The Geography of Palestine

A Photographic Tour

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Physical Features of Palestine

- Major Regions
  - Going from West to East
- Some Smaller Geographic Features
  - Going from North to South
- The Major Bodies of Water
  - Seas, lakes, rivers
Major Regions West to East

- Coastal Plain - 1
- Shephelah - 2
- Hill Country - 3
- Rift Valley - 4
- Trans-Jordan Plateau - 5
Coastal Plain

- Low, flat
- Fertile where not too salty or sandy
- Easily invaded
  - Terrain pretty smooth
  - Open to South
  - Reached from North thru passes
Coastal Plain
Coastal Plain
Shephelah "Lowlands"

- Somewhat higher than coastal plain
- Lower than Hill Country
- Rolling terrain
- Travel typically along valleys
- Relatively easy to invade
Shephelah "Lowlands"

Beth Shemesh
Shephelah "Lowlands"

Shephelah from Azekah
Hill Country

- Sharp hills, V-shaped valleys
- Resembles West Virginia
- Travel along ridges
- Difficult to invade
- Agriculture uses terraces
- Rainfall good W of ridge, poor to E of ridge
Hill Country

Kefar Ezyon
Rift Valley

- A geologic fault (Graben)
- Extends S into Africa, N into Syria
- Wide U-shaped valley
- Jordan R has its own valley in middle
- Climate hot & dry
- To grow crops, must use irrigation
Rift Valley

Rift Valley from Belvoir
Rift Valley

In Rift Valley
North of Jericho
Trans-Jordan Plateau

- A flat tableland
- Higher than Hill Country
- Relatively well-watered at Western edge
- Quickly becomes desert as one moves Eastward
Trans-Jordan Plateau

Fertile soil on T-J Plateau
Trans-Jordan Plateau

On T-J Plateau
Looking SW
Into Rift Valley
Smaller Geographical Features

- Mount Hermon - A
- Galilee & Mt. Tabor - B
- Jezreel Valley - C
- Mount Carmel - D
- Wilderness of Judea - E
- The Negev - F
Mount Hermon

- Highest peak in Palestine area
- Elevation over 9,000 ft
- Southernmost peak of the Anti-Lebanon range
- Peak is generally snow-covered all year
Galilee & Mount Tabor

- Hilly region, N extension of Hill Country
- Best-watered area in Palestine, similar to Eastern United States
- N is higher, S lower
- Reasonably cool except around Sea of Galilee
- Mt Tabor (1900 ft) is an isolated peak
Galilee & Horns of Hattin from Mt Arbel
Jezreel Valley

- An E-W valley connecting coast with Jordan valley
- Separates Samaria from Galilee
- Easiest passage from Rift Valley to coast
- An important trade route
Jezreel Valley

Jezreel Valley from Megiddo Pass
Mount Carmel

- Long ridge on S side of Jezreel Valley
- Maximum height about 1800 feet
- Barrier to N-S travel
- Trade routes go thru passes
- City of Megiddo controls one pass
Wilderness of Judea

- A badlands region E of Jerusalem
- Virtually uninhabited, due to poor rainfall & soil
- Used for grazing sheep in winter (wetter) season
- Site of Jesus' temptations
Wilderness of Judea

Bedouin tent & sheep
The Negev

- Arid region South of Hebron
- Flat or rolling terrain
- Soil is good for agriculture
- Very little rainfall due to latitude effect
- Agriculture possible using tricks to concentrate water
The Negev

Camel & Tent
Major Bodies of Water

- Mediterranean Sea – 1
- Sea of Galilee – 2
- Jordan River – 3
- Dead Sea – 4
Mediterranean Sea

- Large body of salt water (1700 x 500 mi)
- Connects to Atlantic at Gibraltar
- Major transportation route
- Palestine has few ports, so Jews typically middle-men rather than sailors
Mediterranean Sea

Near Ashkelon
Sea of Galilee

- A fresh-water lake (about 7 x 13 miles)
- Surface is 600 ft below sea level!
- Source & outlet both called Jordan River
- Important for fishing
- Peculiar topography allows violent storms
Sea of Galilee

Sea of Galilee from Horns of Hattin
Jordan River

- Begins in N on lower slopes of Mt Hermon
- Descends thru Sea of Galilee to end in Dead Sea
- Drops about 2300 ft in 100 mi (with river winding perhaps 250 mi)
Jordan River

Jordan from Belvoir
Dead Sea

- Surface is lowest point on earth, 1296 ft below sea level
- Water is extremely salty, so fish cannot live in it
- Objects float unusually well
- Mined in antiquity and today for minerals
Dead Sea

Dead Sea near En-Gedi
Political Features of Palestine

- Political divisions at time of Jesus' ministry
- Cities of Palestine at same time
- Major roads
- The Herodian fortifications
Political Divisions

Boundaries are red lines

- Judea – A
- Galilee – B
- Perea – C
- Tetrarchy of Philip – D
- The Decapolis – E
Judea

- Also included Samaria & Idumea
- Population mostly Jews
  - Gentiles in Samaria & Idumea
- Rulers:
  - Herod the Great
  - Archelaus
  - Roman governors
  - Herod Agrippa 1
  - Roman governors
Galilee

- Area W of Sea of Galilee
- Territory of N tribes till captivity
- Territory of Gentiles till Maccabees took it back
- Rulers:
  - Herod the Great
  - Herod Antipas
  - Roman governors
  - Herod Agrippa 1
  - Roman governors
Perea

- Narrow strip E of the Jordan
- Inhabited mainly by Jews after Maccabean conquests
- Same rulers as Galilee
Tetrarchy of Philip

- Region NE of Sea of Galilee
- Multi-ethnic, mostly Gentile
- Part of Herod the Great's territory, went to Philip
- Rulers:
  - Herod the Great
  - Philip the Tetrarch
  - Roman governors
  - Herod Agrippa 1
  - Roman governors
The Decapolis

- League of Hellenistic cities (w/ territories)
- Mostly Gentile
- Under Maccabees during their power
- After Romans came, made independent of Jewish control
Cities of Palestine

- Jerusalem – 1
- Caesarea – 2
- Sebaste – 3
- Tiberias – 4
- Caesarea Philippi – 5
Major Roads

- Via Maris
  - Latin for "Way of the Sea"
  - Coastal road from Egypt to Antioch & Damascus

- King’s Highway
  - On T-J Plateau
  - Gulf of Aqabah to Damascus

- Ridge Route
  - Thru Hill Country
  - Connects Jerusalem with Galilee
Herodian Fortifications

- Macherus – A
  - E of Dead Sea
  - John the Baptist killed here, acc to Josephus

- Masada – B
  - W of Dead Sea
  - Last stand of Zealots

- Herodium – C
  - Near Bethlehem
  - Herod buried here?
Masada
Herodium
Knowing geography helps in understanding the narratives of the OT, the Gospels & Acts.