

Teaching Bible

in the

Third Dimension

How Geography Illuminates the Scriptures

It was April and about 73 degrees in Palestine. Walking along the narrow, dusty road, Jesus was surrounded by a troop of homeless-looking men. The small band was trailed by a noisy mixed crowd of gawkers and disciples. The final rains of the season had passed. Everywhere wheat and barley were ripening for harvest. The fields were no longer brilliant green, but had already begun to turn brown. In another month, they would be completely dried by the hot easterly khamisin wind, which sometimes blew to 50 mph.

Jesus wouldn't spend another summer in Palestine with His disciples or feel the temperature rise above 100 degrees in Jericho. He wouldn't enjoy the cooler temperatures of Jerusalem. On the way to His destiny at Calvary,

We must make the flat, gray, two-dimensional Bible text come alive.

He would leave Jericho, with its lush aromatic subtropical produce that grew in the irrigation from "Elisha's Well," a 1,000 gallon-per-second gusher.

On His way to be crucified Jesus would climb almost 3,500 feet in the 15 short miles between Jericho and Jerusalem. Fortunately, the temperature would cool by 15 degrees as He approached the capital city. He had to pass through the wasteland of the

Judean wilderness filled with bandits and robbers where three years before He had rejected Satan's offer of an easy path. Only then could Jesus enter the city named "Possession of Peace" where He would receive His "possession of death."

We find this Bible story in Luke 17:11-19:28 (also Matthew 19:1-21:1 and Mark 10:1-11:1). It describes Jesus' exit from Galilee, proceeding through Jericho (meeting Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus), and entering Jerusalem triumphantly, about one week before His crucifixion. This story and others provide a wealth of spiritual truth.

However, such stories provide only a bare description of what we might feel, see, smell, and hear if we could have been there. In this sense, the Bible stories are two-dimensional. They give length and breadth, but no

depth—no perspective. We need that third dimension.

Fortunately Jesus' story didn't end with His death in Jerusalem. As we all know, He rose from the dead. And *that* is the reason we teach the Scriptures. *That* is why we must make the flat, gray, two-dimensional Bible text come alive.

But how? Optimally, we would have lived there during Bible times! The next best thing would be to visit Palestine ourselves: to feel the heat, smell the aromas, hear the sounds, meet the people. But few of us get such an opportunity. For the most part, home-bound, overworked teachers in multi-grade schools with zero budgets must find for themselves a realistic way to teach Bible in the third dimension.

First we must reorient our thinking about the size of biblical Israel. It simply wasn't very big. Did you know that it was about the size of Vermont or Maryland? That north to south it was about 150 miles, and east-west varied between 25 and 75 miles? But there were no cars then, and most people had to walk.

If Jesus walked from the Sea of Galilee to Jericho, do you know how far He walked? About 65 miles (unless He followed every meander of the Jordan, then about 200 miles!) How long would it take? About four or five days, depending on how fast He walked.

Second, we must rethink the meaning of "town" as it is used in the Bible. At that time towns were much smaller (2 to 300 acres), far more densely populated (160 to 200 persons per acre), and therefore much more compact than modern towns.

"Streets" were mere paths between buildings, often only two or three per-

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sons wide. Fortunate passersby could avoid stepping into the polluted rivulet in the middle of the town street, but they could not avoid its assault on their senses.

Those towns were much different from towns today. For example, the Canaanite king who attacked the Israelites during their attempted entry into the Promised Land (Numbers 21:1, 33:40) presided over Arad, a town, when excavated, that was found to be 22-25 acres in size. By comparison, a modern freeway cloverleaf covers about 40 acres! Dan, of "from Dan to Beersheba" fame, was about 5 acres; Beersheba, only 2.5 acres. When Solomon was king, Jericho occupied about 5 acres, and Jerusalem had grown from the 11-acre Davidic city to a metropolis of about 45 acres (excluding the Temple Mount, an additional 35 acres).

By New Testament times cities had grown. Jericho was now located a mile south of the Old Testament city. It had become extremely rich since Herod the Great had built his Winter Palace there. Jericho also encompassed hundreds of acres of spring-fed farmland. Jesus entered this wealthy, sophisticated, cultural, and agricultural center on the way to His death. (Knowing this gives us a new appreciation for the callousness of those who

would "hush-up" blind Bartimaeus, as well as new insight into the position of a tax collector in Jericho...such as Zacchaeus!)

By the time of Jesus' birth Jerusalem had grown to 140 acres, and during Paul's ministry it covered about 310 acres.

It is clear from these few examples that we must do a lot of rethinking about Biblical geography, for "geography" involves weather and climate, topography and topology; political, ethnic, and religious boundaries; demographic statistics; trade and industry interfaces; transportation and communication linkages, geology and land forms; and more. Geography is the study of the earth's surface and its inhabitants. Understanding biblical geography dramatically influences our ability to understand the Bible stories.

Population

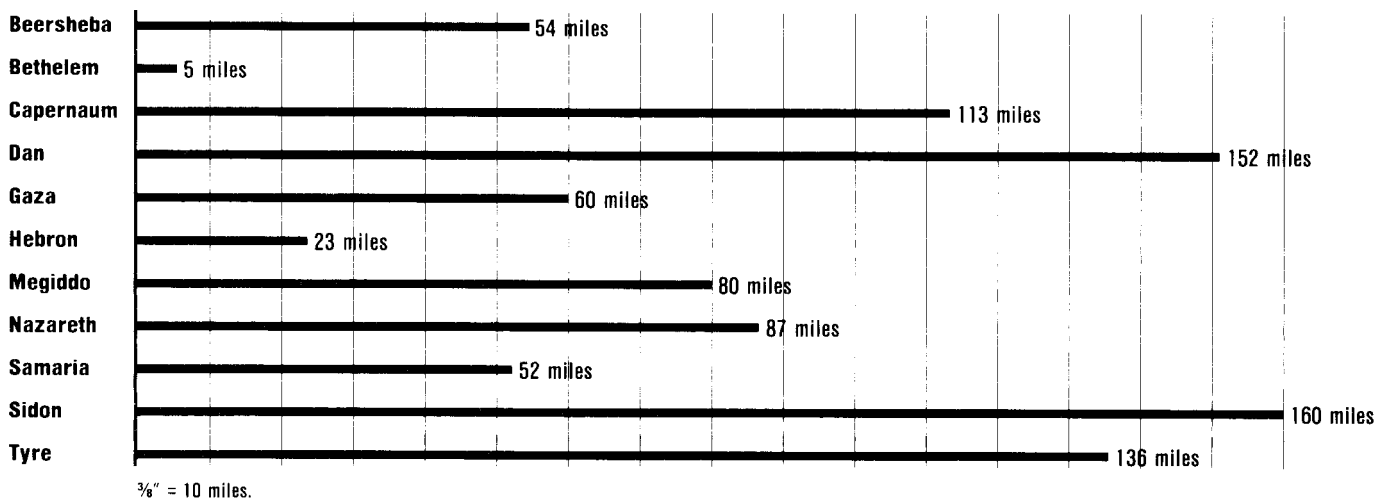
Some authorities estimate that there were about 300,000 people in the whole land of Palestine during the time of Abraham and Joseph. By the time of Joshua there were only about 100,000. Population was higher at the time of the early Christian church—about 350,000. However, modern Israel has about 4.1 million people.

As we study Bible with our students we need to ask, What does the population fluctuation mean for the patriarchal stories? The account of the Exodus? Paul's journeys?

Transportation

How fast could people travel in Bible times? If we deduct their 40 years of wilderness wandering, it still took the Israelites more than two

Distance from Jerusalem (in miles):



years to come to the Promised Land from Egypt by a winding route. How long would it take if one hurried along the shortest route? Menkheperu Thutmose (III), perhaps the Pharaoh of the Exodus, moved his whole army from Sile near the "land of Goshen" to Gaza northwest of Beersheba (about 150 miles) in 10 days. How does knowing this affect our understanding of the movements of General Joshua during the Settlement, or of David with his band of mercenaries during his flights from Saul?

Geology

The Israelites crossed the Jordan on dry ground (Joshua 3:16). Has such a thing ever happened since? For 16 hours, on December 8, 1266, and again for 21 hours on July 11, 1927, earthquakes collapsed rotten chalk-stone cliffs along the banks of the Jordan

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near Adam (about 17 miles north of the Dead Sea). This caused the Jordan's flow to cease! Does knowing this rob God of His omnipotence? On the contrary, it suggests that He controls even rockfalls and might choose to use them for His purposes!

These are not merely trivial facts. They are the stuff that enlivens flat,

printed pages and not only provides flesh for dried bones, but also inspires students with the thrill of learning.

Approaching the Bible stories from the third dimension is well worth the energy it takes to do the research. To help you get started, a list of sources along with several charts and diagrams have been provided.

Look around your community for people who have visited Bible lands: geographers, educators, ministers, missionaries, museum staff. Invite them to talk to your class and to show their slides. Free material and helpful personnel may be only a letter (or phone call) away.

Be creative. Apply some of the materials you would normally use for "secular" geography to biblical geography: sandpaper landforms or copy/trace maps. Get out your state or provincial map and compare it with

the Bible lands. Your students will really get a good idea of its size if you can point out equivalent distances between towns in their own local area. Hold up the maps and show them the comparison. Have your students re-write a Bible story inserting accurate geographic background material. Bible stories don't have to be boring, flat, or lusterless. You can restore that spark by teaching Bible stories in the third dimension! □

REFERENCE MATERIALS FOR THE CLASSROOM

Aharoni, Yohanan. *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*. 1979. Westminster Press, P.O. Box 718, Philadelphia, PA 19105. 1-800-523-1631. (ISBN 0-664-24266-9, pbk). 481 pages. \$15.95. A helpful introductory text for Old Testament geographical history for college and graduate students. Written from an Israeli perspective.

Bahat, Dan. *Historical Atlas of Jerusalem*. 1983. Arbit Books, 8050 N. Pt. Washington Rd., Milwaukee, WI 53217. 1-800-558-6908. (ISBN 0-9330038-05-3). 47 pages. \$23.95. An introduction to the religious sites in Jerusalem from the time of David to the present. Excellent line drawings of the city during 10 historical periods. Very useful for upper secondary students and above.

Biblical Archaeology Review. \$24 for one year (6 issues); The Biblical Archaeology

Society, P.O. Box 10757, Des Moines, IA 50340. 1-800-678-5555. Popular magazine covering a variety of biblical subjects. Fine graphics. Up-to-date. Israeli perspective. Enjoyable for 7th grade and above.

Eerdman's Atlas of the Bible with A-Z Guide to Places. 1983. Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 255 Jefferson Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503. 1-616-459-4591. (ISBN 0-8028-0348-2, pbk). 68 pages. \$9.95. Relief maps and diagrams of cultural/political movements. Timelines, photographs, and hundreds of entries of biblical locations. Useful for advanced 8th-12th grades.

Jenkins, Simon. *Bible Mapbook*. 1985. Lion Publishing Corp., 10885 Textile Road, Belleville, MI 48111. (ISBN 0-85648-887-9, pbk). 128 pages. \$7.95. Colorful, computer generated maps giving "names, places, journeys, and battles of the Bible" with Scripture texts and many special diagrams. Useful textbook for upper elementary or supplementary textbook for 7th to 12th grades.

Parker, James I., et al. *All the People and Places of the Bible*. 1982. Thomas Nelson Publishers, P.O. Box 141000, Nelson Place at Elm Hill Pike, Nashville, TN 37214. 1-800-251-4000. (ISBN 0-8407-5819-7, pbk). 205 pages. \$5.95. Part of the Nelson Handbook Series. Alphabetical listing of people/place names with pronunciation, translation, and Bible references. For grades 9 and above.

Student Map Manual: Historical Geography of the Bible Lands. Zondervan Pub. House, 1415 Lake Drive, SE, Grand Rap-

ids, MI 49506. (616/459-6900). 170 pages. \$15.00. Regional relief maps of the Bible lands, keyed to archaeological periods. Eastern orientation. Highly detailed for serious geographers, college and graduate-level students, or teachers.

FREE AND LOAN MATERIALS

Bryer, James L. *Educators' Guide to Free Audio and Visual Materials*. 35th ed. 1988. (ISBN 0-87708-194-8, pbk). Educators Progress Service, Inc., 214 Center St., Randolph, WI 53956. 1-414-326-3126.

Suttles, Steven. *Educators' Guide to Free Social Studies Materials*. 28th ed. 1988. (ISBN 0-87708-196-4, pbk). Educators Progress Service, Inc. (Address above). Voluminous guide to free materials and lending resources.

NOTE: When requesting "free" or "loan" materials: (1) Identify yourself as a teacher or librarian (use school letterhead if possible). (2) Include a self-addressed mailing label.

Printed Material

Free: "Map of Israel" (18"x24"). Consulate General of Israel, Lewis Tower Building, 225 S. 15th St., Philadelphia, PA 19102.

Free: "The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan" (color map, 18"x24"). Jordan Information Bureau, 2319 Wyoming Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20008. Free.

Purchase: Overhead projector transparency maps of the Bible lands. Abingdon Bible Map Transparencies, Abingdon Press, 201 8th Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37202. Write for information.

16mm Films

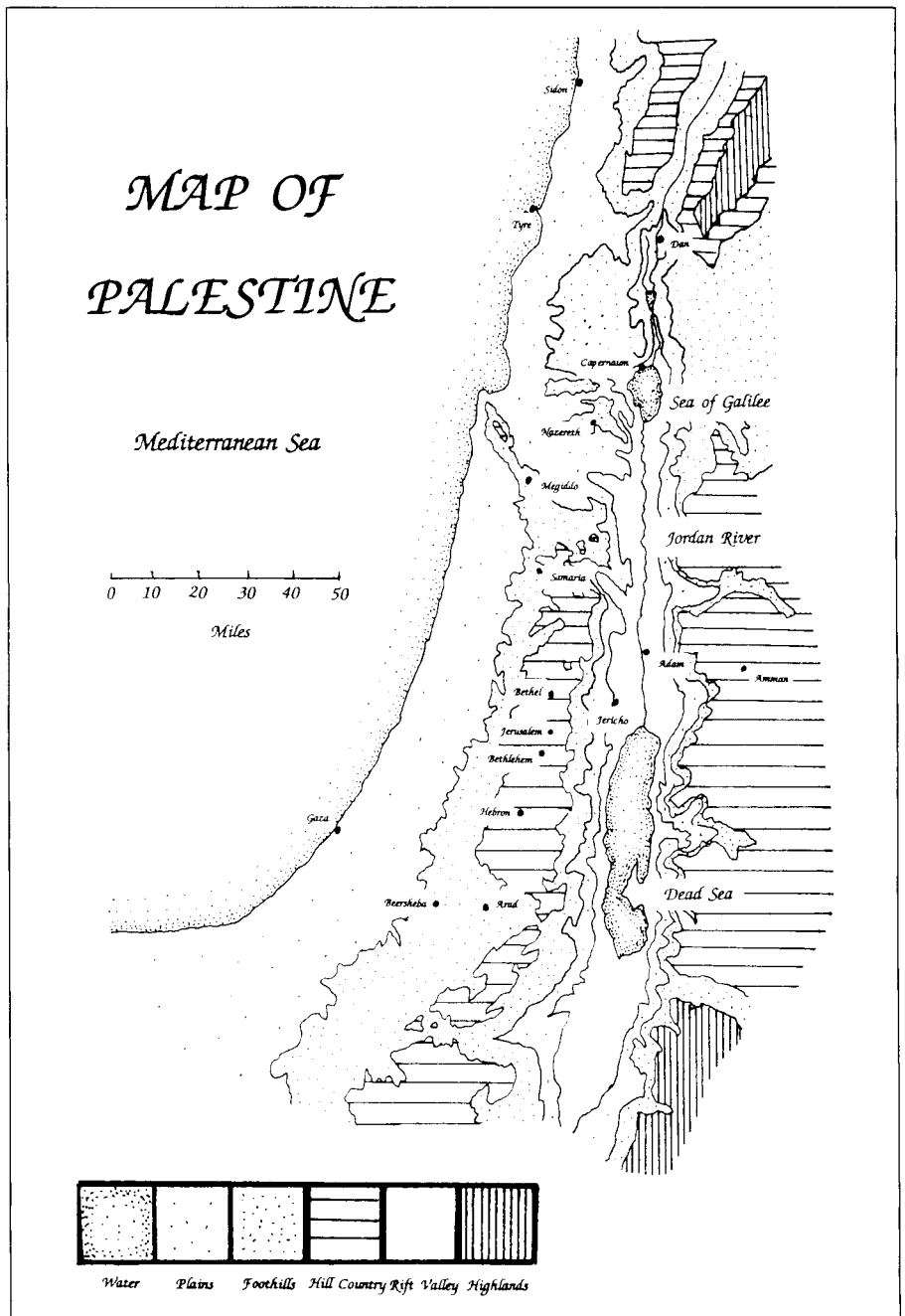
Loan: *Israel: Past and Present*. (1975). 22 min. Travelogue of historical, religious, natural, and recreational attractions in Israel. *Jerusalem From Below*. 30 min. A Jerusalem homeowner excavates below his house and uncovers the city's past. *Noah's Park*. 24 min. Documents the project to restore the variety of wildlife mentioned in the Bible to Israel. *Treasures of the Holy Land*. (FL-5023). 30 min. Documents an archaeological exhibit that covers the whole country of Israel during 6,000+ years of history. Atlanta Jewish Community Center, 1745 Peachtree Street, N.E., Atlanta, GA 30309. Limited to Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Book six weeks in advance. Borrower may use for seven days and must pay return postage.

Loan: *Story of the Hittites* (TR-706). (B/W). 25 min. Turkish Embassy, Office of the Press Counselor, 6th Floor, 2010 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20036. Book four weeks in advance. Return as soon as possible after showing. Borrower pays return postage.

Video Materials

Loan: *Archaeology Proves the Bible* #VC 29. Beta or VHS. 45 min. Yigael Yadin, noted Israeli archaeologist, discusses the role of archaeology in proving the Bible. Dawn Bible Students Assn., Videocassette Service, P.O. Box 4355, North Hollywood, CA 91607. May borrow one cassette at a time. Book three weeks in advance. May use

Continued on page 47



Sizes of Selected Cities in Old Testament Times (in acres):

Dan
5 acres

Beersheba
2.5 acres

Jericho
5 acres

Jerusalem
11 acres (Davidic)
46 acres (Solomonic)

Megiddo
13 acres

Samaria
15 acres

Freeway Cloverleaf
40 acres

phone book, which is available in most public libraries. Other countries should contact their national government offices to obtain information about embassy addresses.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GEOGRAPHY TO OTHER DISCIPLINES

Continued from page 24

studies of the physical earth and humankind, culture and environment. It takes into account human activities and their various distributions upon the face of the earth through space and time.

The political unrest among nations, the plight of refugees, the instability of the governments in the countries exposed to the natural calamities and natural crises, the unusual global climatic patterns, the threats of famine and floods, disasters over land and sea, have all contributed to the role of specialized geographical studies.

Geography will, in the future, be considered as a subject of keen interest, as it relates intimately to technical advances and scientific research in the quest of human search for knowledge. Today, advances in weather forecasting, aerial photography, and sophisticated scientific satellites give us new ways to examine planet Earth.

The broad variety of careers described above point out the importance of a study of geography for today's young people. □

Dr. Alexander S. Job is the author of six geography textbooks currently being used in the middle and secondary schools in India. He has had 20 years of teaching and administrative experience. At present he is working on a book, The Effective Teaching of Geography. He is employed at a firm in Rockville, Maryland, in the data-processing division.

TEACHING BIBLE IN THE THIRD DIMENSION

Continued from page 37

10 days. Borrower pays return postage. Available for purchase for \$6.00.

Loan: *Egypt: Partnership Along the*

Nile (#1900). 1982. Umatic or VHS. 28 min. Contrasts modern vs. traditional lifestyles along the Nile. Catholic Relief Services, Karol Media, 22 Riverview Drive, Wayne, NJ 07470-3191.

Slide Materials

Loan: *Flight Into History: Jordan and the Holy Land*. 1983. 58 slides with script and cassette narration. Jordan Information Bureau, 2319 Wyoming Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20008. Book three weeks in advance. Borrower pays return postage.

Purchase: Color slides of relief maps of the Bible lands. Jerusalem Center for Biblical Studies, Box 19991, Jerusalem, Israel. Write for information.

Purchase: Satellite color slides of the Bible lands. Eros Data Center, Sioux Falls, SD 57198. Write for information.

Ralph E. Hendrix writes from Berrien Springs, Michigan, where he recently completed graduate work in Old Testament Studies at Andrews University. His classwork included the study of archaeology and history of the ancient Near East. During the summer of 1988 he participated in a photographic survey of Egypt and Palestine. He recently served as assistant to the curator at the Siegfried H. Horn Archeological Museum at Andrews University. Before attending the SDA Theological Seminary Mr. Hendrix served as a pastor and multi-grade teacher in the Nevada-Utah Conference of SDA.

NEWS NOTES

Continued from page 39

Linda University, is chairman, with James Epperson, director of education for the Southern Union, as vice chairman.

- Alternative financial strategies. Southern California Conference president Charles Dart is chairman. Gil Plubell, executive secretary of the North American Division Board of Education, K-12, is vice chairman.

- Marketing and advocacy. Northern California Conference president Donald Schneider is chairman, with Richard Duerksen, vice president for marketing and communication at Pacific Union College, as vice-chairman.

Each task force is carrying out research, making recommendations, and developing resources to improve the quality of Adventist education. One study on faith development, called the Valuegenesis Survey, promises to be a landmark in the understanding of adolescents and religion.

The North American Division

Department of Education, which initiated Project Affirmation, has retained the consulting services of the Minneapolis-based Search Institute. Search founder Merton Strommen is the author of the widely acclaimed books *Five Cries of Youth* and *Five Cries of Parents*, published by Harper and Row.

Last February, Search personnel trained 70 facilitators to hold "vision-to-action" planning sessions across the North American Division. These sessions are now being held in every conference to help church members focus on their desired futures for local Adventist education and lay plans for constructive change. This grassroots drive for excellence, Smith believes, will be the most important and lasting outcome of Project Affirmation.

The work of Project Affirmation will be summarized in three major reports:

- *Risk and Promise — Imperatives Facing Adventist Education* will present findings and recommendations from the four task forces for attaining excellence in the schools. This major report will be presented to the North American Division year-end meetings in 1990 and made widely available throughout the denomination.

- *The Implementation Series* will include a number of research studies and practical resources that will help schools increase their quality and enrollment. Publication has already begun with a marketing guide for elementary and secondary schools.

- *Valuegenesis*. Plans are being made for a book to be published that will explain and make practical and findings of the Valuegenesis Survey of Adventist youth. It will be valuable for parents, pastors, teachers, and all those involved in helping adolescents develop faith.

"We believe that Project Affirmation will leave the North American Adventist Church with four major gains," says Smith. "First, there will be a deeper understanding of constituency concerns at the local school level. Second, new and valuable resources will be available for meeting the needs of schools and school personnel.

"Third, the Valuegenesis Survey will result in a tremendous data bank. This will help educators, pastors, and parents to develop information-based programs and materials to foster faith and church commitment.

"Most importantly," Smith concludes, "Project Affirmation will set in motion a process of planned change. This ongoing effort, carried out at all levels, will keep the schools moving toward excellence into the 21st century."—Project Affirmation news release, October 6, 1989.