David”. A few days later, at the time of the feast of the Passover, He ate the Passover meal with the disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem. After this, He was betrayed by Judas Iscariot and put on trial by the priests and leaders of the people. He was crucified just outside the city wall. The first appearances of the Lord Jesus after His resurrection were at Jerusalem.

After the Lord Jesus returned to heaven, the disciples waited at Jerusalem as He had told them to, until God sent the Holy Spirit to them. Then on the Day of Pentecost, Peter spoke to the many people who had gathered at Jerusalem from many countries. On that day, three thousand people became Christians.

Read:

2 Chronicles 36: 14-23

Nehemiah chapters 1 and 2

Jeremiah 29: 10

1. Why were the people of Israel taken away from their land? (2 Chronicles 36: 14-17)
2. How was the prophecy of Jeremiah fulfilled? (Jeremiah 29: 10, and 2 Chronicles 36: 22-23)
3. How did Nehemiah react to the news about Jerusalem? (Nehemiah 1: 3-4)

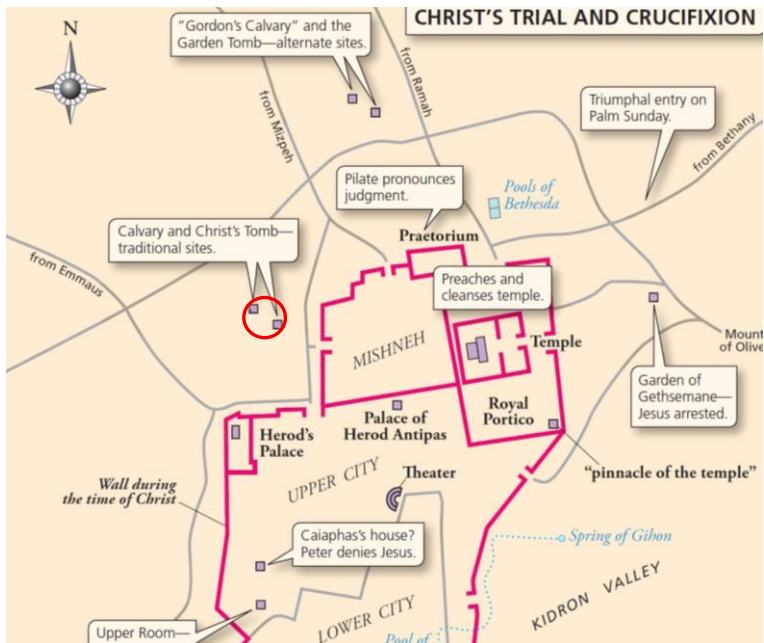
Jerusalem – 2 - Calvary

What does the name mean?

“Place of a skull” from the Latin word “Calvara”. The Hebrew word is Golgotha.

Where is it?

Outside the walls of the city of Jerusalem. The exact site is not known. Although at least two sites are shown to tourists, it is not possible to be certain.



Where do we read about it?

Matthew 27: 33 - 61

Mark 15: 22 - 47

Luke 23: 33 - 53

John 19: 17 - 42

Hebrews 13: 12

What happened there?

Calvary was the place where the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified. This is the place where the most important event in history took place. It was here that the sinless Son of God was nailed to a cross and left to die between two criminals.

This event is the central theme of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Man had rebelled against his Creator: we read how this rebellion began in Genesis chapter 3. In the same chapter, we have the first promise of a Saviour who would come (Genesis 3: 15). This promise became clearer throughout the Old Testament: to Abraham (Genesis chapter 12); to King David (2 Samuel 7: 16). All the teaching about the tabernacle and the offerings made there, picture the work that the Lord Jesus would do. (See Exodus chapters 25-40; Leviticus chapters 1-9, 16, 23.) The Bible tells us of God's great plan to reconcile men and women to Himself. God's holiness means that He cannot act as though sin does not matter. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit agreed together a plan to rescue sinful men and women.

God the Father loved the world and gave His Son so that those who trust in Him would have everlasting life (John 3: 16). God the Son gave His life on the cross, as the perfect sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 10: 12). God the Holy Spirit convinces us of our sin and need of a Saviour, and shows us that salvation is only through the Lord Jesus Christ (John 15: 26; 16: 7-8).

The death of the Lord Jesus for all who believe in Him, was planned in eternity but it was carried out on that particular day when He was crucified at Calvary. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6: 23). The Lord Jesus took sin's punishment for everyone who would have faith in Him. He was the Substitute: the One who took the sinner's place. He became a man in order to do this, but only He could do it, because only He had lived a sinless life.

Read:

John 19: 14-18

Acts 2: 22-24

1. Why does Peter say the Jews should have known that the Lord Jesus was more than just an ordinary man? (Acts 2: 22)
2. Whose purpose was it to deliver Jesus to death? (Acts 2: 23)
3. Does this mean that those who wanted Him to die were not guilty of putting Him to death? (Acts 2: 23, 36-37)

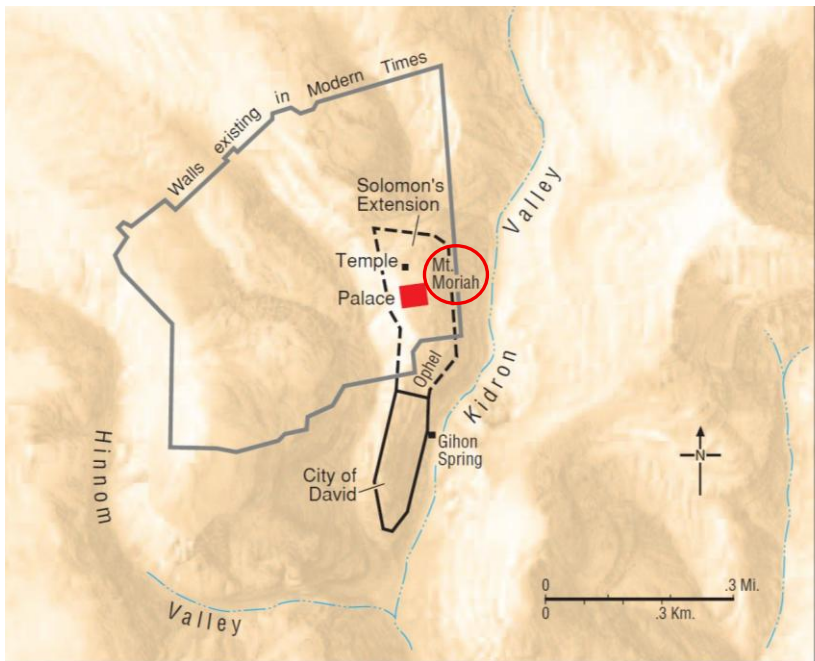
Jerusalem – 3 - Mount Moriah

What does the name mean?

Moriah means “Provided by Jah”. (Jah is a short form of God’s name Jehovah. We have it in the word “Hallelujah” – praise the Lord.)

Where is it?

Mount Moriah is on the east side of the City of Jerusalem. This is where the Temple Mount is today.



Where do we read about it?

1. Genesis 22: 2 (one of the mountains in “the land of Moriah”).
2. 1 Chronicles 21: 15-26
3. 2 Chronicles 3: 1 (This is the only place where Mount Moriah is named in the Bible.)

What happened there?

1. Abraham was told by God to take his son Isaac to the land of Moriah. He was then to offer Isaac as a sacrifice on a mountain which God would show him. An angel spoke to Abraham and stopped him harming Isaac. As Abraham looked up, he saw a ram caught in a thicket. He offered the ram as a sacrifice. God tested Abraham's obedience in this way, giving us a picture of what God Himself would do in giving His beloved Son to die for sinners (see John 3: 16). The Bible does not actually say that the place where Abraham offered his son Isaac to God, was the Mount Moriah where the temple was built. But it does seem likely that this was the reason that God told Abraham to travel so far.

2. King David wanted to know the number of people living in the land of Israel, so a census was taken. The Bible does not tell us why David wanted to do this. It could have been the pride David would feel at ruling over so many people. Whatever the reason, God was displeased and David was sorry for what he had done. God sent a plague and many people died. David saw the Angel of the Lord with

his sword stretched out over Jerusalem. The Angel sent a message to David that he must erect an altar on the threshing floor of a man named Ornan (sometimes called Araunah), where the Angel stood. David bought the threshing floor from Ornan and built an altar there. He offered sacrifices there and the plague was stopped. As 2 Chronicles 3: 1 tells us, Ornan's threshing floor was on Mount Moriah.

3. All the time the people of Israel lived in the wilderness, whenever they moved camp, they moved the Tabernacle with them. After they had been settled in their own land for some years, King David wanted to build a Temple to replace the Tabernacle. God did not allow David to do this but promised that David's son Solomon would build the Temple in more peaceful times. The place where the Temple was built was Mount Moriah.

Read:

Genesis 22: 1-14

John 3: 16

1 Chronicles 21: 9-26

2 Chronicles 3: 1

1. What does John 3: 16 teach us about what God did to save sinners?

2. Why did David insist on giving Ornan money, when Ornan would have given the threshing floor to him? (see 1 Chronicles 21: 24)

3. Why did God not allow David to build the Temple? (1 Chronicles 28: 3 and 6)

Joppa

What does the name mean?

Joppa means “beauty” or “beautiful”.

Where is it?

Joppa was a seaport on the Mediterranean Sea. It was about 60 miles (96 km) south of Mount Carmel and 30 miles (48 km) north-west of Jerusalem. The modern city of Jaffa is on the site of Joppa, just south of Tel Aviv.



Where do we read about it?

2 Chronicles 2: 16

Ezra 3: 7

Jonah 1: 3

Acts 9: 36-43; 10: 5-23.

What happened there?

We know that Joppa was a port in Old Testament days. We read of it being a convenient place to receive wood sent by sea from Lebanon, in both Solomon's and Ezra's time. It was also the port used by Jonah when he was disobedient to God's call for him to go to Nineveh.

In the New Testament, we read of the Apostle Peter spending some time in Joppa. He had been in Lydda, about ten miles away, when two men from Joppa asked him to go to the Christians there. A Christian lady named Tabitha (also called Dorcas) had just died. She had been very kind to the widows there, making clothes for them. When Peter reached Joppa, he found the widows weeping because they had lost such a friend. Peter told them to leave the room. He knelt down and prayed and then said, "Tabitha arise". She did so, to the great joy of the widows she had helped.

Just over 30 miles (48 km) north of Joppa, in the town of Caesarea, there was a centurion named Cornelius. This Roman officer believed in God and prayed to Him. He was also a generous giver to people in need.

One day Cornelius had a vision of an angel. The angel told him that God had heard his prayers and knew all about his kindness. Now he must send for Peter to come from Joppa. Cornelius sent two servants and a soldier to tell Peter what had happened and bring him to Caesarea.

It was unusual for a Jew to go to a Gentile (non-Jewish) home. But God had prepared Peter, and he set off with the men the following day. Cornelius had gathered his household together, ready to hear what Peter had to tell them. When Peter explained about the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit came to all who were listening. They became Christians and were baptized.

Read:

Acts 9: 36-43

Acts 10: 1-23

1. In what way had Tabitha shown kindness to needy people in Joppa? (Acts 9: 39)
2. How had God prepared Peter to go to a Gentile home? (Acts 10: 9-20)
3. Did Peter understand what God was teaching him? (Acts 10: 23 and 34-35)

Kadesh Barnea

What does the name mean?

The name means holy desert.

Where is it?

In the north-east of the Sinai Peninsular, about 33 miles (53.3 km) south-west of Beersheba.



Where do we read about it?

Numbers 13: 26; 20: 1; 32: 8

Deuteronomy 9: 23

Joshua 10: 41; 14: 6-7

What happened there?

When the Israelites left Egypt, they crossed the Red Sea and travelled down the west side of the Sinai Peninsular. They camped for about a year near to Mount Sinai, where God gave them the Ten Commandments and the instructions for making the tabernacle. In the second year after leaving Egypt, they travelled from Mount Sinai to Kadesh Barnea. There God commanded Moses to send twelve men to spy out the land of Canaan: one man from each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

After 40 days, the men returned to Kadesh Barnea to make their report to Moses and the people. All the spies agreed that Canaan was a good land, but ten of them made the people afraid. They described the cities as well fortified and the men as very strong. Only two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua assured the people that God would help them to take over the land He had promised them.

At this time, the Israelites showed a lack of faith in God, by refusing to enter Canaan. Because of this, God said that none of the people who were aged 20 years and over, would ever enter the land, except Joshua and Caleb. All the rest of the people would die in the wilderness. It would be their children who would make Canaan their home. Before that time there would be 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.

The Israelites were very sad when they heard what God had said. They decided they would now

go into Canaan, but Moses warned them that God would not be with them. Their attempt was not successful: the Canaanites drove them away. The long years of wilderness wanderings began.

We read about the Israelites again being in Kadesh Barnea in Numbers chapter 20. Moses' sister Miriam died and was buried there. It was also the place of Moses' act of disobedience. The people had complained about the shortage of water. God told Moses to speak to the rock and water would come from it. Instead of speaking, Moses struck the rock twice with his rod. Water was provided for the people and their animals, but God said that because he had not obeyed Him, Moses would not lead the people into Canaan.

Read:

Numbers 13: 1-3, 17-33

Numbers 14: 1-35

1. What were the spies to find out about the people and the land of Canaan? (13: 17-20)
2. What did Joshua and Caleb say to the people that was different from what the other ten spies said? (13: 27-31; 14: 6-9)
3. What was the result of the disobedience of the Israelites at this time? (14: 26-35)

Mount Carmel

What does the name mean?

Carmel means “garden land” or “fruitful land”.

Where is it?

Mount Carmel is actually a range of hills about 15 miles (24 km) long, ending at the Mediterranean Sea where it forms a headland. The modern city of Haifa is at the foot of Mount Carmel.



Where do we read about it?

1 Kings 18: 19-44

2 Kings 2: 25

2 Kings 4: 25

Amos 1: 2

Amos 9: 3

What happened there?

Only three Kings, Saul, David and Solomon, reigned over the whole land of Israel. After Solomon's time, the land was divided. The northern kingdom was known as Israel and the southern kingdom was known as Judah. None of the kings of the northern kingdom, were obedient to God's law.

God called Elijah to be a prophet in the northern kingdom, during the reign of King Ahab. Ahab had built a temple to the false god Baal, because he had married an idol-worshipper named Jezebel. Elijah had informed Ahab that there would be no rain in the land. This was the case for three and a half years, resulting in a severe famine. Towards the end of that time, God commanded Elijah to speak to Ahab again.

Elijah told Ahab to gather the people together at Mount Carmel. Hundreds of Baal's "prophets" were there. Elijah told them to build an altar and prepare a sacrifice and he would do the same. Baal's prophets must call on their god to send fire down on the sacrifice. Elijah would call on the true God. The one who answered by sending fire must be the God the people should worship.

Baal's prophets made a great fuss, calling on Baal, leaping about the altar and even cutting themselves with knives. Of course, there was no answer. Calmly, Elijah called the people to him. He not only prepared the sacrifice, but had water poured on it. Then he prayed that God would show the people that He alone is God and that Elijah was His true servant.

In answer to Elijah's prayer, fire came down on the sacrifice. The people fell to the ground saying, "The LORD (Jehovah) He is God". The false prophets were put to death. Elijah went to the top of Mount Carmel, where he bowed down and awaited the rain which he knew God would now send.

Read:

1 Kings chapter 18

1. In what way did Elijah mock the prophets of Baal? (verse 27)
2. How much time did Elijah allow the false prophets to call on their god? (verses 26-29)
3. Did the water around the altar quench the fire that fell in answer to Elijah's prayer? (verse 38)

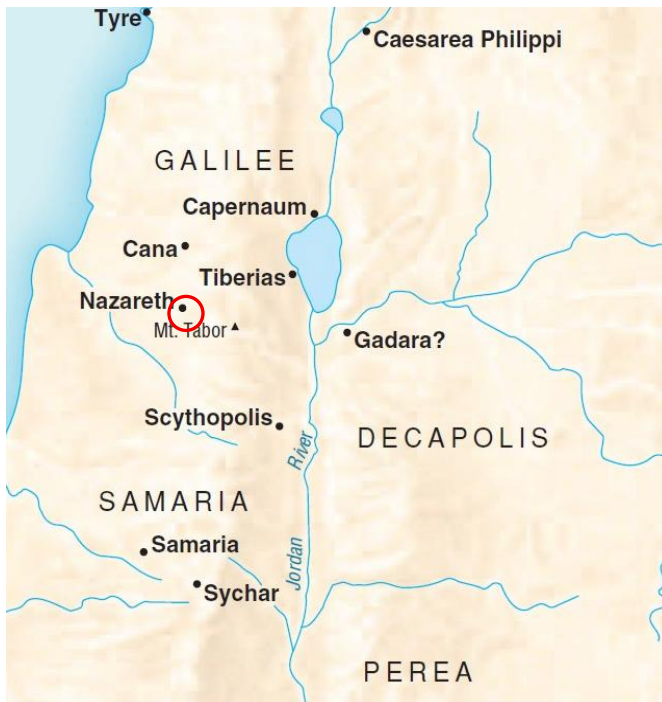
Nazareth

What does the name mean?

There are two possible meanings, “watch tower” from the Aramaic word because of Nazareth’s height above sea level, or, “shoot” (twig or branch) from a Hebrew word of that meaning.

Where is it?

About 18 miles (29 km) west of the southern end of the Sea of Galilee.



Where do we read about it?

Matthew 2: 23

Luke 1: 26-38

Luke 2: 1-5

Luke 4: 16-30

John 1: 45-46

What happened there?

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a young woman named Mary, who lived in Nazareth. The angel's message was that Mary would be the mother of the Saviour who God had promised to send into the world. Mary was puzzled by this message as she was not married. In fact she was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph. The angel explained to Mary that this would be a special birth. This Baby would not have a human father, but was the Son of God. Mary accepted that God had chosen her for this very special task of caring for the Lord Jesus from His birth and through His childhood.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Herod the king wanted to destroy Him. God warned Joseph about this and told him to take Mary and the Lord Jesus into Egypt. Joseph obeyed and they remained in Egypt until Herod died. Then God told him to return to the land of Israel. So the family went back to Nazareth where Jesus spent His boyhood.

When He was 30 years old, Jesus began to teach the people and He also performed many

miracles of healing. On the Sabbath days, He attended the synagogue, where the people met to learn from the Old Testament scriptures. In Luke chapter 4 we read about Jesus attending the synagogue at Nazareth. He read from the Book of Isaiah and then explained what He had read. He told the people that the words that Isaiah had written about 700 years before, were actually about Him. He was the promised One who would come and preach and heal.

Jesus told the people that He knew they would not believe Him because they had seen Him growing up and so thought He was just an ordinary person. They became angry and took Him from the synagogue to the top of the hill that Nazareth was built on. They would have pushed Him down the cliff, but He calmly walked away from them.

It was so well known that the Lord Jesus spent His early years in Nazareth, that we find the apostles calling Him “Jesus of Nazareth” when they spoke of Him. This is recorded several times in the Book of Acts.

Read:

Luke 1: 26 -38

Luke 4: 16-21

1. The name Jesus (Luke 1: 31) means Saviour. Why was He given that name? (Read the angel's words to Joseph in Matthew 1: 21.)

2. What would be special about the Kingship of this descendant of King David? (Luke 1: 32-33)
3. Was Nazareth thought of as a very special place? (John 1: 46)
4. Look at Luke 4: 16-21. What do the words of the Lord Jesus in verse 21 mean?

Nineveh

What does the name mean?

Nineveh was the capital of Assyria. It was possibly named after the goddess Ishtar who was also known as Nina.

Where is it?

On the east bank of the River Tigris (opposite modern Mosul in Iraq). The ancient city was destroyed in about 612 B.C.



Where do we read about it?

Genesis 10: 8-12

2 Kings 19: 36

The Book of Jonah

The Book of Nahum

Zephaniah 2: 13

Spoken of by the Lord Jesus: Matthew 12: 41
and Luke 11: 32

What happened there?

The Assyrians were idol worshippers, known for their cruelty. God told the prophet Jonah to give His message to the people of Nineveh, because of their wickedness. Jonah refused to go, and set off in the opposite direction, to Tarshish (possibly in southern Spain).

We learn the reason for Jonah's disobedience, in the last chapter of the Book of Jonah. Knowing that God forgives those who repent of sin, he did not want to give the Ninevites the opportunity to repent (Jonah 4: 2). He knew what a threat Assyria was to the nations around them, including Israel, and their cruelty to those they defeated.

Jonah did not reach Tarshish. The account of the storm that terrified the sailors and how Jonah spent three days inside a "great fish", is found in Jonah chapter 1. When God called Jonah a second time to go to Nineveh, he obeyed. The message he had for the people there was stark – "forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown".

The people of Nineveh believed Jonah's words, and both the king and the people put on sackcloth: a sign of their repentance. The king's words to his people are found in Jonah 3: 7-9. Amazingly, he told them to call upon God and to give up their evil ways. As Jonah had expected, because the people repented, God did not destroy them.

Sadly, the story of Nineveh does not end there. The prophet Nahum, probably about one hundred years after the events recorded in the Book of Jonah, predicted God's judgement on the city. The people of Nineveh had returned to their evil ways. The city was destroyed in 612 B.C.

Read:

The Book of Jonah
Matthew 12: 40-41

1. Why does Matthew 12: 40 make it absolutely certain that Jonah's experience inside the large fish, did really happen?
2. What message did Jonah give to the people of Nineveh? (Jonah 3: 4)
3. Can you find four ways the people of Nineveh were ordered by the king to show their repentance? (Jonah 3: 6-8)

Philippi

What does the name mean?

The city was named after Philip of Macedon who took the city about 300 B.C.

Where is it?

In Macedonia about 10 miles (16 km) north-west of the Port Neapolis (modern Kavala in Greece).



Where do we read about it?

Acts 16: 9-40

Acts 20: 6

Paul's letter to the Philippians

What happened there?

Paul set out on his second missionary journey with Silas and Timothy. Later they were joined by Luke. At Troas (a town on the east coast of the Aegean Sea) Paul had a vision in the night. He heard a man of Macedonia pleading, "Come over to Macedonia and help us". Believing that God was directing them, Paul and his companions sailed from Troas to Neapolis. From there they made their way to Philippi which was an important city in that area.

On the Sabbath day, Paul spoke to a group of women who met beside the river to pray. God helped one of these women named Lydia, to understand what Paul said. She became a Christian. Lydia was the first person in Europe to become a Christian as a result of these missionaries bringing the Gospel.

There was a slave girl in Philippi who made a lot of money for her masters by fortune-telling. She was able to do this because of an evil spirit. Paul commanded the spirit, in the name of the Lord Jesus, to leave her and it did. The slave girl's masters were angry because they could no longer make a lot of money from her fortune-telling. They took Paul and Silas to the magistrates and accused them of being trouble-makers. Paul and Silas were beaten and put in prison. Their feet were fastened so that they could not move.

At midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns. The other prisoners listened to them. Then

the prisoners realised that the prison was shaking, the doors opened and their chains fell off. There had been an earthquake. The jailer woke up and saw what had happened. He thought that the prisoners had escaped. Knowing that he would be severely punished he decided to kill himself. He took his sword, but Paul called out that all the prisoners were there, he must not harm himself.

The jailer hurried to Paul and Silas. He was trembling and fell down before them. He had one question for them, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul told him that he must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Then he and Silas spoke to the jailer and his family. We do not have their words, but we know they would have explained how the Lord Jesus died on the cross so that sin could be forgiven.

The jailer and his family believed the words of Paul and Silas. They became Christians and were baptized. Instead of treating Paul and Silas roughly, the jailer cleaned the wounds they had received from being badly beaten. He also provided a meal for them. Paul and Silas were set free by the magistrates. They continued on their travels, to tell others about the Lord Jesus. But in Philippi a church had begun: a group of Christians which grew, and to which Paul wrote the letter we have in our Bibles.

Read:

Acts chapter 16

Philippians 1: 1-6; 4: 4-9

1. Who was the first person in Philippi to become a Christian? (Acts 16: 14-15)
2. What was the false accusation against Paul and Silas? (Acts 16: 20-21)
3. What answer did Paul and Silas give to the jailer's question? (Acts 16: 30-31)
4. How did Paul show his continuing concern for the growing church in Philippi? (Philippians 1: 3-4)

River Jordan

What does it mean?

The word Jordan means “descender”. This would be a suitable name for this river, which descends about 3000 feet (about 923 metres) from its source in the north to the Dead Sea in the south.

Where is it?

It runs from Mount Hermon in the north, to the north end of the Dead Sea in the south, roughly parallel to the Mediterranean Sea coast of the land of Israel. It covers a distance of about 120 miles (195 km), but the actual length of the river is probably about 220 miles (350 km) because of the way it meanders.



Where do we read about it?

The river Jordan is mentioned many times in the Old Testament from Genesis to Zechariah. Also in the four Gospels in the New Testament.

Well known events are found in Joshua chapters 3-4, 2 Kings 5: 9-15, Matthew 3: 1-6, 13-17, Mark 1: 4-11, John 1: 19-34.

What happened there?

God commanded Joshua to lead the Israelites across the river Jordan, into the land of Canaan which God had promised to give them. The river was in full flood and there were at least two million people to cross to the other side.

Joshua instructed the priests to carry the ark of the covenant, the symbol of God's presence, and go ahead of the people. As soon as the priests carrying the ark put their feet into the water, the water stopped flowing towards them. The priests then stood on dry ground in the middle of the river. They stayed there until all the people had crossed over. Then God told Joshua to tell the priests to come out of the river. As soon as the priests stood on the land, the River Jordan flowed again, overflowing its banks as it had before.

God had shown His great power in this miracle. The Israelites who had seen this were helped to trust God as they entered their new land. The people of Canaan at that time were very wicked and worshipped idols. God had given them many years to change their ways, but they would not

change. When they heard what the true God had done for the Israelites, they were very afraid.

In the New Testament, we read about John the Baptist baptizing people in the River Jordan. John knew that God had given him the task of preparing people for the coming of the promised Saviour. He taught the people that they must repent: be sorry for their sins and change their ways. Many people came to John to be baptized.

One day the Lord Jesus came to John. He had no sins to repent of: He never sinned in what He said, or what He did or what He thought. But He chose to be baptized by John. As He came up from the water, the Holy Spirit came upon Him like a dove, and God spoke from heaven: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased". This happened just before the Lord Jesus began to move about the land of Israel, teaching the people, healing the sick and training His disciples.

Read:

Joshua chapter 3, and 4: 1-18

Matthew chapter 3

1. Why were twelve stones brought from where the priests had stood in the river Jordan? (Joshua 4: 2-3, 6-7)

2. Isaiah had prophesied that someone would prepare the people for the promised Saviour (Isaiah 40:3). Who was given this task? (Matthew 3: 1-3)

3. In what way do we know that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit were all present when the Lord Jesus was baptized? (Matthew 3: 16-17)

Sea of Galilee

What does the name mean?

Named from a Hebrew word meaning “harp” – roughly the shape of the sea.

Where is it?

About thirty miles (48 km) east of Mount Carmel. The river Jordan flows into it in the north and out in the south. The Sea of Galilee is also known as the Sea of Gennesaret; the Sea of Tiberias; the Sea of Chinnereth. It is about 12½ miles (20 km) long and 7½ miles (12 km) wide at the widest point. It is about 700 feet (213 metres) below sea level. There is also a district of Galilee in the north of Israel and west of the Sea of Galilee.



Where do we read about it?

Numbers 34: 11 }
Joshua 12: 3 } Called Chinnereth
Matthew chapters 4; 8; 13; 14; 16
Mark chapters 1; 4; 6; 8
Luke chapters 5 and 8
John chapter 6 and
John 21 – Called Sea of Tiberias

What happened there?

At least seven of the twelve disciples were fishermen (John 21: 2). As the Lord Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, He called two sets of brothers to follow Him: Peter and Andrew, James and John. All four left their fishing nets and went with Him. They remained with him through the 3 years of His ministry. A large part of Christ's early ministry was spent in the district of Galilee. At times He crossed the sea with His disciples to reach the towns which had grown up around it.

On one occasion, a severe storm arose suddenly. Even though they were experienced fishermen, the disciples were afraid, as the waves washed over the boat. Amid this storm, the Lord Jesus was sleeping. When His disciples wakened Him, He immediately calmed the wind and the waves. Once again Jesus displayed His power as the Son of God.

The last mention of the Sea of Galilee in the Gospels, is in John chapter 21 (called Tiberias).

The Lord Jesus had shown Himself to His disciples after His resurrection. However, seven of them decided to spend a night fishing. They did not catch anything. In the morning they saw a Man standing on the shore. He told them to cast their net on the right side of the boat. They did so, and struggled to draw the net in because it was filled with so many fish.

The disciple John realised that it was the Lord Jesus who had spoken to them. When he told Peter this, Peter plunged into the sea and hurried to the shore. The other disciples followed in the boat, dragging the heavy net.

The Lord Jesus had prepared breakfast for the weary men. After they had eaten the meal, the Lord spoke to Peter. Three times He asked Peter whether he loved Him. Three times Peter replied that he did. Did Peter think of the three times he had denied even knowing the Lord Jesus? (Luke 22: 55-62). Did he also remember another occasion when Jesus had told him to let down his net and a great number of fish were caught? (Luke 5: 4-6). If Peter had been afraid that after denying the Lord Jesus, he could no longer be a true disciple, he now heard the words he had heard before on the seashore – “Follow Me” (Matthew 4:18-19; John 21: 19).

Read:

Matthew 4: 18-22

Matthew 8: 23-27

John chapter 21

1. Which two sets of brothers were called to be disciples? (Matthew 4:18-22)
2. What do you think the words “I will make you fishers of men” mean? (Matthew 4: 19)
3. What do you think the words “feed My sheep” mean? (John 21: 17)

Shechem/Sychar

What does the name mean?

Shechem probably means “shoulder” or “saddle”.

Where is it?

Shechem was about 30 miles (48 km) north of Jerusalem, between two mountains: Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. We do not read about Shechem in the New Testament, but Sychar (John 4) must have been close to where Shechem was. Sychar was also situated between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, in the area known as Samaria.



Where do we read about it?

Shechem:

Genesis 33: 18, 37: 12-14

Joshua 20: 7, 21: 21

Judges 9

1 Kings 12: 1

1 Chronicles 6: 67

Sychar:

John chapter 4

What happened there?

When Jacob returned to the land of Israel after twenty years with his Uncle Laban in Haran, he settled for a time in Shechem. He had a great deal of trouble with the people of Shechem, and God told him to move south to Bethel (Genesis 35: 1-4).

In the time of Joshua, we learn that Shechem was one of the six Cities of Refuge. It was a place where anyone who had killed a person accidentally would be safe, until a proper trial could be held.

Solomon's son Rehoboam went to Shechem, where he expected to be made king over Israel. He was given good advice by men who had been his father's advisers. They told him that if he treated the people well, they would be loyal to him. Instead, he took the advice of some of his young friends. They told him to treat the people more harshly than his father had done. When they heard this, all ten tribes living in the north of Israel rebelled and

appointed their own king. Rehoboam reigned over the southern part of the land which was called Judah (the name of the larger southern tribe).

In the New Testament, we read about Sychar in John chapter 4. The Lord Jesus was travelling from Judea in the south of Israel, to Galilee in the north. Between the two was the area known as Samaria. Jewish people did not like travelling through Samaria and avoided having anything to do with the people who lived there. 2 Kings chapter 17 tells us about the King of Assyria removing people from this part of Israel. In their place he put people from other nations who worshipped idols.

The Lord Jesus deliberately went through Samaria and rested by the well at Sychar. When a Samaritan woman came to the well, He asked her for a drink of water. The woman was surprised that He spoke to her, but Jesus continued the conversation. He explained to her that He could give her "living water": new life. Then He showed her that He knew all about her: she had been married five times and now lived with a man who was not her husband. As the conversation continued, Jesus told this Samaritan woman that He was the Messiah: The One who God had promised to send into the world.

When the woman told the men of the city that she had met Someone who knew all about her life, they came to see Him. At their request the Lord Jesus stayed for two days in Sychar. As they

listened to the Lord Jesus many people there believed that He was the promised Saviour.

Read:

Joshua chapter 20

John 4: 1-42

1. Why were six cities, including Shechem, known as “cities of refuge”? (Joshua 20: 3 and 9)
2. What was the first thing that made people from Sychar believe in the Lord Jesus? (John 4: 39)
3. What caused many more Samaritans to believe? (John 4: 40-42)

Shiloh

What does the name mean?

Place of peace, or, to be at ease. There is one reference to Shiloh as a Person (Genesis 49: 10) where it means ‘the peace giver’ referring to the coming of the promised Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Where is it?

20 miles (32 km) north of Jerusalem.



Where do we read about it?

Joshua chapter 18

Joshua 22: 9

Judges 18: 31

1 Samuel chapters 1-4

Jeremiah 7: 12-14

Jeremiah 26: 6-9

What happened there?

We first read about Shiloh in Joshua chapter 18. The Israelites were taking over the land of Canaan. They set up the tabernacle there and it remained at Shiloh right through the time of the Judges. It was also at Shiloh that Joshua continued the dividing of the land between the tribes of Israel.

In 1 Samuel chapter 1 we read about Elkanah taking his family to Shiloh once a year, to worship and offer sacrifices. On one of these visits, Elkanah's wife, Hannah prayed for a son, promising that if God gave her a son, she would give him to God.

Samuel was the answer to Hannah's prayer. As soon as he was old enough to leave his mother, Samuel was taken to Shiloh and remained there to assist Eli, the aged priest. In 1 Samuel chapter 3, we read of how God spoke to Samuel while he was still young. When he was old enough Samuel became the leader who brought God's messages to the people. Samuel was the last of Israel's 'Judges' and also a prophet.

At a time when Israel was defeated in battle by the Philistines, the people called for the ark of God to be brought from the tabernacle at Shiloh. The ark was a wooden box covered with gold, that contained the two stones on which God had written

the Ten Commandments. It was the symbol of God's presence among His people. It was not to be used in a superstitious way, as if it guaranteed victory whether the people were obeying God or not. Eli's sons, who were priests at that time, were wicked men. The continued battle with the Philistines was a complete disaster for Israel. They were defeated, thirty thousand foot soldiers were killed, the ark was captured and Eli's two sons died.

Eli the aged priest, was very troubled and anxious about the ark of God. He sat by the roadside at Shiloh waiting for news. A messenger told him that Israel had been defeated, his two sons were dead, and the ark had been captured. Eli, who was ninety-eight years old, fell from his seat and died.

The ark of God did return to Israel, but not to Shiloh. In fact Shiloh was destroyed, probably about 1050 B.C. The Bible does not record exactly what happened, but it is referred to by the prophet Jeremiah. God spoke to Jeremiah about what He had done to His house at Shiloh "because of the wickedness of my people, Israel".

Read:

1 Samuel 1: 11, 24-28

1 Samuel 4: 1-18

1. What was Hannah's prayer and promise?
(Chapter 1 verse 11)

2. How was her promise fulfilled? (Chapter 1 verses 24-28, Chapter 2 verse 11)

3. What three pieces of news were given to Eli the priest, after the battle with the Philistines? (Chapter 4 verse 17)

Sinai

What does the name mean?

May be named after the moon-god 'Sin'. The translation from the Hebrew is 'a bush' or burning bush'.

Where is it?

Sinai is in a triangular peninsular between the Gulf of Suez on the west and the Gulf of Akabah on the east. The northern part of the peninsular includes three areas known as wildernesses: Shur, Zin and Paran.

The southern part of the peninsular is the wilderness of Sinai and includes the mountainous area where Mount Sinai (also known as Horeb) is located. (Mount Sinai is thought to be the modern Jebel Musa, although other mountains in the area have also been claimed to be the Biblical Mount Sinai.)



Where do we read about it?

Exodus 3: 1-17; chapters 19 to 40 and Numbers chapters 1 to 10.

1 Kings 19: 1-18

What happened there?

While the Israelites were enslaved by the Egyptians, Moses was brought up by a daughter of Pharaoh. Moses killed an Egyptian who was ill-treating one of the Israelites. He then fled from Egypt and settled in the land of Midian. He married and had two sons.

One day, as he looked after his father-in-law's flock, Moses came to Mount Sinai. It was there that God spoke to him from a burning bush. God assured Moses that He knew all about the suffering of the Israelites. Moses must return to Egypt and speak to Pharaoh. Then Moses would lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

Moses gave reasons why he could not do this: the Israelites would not believe that God had sent him; he was not good at speaking. But at last he knew that he must obey God. God promised that Moses would bring the people to the very mountain where God had spoken to him: Mount Sinai.

God's promise to Moses was fulfilled and Moses did lead the Israelites out of Egypt to Mount Sinai. It was there that God gave the Ten Commandments to the people, first of all by speaking in their hearing. Later God Himself wrote the words of the Ten Commandments on two pieces of stone. These

commandments are God's rules for life for all people. The first four tell us our duty to God and the remaining six tell us our duty to others.

God called Moses to come up into the mountain and there He gave him instructions for making the Tabernacle. This was to be a special tent where God promised to meet with His people. While they were living in tents in the wilderness, the Tabernacle would be carried with them. There were six pieces of "furniture" to be made. The most important was the Ark of the Covenant, a wooden box covered with gold. The ark contained the two pieces of stone on which God had written the Ten Commandments. The ark was the symbol of God's presence among His people and the place where He spoke to Moses once the tabernacle had been made.

While Moses remained in Mount Sinai, a terrible thing was happening among the people. Moses' brother Aaron was left "in charge" while Moses was absent. The people came to Aaron and demanded a god that they could see. Aaron listened to them and from their golden earrings he made a golden calf: an idol. The people had promised to obey God's commands. The second commandment says that we must not make idols or bow down to them (Exodus 20: 4-6).

As Moses came down from the mountain, he broke the stones on which the Ten Commandments were written: he knew that the Israelites had already broken God's law. (In Exodus chapter 34,

we read that God again wrote the Ten Commandments on two pieces of stone.) Moses also destroyed the golden calf. Many people died because of their sin, but Moses prayed that God would forgive His people.

While the Israelites stayed in the wilderness of Sinai, the tabernacle and its furniture were made exactly as God gave instructions. Aaron became the High Priest and his sons became priests. Through the commandments, God was teaching His people how they should live when they came into their own land. Through the tabernacle, they learned that God is holy and could only be approached in the way He taught them. At the tabernacle, sacrifices were offered: animals who died in place of people who were sinful. This was to teach the people that God would send a Saviour who would die to take sin's punishment for everyone who trusts in Him.

Read:

Exodus 3: 1-10

Exodus 19: 16-18

Exodus 20: 1-17

Exodus 25: 1-9

1. What did God know about the Israelites in Egypt? (Chapter 3: 7)

2. What was the scene at Mount Sinai as God prepared to give His Ten Commandments? (Chapter 19: 16–18)

3. Find the verse in Exodus 25: 1–9, that tells us why God instructed Moses to make the Tabernacle.

4. Which prophet travelled to Mount Sinai about 6 centuries after the Israelites had camped there? (Read: 1 Kings 19: 1–8)

Susa: Shushan the citadel

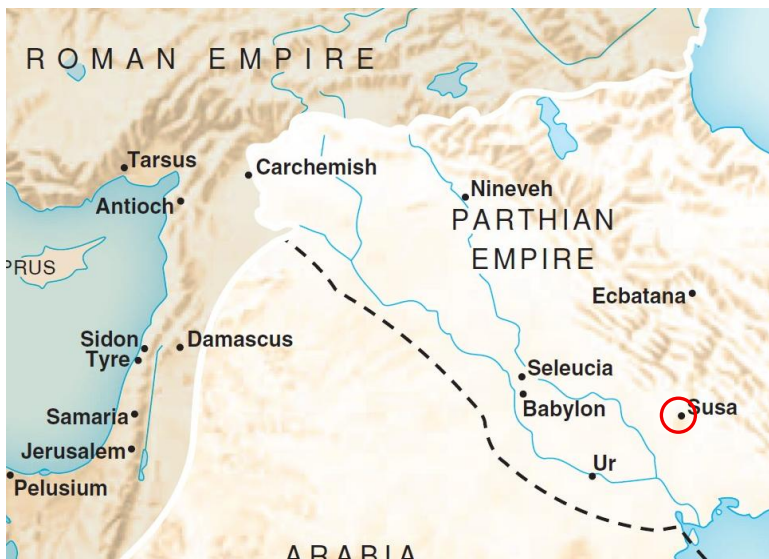
What does the name mean?

Susa was the Persian name for this very important city. It means “lily”. Shushan was the Greek form of the name which is used in the Bible. The Persian rulers had their palace there: a citadel was a fortified palace.

Where is it?

On the Coaspes River, about 150 miles (240 km) north of the Persian Gulf.

The modern Iranian town of Shush is on the site of ancient Susa.



Where do we read about it?

Nehemiah 1: 1

The book of Esther

Daniel 8: 2

What happened there?

Many people from Judah (the southern part of Israel) were taken captive to Babylon. This happened in 586 B.C. In the year 538 B.C., the Babylonian empire fell and the Persian empire under King Cyrus, became the ruling power. After this, we read about some of the Jewish people being in Susa, where the Persian rulers had their fortified palace.

Nehemiah was cupbearer to king Artaxerxes in Susa. He would have been responsible for making sure that the King's wine had not had anything (such as poison) added to it. It was while he was in Susa that Nehemiah heard the news about the poor state of the city of Jerusalem. The walls of the city had been broken down and the gates burned. After praying about this, he was able to speak to the king, and his request to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls, was granted.

In the book of Esther we read about another Persian king in Susa. This was Ahasuerus. He became angry with Queen Vashti and removed her from being Queen. Many beautiful young women were sent for. King Ahasuerus chose Esther, the Jewess, to be his queen in place of Vashti.

Esther's parents had died and she had been brought up by her cousin Mordecai. Mordecai refused to bow down to a man named Haman who was a favourite of the king. Haman was angry, but instead of punishing Mordecai, he plotted to destroy the Jewish people throughout the empire. Mordecai understood that Esther was in a position where she could help her people. He persuaded her that she must go to the King to plead for the Jews. This was a dangerous thing for Esther to do. Anyone (even a Queen) could lose their life if they approached the King without being sent for.

The King did receive Esther, but she did not rush to make her request. Instead, she invited the King and Haman to come to "a banquet of wine". On the second day of her banquet, Esther pleaded for the Jewish people to be saved. When the King understood how Haman had deceived him and plotted against the Jews, he was very angry. Haman was put to death and the Jews were saved. Mordecai was given the important place in the land, that had been Haman's.

The name of God does not appear in the Book of Esther, but we can clearly see God's protection of His people. God had promised that the Saviour would be born into the nation of Israel. God always does what He has promised and He would not allow that nation to be destroyed.

Read:

Nehemiah 1- 2:6

The book of Esther

1. When did Nehemiah pray for a long time and when did he pray a short silent prayer? (Nehemiah 1: 3-4; 2: 4-5)
2. What was Haman's reaction when Mordecai refused to bow down? (Esther 3: 5-6)
3. What did Haman accuse the Jews of when he spoke to the king about them? (Esther 3: 8)
4. What did the King find out that Mordecai had done for him? (Esther 6: 1-3)

Valley of Achor

What does the name mean?

Achor means “trouble” or “causing trouble”. It was named because of the trouble caused by Achan (Joshua 7).

Where is it?

The exact location is uncertain, although it must have been near to Jericho or Ai.



Where do we read about it?

Joshua 7

Isaiah 65: 10

Hosea 2: 15

What happened there?

After 40 years in the wilderness, with Joshua as their leader, the Israelites entered the land of Canaan. They gained a victory over the fortified city of Jericho, due to their obedience to God's instructions. They next attacked the city of Ai and were defeated.

Joshua was very distressed. Why had they failed? What would the Canaanites think of Israel's God, when Israel was overcome by its enemies? God informed Joshua that Israel had sinned. Someone had taken goods from Jericho which God had forbidden. Joshua must deal with this, or God would no longer be with them.

The next day Joshua did as God commanded him. God first made it clear which tribe was involved in the disobedience. Then which family within that tribe and finally, which individual.

A man named Achan from the tribe of Judah was the person who had disobeyed God. Achan confessed that he had taken gold, and silver and a beautiful garment. He had hidden them under the earth in his tent. Joshua sent messengers who found the objects just as Achan had said. Achan was put to death because his sin was very serious.

God continuing to be with his people depended on their obedience. One man's disobedience had brought defeat. Once that sin had been dealt with, God gave the Israelites victory at Ai.

We read in Hosea 2:15 about the Valley of Achor becoming a door of hope. There is a place where the "trouble" our sin has brought can be seen. That place is Calvary, where the Son of God was crucified. God is holy: perfectly pure and good. He hates our sin, which is rebellion against His good commands. Because God is holy and just, He cannot 'turn a blind eye' to sin, but must punish it (Genesis 2: 17 and Romans 6: 23). God is very merciful and has provided a way for sin to be forgiven. So serious is our position that God sent His beloved Son to take sin's punishment for everyone who trusts in Him. The Lord Jesus willingly came and died on Calvary's cross, so that sinful people could be forgiven (John 3: 16). The resurrection assures us that God accepted the sacrifice of His beloved Son. Calvary, that place of trouble, is the place of victory over sin and death.

Read:

Joshua 6: 17-19

Joshua 7

Hosea 2: 15

1. What warning had been given to the Israelites before they took the City of Jericho? (Joshua 6: 17-19)
2. What had Achan taken? (Joshua 7: 21)
3. Can you find the word in Joshua 7: 21 that tells us how Achan's sin began?

Valley of Elah

What does the name mean?

Elah means Oak or Terebinth tree. Some terebinth trees still grow in the area, but it does not seem that the valley was ever thickly covered by trees.

Where is it?

The valley runs north-west through the western hills of Judah to the Philistine plain (now the Gaza strip). It is about 15 miles (24 km) West of Bethlehem, and 20 miles (32 km) East of the Mediterranean Sea.



Where do we read about it?

1 Samuel chapter 17

1 Samuel 21: 9

What happened there?

Saul was the first king of Israel, at a time when the Philistines were still the enemies of Israel, as they had been at the time of the Judges. 1 Samuel chapter 17 tells us of a particular occasion when the two armies faced each other across the valley of Elah.

The Philistines had a champion, the giant Goliath, who was about three metres tall. For forty days, each morning, Goliath called for a man to come and fight him. The Israelite army was afraid: no-one was prepared to take up the challenge.

David was the youngest son of Jesse who lived in Bethlehem. David's three oldest brothers were soldiers in King Saul's army. Jesse sent David with food for his brothers and for the other men. David heard the words of Goliath and was willing to fight him. He believed that God would enable him to do this because the giant was defying the people of God.

David took his shepherd's staff and sling, and chose five small stones from the brook. Goliath spoke angrily as this young, inexperienced man approached him. But David was skilled in using a sling. He had used it many times when wild animals attacked his father's sheep. One stone from David's

sling hit the Philistine on his forehead and brought him down.

The death of their champion caused the Philistines to flee. The Israelites pursued them and there was a great victory.

Read: 1 Samuel chapter 17

1. When did David learn to trust God? (verses 33-37)
2. What did Saul think that David would need? (verses 38-39)
3. Why did David think that victory over Goliath was important? (verses 45-46, notice the end of verse 46)

Empires of Bible Times



The Babylonian Empire

You may have heard of the “Hanging Gardens of Babylon”, one of the seven wonders of the world. They are thought to have been made about 600 B.C. in the time of King Nebuchadnezzar, but the story of Babylon goes back many years before that.

The origin of the old Babylonian Empire was more than two thousand years before the birth of Christ. The city of Babel is generally believed to have been the beginning of the city of Babylon and the centre of the Babylonian Empire.

From about 1200 B.C. until Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C., Assyria was the dominant power. After this, under Nabopolassar, the new Babylonian Empire emerged. Under Nabopolassar's son Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon reached its greatest power. The empire extended from the Persian Gulf, north to Syria, and west to the Mediterranean Sea, including the land of Israel. We read about the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 2 Chronicles chapter 36. This was in 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar had no strong ruler to succeed him after his death, and so Babylon did not continue long as the leading power. We read the story of the fall of Babylon in Daniel chapter 5.

Nabonidus, who was king after Nebuchadnezzar, had left his son Belshazzar in charge of the kingdom. He held a great feast and drank wine to the false gods of Babylon, using the beautiful golden vessels from the temple at Jerusalem. Terrified, Belshazzar saw the fingers of a man's hand writing on the wall. Belshazzar trembled and sent for his wise men, but no-one could understand the meaning of the words.

At last, Daniel was sent for. God helped him to understand the writing, and he told Belshazzar the meaning of the writing on the wall (Daniel 5: 25-28). That very night, Belshazzar was killed and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom. The Medes were a people who lived in the north part of the land we know as Iran. This area became part of the Persian Empire under the rule of King Cyrus.

The Persian Empire

Cyrus was the ruler who united the Persians, and then conquered the Medes and the Lydians. In 539 B.C. he entered Babylon, making it a part of the Persian Empire. This meant that he ruled over the lands from the River Euphrates to the Mediterranean Sea, including the land of Israel.

Jewish people who had been removed from their land and taken to Babylon in 586 B.C. were still living there. In about 536 B.C., Cyrus told them that those who were willing to go back to Israel and rebuild the temple there, could do so. A man named Zerubbabel led about fifty thousand Jewish people back to their own land (Ezra chapters 1 & 2). Some time later (about 458 B.C.), Ezra the priest led a second group of returning exiles to Jerusalem.

The Persian Empire conquered Egypt and tried to conquer Greece but was unsuccessful. Persia was eventually conquered by the Greeks under the King known as Alexander the Great (332 B.C.).

The Greek Empire

Alexander was the son of Philip of Macedon. Philip had planned a war against Persia, but was not able to carry out his ambition. Alexander first of all put down local rebellions and then defeated the Persian army. His conquests continued through Syria, and south along the Mediterranean coast to Egypt. He took Babylon and important cities of Persia, even reaching to part of India. Alexander died in 323 B.C. at the age of thirty-three. He had

spent eleven years on his conquests. Alexander's only son was killed and the Empire was divided among the men who had been Alexander's generals.

At first (about 321-198 B.C.) the Jewish people did quite well under the rulers who succeeded Alexander (the Ptolemies). It was at this time that the Old Testament was translated into Greek. This translation was known as the Septuagint. Now people who were not Jewish were able to read the Old Testament.

From 198 - 166 B.C. the Jews came under the rule of Syria. Brave Jewish people fought against those who misused the temple. They achieved some victories and restored the temple to its proper use. However, their troubles were not over and the city of Jerusalem was besieged several times. Gradually Syrian power was defeated by Rome. Jerusalem came under Roman control in 63 B.C.

The Roman Empire

The origins of the Roman Empire go back to the 8th century B.C. People called the Etruscans united some small communities in Italy, forming the city of Rome about 753 B.C. Gradually the Romans gained control of the whole of Italy. Various battles followed as Rome established its power eastward, taking over territory won for Greece by Alexander the Great. Egypt, Libya, Syria and the land of Israel came under Roman control.

The empire also expanded through Europe as far north as Britain. It was around the year 100 A.D. that the Roman Empire was at its greatest extent as far as territory was concerned.

The Roman Empire in the west fell in 476 A.D. In the east it continued, as the Byzantine Empire, until Constantinople fell in 1453 A.D.

Rome was the great power in New Testament days. Rome ruled through local kings and governors. It was the Roman Emperor who ordered the census to be carried out that we read about in Luke chapter 2. This caused Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem, so fulfilling Micah's prophecy (Micah 5: 2). It was to the king in Jerusalem that the wise men travelled, when seeking the King who had been born.

When the Lord Jesus was put on trial, both King Herod and the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate were involved. It was Pilate who handed Jesus over to be crucified, even though he had said he found no fault in Him (Luke 23: 4).

Christians in the early church faced persecution from the Roman powers. However, the ability to travel within the large area covered by the empire, aided the spread of Christianity. The book of Acts gives details of the journeys of the Apostle Paul through Asia (Acts chapters 13-15) and into Europe (Acts chapters 16-20).

For further information on Paul's Missionary Journeys go to -

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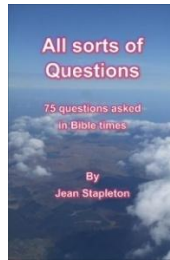
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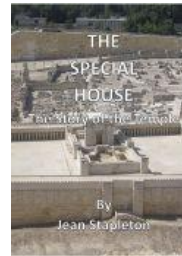
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