GEOBASICS STUDY GUIDE

MAP STUDIES IN THE GEOGRAPHY
OF THE LAND OF THE BIBLE
PART TWO—CENTRAL ARENA

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INTRODUCTION IN BRIEF

This Geobasics Guide recognizes the reality that some users want less detail while some want more. It attempts to meet this need by using the phrase ‘guide in brief’ and a vertical line | to designate certain sections for those who want to complete assignments with haste but still observe their main points. They later may want to return and complete the full Guide as others do. All users should feel free to interact with the Guide, especially with ‘personality in texts,’ by highlighting key words and phrases in order to fix them in their minds and later return to review what they earlier found important. In order to have this Introduction readily available it is repeated at the beginning of each arena, together with a specific introductory Master Map for each arena, each with its own markings.


The following provides a quick survey of the main features of the book.

• The three-dimensional map on the front cover communicates that the land of the Bible is a land of variety. We need to learn it; ‘God’s eyes are on it.’
• The outside of the back cover serves as a quick index to find specific maps in the book.
• The reference chart inside the back cover offers introductory discussions on ‘geobasics.’
• The center double-spread (pp. 12/13) presents a full map of the land with a legend and short descriptions of rocks and soils.
• Three full-color, double-spread rocks and soils maps (pp. 2/7) introduce the three arenas of the land: Northern (pp. 2/3), Central (pp. 4/5) and Southern (pp. 6/7) Arenas.
• The remaining maps (pp. 8-23) provide ‘closer views’ of the land but show only soils and not rocks. These maps assist with more detailed regional study.

II. Introducing the map

Look at the rocks and soils map on pp. 12/13 and find the following, arranged in an easy to find order rather than the sequence seen on p. 12. Regional names appear on the map on p. 1.

• Red represents volcanic basalt of Golan and Bashan.
• Green represents thick beds of uplifted limestones particularly well-represented in the center of the land or in Galilee.
• Purple represents deeper, yet forcefully uplifted beds of hard limestones in the two Lebanon ranges between the Mediterranean sea and the site of Damascus far to the east.
• Brown represents tracts of chalks such as those east of Bethlehem or south of Medeba.
• Pale yellow represents softer limestones and chalks, such as those west of Judah, west of the Southern Highlands or north of Damascus.
• Gray (with a pattern) represents lissan in the Rift, sediments from an ancient, larger lake.

The maps in the book divide into two types.

• The first set of maps shows both rocks and soils. It consists of the three introductory arena maps (pp. 2-7) and the center-fold in the book (pp. 12/13), which includes a legend and short description of the rocks and soils. The chart inside the back cover addresses rock characteristics.
• The second set of maps uses uncovered rock relief but keeps the heavier soil deposits. This allows for easier viewing of the land’s topography, waterways, sites and routes and the opportunity to identify the soil resources of the various regions.
III. Introducing reference helps and lines

Some reference helps in the Geobasics book require your attention.

• ‘Rocks, Force, Water, Soils and Man’ chart (inside the back cover). The left-hand column offers a key to your study and the basic physical issues of the land. It summarizes rocks and geological processes; introduces the important factors of rainfall, erosion and water storage; identifies soils in the land and factors of settlement [erratum: change ‘page 3’ under this discussion to pages 12/13]; and begins the discussion of travel in the land. The right side of the chart lists the major rocks in the land with their characteristics and locations throughout the land.

• Legend and glossary of rocks and soils (pp. 12/13). The ‘Legend of Sequence’ identifies the geological color scheme in the book. A short glossary of rock and soil terms appears with the legend and identifies the major rock types in each era and briefly introduces soil formation.

• Rainfall Line. A green rainfall line appears on pp. 12/13. Areas with rainfall sufficient for farming north of the line. Areas south of the line receive insufficient rainfall for agriculture, and since rainfall is also the most significant factor in soil production, these areas do not have the necessary soil quantities for farming.

Highlighting instructions: ‘HL’ means highlight with a colored highlighter, according to the thickness you desire; you can always add more HL but not take it away. Do not use a permanent pen that bleeds through the paper, and do not rest on a line and allow the paper to absorb the ink. Accent highlighters with chisel or wedge tips work well. You will need a green, a red/pink and a yellow which simply highlight the text or road.

HL in green the rainfall line on pp. 12/13. Begin on the coast near Ashkelon, follow the line up to the heights around Hebron and then north along the eastern edge of the Central Hill Country to Lake Galilee. The line then runs south along the top of the eastern scarp above the Rift valley. The heights of the scarp in Moab and Edom allow the line to move south to just beyond the edge of the map. On the way back north, notice the narrow strip along these eastern heights that falls within the line. As you approach Bashan, the line veers east around heights of Jebel Druze and then swings back west before following the eastern face of the Anti-Lebanon range off the map.

Four types of lines on the maps require your attention.

• Uplift Lines: Uplift lines are yellow, dotted lines which mark out the top of an upfold along the crest of mountain ranges. The Lebanon range, for example, displays one long uplift. On pp. 2/3 find the yellow, dotted line marking the crest of this range.

• Divisional Lines: We have divided the land into major divisions in order to facilitate grouping subdivisions and regions. Thicker, solid gray lines mark out these major divisions. On pp. 2/3 find this solid line separating the Damascus plateau, Golan and Bashan from the Anti-Lebanon and Lebanon ranges. This is a divisional line.

• Subdivisional Lines: On pp. 2/3 find the thin, dotted, black line which separates Golan from Bashan; and another which separates Lower Gilead from Bashan. These are subdivisional lines. Both divisional and subdivisional lines should give cause for you to reflect on what distinguishes one region from another or one subregion from another.

• Soil Division Lines. On pp 10/12, find a thin, broken line which divides soils in the valleys of Lower Galilee from the rocks in the hill regions. This line serves to set the soils apart from the surrounding rocks and demarcates valleys and plains where greater amounts of soil have collected. We will never ask you to HL these lines.
IV. Introducing the Central Arena through marking the Master Map

The Master Map on p. 87 is a key reference tool in your study. By showing the entire country the map allows you to see the full layout of the land. Use the markings below to mark this Master Map. You should also relate this map to the front cover map of *Geobasics in the Land of the Bible* (Geobasics below) as well as to other maps in the Geobasics book. Your exploration of these maps is very important, especially as you locate divisions and their lines (solid dark) and subdivisional/regional names. Some names appear in their longer form on Geobasics maps.

**Print out the Master Map on p. 87:**

- On the master map find the term Central Arena and HL it in pink
- HL in yellow the main divisions of the CA: Eastern Heights, Central Abyss, Western Uplifts (Central Hill Country) and Coastal Plain
- Find these same areas on Geobasics front cover map, although they are not named there. This exercise allows you to see the dramatic differences between the eastern desert, the Rift valley and the coastal plain as compared to the eastern heights and western uplifts. The bold names below appear on the Geobasics front cover map:
  1) Eastern Heights include (Upper) Gilead, Ammon, and Moab;
  2) Central Abyss lies between the Dead Sea and Lake Galilee to the N;
  3) Western Uplifts are the territories of Israel and Judah;
  4) Coastal Plain includes Sharon and Philistia.
- On the master map find subdivisional/regional names in the main divisions of the CA.
  - In the Eastern Heights HL in green: Upper Gilead, Ammon, Medeba plateau and Moab
  - In the Western Uplifts HL in green: Samaria, Ephraim, Judah and Wilderness
  - In the Coastal Plain HL in green: Sharon, Philistia and Shephelah
- Find the same subdivisional/regional names in Geobasics Rocks and Soils map on pp. 4/5
E. CENTRAL ARENA—Pages 4/5

Our focus in the land now changes from the north to the center of the Land Between. Compare the Finder Maps on p. 2 and p. 5 to see the shift S. Note as well that a little overlap exists between the maps on pp. 4/5 and pp. 2/3. For example, Mt. Gilboa appears on both maps. The overlap, the Finder Maps and the full map on pp. 12/13 all help you to maintain a perspective of the entire land and how each arena fits into this land.

A comparison of pp. 2/3 with 4/5 show some clear differences between the Northern and Central Arenas. Both maps represent the same rock types, but variations in regional structure and distribution of the rock types varies greatly. Try to note some of these differences: the Stable East and the Soaring North are gone; the Complex West yields to a uniform pattern of uplifted ranges.

Read the text on pages 4/5 and note the Central Arena's major divisions. Thicker, solid gray lines mark out 1) the eastern heights (E of Rift) adjacent to Arabia, which is covered by the text box; 2) the central abyss is the rift and related areas; and 3) the western uplifts together with their coastal plains. Smaller, broken lines within these major divisions indicate subdivisions.

As in previous studies, marking instructions add color emphasis to each map; lists of geobasics summarize regional essence; and texts illustrate the geobasics within the living land. The study of the Central Arena is particularly important since it contains some of the land's most active biblical regions. Again, our goal is to hear the fuller message of those who spoke from the living land.

1. EASTERN HEIGHTS

As you look down the Eastern Heights from N to S note changes in rocks and soils and the relationship of these heights to the nearby Rift. What differences and similarities do you see between the northern and southern regions? These will become apparent as you proceed.

A. UPPER GILEAD

Upper Gilead is a broad, uplifted hill country region of hard limestone (green) between the Rift, the southern edge of basaltic-covered Bashan, and northern Arabia.

Plentiful rainfall, fertile soils and strong springs invite settlement in Upper Gilead's hills where cities flourish along trade routes or deep within its more secluded valleys.

The Jabbok river canyon drains much of Upper Gilead, flowing NE in the area of Rabbah, then N and finally W into the Rift through deeper limestones and sandstones (purple).

Upper Gilead's deep drainage systems force its network of roads to stay on specific paths that link Rabbah in the S with Ramoth-gilead in the N and Beth-shan in the NW.

Upper Gilead is unique and alluring hill country east of the Rift which offers ideal settlement conditions, built-in security and yet potential control of caravan trade.
The uplift through Upper Gilead (broken yellow line) is the backbone of this region. In the south it divides drainage systems while a higher watershed to the N reaches 1247m/4091f. West of this height canyons descend some -1500m/-5000f to the Rift. To the E of this height subterranean waters emerge in springs in the area of Gerasa making this a very attractive area of settlement. Elevations farther E slowly descend into a broad area of hills.

Winter storms from the west easily pass across the lower hills of Samaria and Jezreel’s broad depression but drop abundant rainfall on Upper Gilead’s western slopes and higher elevations. Much of the hill country E of the uplift drains into the large Jabbok river system (called ‘Zarqa’ in Arabic). It begins by Rabbah in Ammon with surface runoff and spring-fed streams and runs NE before making a great bend to the N and NW to reach the area of Gerasa whose streams here join the Jabbok. It then heads due W through a deep canyon to the enter the Rift by Succoth and SW to join the Jordan river near Adam. The Jabbok’s deep path naturally divides Upper Gilead into two parts, one to the N and one to the S, a division which was used in local descriptions of territories in the Bible. Deep within the Jabbok canyon the river flows around two prominent hills, the sister sites of Mahanaim and Penuel.

Part of Upper Gilead’s uplift (broken yellow line) again appears on this map (pp. 10/11). Only the northern portion of Upper Gilead appears here, but this map shows how sites and routes you just HL fit into the larger picture of the Northern Arena, directly linking Upper Gilead to Lower Gilead, Bashan and the Jezreel valley. Other routes farther E bypass Upper Gilead’s higher hill country and, with the route N of Gerasa, allow traffic to flow through Bashan to Damascus (beyond the NE corner of this map). Thus Upper Gilead is both a hill country retreat as well as a link to various parts of the Northern Arena from southern Transjordan.

This new map (pp. 16/17) provides a view into the heart of the Central Arena. It also includes connections to the Northern Arena discussed immediately above. Take a moment before marking to review names and features you already know in Upper Gilead.

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This map (pp. 16/17) reveals obstacles within Upper Gilead's uplifted, limestone hill country. Find these obstacles and notice how main routes avoid them (cf. front-cover map).

1. Obstacle: **Jabbok river** system draining the center of Upper Gilead
2. Obstacle: **Kufrrinja** and other canyons in the NW and **Shueib** canyon in the SW
3. Obstacle: **Eastern Upper Gilead**'s complex systems of ridges and canyons
4. **Rabbah-Mahanaim route:** An uninterrupted ridge route above the Shueib system reaches the Zia area and then descends to the Jabbok by Mahanaim and into the Rift where it continues along the base of Upper Gilead to the Rehob/Beth-shan region.
5. **Rabbah-Gerasa route:** Avoiding more serious obstacles it proceeds N, crosses the Jabbok at the most convenient ford in the area and reaches Gerasa's spring-fed valleys.
6. **Gerasa-Pehel/Pella route:** Ascending a ridge NW of Gerasa above the Suf valley it climbs around the 1247m/4091f height, descends to Jabesh-gilead in Wadi Yabis, ascends from this depression and descends to Pehel/Pella before crossing the Rift to Beth-shan.
7. **Gerasa-Ramoth-gilead route:** Climbing abruptly to a pass N of Gerasa it descends via a narrow valley to eastern Lower Gilead's plain, passes Ramoth-gilead then enters Bashan.

The above exercise reveals how Upper Gilead's uplift creates a maze of serious natural obstructions that main routes avoid. Rainfall along this uplift (see rainfall line on pp 12-13) turned Upper Gilead's hard limestone hills into rich soils for orchards and vines, with grains along outlying areas. The combination of rainfall, fertile soils and streams makes this an attractive area for settlement, fertile yet remote and obviously attractive to early Israelites arriving from the arid south. Not surprisingly, the tribes of Gad and Reuben asked Moses to let them settle east of the Jordan while other Israelites inhabited the hill country west of the Rift. This division of the tribes on either side of the Rift would impact later Israelite history.

As E-W trade began to flourish, caravans approaching Rabbah sought natural routes around or through Upper Gilead. As seen on the front cover map (but without roads), eastern routes could circumvented the hill country of Upper Gilead but had to pass through less secure plains adjacent to Arabia to reach the area of Ramoth-gilead in Lower Gilead. This made the roads you have HL directly through Upper Gilead very attractive. Thus, in Saul's day the Ammonites sought to control the Rabbah-Beth-shan route through Gilead's Israelite population. This is the background of the vicious Ammonite attack on Israelites at Jabesh-gilead and provided the context for Saul's victory as he demonstrated his tactical prowess.

In Greco-Roman times flourishing cities arose in and around Upper Gilead, known collectively as the Decapolis. Impressive, well-preserved remains make them attractive tourist sites in Jordan today, and they illustrate the importance of bustling trade through Upper Gilead in the days of Jesus. Roman roads and milestones between these commercial centers mark the ancient roads and accent by replication the Ammonite desire to control the Gerasa-Beth-shan route in the Israelite period. The following Decapolis cities surround Upper Gilead.

1. **Philadelphia** (Rabbah) is an impressive site, now capital of Jordan (discussed later).
2. **Gerasa** lies nestled in an eroded depression amid flowing streams and fertile slopes E of Upper Gilead's uplift with well-preserved colonnaded streets, large temples and theaters.
3. **Pella** (Pehel) sits on a fertile, spring-fed plateau above the Rift facing W into Galilee; it has a new road to Jabesh-gilead and impressive remains from on-going excavations.
4. **Scythopolis** (Beth-shan) is the only Decapolis city W of the Rift (in modern Israel) and links Gilead to coastal ports via the Jezreel valley; its restored remains impress tourists.

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**Num 32**

**Judg 12:1-7**

**1 Sam 11:1-11**
The attention given to Gilead in the Bible includes references to specific parts of Gilead as well as to what we call 'Greater Gilead,' that is, all of Israel's Transjordanian territories. ‘Upper Gilead’ (our term for Gilead's hill country) describes this uplifted region, dissected by the rugged Jabbok canyon and desirable for settlement, herding and agriculture, as well as for the routes linking Rabbah to Beth-shan. The hill region never served for long as the heartland of a political entity, although it did function as an ideal place for political refuge or a sheltered haven from which a rebellion might foment.

- The 'land of Gilead' is a common phrase that refers to Israel's Transjordanian territories in part or in whole; Lower and/or Upper Gilead; or all of Israelite Transjordan—

  ‘Land of Gilead’ = Transjordan, S of the Jabbok. The Reubenites and the Gadites ... saw the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead, [and they said,] 'Look, the area is a place for [our] herds!' Number 32:1 / If the Gadites and the Reubenites cross over the Jordan with you ... then, after the land is subdued before you, you shall give them the land of Gilead [from Mahanaim/the Jabbok S] as an inheritance. Number 32:29; cf. Joshua 13:15-28

  ‘Land of Gilead’ = Transjordan, N of the Jabbok. Manasseh received ten portions besides the land of Gilead and Bashan, which is across the Jordan ... and the land of Gilead [from Mahanaim/the Jabbok N] belonged to the rest of the Manassites. Joshua 17:5-6; cf. Joshua 13:29-31

  ‘Land of Gilead’ = Lower Gilead(?). Segub was the father of Yair, who had twenty-three towns in the land of Gilead. 1 Chronicles 2:22 / Yair the Gileadite ... judged Israel for twenty-two years. He had thirty sons, who [as rulers] rode on thirty donkeys and oversaw thirty cities in the land of Gilead, which are called Havvot Yair to this day. Judges 10:4

  ‘Land of Gilead’ = Upper Gilead. [Among Solomon’s governors was] Geber ben-Uri in the land of Gilead (the land of Sihon, the Amorite king, and Og, king of Bashan); that is, one governor over the land [of Gilead]. 1 Kings 4:19 (his territory did not include Lower Gilead which fell under Ben-Geber in Ramoth-gilead, v. 13)

  ‘Land of Gilead’ = Medeba plateau. [Among the Reubenite clans were those who] settled from Aroer as far as Nebo and Baal-meeon, and to the east they settled as far the entrance to the wilderness that extends to the Euphrates river, because their herds had increased in the land of Gilead. 1 Chronicles 5:8-9

  ‘Land of Gilead’ = Greater Gilead, all of Israelite Transjordan. All Israel went out from Dan as far as Beer-sheba [in Cisjordan] as well as the land of Gilead [in Transjordan], and the assembly gathered as one man to the LORD at Mtzpeh. Judges 20:1 / Hazael defeated [the Israelites] throughout all Israel’s territories: from the Jordan eastward [he took] all the land of Gilead belonging to Gad, Reuben and Manasseh; from Aroer on the Arnon canyon through Gilead and Bashan. 2 Kings 10:32-33; see also Joshua 22:9, 13, 15, 32; Zechariah 10:10

- Upper Gilead is well-watered hill country with rugged terrain, scrub-forests, fertile soils and grazing lands (for a discussion of scrub-forests see p. 74 under Carmel range)—

[T]he Bible calls Upper Gilead har haggi’lad, ‘the hill country of Gilead,’ similar to the phrases har ‘efrain, ‘the hill country of Ephraim’ (Joshua 17:15) or har yehudah, ‘the hill country of Judah’ (Joshua 11:21). Jacob fled with all his possessions; he left, crossed the [Euphrates] river and set out toward the hill country of Gilead.... Laban pursued him on the road for seven days and overtook him in the hill country of Gilead.... Laban caught up with Jacob, after Jacob had driven the pegs of his tent into the hill country of Gilead,... Laban with his relatives drove his pegs into the hill country of Gilead. Genesis 31:21, 23, 25 / We took this territory at that time—from Aroer, which is on the Arnon canyon, and half of the hill country of Gilead and its cities—and I gave it to the Reubenites and the Gadites. Deuteronomy 3:12 / Your hair is like a flock of goats flowing down Gilead’s hill country. Song of Songs 4:6-1, 6-5 [Several texts speak of the scrub-forests and rugged terrain of Upper Gilead.] Some Gadites [from the hill country of Gilead] broke away to join David at the Stronghold in the wilderness. They were valiant warriors—military men prepared for battle, equipped with shield and spear—and their faces were set like the face of a lion, and they moved swiftly like gazelles in the mountains [from their life and training in the rugged terrain of Upper Gilead].... These Gadites were military commanders, the least was equal to a hundred, the greatest equal to a thousand. These are they who crossed the Jordan [from Upper Gilead to join David] in the first month [the month of Nisan after the winter rains], when the Jordan overflowed all its banks. They put to flight all who were in the depths [of the Rift], both on the east side and the west. 1 Chronicles 12:8, 14-15 / [David] fled from Absalom to Mahanaim in the Jabbok of Upper Gilead. Absalom pursued David, and although David stayed in Mahanaim, he divided his forces into three groups, no doubt for an ambush, and they went out to confront Israel. The battle took place in the scrub-forest of Ephraim. [The term scrub-forest of Ephraim may refer to vegetation in canyons above the valley of Sukkoth where the Jabbok canyon emerges from Upper Gilead into the Rift. This is an area closely connected to the territory of the tribe of Ephraim, both via the Adam ford and in allusions in the Bible (Judges 7:24; 12:4-5; Psalm 60:6-7; 108:7-8). Absalom mustered rebellious forces from southern Judah and northern Israel, crossed the Rift and approached the mouth of the Jabbok canyon. There David’s forces must have attacked from different directions pushing Absalom’s militia into Upper
Gilead’s canyons of scrub forest.] The battle took place in the scrub-forest of Ephraim... As the battle spread out across the whole region, the scrub-forest consumed more people that died than the sword... They struck Absalom and killed him... Then they took Absalom and cast him into a big pit in the scrub-forest, and they heaped up a very large heap of stones over him... Jobah said to the Cushite, ‘Go, report to the king what you have seen.’ The Cushite bowed down before Jobah and ran. [Ahimaaz, who had hoped to bring the news to David, begged Jobah, and Jobah finally answered,] ‘Rum! But Ahimaaz ran via ‘the roundabout way’ [Hebrew derek hakikkar], and outran the Cushite. [A ridge descending from Upper Gilead diverts the Jabbok leaving a 100m/330ft high bulge between the battlefield and the bend in the Jabbok leading directly to Mahanaim. The Cushite apparently took a direct path over the bulge but Ahimaaz ran the level way around it and thereby passed the Cushite.] 2 Samuel 18:6-23

[A Davidic song of victory links the valley of Succoth with Shechem and places Gilead with Manasseh, Ephraim and Judah as Israel’s hill country heartland:] God has spoken in his holiness, ‘I would exalt! I would parcel out Gilead—the valley of Succoth [leading into Gilead] would I strike up! To me belongs Gilead—To me belongs Manassesh! Ephraim is my chief stronghold! Judah my commanding staff. Moab is a bowl for washing myself—over Edom will I throw my shoe! Above Philistia will I raise a shout of victory!

Psalms 108:7-9; cf. 60:6-8

[Biblical writers speak of Upper Gilead’s fertility and grazing.] Oh, shepherd your people with your staff, your very own flock, dwelling apart (secure) within a scrub-forest in the midst of Carmel, feeding as in Bashan and Gilead as in days of old. Moseh 7:14 / Though you were Gilead to me [luxuriant and fertile], even the summit of Lebanon, would not make you a wilderness—yea, cities not inhabited? Jeremiah 22:6 / Yet I will bring Israel back to his pastures, and he will feed on Carmel and Bashan; and in the hill country of Ephraim and on Gilead he will satisfy himself. Jeremiah 50:19 / Your hair is like a flock of goats flowing down Gilead’s hill country. Song of Songs 4:1; 6:5

Perea [which includes the village of Gilead] ... is for the most part desert and rugged and too wild to bring tender fruits to maturity. Here also, however, are tracts of finer soils that support every species of crop; and the plains are covered with a variety of trees, olive, vine, and palm... The country is watered by torrents descending from the mountains and by springs which never dry up and provide sufficient moisture when the torrents dwindle in [the dry summer]. Perea extends in length from Machaerus to Pella, in breadth from Philadelphia to the Jordan. War 3.44-47/lxi.3

Rugged isolation and the security of the Jabbok canyon makes Upper Gilead a place of political refuge and haven from which to foment rebellion—

Political refuge. [When the Philistines came up and camped at Michmas] some Hebrews crossed the Jordan to the land of God and Gilead [to seek refuge]. 1 Samuel 13:7 / [After Saul’s death when David became king in Hebron] Abner ben-Nur, the commander of Saul’s army took Ish-bosheth, Saul’s son and brought him across the Jordan to take refuge at Mahanaim. He made him king over Gilead, Asher, Jezeel, Ephraim, Benjamin and all Israel. 2 Samuel 2:8-9 / [David’s forces overpowered Abner and Ish-bosheth’s forces] so Abner and his men marched through the Arabah all that night. They crossed the Jordan and marched through the whole ravine until they came to Mahanaim. 2 Samuel 2:29 / [In David’s flight from Abalom] David and all the people who were with him set out and crossed the Jordan ... and David arrived at Mahanaim [to take refuge]. 2 Samuel 17:22, 24 / Jeroboam rebuilt Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived in it, then [perhaps at the advance of Pharaoh Shishak (1 Kings 14:25)] he went out [across the Jordan] and rebuilt Penuel [as a place of refuge, a capital in exile near the Jabbok canyon]. 1 Kings 12:25

Foment rebellion. Elijah, the Tishbite from Tishbe[ˈ̃]t [or toshībe the settlers] in Gilead [opposed Ahab in Samaria who bowed before Baal...]. The LORD said to Elijah, ‘In your return journey go by the desert to Damascus, enter and anoint Hazael as the king of Aram, and Jehu ben-Nimshi, you shall anoint as the king of Israel, and Elisha ben-Shaphat from Abel-meholah, you shall anoint as a prophet in your place. Any [Baal worshippers] who escape Hazael’s sword, Jehu will kill, and any who escape Jehu’s sword, Elisha will kill; for I have preserved in Israel seven thousand, that is, every knee that has not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him. 1 Kings 17:1; 19:15-18 /Pekah ben-R gamm, a top general, conspired against Pekahiah and attacked him along with Argob and Arvah in Samaria in the citadel of the palace. Fifty men from the Gileadites were with Pekah when he assassinated him. 2 Kings 15:25

The Jabbok Canyon, a major divide in Upper Gilead, figures prominently in Jacob’s return to the land of promise but also separates Upper Gilead into two political units.

Jacob’s return. Jacob ... set out toward the hill country of Gilead ... and he drove the pegs of his tent into the hill country. Genesis 31:21-23 / Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him, and when Jacob saw them, he said, ‘This is the camp of God.’ So he named that place Mahanaim [‘two camps,’ which later became the name of a city in the Jabbok canyon]. Genesis 32:1-2 / While at Mahanaim Jacob heard that his older brother, Esau was coming from Edom far to the S, and fearing retribution for taking his birthright Jacob sent presenters along the only possible route, via Zia and the ridge route SE in the direction of Esau’s approach, for I may appease him with a gift that goes before me ... perhaps he will accept me. Genesis 32:3-21 / Jacob got up that night and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons, so that he might cross [S over] the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, so he sent across all that he had, but Jacob remained alone [on the N side of the Jabbok]. Then a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn... Jacob named that place Peniel [‘face of God,’ which later also became the name of a city beside Mahanaim in the Jabbok canyon], saying, ‘I saw God face to face, and my life was delivered.’ The sun rose upon him as he crossed over at Penuel. Genesis 32:22-31 /
Conflicts over Upper Gilead often reflect a struggle to control trade passing through the region to Beth-shan and coastal ports—

Trade passing through Upper Gilead. [Joseph’s brothers] saw a caravan of Ishmaelites which had come from Gilead. Their camels carried spices, balm and myrrh [products from southern Arabia], and they were on their way down to Egypt. Genesis 37:25

Is there no balm in Gilead? [Balm is the product of a tree native to southern Arabia. En-gedi, a sub-tropical zone by the Dead sea, developed a balm industry, but it is an unlikely product of Gilead. A more likely explanation for ‘balm in Gilead’ is that caravans carrying balm from Arabia to the sea traded balm in Gilead for service and protection. Is there no physician there? A healing industry must have grown around the surplus of balm traded in Gilead.] So why does the wound of my people not heal? Jeremiah 8:22

Go up to Gilead and get balm [from the surplus traded there], O Virgin Daughter of Egypt. In vain you multiply remedies. No healing exists for you. Jeremiah 46:11

Conflicts over Upper Gilead. In the days of Jephthah, the Ammonites oppressed Israel from the Arnon to the Jabbok, a struggle which gave the Ammonites a monopoly on routes S of the Jabbok. [The sages saw significance in the sunrise at Penuel. It marked the end of Jacob’s dark descent from the land, which had begun when the ‘sun set’ during his departure from the land at Bethel. When the wrestler spared his life in the Jabbok canyon and he crossed the Jabbok stream, he ascended into the light of the land of promise.] Rabbi Akiva asked, ‘It is written, “And the sun rose upon him.” Did the sun rise upon Jacob only? Did it not rise upon the whole world?’ Rabbi Yitzakh replied, ‘It means that the sun which had set for his sake [Genesis 28:11] now rose for him’ [Genesis 32:31].

The Ammonite claim. [Moses put strict limits on Ammonite territory.] You did not encroach upon the territory of the Ammonites, no part of the ‘hand’ of the Jabbok stream-bed [the upper Jabbok drainage between Jazer and Rabbah] nor the villages in the hill country [which lies N of Rabbah and drains eastward into the Jabbok]. Deuteronomy 3:16

Conflicts over Upper Gilead—Upper Gilead
optional— Benjamin will possess Gilead. Obadiah 19 / Fadus, as soon as he was come procurator into Judea [+44 to +46], found argument between the Jews who lived in Perea, and the people of Philadelphia, about their borders, at a village called Zia, that was filled with men of a warlike temper; for the Jews of Perea had taken up arms without the consent of their principal men, and had destroyed many of the Philadelphians. Ant 20:1-2 / Vespasian marched on Gedor, the capital of Perea and a city of some strength [which sat near the Philadelphia-Scythopolis trade route]. For the leading men had, unbeknown to the rebels, sent an embassy to him offering to capitulate, alike from a desire for peace and from concern for their property, for Gedor has many wealthy residents. War 4:423-415/vii.3

B. AMMON AND THE ABARIM SLOPES

As we approach our discussion of Ammon we pause to consider a major geobasic issue in this important transitional area between the watered north and the arid south: How to partition all-important water resources? Major watershed ridges (high ground dividing surface run-off) create large catchment areas (steam-beds flowing in a common direction and usually to a common outlet). Farmers and herdsmen instinctively knew the watersheds within their locality, and watersheds also served as boundaries between clans or peoples. Understanding Ammon within its locale depends upon knowing the watersheds. The map below (taken from p. 5) shows such watersheds with information added in white.

Note white items
(on a colored map if viewed on a screen but on grey if printed without color):

* Orientation
  - N arrow, Arabia, Dead Sea, Rift

* Dotted lines
  - Watersheds lines dividing catchment areas

* Solid arrows
  - Jabbok drainage, first flowing to E in Upper Jabbok, then N and finally W in Lower Jabbok

* Catchment areas
  1. Upper Jabbok forms Ammon
  2. Lower Jabbok in Upper Gilead
  3. Medeba Plateau draining S
  4. Abarim slopes draining W to Rift

Rabbah/Philadelphia was a hub from which two major routes began their journey NW toward Beth-shan, beyond the hill country of Upper Gilead (HL routes on p. 17). Rabbah/Philadelphia dominated the region of Ammon, a region formed around features the Bible calls the ‘hand of the Jabbok’ and the adjacent area of ‘hill country villages.’ The map above shows tributaries flowing E from this ‘hand of the Jabbok’ and converging by Rabbah to form the upper Jabbok. Ammon’s ‘hill country villages’ lie in hills NE of Rabbah and also drain E
to join the same upper Jabbok. Watersheds around Ammon on this map show how Ammon lies in district #1, distinct from districts #2, #3 and #4. The separate catchment of the lower Jabbok (#2) gathers drainage deep within Upper Gilead and flows W into the Rift. The Bible carefully distinguishes these 'watershed geobasics' in a type of eye witness fashion, describing borders and events understood by ancient peoples living in the area. Modern urbanites would have difficulty recognizing such nuanced boundaries and descriptions.

On the map above note the watershed between Ammon (district #1) and the 'the Abarim slopes' (district #4). Later we discuss the Abarim slopes in detail, but for now note the watershed dividing the 'hand of the Jabbok' from the 'Abarim slopes.' It runs N and S of Jazer (Kh. es-Sar) on a hill overlooking the Abarim slopes but just outside Ammon’s ‘hand of the Jabbok.’ (The modern Jordanian city of Wadi es-Sir sits nearby along the same watershed.) The Israelite tribe of Gad received Jazer and the Abarim slopes draining SW into the Rift. The Gadite city Jogbehah was within the watershed of the lower Jabbok, on a hill just N of Ammonite territory. The Israelite tribe of Reuben, known for its extensive herds, received the Medeba plateau, S of the watershed with Ammon, as well as the Abarim slopes around Pisgah and its descents. Thus the Bible clearly defines Ammon within watershed limits of the upper Jabbok. Biblical events and territorial descriptions recognize the constraints of these watersheds.

**Geobasics**

- The Bible uses the terms ‘the hand of the Jabbok’ and nearby ‘hill country villages’ to define the region of Ammon, an area whose canyons drain E into the upper Jabbok.
- Ammon was ideally situated to control trade between the arid south and the watered north, a magnet for desert caravans making their way to Phoenicia and to Damascus.
- Ammon’s natural stronghold of Rabbah was a formidable fortress with adequate water and maximal protection in the midst of an area threatened by Arabian marauders.
- Small forts encompassed the Rabbah citadel, and from this central core the Ammonites controlled their region of grainfields on the edge of settled areas to the N, S and W.
- A strong man at Rabbah could exploit Ammon’s potential by securing Ammon itself and then expanding into settled areas along adjacent routes to the N, S and W.

**Turn to pp. 16/17: SHARON, SAMARIA, EPHRAIM AND UPPER GILEAD map**

The area of Ammon lies between Upper Gilead (N) with its deep lower Jabbok, the Medeba plateau (S), canyons draining into the Rift (‘the Abarim slopes’ to the W) and Arabia (SE). A cursory look at the lower right area of this map reveals no clear-cut borders for Ammon, but above we saw that these exist along watersheds of the upper Jabbok.

- HL in yellow: elevation readings 976m/3202f (W of Rabbah) and 978m/3238f (N of Rabbah)
- HL in red: Jogbehah
- Black write-in: UPPER JABBOK (small caps in two lines) between Rabbah and Zarqa (Arabic name of the Jabbok meaning 'blue'); LOWER JABBOK (small caps in two lines) just above/below Jabbok river E of Mahannaim/Penuel and ‘Jabbok River’

Biblical people had their own way of defining an area such as Ammon within its distinctive setting. Precipitation in the area decreases quickly as storms move eastward into arid Arabia. Catchment areas of runoff become critical for farmers, and watersheds define catchment areas and become stable territorial boundaries, divisions between tribes, clans or peoples. Within this context the large curve of the Jabbok is very significant. Tributaries (fingers of ‘the hand of the Jabbok’ from Jazer/Kh. es-Sar and Jogbehah) descend to Rabbah to form the eastward
flow of the upper Jabbok. Near Zarqa, eastern drainage from adjacent hill country joins the Jabbok, now flowing N. It soon veers to the W and gathers drainage from a different region, the westward flow of the lower Jabbok deep within Upper Gilead (see white solid arrows on map above). Follow the Jabbok on p. 17 as it creates these two regions. The Bible carefully describes this real world surrounding Ammon, stressing that the Israelites did not receive the Ammonite homeland of the upper Jabbok (the hand of the Jabbok and adjacent hill country).

... except you did not encroach upon the territory of the Ammonites, no part of the 'hand' of the Jabbok stream-bed nor the villages in the hill country [to NE of Rabbah and draining eastward into the Jabbok].

Numbers 21:24 (read 'Jazer' with LXX) and 32:35 underscore this specific Ammonite area by placing Jazer (Kh. es-Sar) and Jogbehah (p. 17; see also RSM4), two cities of the Israelite tribe of Gad, just outside this 'hand' of the Jabbok stream-bed' where drainage begins to flow in the opposite direction. The Bible is thus using watersheds around the land of the Ammonites to delineate their territory on all sides except the E, which borders on arid Arabia.

You can outline 'Ammon' by placing your finger on the subdivisional line S of Rabbah, moving W to the 976m/3202f elevation reading, then N by Jazer, N and E in an arc to reach Jogbehah, NE to the 978m/3238f elevation reading and then E along a canyon leading to the Jabbok (just N of Zarqa). This area emerges as a region E of Gilead's uplift and S of the higher hills through which the Jabbok winds before entering its deep canyon leading to the Rift.

With the geographical parameters of 'Ammon' defined, we turn to what is by far its most prominent site, the stronghold-capital of Rabbah, meaning 'Great' or 'Immense.' The Ammonites ruled from atop this impressive natural fortress, which lies at the juncture of deep tributaries and a spring flowing into the upper Jabbok drainage system. Ammonite forts along surrounding routes guarded the approaches to Rabbah. Later, in Greco-Roman times, the southernmost city of the Decapolis, Philadelphia, arose upon Rabbah and overflowed into the open canyon floor at the foot of the bastion, where a large Roman theater still today offers a magnificent view of the citadel high above. These ruins—together with the Jordan Archeological Museum located on the citadel itself—create a major tourist attraction at the very heart of Amman, the capital of the modern state of Jordan.

The 'hand of the Jabbok stream-bed' (the plateau W of Rabbah discussed above) rises to watershed heights around Jazer (Kh. es-Sar) where it abruptly drops into canyons draining W to the Rift. The well-watered and fertile highland plains around Jazer (allotted to the Israelite tribe of Gad) no doubt saw tense scenes as Israelites and Ammonites debated their common border. The fact that the route between the Medeba plateau and Gadite Jogbehah connected to the Rabbah-Zia-Beth-shan trade route must have also generated friction between the two peoples. In Greco-Roman times the Jewish sites of Gedor and Tyre of Tobiah (p. 17) dominated hill-country and canyons W of the Decapolis city of Philadelphia at Rabbah, and an on-going Jewish-Gentile dispute arose over this same trade route via Zia north of Gedor.

Turn to pp. 4/5: This map shows limestones and chalks, allowing you to place sites and features above within their geological context. Note that Rabbah lies just N of our subdivisional line (HL in green) within a chalk depression (brown), through which the Jabbok flows. Limestone heights lie S of this line, draining both into Ammon to the N and to the Medeba plateau to the S. The boundary between Israelites on the plateau and Ammonites around Rabbah ran through these heights. The subdivisional line actually represents a large side fault beginning as a dark, solid line at the NE corner of the Dead Sea and continuing NE off the visible part of this map. The fault creates deep canyons by the Rift, while in the area of Rabbah it separates limestones (green) from chalks (brown), which includes much of 'hand of the Jabbok stream-bed' W of Rabbah. Ammon's hill country, N and NE of Rabbah, is slightly uplifted limestone which drains eastward into the Jabbok.
This map (pp. 18/19), covering much of the Central Arena, reveals Ammon's lucrative position where the arid south of Arabia meets the watered, settled north. The Desert highway, collecting roads from Arabia, Edom, Moab and Medeba, gravitated to Ammon. An Ammonite entity ruling from Rabbah could direct trade along one of the two main roads through Gilead to the northern trade corridor and coastal ports. To succeed, however, Ammon had to harness the agricultural and commercial potential of surrounding regions, which were now Israelite but formerly the territory of Sihon, the Amorite king who had ruled from Heshbon. Only then could they rein in surrounding caravan routes linking Arabia with the northern trade corridor.

**Turn to pp. 12/13:** This map is an overview of rocks and soils; it appears without roads but names major cities and has initials of other sites. By comparing this map with the front cover map on this book you can place regions such as Ammon within their larger context and begin to see how various regions fit into the entire land. Try doing this by noting the following.

1. Find **Rabbah** on this map. What lies between it and Acco, Tyre, Sidon and Damascus?
2. Find the broken, green line showing the **limit of adequate rainfall**. Rabbah and its adjacent region of Ammon fall within the area of adequate rainfall. This area broadens over the hill country of Gilead to the N but narrows over the highlands to the S.
3. The **Desert highway** from Arabia and Edom runs from the bottom of the map to Rabbah just E of the rainfall line. Run your finger just right of the line as it separates Arabia from watered regions. Imagine other Arabian caravan routes approaching Rabbah directly from the E. North of Rabbah, a far different situation emerges in the watered area of Bashan with its basalt (red) and fertile soils. Trace the desert highway N to Rabbah on the front cover map, which also appears without roads or sites.
4. Find **Ramoth-gilead** and **Beth-shan**. Using what you know from previous studies look for ways to link these sites with Rabbah through and around uplifted Upper Gilead.
5. A future study will look at the **Medeba plateau** to the SW of Rabbah. Why would the Ammonites want to control the Medeba plateau?

The exercise above demonstrates important facets of the region of Ammon. Its position between the settled north and Arabia offered great potential wealth if it could draw and direct caravan traffic from its imposing, natural capital at Rabbah. When central authority waned, however, in either Ammon or throughout the land, Ammon’s exposed position on the edge of the desert and its undefined borders made it vulnerable to attacks from Arabia, and Rabbah’s bulwarks proved insufficient to enforce territorial claims. The fortunes of Ammon and the advantages of Rabbah were thus at the mercy of greater forces.
Texts: Ammon

Behind the English Bible terms Ammon and Ammonites lies benei ‘ammon, ‘sons of Ammon,’ a Hebrew designation for an ethnic or tribal group. The expression occurs in some one hundred of the Bible’s one-hundred-and-one references to Ammon, and such persistent use may imply that in Israelite thought Ammon was still a tribal people without the political clout to support their expanding territorial encroachments into greater Gilead and the Medeba plateau. Many of these references to the ‘sons of Ammon’ do involve territorial issues or conflicts over land. The Bible, however, positions the sons of Ammon and their stronghold of Rabbah in the upper drainage of the Jabbok stream but near the edge of the eastern desert and along the Transjordanian highway.

- Several descriptions combine to pinpoint the frontiers of the sons of Ammon within the upper Jabbok stream, before it cuts a deep canyon to the Rift—

Moses defines Ammon’s territory as the upper Jabbok. According to the command of the LORD, our God, you did not encroach upon the territory of the Ammonites; that is, no part of the ‘hand’ of the Jabbok’s stream-bed [the watershed on the highland plateau between Rabbah and Jazer] nor the villages in the hill country [which lies N of Rabbah and drains eastward into the upper Jabbok]. Deuteronomy 2:37

Jazer and Rogobehah, two Gadite cities, lies just outside the upper Jabbok and Ammonite territory. Israel defeated Sihon with the sword and took possession of his territory from the Arnon [in the S] as far as the Jabbok [in the N] and as far as the Ammonites [in the E], that is, Jazer (per the Septuagint), the Ammonite’s [western] frontier. Numbers 21:24 / This is what Moses had given to the tribe of Gad... Their [eastern] frontier included Jazer and all the cities of Gilead and half of the Ammonite territory up to Arroer, which faces Rabbah... Joshua 13:24-25 / The Gadites rebuilt Dibon, Ataroth, Aror, Atroth-shophan, Jazer, Rogobehah, Beth-nimrah and Beth-haram as fortified cities and as pens for flocks. Numbers 32:34-36

‘As far as the Jabbok stream-bed, which serves as the Ammonite frontier’ is a phrase that can only refer to the upper Jabbok and not to the lower Jabbok canyon. The Jabbok canyon occurs in land descriptions that allot Gilead and the canyon to other entities. Sihon, the king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, ruled from Aror [in the S]—which is on the lip (edge) of the Arnon canyon—indeed, from the middle of the canyon and half of Gilead and as far [E as that part of] the Jabbok stream-bed, which serves as the Ammonite frontier. Joshua 12:2 / To the Reubenites and the Gadites I gave territory from Gilead as far [S] as the Arnon canyon—with the middle of the canyon as a [specific] boundary—and as far [E as that part of] the Jabbok stream-bed, which serves as the Ammonite frontier. Deuteronomy 3:16 / [East of the Jordan, Moses gave Manasseh, Gad and Reuben the territory] from Aror on the lip (edge) of the Armon canyon—even the city in the midst of the canyon, the entire Medeba plateau as far [SW] as Dibon, all the cities of Sihom, the Amorite king, who ruled in Heshbon, as far as the Ammonite frontier [in the upper Jabbok], Gilead, the Geshurite and Maacathite territory, all of Mt. Hermon and all Bashan as far [E] as Salecach, that is, the whole kingdom of Og in Bashan. Joshua 13:9-12

- The watered valleys of the sons of Ammon—between the heights of Gilead and the arid eastern desert—attracted trade caravans but also invaders from this same desert—

Trade caravans. Concerning the sons of Ammon... ‘Why do you brag about your valleys? Your valley is flowing—away! O renegade daughter, who depends on her treasures [by hosting trade caravans], “Who will come to me?” Behold, I am bringing terror upon you’ —an utterance of the Master, the LORD of hosts—from all around you, and everyone [of you] will be driven out before it, without anyone to gather the scattered ones. Yet, after that I will restore the fortunes of the sons of Ammon—an utterance of the LORD. Jeremiah 49:1, 4-6

Desert invaders. Son of man, turn your face toward the sons of Ammon and prophesy against them... ‘Behold, I am giving you to the sons of the east as a possession, and their encampments will occupy your territory, and they will place their tents on your land. They will eat your produce, and they will drink your milk. I will make Rabbah a pasture for their camels and the fields of the sons of Ammon a place for flocks to lie down. Then you will know that I am the LORD.’ Ezekiel 25:1, 4-5

[The Nabateans, a desert people, called Arabs in Josephus’ works, had pushed N from Petra along the desert highway to enter and control Damascus (Ant 13:392lav.2). The scope of their control included Rabbah/Philadelphia, for Aretas, on threat from the Romans] retreated to Philadelphia [Rabbah], War 1:129/vs.3 / One of Herod’s first engagements with the Nabateans took place at Canatha on the slopes of Jebel Druze, N of Philadelphia, and ended badly for his Jewish forces (War 1:366-368/xix.2). In his next major engagement] Herod... crossed the Jordan with his troops. Encamping in the neighborhood of Philadelphia, close to the enemy, and anxious to force an engagement, he began skirmishing with them for a fort which lay between the opposing lines.... [The desert Nabateans had overrun the territory of the sons of Ammon.] War 1:380-382/xix.5
**Ammon**

- **Ammon**’s territory lay directly between desert trade routes from the S and routes to the northern trade corridor and coastal ports—

Desert routes from the S from indirect evidence. [David took control of the desert routes S of Ammon (2 Samuel 8 [= 1 Chronicles 18] provides a summary of David’s victories, whereas 2 Samuel 10 [= 1 Chronicles 19] offers motive and orders David’s battles against the Arameans and Ammonites.) He defeated Moab [which carries or oversees a southern portion of the Transjordanian highway] ... and Moab became David’s subjects and brought him tribute. 2 Samuel 8:2 / David’s fame grew when he returned from defeating eighteen thousand Edomites in the valley of Salt, and he placed overseers in Edom [which carries the Transjordanian highway S of Moab]; indeed, throughout all Edom, he placed overseers, and all Edom became David’s subjects. 2 Samuel 8:13-14 / [When David sent a peaceful delegation to Hanun, king of the sons of Ammon, Ammonite suspicions ran high—probably because Rabbah was the next logical point of expansion for David along the Transjordanian highway—and they reasoned.] ‘Hasn’t David sent his men to you to explore the city [of Rabbah], spy on it and overthrow it? ’ [Hanun humiliated David’s ambassadors, but when the sons of Ammon realized that they had made themselves offensive to David, the sons of Ammon sent and hired [forces from the N, who also had an interest in the unhindered flow of trade]: Arameans from Beth Rehob and Zobah [in the Beqaa valley] ... the king of Maacah [in the Huleh basin] ... and men from Tob [on the Bashan]. ... [These forces] came and camped in front of Medeba, and the sons of Ammon gathered together from their cities and came out for battle (1 Chronicles 19:1). When David heard [the report], he sent Joab and the entire army of fighting men. The sons of Ammon went out and arranged for battle at the entrance to the gate [of Rabbah], and Arameans of Zobah and Rehob along with the men of Tob and Maacah were by themselves in the open plain [N of Medeba]. Joab [from the line of hills S of Rabbah] saw that the battle lines were both in front and behind him, so he chose from the best fighters in Israel and arranged them to meet the Arameans. The rest of the army he placed in the charge of Abishai, his brother and arranged them to meet the sons of Ammon. ... Joab and the force with him drew near for the battle with the Arameans, but they fled before the sons of Ammon. ... Joab and the Arameans were fleeing, and they fled from Abishai and entered the city [of Rabbah], so Joab returned from fighting the sons of Ammon and came to Jerusalem. 2 Samuel 10:1-14 / [See also preceding point for the Nabataeans along the desert routes and at Rabbah/Philadelphia.]

Highways across the walled N from indirect evidence: Highways through Bashan and Lower Gilead. In those days the LORD began to cut off portions from Israel, and Hazael [of Damascus] defeated them throughout all the territory of Israel from the Jordan eastward; that is, all the land of Gilead: the Gadites, the Reubenites and the Manassites, from Golan on the Arnon canyon, through Gilead and Bashan [a conquest which took the entire Transjordanian highway from Arzero to Damascus and would certainly intersect with Rabbah of the sons of Ammon]. 2 Kings 10:32-33 / You, mortal man, determine two ways the sword of the king of Babylon might come, both ways leaving from the same spot [along the Conquer’s Corridor (see above, p. 33) in the northern Rift]. By putting up a signpost where roads branch off to each city, indicate the way the sword is destined to follow: RABBAT of the sons of Ammon [east of the Rift] or Judah’s JERUSALEM the fortified [west of the Rift]. For the king of Babylon stops at this all-important fork in the road where these two roads begin, here seeking supernatural insight: he shakes arrows, consults idols and examines a liver. Ezekiel 21:19-21

Highways through Upper Gilead. In a push NW toward Beth-shan] Nahash the Ammonite went up and laid siege to Jabesh-gilead [on the Gerasa-Pehel-Beth-shan road through Upper Gilead]. 1 Samuel 11:1 / For three sins of Ammon, yea, four, I will not turn back [judgment]. Because he split open the pregnant women of Gilead in sins of Ammon, yea, four, I will not turn back. Amos 1:3-14 / Concerning the sons of Ammon—thus says the LORD— Does Israel have no sons? Or does it have no heir? Why then has Milcom dispossessed Gad, and his people dwelt in Gad’s cities [in Upper Gilead]? Jeremiah 49:1

- Rabbah’s strong and attractive position offered some security on the edge of the desert, but its water, grains and caravan-wealth drew the attention of others—

Of the remnant of the Rephaim [who were big people], only Og, king of Bashan remained [and he was big!]—indeed, his bed, an iron bed was nine cubits in length by four cubits in width according to the common cubit. Is it not [on display] in Rabbah of the sons of Ammon? [This curious detail speaks to Rabbah’s importance.] Deuteronomy 3:11; 1 Samuel 11:1 / At the turn of the year, the time when kings go out [to war], David sent Joab along with his army and all Israel, and they destroyed the territory of sons of Ammon and besieged RABBAT. 2 Samuel 11:1; 2 Chronicles 20:1 / [David used Rabbah’s strong defenses and the difficult siege as an opportunity to free himself of Uriah. He wrote to Joab,] ‘Place Uriah in the place of fiercest fighting [in front of the walls of Rabbah], then withdraw from him, so that he will struck and die. So as Joab watched the city, he placed Uriah at a place where he knew there were
fearless defenders. The city’s defenders came to fight with Joab, and some of the army, David’s men fell, and Uriah the Hittite also died. [Joab sent a report to David and instructed the messenger:] ‘If the king becomes angry and says to you, “Why did you allow your men to fall back and be killed?” should the enemies know that they would shoot down on you from the walls?...’” then say, ‘Your servant, Uriah, the Hittite is also dead.’” 2 Samuel 11:15-21 / [In a prolonged siege that presumably extended through the conception, birth and death of David’s child.] Joab continued fighting at Rabbah of the sons of Ammon, and he captured the royal city. He sent messengers to David with the report, ‘I have been fighting at Rabbah; indeed, I have captured the city’s water supply. Now gather the rest of the army and camp against the city and capture it, lest I should capture the city, and it be named after me.’ So David gathered the entire army and went to Rabbah, fought against it and captured it. He took the crown from the head of their king—its weight was a talent of gold along with precious stones, and it was put on David’s head, and he brought out the spoil of the city in great abundance. 2 Samuel 12:26-30 / The Ammonites sent tribute to Uzziah. 2 Chronicles 26:8 / Jothan fought with the king of the sons of Ammon. He overpowered them, so the sons of Ammon gave him a hundred talents of silver, ten thousand measures of wheat and ten thousand of barley that year, and the sons of Ammon paid this tribute to him in the second and third years as well. 2 Chronicles 27:5 / [The Lord told Ezekiel] Put up a signpost where roads branch off to each city and indicate the way the sword [of the king of Babylon] is destined to follow: RABBAH of the sons of Ammon.... Thus says the Lord GOD about the sons of Ammon and about their scorner, ‘A sword, a sword, drawn for the slaughter, polished to flash as lightning... I will put you into the hand of fierce men trained in destruction.’ Ezekiel 21:20, 26, 31 / ‘The days are coming,’ an utterance of the LORD, ‘when I will cause the battle cry to be heard at RABBAH of the sons of Ammon, and it will become a desolate mound; its villages burned with fire.’ Jeremiah 49:2 / On the side of Syria, joining up to Judea, is the region of the Decapolis, so called from the number of its cities: as to which all writers are not agreed. Most of them, however, agree in speaking of Damascus... Philadelphia [Rabbah]... Philistines, Amalek and from the spoils of Hadadezer the son of Zobah. 2 Samuel 8:12 (cf. 1 Chronicles 18:11; see other victory lists: Judges 10:11-12; 1 Samuel 14:47-48) / [In his flight from Absalom] David came to Mahanaim [and local leaders helped sustain him.] Shobi the son of Nahash from Rabbah of the sons of Ammon; Machir the son of Ammiel from Lo-debar; and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim. 2 Samuel 17:27 / Solomon built high places... on the mountain east of Jerusalem... [and Israel] worshiped Ashstoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab and Milcom the god of the sons of Ammon. 1 Kings 1:5, 7; 33 (cf. destruction in 2 Kings 23:13; and other lists of syncretistic action or judgment: Amos 1:3-2:8; Jeremiah 9:26; 25:18-26; 27:3; Ezra 9:1; Daniel 11:4)

Ammon, a key figure in the fight for Gilead. See ‘Conflicts over Upper Gilead’ on p. 93 above.

Ammon in alliances against Israel. [Eglon, the king of Moab] gathered around him the sons of Ammon and the Amalekites and went and defeated Israel; and they took possession of the city of palms [Jericho]. Judges 3:13 / [The sons of Moab and the sons of Ammon, and with them of the Moabites, came against Jehoshaphat for battle. 2 Chronicles 20:1; cf. v. 10 / ‘I have heard the taunts of Moab and the revilings of the sons of Ammon, for they taunted my people and bragged about their territory. Therefore, as I live,’ an utterance of the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Moab shall become like Sodom, and the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah.’ Zechariah 2:8-9]

Ammon dabbles in governance W of the Rift. The sons of Ammon crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah, Benjamin and the house of Ephraim; so Israel was in dire straits. Judges 10:9 / The LORD sent against Jehoiakim bands of the Chaldeans, bands of the Syrians, bands of the Moabites and bands of the sons of Ammon. He sent them against Judah to destroy it. 2 Kings 24:2 / The king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah ben-Ahikam [as governor over Judah.] Then Johanban ben-Kareah ... came to Gedaliah at Mizpah and said to him, ‘Do you know that Baalis, king of the sons of Ammon has sent Ishmael ben-Nethaniah to assassinate you?’ Jeremiah 40:11-14 / When Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the restoration of the walls of Jerusalem was progressing and that the breaches were beginning to be blocked up, they were very angry. Nehemiah 4:7

ABARIM SLOPES

Within the context of Ammon we return to the term ‘slopes’ introduced earlier. The general term ‘slopes’ in the Bible (Hebrew ha’ashedot) refers to catchment areas in the land in which drainage flows to a common outlet. These slopes lie between high ground and lower plains, such as those in the Rift. The Bible uses the specific term ‘the slopes of Pisgah’ four times to designate a catchment area falling into the Rift from the edge of the Medeba plateau and
This map (a part of p. 5) shows the ‘Abarim slopes’ W and below the watershed (the white dotted line). These slopes fall within a large drainage area that is distinct from Ammon. They include deep canyons in the Gedor area just E of Upper Gilead’s uplift (a broken yellow line on p. 5). From Gedor the watershed runs along the nearby ridge route (red in your book) to Jazer (Kh. es-Sar), encompassing other canyons. Both Gedor and Jazer lie within this watershed. From Jazer the watershed line bends around to reach Abel-keramim, Heshbon and Mt. Nebo before descending westward into the Rift by Beth-jeshimoth. Drainage from all of this area empties into the Rift between Beth-nimrah and Beth-jeshimoth, a region which attracts settlement.

The ‘Abarim slopes’ divide into three main sections (use p. 5 map as context for map above):

1. **Canyons NE from Beth-nimrah**: This uplifted and watered region of hard limestone and fertile soils reaches NE from the Rift to the Zia-Jogbehah ridge route. Beyond this ridge route most canyons drain N into the lower Jabbok canyon in the midst of the hill country of Upper Gilead. The interior of this area is secluded, but a route (not shown) links the important area of Beth-nimrah with the Zia route near Gedor.

2. **Canyons E from Abila**: A large fault off the NE corner of the Dead Sea continues NE (broken and HL in green on p. 5) creating a fragmented area. Deeply eroded canyons exploit the area and emerge around Abila. This creates a large catchment area reaching E to the watershed line, which divides it from fingers of ‘the hand of the Jabbok’ (stream-beds in Ammonite territory draining to Rabbah to form the upper Jabbok as discussed above). Note that both Jazer (Kh. es-Sar) and Abel-keramim lie on the edge of Ammonite territory but within the area draining W to the region of Abila. A beautiful site, Tyre of Tobiah (today’s Iraq el-Amir), lies within this fertile area of limestone, nestled along a deep, spring-fed canyon called ‘Wadi es-Sir’ Arabic.

3. **Canyons reaching E and SE to Heshbon and Medeba**: The setting of this area differs greatly from the other two. It lies S of the large fault discussed above (HL in green on p. 5). Limestone is now limited to a narrow strip descending from edge of the Medeba plateau into the Rift along relatively short and convenient descents (or ascents in the opposite direction). This specific and important part of the Abarim slopes is adjacent to Heshbon and Medeba, an area the Bible carefully specifies as the ‘slopes of Pisgah’ (‘P’ on p. 5), the name of a promontory along the ascent just below Mt. Nebo.

This brief introduction to the Abarim slopes allows us to make a few observations. First of all, early Israelite settlement on the slopes (Reuben and Gad) remained outside the official territory of Moab S of the Arnon and outside the official territory of the Ammonites, within
the hand of the Jabbok’ (E of Jazer/Kh. es-Sar). Second, the most convenient connection between Israelites on the Medeba plateau and those in Upper Gilead lay along the watershed road via Jazer. Third, to maintain this connection and convenient links to the Rift the Israelites had to control the region of the ‘Abarim slopes.’ Understanding how this region and its routes function explains events in the Bible from the time of Moses and Joshua to the days of the apostles and the Jewish historian Josephus Flavius. We meet some of these events below.

Texts: Abarim Slopes

The texts begin with the general term ‘the slopes’ in the Bible and then turn to the specific uses of ‘the slopes of Pisgah,’ a defined area within Reuben’s territorial settlement. The full settlement texts for Reuben and Gad claim the watershed from Mt. Nebo through Jazer to the area of Gedor and also bring the entire area of Abarim slopes under Reuben’s and Gad’ control, a significant territorial claim that excludes Ammon from strategic descents into the Rift and on to Jericho. These descents through the Abarim slopes all arrive on the ‘plains of Moab,’ a designation that suggests Moab once held this important link to Jericho, as well as a portion of the slopes and the Medeba plateau above them.

- Two of Joshua’s regional lists contain the enigmatic term, ‘the slopes’ (ha’ashedot), apparently catchment areas W of the Jordan—

So Joshua conquered all the land—the Hill Country, the Negev, the Shephelah and the slopes—and all their kings; he left no survivor, but he destroyed completely all that breathed, as the LORD, the God of Israel, had commanded. Joshua 10:40 / West of the Jordan ... Joshua gave the conquered land as a possession to the Israelite tribes according to their tribal divisions: in the Hill Country, the Shephelah, the Arabah, the slopes and the Wilderness. Joshua 12:7-8

- The specific area of ‘the slopes of Pisgah’ appears in various territorial descriptions E of the Jordan and became part of Reuben’s tribal inheritance—

To the Reubenites and the Gadites I gave territory from Gilead as far as the Arnon canyon—with the middle of the canyon as a boundary—and as far as the Jabbok stream-bed, which serves as the Ammonite frontier; the Arabah with the Jordan as a boundary from Chinnereth as far as the Sea of the Arabah, that is, the Salt Sea, below the slopes of Pisgah on the east. Deuteronomy 3:16-17 / [Israel took possession of the territory of the two Amorite kings] in Transjordan from Aroer, which is on the lip (edge) of the Arnon canyon, as far as Mt. Sirion [following Syriac], a part of the Hermon [range], including all the Arabah across the Jordan to the east, as far as the sea of the Arabah, below the slopes of Pisgah. Deuteronomy 4:48-49 / Sihon, the king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, ruled from Aroer—which is on the lip (edge) of the Arnon canyon—indeed, from the middle of the canyon and half of Gilead and as far [as the hand of the upper] Jabbok stream-bed, which serves as the Ammonite frontier; including the east side Arabah as far [N] as the Sea of Chinnereth, and the east side as far [S] as the Sea of the Arabah, that is, the Salt Sea, including the Beth-jeshimoth road [that is, the ascent] which lies just south, below the slopes of Pisgah [the southern ascent to the Medeba plateau]. Joshua 12:2-3 / Moses gave the sons of Reuben ... Beth-pearl on the slopes of Pisgah and Beth-jeshimoth [the southern descents into the Rift]. Joshua 13:15, 20

- Reuben’s and Gad’s requests for territory and their allotments included the Abarim slopes W of the watershed running from Mt. Nebo via Jazer to the area of Gedor—

Underlined sites are on Geobasics maps; bold-underlined sites represent cities on or below the Abarim slopes.

The Gadites and the Reubenites came and said to Moses, Elazar and the leaders of the congregation, ‘Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, [Beth] Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sibmah, Nebo and Beon [Beth-baal-meon, the territory the LORD subdued before the assembly of Israel, is a territory for livestock, and [we] your servants have livestock.’ ... So the Gadites built up Dibon, Ataroth, Jazer, Elealeh, Beth-nimrah and Beth-haram as fortified cities together with holding pens for flocks. The Reubenites built up Heshbon, Elealeh, Kiriathaim, Nebo, [Beth] Baal-meon—whose name was changed, and Sibmah. Numbers 32:2-4, 34-36 / Moses gave the sons of Reuben, by their clans, the territory from Aroer—which is on the lip (edge) of the Arnon canyon—including the city, which is in the middle of the canyon, and all the plateau around Medeba. It included Heshbon and all its cities which were on the plateau—Dibon, Bamoth-baal and Beth-baal-meon [to the SW]; Jahaz, Kedemoth and Mephaath [to the SE]; Kiriathaim, Sibmah and Zered-thasher on the hill in the valley [to the NW]; and Beth-peor on the slopes of Pisgah and Beth-jeshimoth (descents into the Rift)—all the cities of the Medeba plateau, the entire kingdom of Sihon, the Amorite king, who ruled in Heshbon. Joshua 13:15-21 / This is what Moses had given to the tribe of Gad ... Their [eastern] frontier included Jazer and all the cities of Gilead and half of the Ammonite territory up to Aroer, which faces Rabba, and from Heshbon [in the S] though Ramath-mizpeh, Betonim and Mahanaim [in the Jabbok canyon] to the frontier of Lo-debar; in the valley [of the Arabah below the slopes], Beth-haram and Beth-nimrah; Succoth and Zaphon—the rest of the kingdom of Sihon, king of Heshbon—the Jordan [itself as a western] frontier up to the [southern] end of the Sea of Chinnereth and eastward across the Jordan. Joshua 13:24-28
The phrase, 'plains of Moab' suggests that Moab, prior to Sihon's kingdom, held the slopes with their strategic descents to the Arabah plains; the term 'shoulder of Moab' must also refer to Moab's interest in these slopes—

Bold-underlined sites appear on Geobasics maps and represent cities near the Abarim slopes.

[Israel] had journeyed from the Abarim mountains and encamped on the plains of Moab beside the Jordan near Jericho; they camped beside the Jordan from Beth-eshmoth as far as Abel-shittim on the plains of Moab.

Numbers 33:48-49 / Moab and Seir said, 'See, the house of Judah is like all the nations!' Therefore, I will open wide the shoulder of Moab by means of certain cities, its cities on its frontier, the beauty of the territory, Beth-eshmoth, Baal-meon and Kiriathaim. Ezekiel 25:8-9

c. Moab and the Arnon Canyon

The rocks and soils of the region of Moab appear on two maps, the Central Arena (p. 5) and the Southern Arena (p. 7). Refer to both maps in the marking and discussions below.

Turn to pp. 4/5: CENTRAL ARENA map

- HL in yellow: Arnon/Mujib canyon (by subdivision line) and Heidan canyon; elevation readings in Moab of 1065m/3494f and 971m/3186f (bottom edge of map)
- HL in red/pink: Dibon and Aroer N of Arnon and Kir (of Kir [hareseth]) S of Arnon
- Black write-in: ARABIA in small caps on p. 5, vertically between the lower right edge of map and solid dark division line; DESERT HIGHWAY in small caps along red road near this solid dark line, E of Moab; LISSAN in small caps on land in Dead Sea W of Bab edh-Dhra

Compare the broad, uplifted limestone area (green) of Upper Gilead with the restricted limestone regions to the S and in Moab. The contrast between Upper Gilead's uniformity and Moab's variety is clear. The geological division is made by a long fault off the NE end of the Dead Sea (the solid line and HL broken line). South of this fault broad, uplifted Upper Gilead disappears and a dissected plateau emerges, the eastern edge of greater Arabia. Seasonal runoff racing headlong into the Dead Sea chasm cuts into this plateau, a tableland deeply eroded by raging torrents which sometimes reach the Rift long after the highland downpour ceases.

Turn to pp. 6/7: SOUTHERN ARENA map

- HL in green: Moab (regional name)
- HL in green: subdivisional line N of Moab
- HL in red/pink: Dibon, Aroer, Kir (of Kir [hareseth])
- HL in yellow: Arnon/Mujib canyon, Heidan canyon, Kerak canyon and Zered canyon; Ascent of Luhith and Ascent of Horonaim
- Black write-in: DESERT HIGHWAY in small caps along red road E of Moab; LISSAN in small caps on land in Dead Sea W of Bab edh-Dhra

Geobasics

- An extensive, watered plateau, part of the greater Arabian plateau, extends S of Upper Gilead, across the Arnon canyon and through the region of Moab to the Zered canyon.
- The deep Rift chasm creates erosion which cuts rugged canyon systems eastward from the Dead sea into the Arabian plateau, often capturing runoff far to the E.
- Eastward erosion in larger canyons exposes scarps of limestone (green) and deeper sandstones (purple), while rainfall on higher, gentler slopes produces fertile soils.
- The Arnon canyon divides Moab proper to the S from the plateau to the N, while the Zered canyon serves as Moab's southern limit; beyond lies Edom.
• Arid Arabia and the Dead Sea chasm effectively isolate Moab, which must expand N of the Arnon canyon onto the Medeba plateau in order to control trade routes.

• Like Ammon, Moab possesses a great natural stronghold, the isolated height of Kir towering above the Kerak canyon, which drains into the Dead Sea chasm.

The Southern Arena map (p. 7) shows rocks and soils in Moab’s territory between the Arnon (‘Mujib’ in Arabic) and Zered canyons. The beautiful Kerak canyon lies in the midst of Moab, and its sediments draining into the Rift form agricultural farmland along the eastern edge of the Lissan. Shorter canyons from Moab’s eastern tableland make even steeper descents to the Rift. Heights W of the Rift provide dramatic views of this rugged, western face of Moab.

Moab divides into four districts. In the W, rugged canyons plunge from limestone scarps and cut deeply into softer sandstones before emptying into the Dead Sea chasm. These western limestone slopes are often too steep to cultivate, but a second district—an often overlooked agricultural district—lies W and SW of Kir, where olives, vines and grains cover gentler inclines with fertile soils and abundant rainfall on elevations higher than those W of the Rift (p. 7). These lovely areas lie quietly between torturous, sandstone canyons to the W (purple) and Moab’s tableland to the E. Elimelech and Naomi may have migrated to one of these fertile regions in ‘the fields of Moab’ when drought and famine came upon the area of Bethlehem, W of the Dead Sea. King David, son of Jesse, ultimately issued from this trip as we learn at the end of the book of Ruth. If this were Ruth’s ancestral home in Moab, then David may have taken his family here as a sure refuge from Saul who sought to eliminate any trace of David in Judah. Today villages dot this area, at the head of what the Bible calls the ‘Descent/Ascent of Horonaim.’

A third district in Moab lies farther E, mainly a high tableland which extracts remaining rainfall from western storms before they reach Arabia. Volcanic basalt (red) partially covers it, and one cone, NW of Balu, is visible from Jerusalem. This tableland receives adequate rainfall for some grains but is especially suitable for grazing. The levy, that king Ahab of Israel imposed upon king Mesha of Moab, reflects the grazing potential of this district.

A fourth district lies to the E and gently descends from a dark basalt to the chalky, arid plains of Arabia, a transitional zone suitable for seasonal grazing. Rainfall decreases and beyond lies the desert highway and the ever-present threat of marauders from Arabia. A brave sentinel site of Roman times attests to the need to insure security in eastern Moab, the large and well-organized fortress-city of Lejjun (Beth-horon), nestled at the head of a spring-fed stream which drains N into the great Arnon canyon. The contrast between the area of Lejjun and the fertile fields SW of Kir is astounding, representing Moab’s diversity E of the Rift.

Turn to pp. 18/19: PHILISTIA, JUDAH, THE RIFT AND MOAB map

- HL in green: Moab
- HL in red/pink: Dibon, Aroer, Kir (of Kir [hareseth])
- HL in yellow: Arnon/Mujib canyon, Heidan canyon and Kerak canyon; elevation readings in Moab of 1065m/3494f, 975m/3199f, 971m/3186f and 1255m/4118f
- Black write-in: LISSAN in small caps on land in Dead Sea W of Bab edh-Dhra
- HL in yellow on red routes: 1) Route from the S edge of the map S of Kir, running N through Qasr to Dibon; 2) Route from Qasr to Aroer

This marking reveals that a Moabite leader S of the Arnon canyon had no options for exploiting trade without extending Moab’s control E to the Desert Highway (requiring a great outlay to ensure passage) or N beyond the Arnon to Dibon and Aroer. From there Moab could attack the network of routes in and around the Medeba plateau. This happened ‘when
Ahab [the powerful king of Israel] died, and Moab rebelled against Israel. The famous Mesha Stele (or Moabite Stone) found at ancient Dibon in +1868 adds many details to Moab's campaign which reached N from Dibon across the Medeba plateau. This sets the scene for our later discussion of the campaign of Mesha, king of Moab who ruled at Dibon.

**Turn to pp. 20/21: JUDAH'S SHEPHELAH, HILLS AND WILDERNESS map**

- HL in green: Moab
- HL in red/pink: Dibon and Tyr of Tobiah (top right corner)
- HL in yellow: Arnon/Mujib canyon, Heidan canyon and Kerak canyon; Ascent of Luhith; elevation readings in Moab of 1065m/3494f and 975m/3199f
- Black write-in: LISSAN in small caps on land in Dead Sea W of Bab edh-Dhra
- HL in yellow on red routes: 1) Route from the S edge of the map S of Qasr running N through Qasr to Dibon; 2) Segments of route from Qasr to Aroer (cf. p. 19)

This map reveals a smaller portion of Moab than seen earlier. Its main focus is areas W of the Rift studied later under Judah. Your marking, however, presents a context for that study.

**Turn to pp. 22/23: SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS AND EDOM map**

- HL in green: Moab
- HL in red/pink: Kir (of Kir [hareseth])
- HL in yellow: Arnon/Mujib canyon, Heidan canyon, Kerak canyon and Zered canyon; Ascent of Luhith and Ascent of Horonaim
- Black write-in: DESERT HIGHWAY in small caps along red road E of Moab; LISSAN in small caps on land in Dead Sea W of Bab edh-Dhra
- HL in yellow on red routes: 1) Route from the floor of the Zered canyon running N via Qasr and off the map; 2) The Desert highway from the Arabian desert on S edge of the map running N via various desert intersections and off the N edge by page number ‘23’

Your marking above (p. 23) sets Moab within the Southern Arena. It also shows 1) the more secure but more topographically challenging route through the heart of Moab (running just E of the natural stronghold of Kir) and 2) the less challenging but far less secure Desert highway, which receives caravan trade from southern and central Arabia. Again note that Moab has little if any opportunity to control Arabian caravan trade and channel it westward or northward to the bustling, settled part of the land. Moab, unlike the Medeba plateau and Ammon (off this map to the N) and unlike Edom (as we shall later see), is hemmed in by the Dead Sea chasm, Arabia, the Arnon canyon and the Zered canyon. Any attempt to control the plain S of the Dead Sea would incur the wrath of Edom or Judah. Moab therefore always looked north, beyond the Arnon, to the Medeba plateau and its great intersection of routes.

**Texts: Moab**

- **Ar of Moab** refers to a region lying S of the Arnon, Moab’s heartland, which God forbade the Israelites to touch in their approach toward the land—

  **Ar is Moab’s heartland. Do not harry Moab! Do not challenge them to war! I will not give you any of their land as a possession, because I gave Ar to the sons of Lot as a possession.** Deuteronomy 2:9 / Today you are crossing over the territory of Moab, that is, Ar. Deuteronomy 2:18 / [Moses sent to Sihon requesting:] ‘Let me pass through your land; I will only use the highway.... You can sell me food for money, so that I may eat. You can sell me water for money, so that I may drink. Only let me pass through on foot, as the sons of Esau who live in Seir and the Moabites who live in Ar did for me. Deuteronomy 2:21-29

  Yes, devastated in a night! .................... Ar [the heartland] of Moab is ruined.
  Yes, devastated in a night! .................... Kir [the capital] of Moab is ruined. Isaiah 15:1
Two early texts tantalize with incomplete descriptions of Ar’s location. [A partial quotation from a non-extant, early record leaves a cryptic reference to Ar’s location S of the Arnon.] They encamped across the Arnon [to the N where the Amorite border goes out in the wilderness, because the Arnon is the border of Moab between Moab and the Amorites. Therefore, it is said in the Book of the Wars of the LORD, ‘Waheb in Suphah, and the canyons of the Arnon and the slope of the canyons that reach [S] toward the environs of Ar but incline [N] toward the border of Moab’ [that is, the Arnon]. Numbers 21:13-15]

For fire went out from [Shimon’s] Heshbon, ...................A flame from Shimon’s town.

It consumed Ar of Moab, ....................................The masters of the heights of the Arnon. Numbers 21:28

The phrases ‘land of Moab’ and ‘plains of Moab’ recall that Moab once held territory N of the Arnon before Shihon, king of Heshbon took it, and later Israel captured it—

In earlier contexts ‘land of Moab’ [‘eretz mo‘aw] and ‘plains of Moab’ [‘arevot mo‘aw] referred to territory across the Jordan and opposite Jericho. Then the people of Israel journeyed and encamped on the plains of Moab across the Jordan from Jericho. They had journeyed from the Abamin mountains and encamped on the plains of Moab beside the Jordan near Jericho; they camped beside the Jordan from Beth-jeshimoth as far as Abel-shittim on the plains of Moab. Numbers 22:1 with 33:48-49; cf. Numbers 26:3, 63; 31:12; 33:50, 35:1; 36:13 / Across the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses determined to explain this law [to the next generation of those who had come out of Egypt]. Deuteronomy 1:5; cf. Deuteronomy 29:1 / [The LORD instructed Moses.] Go up this mountain of the Abamin range, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab that faces Jericho, and view the land of Canaan. Deuteronomy 32:49 / Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which faces Jericho, and the LORD showed him all the land. Deuteronomy 34:1 / Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD, and he buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor. Deuteronomy 34:6 / The people of Israel wept for Moses on the plains of Moab for thirty days until the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were complete. Deuteronomy 34:8 / These [tribal inheritances] Moses bestowed while on the plains of Moab, across the Jordan, east of Jericho. Joshua 13:32

In a later territorial dispute the ‘land of Moab’ referred to territory south of the Arnon. [The king of Ammon claimed that Israel had taken its territory N of the Arnon, and Jephthah argued that] Israel did not take away the land of Moab nor the land of the sons of Ammon. [... Since neither the king of Edom nor the king of Moab would allow Israel to pass through their territory] Israel ... went through the wilderness, went around [to the E of both] the land of Edom and the land of Moab and came up east of the land of Moab. They camped across the Arnon [to the NE], but they did not enter the Moab’s territory, because the Arnon marks Moab’s territory. Judges 11:15-18 (Jeremiah’s use of ‘land of Moab’ appears to include the Medeba plateau [49:24, 33]).

The Amorite king, Shihon of Heshbon took Moab’s land N of the Arnon; later Israel captured it. Israel took all these cities and settled in all the Amorite cities and in Heshbon and all its [outlying] villages. Heshbon was the city of Shihon, the Amorite king. He had fought earlier with the king of Moab and had seized all of his land as far [S] as the Arnon. Numbers 21:25-26; See below under the Medeba plateau texts: ‘Governance from Heshbon’ and ‘Contested road center and battleground.’

Moab pushed to regain its northern territories, but Israel resisted and David even taunted Moab regarding its border, the Arnon, God’s great ‘bowl for washing’—

The LORD strengthened Eglon, king of Moab over Israel ... and he defeated Israel and took possession of the City of the Palms [that is, Jericho, which required control of the Medeba plateau and the plains of Moab before reaching Jericho]. Judges 3:12-13 / [Ehud the Benjamite provided deliverance.] The sons of Israel ... went down after Ehud and captured the fords of the Jordan [leading to] Moab; ... they defeated Moab ... and Moab was humbled that day under Israel’s hand. Judges 3:27-30 / Saul ... fought all around against his enemies: Moab, the sons of Ammon, Edom, the kings of Zobah and the Philistines. 1 Samuel 14:47 / David defeated Moab. 2 Samuel 8:2; cf. 8:12 / Omri [king of Israel] had taken possession of the land of Medeba and settled it in his days and in much of [Ahab] his son’s days. Mesha Stele 7-8; cf. 2 Kings 1:1; 3:5 / I am Mesha ... king of Moab ... I rebuilt Medeba. Mesha Stele 1:29-30; See other battles with Moab in 2 Kings 3; 2 Chronicles 20; and raiding ‘bands of Moabites’ in 2 Kings 13:20; 24:2

God has spoken in his holiness: ‘I would triumph! I would parcel out Shechem—the valley of Succoth would I size up!

To me belongs Gilead—To me belongs Manasseh!

Ephraim is my chief stronghold!

Judah my commanding staff!

Moab is a bowl for washing myself—over Edom will I throw my shoe!

Above Philistia will I raise a shout of victory! Psalm 108:7-9; cf. Psalm 60:6-8

• From E to W Moab offered herding near the desert, grain on the ‘fields of Moab,’ and descents into the great Rift to more isolated oases such as Zoar and Eglaim—

Herding near the desert. Send lambs as tribute, O ruler of the land [of Moab!]: From Sela, toward the desert, to the mountain of the daughter of Zion. Isaiah 16:1 / Mesha, king of Moab was a sheepherder, and he sent [tribute] to the king of Israel: 100,000 lambs; wool of 100,000 rams. 2 Kings 3:4

Grain on the ‘fields of Moab.’ [The ‘fields of Moab’ (sedeš/sedēš mo‘aw) may be the grain fields on the basaltic outflow S of the Arnon around Balu, but grains, vines and olives also grow in smaller fields on the
well-watered heights nearer the Rift, such as those S and SE of Kir. The book of Ruth contrasts the ‘fields of Moab’ with Bethlehem (bet-lechem, ‘House/Place of Bread’) in the land of Judah.

In the days, the judges judged, a famine occurred in the land [of Judah], so a man from Bethlehem (Place of Bread) in Judah went to sojourn in the fields of Moab. Ruth 1:1

Then [Naomi] arose .... and returned from the fields of Moab .... for the LORD had given his people bread .... she returned to the land of Judah. Ruth 1:6-7

Naomi returned, and with her was Ruth, her Moabitie daughter-in-law, who had returned from the fields of Moab, and they came to the ‘Place of Bread’ at the beginning of the barley harvest. Ruth 1:22

See other uses of ‘fields of Moab’ in Ruth 2:6; 4:3; and in the early histories of Transjordan—Genesis 36:35; Numbers 21:20; 1 Chronicles 1:46; 8:8—the ‘fields of Moab’ were evidently worthy of conflict and comment.

Descents into the Rift to more isolated oases like Zoar and Eglaim.

My heart cries out for Moab.

Its fugitives are [spread out] between Zoar [note 1] and Eglath-shelishiyah [note 2].

Yes, they are ascending [note 3] the ascent of Luhith weeping.

Yes, along the descent of the Horonaim road they arouse a cry of terror.

Yes, the watercourse of Nimrim [note 4] is appallingly dry.

Yes, grass has withered, used up are the fresh shoots, no green plant exists....

Indeed, the cry has gone around the territory of Moab:

Its wailing as far as Eglaim [in the Rift to the W].

Its wailing even to Beer-elim [along the eastern desert (note 5)]. Isaiah 15:5-6, 8; cf. Jeremiah 48:34

NOTES: 1) Zoar is at the S end of the Dead Sea where the Zered canyon empties into the Aravah valley (see RSM2);

2) Eglath-shelishiyah, ‘the third Eglath/heifer’—perhaps the third after the ‘two heifers’; Eglaim along the Dead Sea in Moab (Isaiah 15:8) and En Eglaim along the Dead Sea in Judah (Ezekiel 47:10)—may stand with Agalla/Agal(l)shaim (modern Ru'in el-Jilma) at the head of the descent to Bab ed-Dhra (see p.19); 3) the ascending flight can be into the Rift as one ascends out of the Wadi Ibn-Hammud when traveling either way along the Luhith ascent; 4) Wadi Numeira is a possible identification midway between Bab ed-Dhra and Zoar; 5) compare Beer-elim with Beer, ‘well’ (used four times) in Numbers 21:16-18.

You too, O Madmen [see note], will be stilled! ............ The sword will go after you [as you escape into the Rift].

The sound of a cry from Horonaim:......................... ‘Devastation and great terror!’

‘Broken is Moab!’................................. Is the cry that is heard from her little ones.

Yes, along the ascent of Luhith, ......................... They will ascend while weeping constantly;

Yes, along the descent of Horonaim, ........................ They will hear the oppressive cry of terror. Jeremiah 48:2-5

NOTES: Kh. Dimna at the head of the Luhith ascent provides a logical identification for Madmen, which is perhaps another form of Dimmon (Isaiah 15:9—‘the waters of Dimon’ may refer to the springs and constant flow of water in the Wadi Ibn-Hammud below Kh. Dimna). The address to Madmen then calls to mind the Luhith ascent as do the parallel lines in verse 5: Madmen/Luhith and Horonaim (vv. 2-3); Luhith and Horonaim (v. 5).

• To the Hebrew prophets Moab appeared secure between the Arnon and Zered canyons, prosperous on watered ‘fields’ above the Rift, and lifted up with pride and arrogance—secure and undisturbed. [Jeremiah uses the metaphor of undisturbed wine to describe Moab’s security.]

Tranquil is Moab, from his youth; ......................... Undisturbed he is—[like wine] on its dregs,

He has not been poured from jar to jar; ..................... That is, he has not gone into exile.

Therefore, his flavor remains in him, ....................... And his aroma has not changed.

He has not been poured from jar to jar; ..................... That is, he has not gone into exile.

As for the bounty they produced ........................ and their royal stores,

Over the Brook of the Poplars [see note] .................. They will carry them. Isaiah 15:7

NOTE: Perhaps the modern Wadi Wala near Kh. Iskander.

Moab’s weighty wealth will be seem light ............ [Distributed] among all of the great [invading] army.

The scrolls will be very little, .......................... Not much. Isaiah 16:14

Because of your trust in your deeds and your riches. Even you [Moab] will be captured;

And Chemosh [god of Moab] will go out into exile .... Together with his priests and his princes. Jeremiah 48:7

Therefore, my heart like a flute moans for Moab; ...... My heart like a flute moans for the men of Kir-heres.

Because the bounty they produced is lost. Jeremiah 48:36

Lifted up with pride. [Moab’s heights—across the sea—stand colorfully, proudly above Judah’s hills and represent Moab’s pride in its security and abundance.]

We have heard of Moab’s pride ......................... —an excessive pompous;

His pageantry, his pride, his arrogance; .............. Not so! His boastings.
THE ARNON CANYON

The great Arnon canyon—the modern Mujib and the ‘Grand Canyon’ of Jordan today—shatters the unity of the broad tableland that extends across both the Medeba plateau and Moab. Although the Arnon appeared in our discussion of Moab, such an impressive geobasic along the eastern heights calls for its own list of texts, most of which recall that the Arnon is an impressive natural feature, a great cleavage that splits the tableland and isolates Moab.

Texts: Arnon Canyon

- The Arnon canyon, reaching far to the E, and Aroer provided an indisputable, natural border between the Medeba plateau in the N and the heartland of Moab in the S—

  The Arnon, Moab’s northern border. [As Israel approached the land from the SE] they camped on the opposite side of the Arnon, which is in the desert that goes out from the Amorite border, for the Arnon was the border between Moab [to the S] and the Amorites [to the N]. Numbers 21:13 / When Balak heard that Balaam was coming, he went out to meet him at the city [Hebrew: ‘ir, or Ar] of Moab, which is along the border of the Arnon, at the end of the border. Numbers 22:36 / Israel ..., went east of the land of Moab and camped on the other side of the Arnon, but they did not enter Moab’s territory, because the Arnon marks Moab’s territory. Judges 11:18

  The Arnon, the Amorite king Sihon’s southern border. [As Israel approached the land, they camped in the eastern reaches of the Arnon along the desert highway. Then God said,] ‘Start moving and cross over the Arnon stream. See, I have given the Amorite Sihon, the king of Heshbon into your hand. Deuteronomy 2:24 / Israel defeated Sihon with the sword and took possession of his territory from the Arnon [in the S] as far as the Jabbok [in the N] and as far as the Ammonites [in the E], that is, Jazer, the Ammonite frontier [in the W]... For Heshbon was the city of Sihon, the king of the Amorites, and he had fought against the former king of Moab and taken all his land from him as far [S] as the Arnon. Numbers 21:24, 26 / Sihon, the king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, ruled from Aroer [in the S]—which is on the lip (edge) of the Arnon canyon—indeed, from the middle of the canyon and half of Gilead and as far [E] as the Jabbok stream-bed, which serves as the Ammonite frontier. Joshua 12:2

  The Arnon, Israel’s southern border. We took this territory at that time—from Aroer, which is on the Arnon canyon, and half of the hill country of Gilead and its cities—and I gave it to the Reubenites and the Gadites. Deuteronomy 3:12 / To the Reubenites and the Gadites I gave territory from Gilead as far [S] as the Arnon canyon—with the middle of the canyon as a [specific] boundary—and as far [E] as that part of the Jabbok stream-bed, which serves as the Ammonite frontier. Deuteronomy 3:16 / Moses gave the Reubenites, by their clans, the territory from Aroer [in the S]—which is on the lip (edge) of the Arnon canyon—indeed, the city which is in the middle of the canyon, and all the plateau around Medeba ... Joshua 13:15-16

  The Arnon, Ammon’s border claim. [The Ammonite king claimed:] When Israel came up from Egypt, it took my land from the Arnon [in the S] up to the Jabbok [in the N] and as far as the Jordan [in the W]. Judges 11:13 / [Jephthath the Israelite countered:] Israel attacked and took possession of all the land of the Amorites who dwelt in that land. They took possession of all the Amorite territory from the Arnon [in the S] up to the Jabbok [in the N] and from the desert [in the E] as far as the Jordan [in the W]. This excluded Ammonite territory, and furthermore, since Israel has lived for three hundred years in Heshbon and its villages, in Aroer and its villages and in all the cities along the Arnon, why haven’t you laid claim to them [formerly] during that time? Judges 11:21, 26

  The Arnon, a point of well-known reference. From Aroer, which is on the lip (edge) of the Arnon canyon and the city that is in the canyon, as far as Gilead, not one city was too high for us. The LORD our God gave everything over to us. Deuteronomy 2:26 / These are the kings of the land, whom Israel defeated, and they took possession of their land which was across the Jordan and eastward from the Arnon canyon [in the S] as far as Mt. Hermon [in the N] and all the Arabah [in the Rift] and eastward [to the desert]. Joshua 12:1; cf. 13:9 / So at that
time we took the land out of the hand of the two Amorite kings who were across the Jordan, from the Arnon canyon to Mount Hermon. Deuteronomy 3:8; cf. 4:47-49 / [David’s census-officials] crossed the Jordan and turned down to Aroer, from the city that is in the middle of the canyon, [they continued on] toward Gad and on to Jazer ... 2 Samuel 24:5 / Hazael defeated [the Israelites] throughout all Israel’s territories: from the Jordan eastward [he took] all the land of Gilead belonging to Gad, Reuben and Manasseh; from Aroer on the Arnon canyon through Gilead and Bashan. 2 Kings 10:32-33

• The Arnon, the ‘Grand Canyon’ of modern Jordan, was always an obstacle and crossing it represented a noteworthy advance, whether for good or bad—

Like bewildered birds, a nest dispersed, are the daughters of Moab at the crossings of the Arnon. Isaiah 16:2 / Descend from honor and sit on parched earth, O inhabitant of Dibon’s villages! The one who is devastating Moab will [cross the Arnon and] come up against you. He will destroy your fortifications. Stand by the road [ascending out of the Arnon] and watch, O inhabitant of Aroer! Ask of them [as they ascend out of the Arnon]—the fleeing man and escaping woman—and say, ‘What has happened?’ [They will answer,] ‘Moab is disgraced, for it is wrecked!’ Wail and cry out! Tell it by the Arnon, ‘Moab is devastated!’ Jeremiah 48:18-20 / [After] Mesha ben Chemosh-yat, king of Moab [rebelled against Ahab’s son, he listed various accomplishments including] I made a highway across the Arnon. Mesha Stele 1, 26; cf. 2 Kings 1:1; 3:5

D. MEDEBA PLATEAU

Our study of Upper Gilead, Ammon and Moab prepares us for the discussion of the Medeba plateau. This natural gateway offered access to routes crossing the Rift to Jericho and beyond, into the western heights. This same plateau attracted the attention of Israel and Judah in the western heights—for from here they could extend their control to all of the eastern heights. This study thus allows us to consolidate all of our previous work in the central arena.

Guide in brief—MARKING

Turn to pp. 4/5: CENTRAL ARENA map

• HL in green (if not already HL): Medeba plateau
• HL in red/pink: Heshbon, Medeba, Jahaz, Machaerus
• HL in yellow: Zarqa Maim hot springs; elevation readings 1007m/3304f (S of Rabbah), 819m/2687f (at T. Jalul), 802m/2631f/Mt. Nebo and 828m/2717f (SW of Dibon)

Upper Gilead’s uplift (yellow broken line) ends in the Rift SW of Gedor. Elevations on the Medeba and Dibon plateaus drop below those of Upper Gilead and Ammon, and much of Gilead’s broad limestone hill country (green) disappears as we move S to the Medeba plateau. It appears again in the Dibon area above the deep Arnon canyon. We now investigate how the region between Ammon and the Arnon fits into the greater eastern heights.

Geobasics

• An extensive, watered plateau, part of the greater Arabian plateau and lower than Upper Gilead, extends S of Ammon, rising slightly through the region of Moab.
• The Rift chasm creates erosion which cuts deep, rugged canyon systems eastward from the Dead sea into the Arabian plateau, often capturing runoff far to the E.
• The Arnon canyon divides the northern part of the plateau from Moab proper to the S.
• North of the Arnon the Zarqa Maim and Heidan canyons cut into the plateau, but it persists in the N around Medeba and T. Jalul, and to the S by Dibon and Aroer.
• The importance the Medeba plateau in the N is that it offers attractive descents into the Rift valley N of the Dead sea, ascents not available in the region of Dibon.
• Highways from the N, caravan routes from the S and E, and ascents from the Rift in the W meet in the Medeba plateau making it one of the land’s major intersections.
• Given the military and commercial importance of the Medeba plateau, leaders in Ammon, Moab, Israel, Judah and elsewhere coveted this plateau and its major sites.
The Medeba plateau is one of the eastern heights’ most strategic areas. It is part of the Arabian plateau stretching far to the S and SE of Upper Gilead and the region of Ammon. On the W this Arabian plateau plummets into the Rift and the Dead Sea chasm creating conditions in which a myriad of rugged and eroded canyons have emerged. A narrow area of convenient descents, however, exists within the short distance between the NE shore of the Dead Sea and the plunging uplift of Upper Gilead (yellow broken line). Note the three roads descending from the Medeba plateau into the Rift (p. 5). These descents are part of a coveted road-system that links the intersection of the Medeba plateau with the oasis of Jericho. Again, geobasics combine to create an area’s potential—here, a convenient Rift-crossing N of the Dead Sea links the history of sites such as Heshbon and Medeba on the edge of the Medeba plateau to events on the adjacent plains of the Rift valley N of the Dead Sea.

Some canyon systems emptying into the Rift erode far to the E into arid Arabia. The largest is the magnificent Arnon canyon along the subdivisional line (green HL). Two other canyon systems, not nearly as deep, reach eastward forming a network of tributaries: the Heidan and the Zarqa Maim (the latter named on the map by its hot springs). The Medeba plateau drains S through an area of rolling hills and small canyons into the Zarqa Maim while adjacent tributaries feed the Heidan canyon. These minor topographical difficulties tend to separate the Medeba and Dibon plateaus allowing Dibon in the S to function as a separate political entity than Medeba to the N. An ambitious ruler in Dibon, however, would naturally desire access to the Rift road system N of the Dead Sea which is accessible from the Medeba plateau. 

Turn to pp. 16/17: SHARON, SAMARIA, EPHRAIM and UPPER GILEAD map

- HL in green: Medeba plateau
- HL in red/pink: Heshbon
- HL in yellow: elevation readings 1007m/3304f (SE of Rabbah); 802m/2631f/Mt. Nebo
- Black write-in: FROM ARABIA in small caps in the blank space below Mawaqqar
- HL in yellow on red routes: 1) Rabbah-Muwaqqar-SE off map to Arabia; 2) Rabbah-Ziza-off map; 3) Rabbah-Bezer-SW off map; 4) Rabbah-Samaga-SW off map; 5) Rabbah-Abel-keramim-Abila; 6) Via Mt. Nebo-Pisgah-Livias/Julias in Rift

This map shows only a portion of the Medeba plateau, but it does provide a good view of the descents from the plateau into the Rift, precisely in a region where the Dead Sea and Gilead no longer hinder E-W passage. These descents provide much-needed links between the Medeba plateau and the E-W road system across the Rift valley to the area of Jericho. Ammon’s nearby natural fortress of Rabbah/Philadelphia overshadows and covets this area, a region on the SE frontier of the country’s agricultural and urbanized lands (see rainfall line on pp. 12/13) and also a zone exposed to desert invaders. All of this and more contributes to the complex and checkered history of the Medeba plateau.

Turn to pp. 18/19: PHILISTIA, JUDAH, THE RIFT AND MOAB map

- HL in green: Medeba plateau
- HL in red/pink: Heshbon, Medeba, T. Jalul, Jahaz, Machaerus
- HL in yellow: Zarqa Maim canyon; the elevation readings of 819m/2687f (at T. Jalul); 802m/2631f/Mt. Nebo (SW of Heshbon); 828m/2717f (SW of Dibon)
This map (p. 19) displays well the area from Ammon to Arnon canyon. Note the following:

1. North: The full Medeba plateau, much of it covered by chalky soil (brown), hosts a network of N-S and E-W routes linking Arabia, Gilead and the Rift valley.

2. Center: Tributaries to the Zarqa-maim and Heidan canyons reach eastward to create a natural separation between the Medeba plateau and the Dibon-Mephaath plateau.

3. South: The Dibon-Mephaath plateau has its own network of roads linking it to the Desert highway and the Medeba plateau (detailed on RSM4, ver. 2) but lacks descents into the Rift and thus must look northward for more complete control of trade.

This context asserts the significance of routes and sites that link the Desert highway with the Rift valley road-system N of the Dead Sea or with Ammon/Gilead. The Jahaz-Medeba route is a key highway in the region, the most direct link between the Desert highway and the Rift. It is the most probable route followed by the Israelites as they migrated from the edge of arid Arabia into the area between T. Jalul, Medeba and Heshbon. Indeed, Sihon, king of Heshbon and defender of the plateau, made a tactical decision to meet the Israelites in battle in the area of Jahaz before they reached the settled and agriculturally attractive Medeba plateau.

Turn to pp. 20/21: Judah’s Shephelah, Hills and Wilderness map

- HL in red/pink: Heshbon and Medeba on the Medeba plateau (not named)
- HL in yellow: Zarqa Maim canyon; the elevation readings of 802m/2631f/Mt. Nebo (SW of Heshbon); 828m/2717f (SW of Dibon)

You will later HL routes on this map when we discuss the Rift N of the Dead Sea and its connections with the Medeba plateau.

Turn to pp. 12/13: The overview map of ‘Rocks and Soils’ marks areas of sufficient rainfall for farming and provides some site names and the initials of other sites. Remember to compare this map with the map on the front cover, as the front cover map vividly depicts features such as canyons. Our goal is to place the Medeba plateau in its larger context and thereby gain a better perspective of the eastern heights from Moab to Gilead. The on-going ‘Madaba Plains Project’ (www.madabaplains.org) underscores the importance of the Medeba plateau as surveys and excavations reveal more of its unique character. Find the following on pp. 12/13.

1. Dibon, Rabbah and Beth-shan; Zered, Arnon and Jabbok canyons (unnamed; cf. pp. 5 and 7); the initials ‘M’ and ‘H’ (Medeba and Heshbon), K-h (Kir [hareseth])

2. Trace with your finger the approximate areas of Moab, Upper Gilead, Ammon and the Medeba plateau; consider what you know about them on this map, including rainfall.

3. The chasm of the Dead Sea plunges to its deepest depths along its eastern shore N of ‘E’ (Eglaim [Mazra]), creating one of the greatest barriers in the land and effectively separating Moab to the E from the central hill country to the W.

4. The arid plains N of the Dead Sea offer the most convenient way around the Dead Sea chasm, an avenue of exchange but also a gateway for invaders from both directions.

5. Return to the Medeba plateau (E of the ‘M’ and ‘H’) and compare the advantages it offers for E-W travel and trade compared to Moab and Upper Gilead.

One long, uninterrupted plain would have allowed traffic to flow unhindered S of Upper Gilead, but the Dead Sea chasm and the erosion of the great Arnon canyon and other canyons immediately N of the Arnon transformed this plateau into separate geographical entities. These geobasics directed the course of history on the eastern heights as Israel, Ammon and Moab all vied for control of the Medeba plateau and its intersection of roads.
guide in brief—
PERSONALITY
IN TEXTS

Texts: Medeba Plateau

• The Mishor is the plateau around Medeba and defines a specific region between the Arnon and Gilead. The site of Heshbon dominated this area in various periods—

The Mishor defines a specific region. [Moses rehearsed:] At that time we took the territory east of the Jordan River from the two Amorite kings, from the Arnon canyon to Mount Hermon... [it included] all the cities of the Mishor [Medeba plateau] and all Gilead and all Bashan... Deuteronomy 3:8-10 / [Moses separated three cities across the Jordan River on the east side as cities of refuge]... Bezer near the wilderness in the territory of the Mishor [Medeba plateau] for the Reubenites, and Ramoth in Gilead for the Gadites, and Golan in Bashan for the Manassites. Deuteronomy 4:41-43, cf. Joshua 20:8 / [The land that Moses gave to Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh includes] all of the Mishor from Medeba to Dibon and all the cities of Sihon, the Amorite king, who ruled in Heshbon, as far as the Ammonite frontier... and Gilead... and the entire kingdom of Og in Bashan... Joshua 13:9-12 / Moses gave the Reubenites, by their clans, the territory from Aror—which is on the lip (edge) of the Arnon canyon—including the city, which is in the middle of the canyon, and all the Mishor around Medeba. It included Heshbon and all its cities which were on the Mishor—Dibon, Baanath-baal and Beth-baal-meon [to the SW]; Jahaz, Kedemoth and Mephaath [to the SE]; Kiriathaim, Sibmah and Zereth-shahah on the hill in the valley [to the NW]; and Beth-peor on the slopes of Pisgah and Beth-jeshimoth [descents into the Rift—all the cities of the Mishor [Medeba plateau], the entire kingdom of Sihon, the Amorite king, who ruled in Heshbon. Joshua 13:15-21

Governance from Heshbon. Israel took all these cities and settled in all the Amorite cities and in Heshbon and all its [outlying] villages. Heshbon was the city of Sihon, the Amorite king. He had fought earlier with the king of Moab and had seized all of his territory as far as the Arnon. Therefore the poets say,

Enter Heshbon [O Israel!; Let it be rebuilt. ....................Let it be restored, the city of Sihon.

For fire went out from [Sihon's] Heshbon, ....................A flame from Sihon's town.

It consumed Ar of Moab, ..............................The masters of the heights of the Arnon.

Woe to you, O Moab! .................................You are ruined, O people of Chemosh!

[Mishor] had given his sons as fugitives, ...................his daughters as captives, to the Amorite king, Sihon!

But we [Israelites] cast them [the Amorites] down; ......Heshbon is ruined as far as Dibon [on the Arnon]!

We laid them waste as far [N] as Nophah [Noahah]; ......Fire [reached as far as Medeba?] Numbers 21:25-30


Heshbon, a regional center during the Second Temple period. [Herod the Great] founded a site in the great plain, called Gaba in the Galilee, for some of his picked cavalymen... and in Perea [he rebuilt] Esebonitis [Heshbon]. Ant 15:294/vii.5 / [At the outbreak of the First Revolt against Rome,] parties of Jews sacked the Syrian villages and the neighboring cities: Philadelphia, Esebonitis [Heshbon] and its district, Gerasa, Pella and Scythopolis... War 2:408/vii.1

The Medeba plateau boasted good wheat land, vines and flocks, but it was also a contested road center and battleground—

Good wheat land. You, O Tyre, ... Judah and the land of Israel were your trading partners. They gave wheat from [as far away as] Minmith [on the northern edge of the Medeba plateau], fig cakes, honey, olive oil and balm for your imports. Ezekiel 27:17

Vines. The fields of Heshbon waver!

O vine of Sibmah! .................................Whose rich, red clusters intoxicated those who rule nations.
[Locally the fame of the wine from these clusters]
Reached as far [N] as Jazer ............................and wandered [E] toward the [Arabian] desert.
Having sent its shoots/exports [even farther].....................they crossed the sea [far to the W].

Therefore, I will weep with Jazer's weeping, O vine of Sibmah!
I will drench you with my tears, .......................O Heshbon and Elealeh!
For over your harvest and over your vintage.............cheering has ceased.
Rejoicing is gathered-in, ................................as well as gladness—from the 'fruitful vineyard,'
No joyous singing in the vineyards; ............................No celebrating the vintage.
Within the winepress no treader treading wine! ............I have made vintage cheering to cease. Isaiah 16:8-10

More than the weeping of Jazer, I will weep for you, ..O vine of Sibmah!
Your spreading vines passed [W] beyond the sea;...........as far [N] as the reservoir of Jazer, they reached.
On your harvest and on your grape-gathering, ............the destroyer has fallen.
Rejoicing is gathered-in, as well as gladness ..........—from the 'fruitful vineyard' and from the territory of Moab.
I have made wine in the winepresses cease; ............there is no wine-treader cheering—
But a [destroyer's] cheering, .................................not a [harvester's] cheering! Jeremiah 48:32-33

Flocks. The Reubenites and Gadites had abundant livestock—very numerous, and when they saw the territory of Jazer and the territory of Gilead, indeed, the area was an area for livestock. So the Gadites and the Reubenites
came and said to Moses, Elazar and the leaders of the congregation, “Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, [Beth] Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sibmah, Nebo and Beon [Beth-baal-meon], [sites around the Medeba plateau] the territory the LORD subdued before the assembly of Israel, is a territory for livestock’ ... So the Gadites built up Dibon, Ataroth, Aroer, Atrath-shophan, Jazer, Jogbehah, Beth-nimrah and Beth-haram as fortified cities together with holding pens for flocks. The Reubenites built up Heshbon, Elealeh, Kirathaim, Nebo, [Beth] Baal-meon—whose name was changed, and Sibmah. They called the cities they rebuilt by these names. Numbers 32:1-4, 34:38 / [Deborah’s song uses images from the shepherding culture to taunt the Reubenites for not Mustering against Sisera.] Among Reuben’s tribal divisions, great was the heart-searching, why did you sit [unable to decide] between two hearth-fires [within your tents]? To listen to the piping for the flocks [around Medeba]? For Reuben’s tribal divisions, great was the heart-searching. Judges 5:15-16 / At Beth-diblathaim and Beth-baal-meon, I [Mesha, king of Moab] put my shepherds to tend the flocks of the [Medeba] region. Mesha Stele 30-31; see Mesha’s tribute to Israel in 2 Kings 3:4 under Moab’s texts above.

**Contested road center and battleground.** [In the days of Abraham, kings from the N campaigned east of the Jordan from Bashan to Edom. Among their conquests] they defeated ... the Emite at the plain of Kiriathaim [on the western edge of the Medeba plateau], Genesis 14:7 / Heshbon [on the Medeba plateau] was the city of Sihon, the Amorite king. He had fought earlier with the king of Moab and had seized all of his territory as far [S] as the Arnon. Numbers 21:26 / Israel defeated Sihon with the sword and took possession of his territory from the Arnon [in the S] as far as the Jabbok [in the N] and as far as the Ammonites [in the E], that is, Jazer, the Ammonite western frontier. Israel took all these cities and settled in all the Ammonite cities and in Heshbon and all its outstanding villages [on the Medeba plateau]. Numbers 21:24-25 / The LORD strengthened Eglon, king of Moab over Israel ... and he defeated Israel and took possession of the City of the Palms [that is, Jericho, which requires control of the Medeba plateau between Moab and Jericho]. Judges 3:12-13; cf. Eshu’s victory at the fords of the Jordan in v. 28 / [The Ammonite king claimed:] When Israel came up from Egypt, it took my land from the Arnon [in the S] as far as the Jabbok [in the N] and as far as the Ammonites [in the W]. Judges 11:13 / Jephthah crossed over to the sons of Ammon to fight them, and the LORD gave them into his hand. He defeated them [and drove them off the Medeba plateau] from Arnon as far as the approach of Minnith [perhaps the road center N of Bezer that funnels roads through the low hills S of Rabbath], twenty cities in all extending as far as Abel-keramim. It was a decisive victory. Judges 11:32-33 / [During David’s day, the Ammonites] hired chariots and horsemen from Aram-naharaim, Aram-maacha and Zobah ... and they came and camped in front of Medeba. 1 Chronicles 19:6-7

Omri [king of Israel] had taken possession of the land of Medeba and settled it in his days and in much of [Ahab] his son’s days ... the men of God had settled in the land of Ataroth [on the SW edge of the plateau] from of old, and the king of Israel had fortified Ataroth for himself ... the king of Israel had fortified Jahaz ... [on the SE edge of the plateau], and he occupied it while warring against me ... Mesha Stele 7-8, 10-11, 18-19; cf. 2 Kings 1:1; 3:5 / I am Mesha, ben Chemosh-yat, king of Moab ... Omri, king of Israel, had oppressed Moab many days ... but I saw [success] against him and his house, so Israel was completely lost forever ... [W of the plateau in the heights] I rebuilt Baal-meon ... I rebuilt Kiriathaim ... I took Ataroth ... [and dishonored Israel] before Chemosh at Kerioth ... and I took Nebo ... [E and S of the plateau] I led [a force] against Jahaz and captured it, annexing it to Dibon ... I made repairs at Aroer ... and I rebuilt Bezer ... [on the plateau] I rebuilt Medeba. Mesha Stele 1-30 / [John] Hyrcanus marched out against the cities of Syria ... he captured Medeba after six months during which his army suffered great hardships; next he captured Samaga [on the northern edge of the Medeba plateau]. Ant 13:254-255.xx/1 / [Under Alexander Jannaeus] the Jews held the following cities of Syria, Idumaea and Phoenicia: ... [on the Medeba plateau and in Moab—Heshbon, Medeba, Lema, Horonaim, Agalaim, Thona, Zoar ... Ant 13:395-396.xx/4 / [In trying to secure the support of Aretas, the Nabatean] Hyrcanus II also promised that if he were restored and received his throne, he would return to Aretas the territory and the twelve cities which his father Alexander had taken from the Nabateans. [On the Medeba plateau and in Moab] these were Medeba, Lema, Daboleth, Arabatha, Agalaim, Thona, Zoar, Horonaim ... Ant 13:14/14 / Herod ... crossed the Jordan with his troops and encamped in the neighborhood of Philadelphia, close to the enemy ... [after initial engagements, the Nabateans retreated and] forced their way into their entrenched camp. There Herod surrounded and besieged them ... on the sixth day, the remnant of [the Nabateans] in desperation came forth for battle; these Herod engaged, killing some seven thousand more. Having, by this crushing blow, punished Arabia and broken the spirit of its people [Herod must have regained the Medeba plateau]. After all] in Perea [he rebuilt] Esebonitis [Heshbon on the Medeba plateau]. War 3:80-385.xx/5-6 with Ant 15:294/viii.5
CROSSING THE ARNON: AN ORDAINED DESTRUCTION KNOWS NO OBSTACLES

It is impossible to leave the broad but eroded tableland of the eastern heights without invoking prophetic texts which view this area as a whole. Before we consider these texts, however, we offer a short summary of the obstacles across this dissected tableland and how history reflects these obstacles as divisions and a border. Only after such a review is it possible to appreciate the full force of the prophetic proclamation.

Four overall geobasics summarize the combined area of the Medeba plateau and Moab:

- A larger tableland—the Medeba plateau and Moab—stretches S from Ammon and belongs both to the watered, settled northern heights and to arid, lonely Arabia.
- The Medeba plateau in the northern part of this tableland has routes reaching NW across Upper Gilead to the northern trade corridor and W beyond the Rift to Jericho.
- Moab in the southern part of this tableland is isolated between the Arnon and Zered canyons (see p. 23), with difficult descents into the Rift, such as Luhith and Horonaim.
- The great cleavage of the Arnon canyon divides the northern and southern tableland, luring Moab N of the Arnon as a prelude to attacking the strategic Medeba plateau.

Biblical events and corroborating texts clearly reflect the Arnon’s cleavage of the tableland. Those who controlled the Medeba plateau did not need Moab. The Arnon equaled a border.

= Sihon, king of Heshbon took the Medeba plateau but left Moab S of the Arnon.
= Israel also took the Medeba plateau but left Moab S of the Arnon.
= Hazael’s campaign stopped at Aroer above the Arnon but left Moab S of the Arnon.

Moab, however, needed the Medeba plateau and its routes and thus campaigned N of the Arnon to unify the entire tableland. For Moab, the Arnon did not equal a border.

≠ Eglon of Moab used the Medeba plateau to reach the City of Palms (Jericho).
≠ Mesha of Moab moved N of the Arnon and campaigned to secure the Medeba plateau.

The unity of this tableland leaps from the pages of the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. Both knew the geobasics of this tableland—an open Medeba plateau to the N and a closed Moab to the S, with the Arnon canyon between. The Arnon cleavage was no longer an issue in their prophetic proclamations: an ordained and total destruction of the entire tableland. Yes, Moab would experience complete devastation—on its tableland, along difficult descents to the Dead Sea chasm and deep within Rift retreats. The Arnon offered no security for the Medeba plateau nor for Moab. Devastation crossed N of the Arnon to Dibon and Aroer, Moab’s launching pads for campaigns farther N, and reached Yahaz near the eastern desert, Nebo on the western heights, Heshbon and Elealeh on the Medeba plateau, roads to Rabbah and even Jazer on Ammon’s border. The overall geobasics of the larger tableland (above) thus greatly increases the potency of their prophetic messages.

Texts: Moab, the Arnon Canyon and Medeba Plateau

- The prophets declared an ordained destruction of the entire tableland, a destruction that would cross the Arnon’s protective cleavage to both Moab and Medeba—
  Isaiah declared an ordained destruction
  —on Moab’s plateau S of the Arnon
  Yes, devastated in a night! ……………………………… Ar [the heartland] of Moab is ruined.
  Yes, devastated in a night! ……………………………… Kir [the capital] of Moab is ruined. Isaiah 15:1
  —on the Medeba plateau N of the Arnon
  He goes up to the temple and Dibon, …………………… To the high places to weep.
  Over Nebo and over Medeba, ………………………… Moab wails. Isaiah 15:2
  Heshbon and Elealeh cry out; ………………………… As far as Jahaz, their voice is heard. Isaiah 15:4
—along Rift descents from Moab’s plateau S of the Arnon

My heart cries out for Moab.

Its fugitives are [spread out] between Zoar and Eglath-shelishiyah.

Yes, they are ascending the ascent of Luhith weeping.

Yes, along the descent of the Horonaim road they arouse a cry of terror.

Yes, the watercourse of Nimrim is appallingly dry. Isaiah 15:5-6

Indeed, the cry has gone around ... The territory of Moab:

Its wailing as far as Eglaim [in the Rift to the W]; ... Its wailing even to Beer-elim [in the eastern desert].

For the waters of Dimon are filled with bloodshed; ... For I bring upon [the descent from] Dimon added terror—

A lion against the escaped of Moab, ... Against the remnant of the land. Isaiah 15:8-9

—at the crossings of the Arnon

Like bewildered birds, ... A nest dispersed,

Are the daughters of Moab ... At the crossings of the Arnon. Isaiah 16:2

—of pleasures S of the Arnon

Therefore, Moab will wail for Moab. ... All of them will wail!

For the raisin cakes of Kir-hareseth, you will murmur. Indeed! Spineless creatures! Isaiah 16:7

—of a rich vineyard industry N of the Arnon

The fields of Heshbon wither! ... O vine of Sibmah!

Whose rich, red clusters intoxicated ... Those who rule nations.

They reached as far [N] as Jazer ... And wandered [E] toward the [Arabian] desert.

Having sent its shoots/exports [even farther] ... they crossed the sea [far to the W].

Therefore, I will weep with Jazer’s weeping, ... O vine of Sibmah!

I will drench you with my tears, ... O Heshbon and Elealeh! Isaiah 16:8-9

Jeremiah declared an ordained destruction

—on the Medeba plateau N of the Arnon

Woe to Nebo; it is devastated! ... Kiriathaim is disgraced and captured!

The stronghold is disgraced and wrecked; ... Moab’s boast is no longer.

In Heshbon they plot evil against her, ... ‘Come, let’s cut her off as a nation!’ Jeremiah 48:1-2a

—along Rift descents from the Moab’s plateau S of the Arnon

You too, O Madmen, will be stilled! ... The sword will go after you [as you escape into the Rift].

The sound of a cry from Horonaim: ... ‘Devastation and great terror!’

‘Broken is Moab!’ ... Is the cry that is heard from her little ones.

Yes, along the ascent of Luhith, ... They will ascend while weeping constantly;

Yes, along the descent of Horonaim, ... They will hear the oppressive cry of terror. Jeremiah 48:2b-5

‘The valley will be ruined and the plateau destroyed,’ as the LORD has said. Jeremiah 48:8

—at the crossings of the Arnon

Descend from honor and sit on parched earth, ... O inhabitant of Dibon’s villages!

He who devastates Moab will come up against you. ... He will destroy your fortifications.

Stand by the road [out of the Arnon] and watch, ... O inhabitant of Aroer!

Ask of them, the fleeing man and escaping woman, ... Say, ‘What has happened?’

[They will say,] ‘Moab is disgraced; it is wrecked!’ ... Wail and cry out!

Declare it by the Arnon, ... ‘Moab is devastated!’ Jeremiah 48:18-20

—on the Medeba plateau N of the Arnon

Judgment has come to the land of the plateau: ... To Holon, Jahaz and Mephlaath;
To Dibon, Nebo and Beth-diblathaim; ... To Kiriathaim, Beth-gamul and Beth-[baal]-meon;
To Kerioth, Bezer and all the cities of the ‘land of Moab,’ far and near. Jeremiah 48:21-24

—of a rich vineyard industry N of the Arnon

More than the weeping of Jazer, I will weep for you, ... O vine of Sibmah!

Your spreading vines passed [W] beyond the sea; ... As far [N] as the reservoir of Jazer, they reached.

On your harvest and on your grape-gathering, ... The destroyer has fallen. Jeremiah 48:32

—from the Medeba plateau N of the Arnon to descents in the Rift S of the Arnon

From the outcry of Heshbon as far as Elealeh, ... Even as far as Jahaz—they send forth their voice—

From Zoar as far as Horonaim up to Eglath-shelishiyah, ‘The waters of Nimrim are a dry waste.’ Jeremiah 48:34.
F. LOOKING AT THE BIG PICTURE: THE EASTERN HEIGHTS

Your markings for the Eastern Heights included eight maps: pp. 4/5, 6/7, 10/11, 14/15, 16/17, 18/19, 20/21 and 22/23. As you consider the questions below consult these maps, as well as pp. 12/13, and explore how the Eastern Heights fit into the entire country.

- First of all review the Eastern Heights on pp. 12/13 stretching from Golan/Bashan in the N to the Zered canyon in the S (SE of the Dead Sea)? Review rock types and structure.
- How do Eastern Heights to the E of the central Rift (Upper Gilead) differ from those E of the Dead Sea. How important is the Dead Sea chasm in your answer to this question?
- From what you know of the Eastern Heights where would you settle in order to balance the need for water, food, security and trade route access? What influences your decision?
- What ultimate commercial destinations in or beyond the Eastern Heights highlight the significance of Upper Gilead and routes which avoid the region’s main obstacles?
- What impact does the uplifted region of Upper Gilead have upon settlement and trade in the Eastern Heights? What effect does the deep Jabbok canyon have upon Upper Gilead?
- How do geobasics impact the commercial (trade) potential N and S of the central Jabbok canyon? How did Moses’ command not to enter Ammon’s territory impact this potential?
- If you were municipal treasurer of the city of Rabbah/Philadelphia what would you propose in order to secure the city’s long-term financial income and ability to build and to grow?
- As an imperial power controlling the Northern Arena how far S of Upper Gilead would you consider extending your control? What considerations would influence your decision?
- If you were king in Moab proper what would be your expansion policy to ensure fiscal growth and how would you go about achieving your economic and territorial goals?
- What conditions might explain why Sihon, king of Heshbon, controlled from the Arnon to the Jabbok? Would you build a kingdom on the Medeba plateau? Why yes, or why no?
- Summarize three main insights you have gained in studying these Eastern Heights.

Turn to pp. 12/13: ROCKS AND SOILS map

With this map open consider the following: The Eastern Heights presents a challenge between Arabia and the Galilee trade routes. As a leader in the Central Hill Country W of the Rift how would you extend your control over these Eastern Heights? As an imperial invader what would you consider to be your priorities in these Eastern Heights?

- Black write-in: Names of the four divisions of the Eastern Heights listed under Eastern Heights in the text on p. 5. You may want to abbreviate some of these (UG and MP).
- See how many city initials you recognize in the Eastern Heights; remember that regular type represents sites from Bronze-Iron periods (e.g., ‘M’ = Medeba), italic type represents sites from Greco-Roman periods (e.g., ‘G’ = Gerasa) and initials in parentheses represent a later or modern name, such as, (Z) = Zarqa (‘S’ represents the restored Shabib Fort in today’s Zarka). The object of this exercise is not to learn all of these names but rather to see how these initials reflect related maps and trade routes in Geobasics.
- On this map (pp. 12/13) review how the Eastern Heights are linked to or are separated from the other major divisions of the Central Arena (the Central Abyss and the Western Uplifts with their adjoining coastal plain). In the same way, consider how the Eastern Heights relate to various major divisions of the Northern and Southern arenas. This type of ‘exploration’ on pp. 12/13 forces you to place the Eastern Heights within the context of the larger Land Between. Group discussions help reveal these issues.
2. THE CENTRAL ABYSS OF THE RIFT

The maps on pp. 12/13 and the front cover of Geobasics show a full view of the Rift, the 'central abyss' of the Land Between. The Dead Sea chasm lies at the lowest point of this abyss, over 400m/1312f below the level of the Mediterranean sea. The abyss effectively cuts the land in two: the east and the west. Earlier we discussed the Rift in the Northern Arena. In this study we consider central parts of this same Rift, seen by comparing the maps on p. 5 and pp. 12/13.

Our procedure differs somewhat from earlier studies. We complete the marking of all relevant maps and then refer to various maps as our discussion proceeds. This not only saves time but also allows you to study and compare specific regions and features on various maps. Begin by comparing the Rift on the maps below.

Observation and Marking of the Rift

✓ Front cover map: Review what you know about the Rift and surrounding regions.
✓ Pp. 12/13: Note rocks and soils in the Rift and surrounding regions (see legend).
✓ Pp. 4/5: Note rocks and soils in the Rift. The gradient color for soils along the Rift's eastern plains was lost in the pre-press digital transfer process but appears on other maps (compare with pp. 16/17).
Ø HL in green: the Rift's subdivisional lines (broken) S of Abel-meholah and Adam
Ø HL in yellow: Jordan River (top of page); Rift elevation readings -237m/-777f, -288m/-945, -350m/1148f and -400m/-1312f (approximate level of Dead Sea)
Ø HL in pink: Succoth, Adam, Jericho (non-italic) and Abila (italic)
✓ Pp. 10/11: This shows the relationship of the central Rift with the Northern Arena.
Ø HL in yellow: Jordan River (E of Beth-shan)
Ø HL in pink: Succoth
✓ Pp. 16/17: This shows the Central Arena's full Rift N of the Dead Sea.
Ø HL in yellow: Jordan River (E of Beth-shan and N of Dead Sea); Rift elevation readings -237m/-777f, -288m/-945 and -330m/1148f
Ø HL in pink: Succoth, Adam, Jericho (non-italic) and Abila (italic)
✓ P. 19: This shows the Rift N of the Dead Sea and connections to the Medeba plateau.
Ø HL in yellow: Jordan River; -400m/-1312f (approximate level of Dead Sea); Hot Springs (by Callirhoe)
Ø HL in pink: Jericho (non-italic), Abila (italic) and Kh. Qumran (modern name)
✓ P. 21: This shows a detailed view of the Rift N of the Dead Sea.
Ø HL in yellow: Jordan River; -400m/-1312f (approximate level of Dead Sea); Hot Springs (by Callirhoe)
Ø HL in pink: Jericho (non-italic), Abila (italic) and Kh. Qumran (modern name)
Ø HL in yellow on red routes: 1) From Jericho (non-italic) SW to Medeba via Beth-arabah, Qasr el-Yehud, Liviais and Pisgah; 2) Medeba to Dibon via Lemba; 3) From Qasr el-Yahud eastward by Abila and then ascending E to Rabbah (off the map)
Ø Pp. 16/17 and 18/19: By comparing these maps with what you HL on p. 21 above, extend HL roads W from Abila and Liviais/Julias to HL Jericho. Note the connections from the lower Jordan valley to the eastern heights. Also, note that pp. 16/17 show all central abyss crossings, from those N of the Dead Sea to those in the Beth-shan area.
Our study of the central abyss of the Rift begins with a list of geobasics for this entire area. While the map on pp. 16-17 is the best map to have open while reading these geobasics, you will also want to compare pp. 16-17 with the other maps listed above in order to become better acquainted with both the geobasics and each map.

**Geobasics**

- The Rift valley creates a major division in the Center Arena between eastern heights and western uplifts, falling some 100m/330f from the Beth-shan area to the Dead Sea.
- Steep scarps descend into the Rift on both the east and the west, but sheer limestone cliffs and violently tilted strata are found around the edges of the Dead Sea chasm.
- A large inland body of water in the central Rift deposited layer upon layer of powdery, white rock, called ‘lissan’ after the ‘tongue’ of land now remaining in the Dead Sea.
- Various types of alluvial deposits from the well-watered eastern heights cover the Rift’s central lissan, through which the Jordan river cuts a valley with small alluvial areas.
- Rain shadow regions in adjacent western uplifts deposit less alluvial runoff, but aquifers in the higher hill country flow toward the arid Rift, emerge as springs and form oases.
- Three main cross-overs in the central Rift link the eastern heights and western uplifts: the convenient area of Beth-shan, the Adam area and the plain N of the Dead Sea.

Understanding these geobasics of the central Rift prepares us for more the following specific discussions. We begin in the more open northern part of the central Rift and move south as the Rift deepens, narrows, and then widens again until it reaches the plains just north of the Dead Sea. It then falls into the great chasm of today’s Dead Sea.

### A. THE CONVENIENT BETH-SHAN CROSSOVER

The map on pp. 10-11 (and a detailed view on pp. 16-17) shows how alluvial regions S of Beth-shan all but disappear in the W as a major uplift in the western heights intrudes into the Rift SW of Abel-meholah. The more open region of intersections between Abel-meholah, Beth-shan, Pehel/Pella and Rehob therefore provides a natural and convenient link for caravans and armies passing between Bashan, Gilead and the Jezreel valley. This explains why the impressive Decapolis city of Scythopolis arose upon the ruins of Beth-shan and became the only such city W of the Rift.

This area witnessed decisive battles throughout history. Egypt saw the area as vital to its control of the Land Between, and Seti I restored Egyptian control here when Hammath and Pehel rebelled. Midianites and their herds from Arabia flooded into the Jezreel valley through this gateway, and on that ‘day of Midian’ Israelites led by Gideon chased the Midianites back to Arabia through this same region as these ‘invaders’ left behind both herd and treasure. After the key battle of Yarmuk to the N, Islamic armies and settlers must have poured into the Jezreel valley on their way to prosperous coastal ports—all this and more because the eastern heights of Gilead and the western uplift define and restrict the Rift S of Abel-meholah.

### B. FERTILE Perea, Adam Ford and Farah Valley

Rising limestone (on the E) and chalk hills (on the W) encompass the slowly descending Rift south of Abel-meholah as elevations drop farther below sea level (pp. 4/5). Areas of lissan border the Jordan riverbed (a small valley within the greater Rift valley) while broad alluvial plains spread out from the base of Upper Gilead (pp. 16/17). This alluvia comes from deeply eroded canyons within Upper Gilead’s uplifted, hard limestone hills and covers sterile lissan. When watered this alluvia becomes agriculturally productive. Note how these eastern
alluvial plains have kept the Jordan river to the western side of the Rift in the area of Zaphon and Amathus. Both sites sit at the mouths of large canyons that drain the heights of Upper Gilead. Amathus lies in the mouth of the Rajib, while Zaphon stands opposite the Kufrinja, on the edge of its fertile, alluvial plain and above the lissan that drops down to an additional tier of alluvia deposited by the Jordan river.

To the S, around Succoth, the Jabbok emerges from its long journey through Upper Gilead and creates another beautiful and fertile plain, only broader than those to the N. Today a canal in modern Jordan brings water from the Yarmuk river (p. 15) to these plains, transforming many of them into fruitful fields and hot houses filled with produce. The combination of soil, water and warm winter sun is ideal.

A similar dedication to innovation and agriculture made this region the flourishing Jewish territory of Perea (perhaps from the Greek, Peran tou Iordanou, ‘Across-the-Jordan’; Ever ha-Yarden in Hebrew) before and during the days of Jesus. Perea, the eastern limit of Jewish territory (general ‘Judea’), encouraged travel between Jewish Galilee and Judea proper in the area around Jerusalem. The route was longer but safer than through the potentially hostile land of the Samaritans in the western uplifts. During the three pilgrimage festivals, pilgrims were, no doubt, a common sight, as they journeyed via Perea on their way to Jerusalem and bought kosher supplies and sought safe overnight accommodations. Indeed, to pass through the region of Samaria was the exception, as John clearly notes in his Gospel.

Jesus knew this route well, and it was the one He followed on the way to the cross before that last Passover, no doubt passing the site of Amathus, the region’s administrative center. Gospel accounts record many events on this trip but include few names which would allow us to pinpoint the various stories. This ‘Perean ministry’ appears with references on p. 36 of Regions on the Run, interspersed with sections of the Gospel of John and visits to Jerusalem, probably occurring during his Perean ministry.

Some of the Jews of Jesus’ day probably also engaged in servicing caravans that passed from the Decapolis center of Philadelphia to Galilee and Phoenician ports beyond. Some caravans travelled N of the Jabbok and found service at the Decapolis cities of Gerasa and Pella, but those on their way from Philadelphia/Rabbah to Scythopolis/Beth-shan via Zia would have stopped at Zia before their descent into the Rift near Succoth. This may explain the tension between Jews in Perea and merchants in Philadelphia shortly after Jesus’ life.

Nearby Decapolis cities also offered a luring temptation in Jewish Perea to ‘leave the farm’ and move to the big city. This meant leaving Jewish religious life and living with the Gentiles, either at Pehel/Pella to the N, at Gerasa in the heart of Upper Gilead or at Philadelphia to the SE. As you have already guessed, this is the context of Jesus’ story about the prodigal son, one which certainly would have touched the hearts of many a Jewish father and mother—and also provided a sterling example of divine love. Jesus told this story somewhere in Perea where it truly counted.

Fords exist at various points along the Jordan, and we hear of them in the story of the yearly incursion of Midianite herdsmen when Gideon called upon Israelites W of the Jordan to seize the fords in order to impede the fleeing intruders. The convenient ford at Adam deserves special note since it lies in the midst of the Rift, between broadening lissan wasteland to the S and difficult overgrowth along a slowly meandering Jordan river to the N. In this same area the Jabbok river also emerges from the depths of Upper Gilead and immediately bends SW to enter the Jordan by Adam. To the NW of Adam a route runs to the beautiful, spring-fed area of Tirzah in the midst of the western uplifts. Find these names and features on pp. 16-17, and change ‘Faria’ to Farah (as it appears toward the bottom of p. 10). The Adam-Tirzah
route follows the Farah valley, a depression between parallel side faults off the Rift known as a 'graben.' Although seriously restricted in places, the Farah valley in one sense belongs to the Rift, a beautiful, spring-fed valley dropping from some 150m/500f in the area of Tirzah to below sea level on its way to the region of Adam. The writer of Song of Songs could think of no more most stunning example of beauty: 'You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love!'

The Adam ford on the Jordan is a convenient crossing since it links the Farah valley in the western uplifts with the beautiful 'vale of Succoth' at the mouth of Upper Gilead's Jabbok river. Nearby is Mahanaim/Penuel where Jacob wrestled with an angel and became 'Israel.' The Adam ford was and is a busy crossing between E and W, but this ford was not enough to unify lands on either side of the Rift, which persisted in dividing the Israelite center of control in the W from the tribes living in the eastern heights.

The regions of Zaphon, Succoth and Adam represent areas rich in agricultural potential that also interacted with trade routes descending from Upper Gilead. Agriculture here at elevations around -300m/-980f can even flourish in the winter months. It is not surprising that the Perea ministry of Jesus appears to have transpired during winter months when the eastern heights and the western uplifts were much colder, even through Passover. It was then that Peter, who with Jesus and the disciples had earlier ascended from Perea to Jerusalem, ventured into the courtyard of the High Priest to warm himself.

C. LOWER RIFT VALLEY NORTH OF THE DEAD SEA

The area of the Rift between Adam and the Dead Sea is unlike any other (pp. 16/17). Side faults off the Rift, so evident in Lower Galilee, eastern Samaria and the Farah canyon, already begin along the dark divisional line running from the bottom of the map NW by the two sites of Jericho. As this line makes a sharp turn to the N (along the base of an uplift), faults continue NW into the region of Ephraim. Faulting and folding thus defines the western edge of the lower Rift valley, in contrast to the area W of Zaphon. This map shows that much of the western side of the lower Rift valley consists of poor soils and lissan, but three areas show mixed alluvial deposits from limestone and chalk canyons in the western uplifts: at Jericho, at Archealais and by Phasaelis.

The Jordan river and surrounding areas of lissan make a westward bend south of Adam and the mouth of the Farah valley. High above, on a tip of an enormous ridge of chalky limestone, sits the impressive Hasmonean fortress of Alexandria (Sartaba), seen by pilgrims passing through Perea in Jesus day. Arid, infertile soils at the SE foot of this ridge soon give way to rich terra rosa deposits from adjacent uplifted limestone hills. King Herod wisely developed agriculture in this area as he built Phasaelis here in memory of his brother, Phasael. Today Israeli technology has restored the area's productivity, while large tracts of date palms border the agricultural fields. To the south lies the small oasis of Archaelais, built by king Herod's son, Archelaus. It still has remains of ancient water channels to manage streams descending from adjacent limestone hill and is a productive Arab city today. The regions of Phasaelis and Archaelais were so admired and their dates so renowned in the Roman world that they later were given to Julia/Livia, wife of Augustus Caesar, together with other areas in the Lower Jordan valley.

The springs and adjoining oases of Jericho and Naaran were by far the most famous region along the western side of the lower Rift valley. These lush, coveted oases of sub-tropical fruits and winter vegetables never cease to be a marvel in this arid area. One of the oldest known fortified cities arose here by the area's main spring. Later cities, called Jericho, stood upon these early ruins in an area that was so inviting (perhaps engendering the lifestyle of Sodom) that Joshua placed a ban on Israelite settlement here. The spring, however, still hosted

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Song 6:4
Psa 60:6; 108:7
Gen 32:1-32
Mark 15:66
Ant 14:49/iii.4
Ant 16:145/v.2
Ant 17:340/xiii.1
Ant 18:31/ii.2;
War 2:168/ix.1
Josh 6:26
passing travellers, and the Bible carefully notes that in the days of northern Israel’s apostate
king Ahab, ‘Hiel of Bethel built Jericho.’ A second Jericho south of the ancient tell emerged
in Greek and Hasmonean times, expanded by king Herod and fully refurbished shortly after
the birth of Jesus. Impressive buildings and urban facilities arose here, with water works which
captured every available spring-fed stream from the hills for pools of pleasure as well as farming. Jesus with His family or His disciples often passed through the region while travelling
to and from Jerusalem. On one of those journeys He encountered one of Jericho’s rich men,
Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector.

During Byzantine times yet another Jericho arose at a nearby crossroads and remains the
center of modern Jericho (not named on these maps). Aqueducts from springs in nearby
rugged, limestone canyons and carefully planned channels from Jericho’s ancient spring
bring abundant water to local fields and orchards. Fresh fruits and vegetables, together with
fragrant, flowering plants, make Jericho a prosperous and delightful region.

South of Succoth much smaller canyons drain the eastern heights. Thus, the adjacent plains
on the eastern side of the Rift receive far less rich alluvial soil, and the area is void of springs
(pp. 16/17). Farther S, however, large canyons—such as the Shueib from Gedor and Wadi Sir
from the region of Jazer (Kh. es-Sar)—supply the Rift plains with abundant alluvial soils and
stream-fed water resources. Evidence of settlement in this choice region stretched over the
millennia: from the prehistoric site of T. el-Ghassul through the days of Augustus Caesar (the
site of Livias was named for his wife, Livia and renamed Julias after his death); into the days
of Jesus, when Herod Antipas fortified Julias; into the years following the book of Acts, when
the emperor Nero granted Agrippa II the adjacent regions of Livias/Julias and Abila; and
on into late Roman times. Hot springs in the area and plantations of date palms and balsam
made this a coveted region. The Bible appropriately calls the area between Abel-shittim and
Beth-jeshimoth ‘the plains of Moab,’ for just as Israel used these plains as a staging ground,
they could serve as a springboard to the west for secluded Moab. This was the ‘back door’ of
Canaan which swung in both directions for those moving W into the western uplifts or E into
the eastern heights. Biblical events therefore flood this lower Jordan valley, from the time of
Moses and Joshua through the reigns of Israelite kings and the days of prophets such as Elijah
and Elisha down to Jesus’ day when Jewish Perea extended S to the Dead Sea.

Maps on pp. 18/19 and 20/21 show the road system which links the Medeba plateau along
the eastern heights with the western uplifts. Our later studies of the western uplifts reveal the
importance of this land bridge N of the Dead Sea. The land bridge together with ridge routes
to the coastal plain link east and west and thereby enhance the importance of the Medeba
plateau. For now review the descents between the Medeba plateau and the Rift valley. The
flow of trade, armies and pilgrims in this area; N of the brackish waters of the Dead Sea was
dependent upon water and sustenance in the area of Abila and around the oasis of Jericho. A
crossing that is impractical just to the south here becomes possible.

D. THE DEAD SEA BARRIER

The map on the front cover of Geobasics shows the depths of the Dead Sea chasm, the
lowest point in the central Rift, today even lower than the -400m/-1312f noted on some of
the book’s maps. The structural complex that produces this chasm remains debatable, but it
appears related to the northern slippage of Arabia, slightly rotating around points deep in
the eastern Mediterranean sea, a process which has transformed both this part of the Rift and
uplifted the Lebanon ranges. The Dead Sea is thus part of a much greater, on-going geological
transformation, but a unique part which allows drainage from the N and even runoff from the
S to flow into this great depression with no outlet. Such a setting makes earthquakes common
and releases underground seismic tension and volcanic outflows, some of which can be seen on pp. 12/13 (red). The destruction of the ‘cities of the plain’ along the SE side of the Dead Sea (mistakenly not named on our maps) is a dramatic record of such seismic activity.

As mentioned above, lissan deposits in the Rift to the N and S show that this inland ‘sea’ was once much larger (pp. 16/17 and 22/23). As water evaporated, and continues to evaporate, in this extremely hot, arid area, suspended minerals remained, and the water became more and more dense, heavier than the human body, which buoyantly floats in the potent water. The depth of the water S of the Lissan (the ‘tongue’ of land in the midst of the Dead Sea) is quite shallow compared to the great eastern depths to the N. Israel and Jordan bring this southern, heavier water into large pools where evaporation leaves minerals that are then ‘harvested.’

In this area ‘salt’ deposits stick to any surrounding surface. Both here and to the N luxurious hotels, some with therapeutic baths, draw those who seek healing from various skin diseases.

Again on the front cover map, you can see that the portion of the Dead Sea N of the Lissan is a different 'structure' than that to the S. Steep cliffs and scarps grip the N with its profound depths rather than small plains surrounding the S with its shallow basin of water. The Dead Sea chasm N of the Lissan was a great topographical barrier, filled with water but useless for irrigation and void of fertile runoff soils, which disappeared within the depths of the sea. One significant exception was En-gedi (p. 19) where deposits issuing from the Arugot canyon, together with springs and a sub-topical climate, allow the cultivation of date palms and exotic flowering plants such as henna. It was here that Moabites, Ammonites and men from Mt. Seir (Edom) set up camp after crossing the Lissan of the Dead Sea in preparation for a failed surprise attack through the wilderness to Jerusalem. Nearby hot springs still issue sulphurous waters, and even larger hot springs emerge at Callirhoe on the NE shore where king Herod built a port and small city, and where he desperately journeyed hoping for healing shortly before his death.

Another site, on a lissan plateau overlooking the NW shores of the Dead Sea, served as a center for a sect which had broken ties with the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem and saw these times as a struggle between light and darkness. The well-known Khirbet (Ruin of) Qumran was the home of Jews whose strict rule of life and faithfulness to copying the Hebrew Scriptures and related documents stunned the world when their scrolls were found in nearby caves in +1947 and +1956. Here in this desolate region they awaited the messianic age, but in +68 their retreat was overrun by the Romans who had captured cities in the adjacent plain N of the Dead Sea during cataclysmic last days of the First Jewish Revolt against Rome.

The stunning words of the prophet Ezekiel must have nourished the messianic dream of those living at Qumran, as he saw the impact of true and faithful Temple worship upon the hostile environment of the Dead Sea and its non-potable, revulsive waters.

He led me back to the entrance of the Temple, and I found that water was coming forth from below the platform of the Temple—eastward, since the Temple faced east—but the water was running out at the south of the altar, under the south wall of the Temple. Then he led ... around to the outside of the outer gate that faces eastward; and I found that water was gushing from under the south wall. As the man went on eastward [the stream grew deeper until] it was a stream I could not cross ... and he led me back to the bank of the stream. As I came back, I saw trees in great profusion on both banks of the stream. He told me, 'This water runs out to the eastern region ... and when it comes into the foul waters of the [Dead] sea, the water will be healed [become wholesome and fresh]. Every living creature that swarms will be able to live wherever this stream goes; the fish will be very abundant once these waters have reached there. It will be wholesome, and everything will live wherever this stream goes. Fishermen shall stand beside it, all the way from En-gedi to En-eglaim [by the Lissan]; it shall be a place for drying nets; and the fish will be of various kinds and most plentiful, like the fish of the Great [Mediterranean] Sea. But its swamps and marshes shall not become healed; they will serve to supply salt. All types of trees for food will grow up on both banks of the stream. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail; they will yield new fruit every month, because water for them flows from the Temple. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.'
F. LOOKING AT THE BIG PICTURE: THE CENTRAL ABYSS

Although Central Abyss markings were fewer than usual, they did appear on these five maps: pp. 4/5, 10/11, 16/17, 18/19 and 20/21. Consult these maps, as well as pp. 12/13, as you explore the impact of the Central Abyss on the entire country and consider these questions.

- Review the Rift on pp. 12/13 as it descends SE via the Beqaa valley in the N, turns due S, drops to Lake Galilee and falls into the deep Dead Sea trough before rising to the S.
- Much of the Central Abyss lies outside the line of adequate subsistence rainfall on pp. 12/13. What place would springs and aqueducts play as the Rift drops and aridity increases?
- How do Eastern Heights to the E of the central Rift (Upper Gilead) differ from those E of the Dead Sea. How important is the Dead Sea chasm in your answer to this question?
- The Dead Sea makes E-W passage problematic at best. What impact does this natural barrier have upon adjacent regions in the Eastern Heights and in the Western Uplifts?
- Explain the affect the Dead Sea has upon E-W passage just N of the Dead Sea? Is there a difference between this passage and E-W passage just S of the Dead Sea? If so, explain.
- Can you suggest why Moab coveted the springs of Jericho and why the plains to the E, beyond the Jordan river, are called the 'plains of Moab'?
- In light of the importance of E-W passage across the Central Abyss, do the fords at Adam service local peoples, imperial interests or Arabian caravans on their way to coastal ports?
- Which routes and ultimate commercial destinations (to the E and to the W) did Rift crossings near and adjacent to the important city of Beth-shan/Scythopolis service?
- As an imperial power controlling the Northern Arena what would be your strategic considerations for extending your control over each of the above E-W passages?
- Compare the significance of Rift crossings found between Lake Galilee and the Dead Sea? As a 'king' of any one of the adjacent regions how would you prioritize these crossings?
- Summarize three main insights you have gained in studying this Central Abyss.

TURN TO PP. 12/13: ROCKS AND SOILS MAP

With this map open consider the following: The Rift’s Central Abyss presents various challenges for travel and commerce flowing between Arabia and coastal ports. Place one of your hands over the area of Tyre and the other in Arabia (lower right of pp. 12/13). As a camel caravan driver who knows about the Eastern Heights and Central Abyss, allow your eye to find the most convenient link between your two hands and consider what negotiations you may have to conduct along your way with representative of such local powers as Damascus, Ammon and Israel. This takes knowledge and astute bargaining skill.

See how many city initials you recognize in the Central Abyss and adjacent regions; remember that regular type represents sites from Bronze-Iron periods (e.g., ‘S’ = Succoth), italic type represents sites from Greco-Roman periods (e.g., ‘L’ = Livias) and initials in parentheses represent a later or modern name, such as, (Q) = Qumran. The object of this exercise is not to learn all of these names but rather to see how these initials reflect related maps and trade routes in Geobasics.

On this map (pp.12/13) review how the Central Abyss is linked to or are separated from the other major divisions of the Central Arena (the Eastern Heights and the Western Uplifts with their adjoining coastal plain). In the same way, consider how the Central Abyss relate to various major divisions of the Northern and Southern arenas. This type of ‘exploration’ on pp. 12/13 forces you to place the Eastern Heights within the context of the larger Land Between. Group discussions help reveal these issues.
3. WESTERN UPLIFTS

Turn to pp. 4/5: CENTRAL ARENA map

- HL in green regional names on this map from the list under the Western Uplifts on p. 5, except PHILISTIA (discussed later); also HL in green the regional names SHEPHELAH and WILDERNESS.
- HL in green the subdivisional line (broken) between Samaria and Ephraim, extending your HL westward along this line to the sea (above Gath-rimmon).
- HL in green the subdivisional line between Ephraim and Judah.
- HL in green: 1) vertical subdivisional line dividing Judah's limestone hill country (green) and Judah's chalk wilderness (brown); 2) horizontal subdivisional line dividing Judah (hill country and wilderness) from complex area between Judah and Ephraim—this runs from the Dead Sea to the Shephelah near Adullam.
- HL in red/pink (S to N): Hebron, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Gibeon, Bethel, Shechem, Tirzah, Samaria and Dothan.
- HL in yellow: Elevation readings 1020m/3346f (in southern Judah), 940m/3084f and 881m/2891f (Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerazim by Shechem in Samaria).

The western uplifted regions before you on this map were the heartland, hill country homes of the Israelites, areas where the majority of events recorded in the Bible occurred. From ancient heights Israelites governed as they attempted to extend their rule over surrounding regions and beyond. When threatened they retreated to into these hills to find security and await another day. As we explore the geobasics and supporting historical events for such an important region, do not forget this map, which clearly shows these western uplifts (broken yellow lines) rising between the central abyss and the low coastal plains.

Although other side and smaller uplifts exist this map only shows three in the central hill country (pp. 4/5). These three main uplifts reveal the structural orientation of the area, which is not due N-S as many believe but rather on a SW-NE, diagonal axis. This orientation impacts the region’s climate, underground flow of water, springs, soils and routes. By comparing the regions of Judah, Ephraim and Samaria you can immediately see distinct differences throughout the central hill country. The structural form of Judah is quite different than that of Samaria, and both differ from that of Ephraim, yet all are part of one central hill country, varying in elevation from N to S:

- 940m/3084f—Mt. Ebal above Shechem, the highest summit in Samaria;
- 1016m/3333f—in Ephraim on a height NE of Bethel (not shown);
- 725m/2379f—in the center on a lower central saddle by Gibeon (not shown);
- 1020m/3346f—south in Judah on a height by Hebron.

We now explore each of the three major regions of the central hill country that you have marked above. Refer to this map (pp. 4/5) as you proceed in this study.

A. SAMARIA

Geobasics (see map, pp. 4/5)

- Samaria divides into 1) eastern uplifted, cross-faulted limestones (green), 2) central mountains of later limestone (yellow), 3) western limestones (green) and chalks (brown).
- Although Samaria’s geological diversity results in obstacles such as mountains and ridges, routes pass between these obstacles with relative ease, often via convenient valleys.
- A chalk trough, filled at some points with alluvia, runs NE from Michmethath past Shechem, Tirzah and Bezek, carrying a route which avoids higher hills to the E and W.
The broad Shechem valley links the site with the coastal highway at Socoh while an arduous route abruptly drops NE into the deep Farah valley, Tirzah and the Rift.

Naturally indefensible Shechem sits at the heart of Samaria, Tirzah lies to the E at the head of the Farah valley and the city of Samaria stands atop a solitary hill in the W.

Dothan stands adjacent to a broad valley and an international pass by the same name.

Samaria, the northern extremity of the central hill country, is a relatively open region, encouraging expansion to the north, but northern invaders also find it easy to conquer.

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The early checkered history of the northern nation of Israel was played out at Tirzah, but Omri overthrew its dynasty and saw far greater potential and a secure setting atop a singular mount lying within small alluvial plains in the important Shechem valley. Omri purchased the hill ‘for two talents of silver and fortified the hill, naming the city he built, Shomeron/ Samaria, after the name of Shemer, the owner of the hill.’ For more than a century the city of Samaria was the flourishing capital of northern Israel, but in -721 it fell to imperial Assyria which gave the name of the city to the newly created surrounding region, the Assyrian province of ‘Samaria.’ Assyria deported many Israelites and brought foreigners to the region, but the regional name ‘Samaria’ continued in use down through the days of the book of Acts. Those living in the area were known as Samaritans, some of whom persist to this day.

The main geobasic lessons gained from this map is that the relatively open region of Samaria is closely connected with the Northern Arena and its history, before, during and after the coming of the Israelites. Access into central Samaria from the coastal highway via the Shechem valley insured that the region would remain important through Persian and Greek/Hellenistic times. This also meant that the administrative capital of Samaria would overshadow Shechem, the area’s central hub, and Tirzah, its eastern focal point. In Roman times king Herod rebuilt and adorned the site of Samaria, calling it ‘Sebaste’ (the Greek form of Augustus). The proximity of Herod’s nearby port-city of Caesarea to Sebaste—and the same strategic reasons which had led Omri to choose the hill in the first place—prompted Herod to make Sebaste one of the land’s major bastions. He surrounded its steep slopes with a great wall and encouraged new-comers to settle adjacent fertile areas. The city atop ‘the hill of Samaria’ thus flourished in the days of Jesus as it had in the days of Omri and his son Ahab.
Turn to pp. 16/17: Sharon, Samaria, Ephraim and Upper Gilead map

- HL region in green (if not already HL): Samaria, Eastern, Central and Western
- HL in red/pink: Shechem, Tirzah, Samaria/Sebaste, Dothan, Arus (SW of Shechem)
- HL in yellow: Shechem valley, Farah (correct Faria to Farah) valley; elevation readings 940m/3084f with Mt. Ebal, 881m/2891f with Mt. Gerizim; 586m/1922f and 510m/1673f (both in the W)
- HL in yellow on red routes: 1) Shechem NW to Socoh; 2) from Socoh N via Gath [padalla] and NE through the Dothan valley to Jezreel; 3) from near the arrowhead of Shechem Valley N via Samaria/Sebaste, Sanur and Beth-haggan to Jerzreel and off map to the NE; 4) from Ebenezer (by Aphek in the coastal plain) via Arus and Michmethath to Beth-shan via Shechem and Tirzah; 5) Tirzah region SE down Farah valley to Adam in the Rift and up to the Zia road in Upper Gilead

This more detailed map places Samaria within its hill country context between the Rift and the Sharon coastal plain. To the N it reveals Samaria’s relatively easy links to both the Jezreel and Beth-shan valleys and their international intersections, and it allows a comparison between Samaria’s open character and the closed, restricted region of Ephraim to the S.

EASTERN SAMARIA—Comparing elevations across this map makes it apparent that the hill country of Samaria differs greatly in elevation from the coastal plain of Sharon (W) to the Rift valley (E). At 940m/3084f Mt. Ebal is Samaria’s highest summit, while the floor of the Farah valley by Tirzah lies at sea level. From there the valley descends 25km/15ml to below -300m/-1000f in the area of Adam in the Rift. The parallel faults off the Rift, which form the Farah valley, cut directly through eastern Samaria’s uplift (broken yellow line). Such ‘cross-faulting’ through the entire area produces ridges and alluvial-filled valleys (green), all oriented NW toward the Carmel range. The Michmethath-Beth-shan road (along a type of chalk moat at the base of the uplift) creates an ideal setting for the administrative center of Tirzah with its beautiful springs emerging at the head of the Farah valley, a natural hub here in eastern Samaria.

CENTRAL SAMARIA—The mountainous core around Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim rises in the heart of central Samaria. This core restrains travel, keeping routes to more convenient paths. The site of Shechem sits at the center of this road system where an open, alluvial-covered part of the chalk moat intersects the Shechem valley and a pass separating Ebal and Gerizim. One could not imagine a more perfect situation for the site of Shechem, called ‘the queen of the hill country.’ The fertile, alluvial-filled ‘Michmethath’ valley runs SW until halted by the complexity of the central uplift in the region of Ephraim. At this point a route heads WSW toward the important site of Aphek along the coastal highway. A far different scene emerges N of Samaria’s mountainous central core, in the area of modern Sanur and Bezek where continued cross-faulting has created a far more open area, discussed below.

WESTERN SAMARIA—A relatively high ridge running to the E and W of the 586m/1922f elevation mark divides western Samaria. Low hills of limestone and chalks lie S or this ridge (cf. pp. 4/5). A summit N of the ridge reaches 510m/1673f but descends eastward into the cross-faulted area of low fertile valleys discussed above. This map (pp. 16/17) shows the complexity and vulnerable nature of this region of lower hills, northern, open valleys and the unobstructed Shechem valley. The proximity of western Samaria to the coastal highway and the region’s routes to the Northern Arena via Dothan and via Sanur highlights its need for a secure administrative center, unlike indefensible Shechem or even Tirzah, buried deep within the Farah valley. In our earlier map study (pp. 10/11) we saw that the solitary hill of Samaria presented by far the best option.
A government based in the region of Samaria needed security but also sought economic gain by extending its control to surrounding trade routes across the northern trade corridor. To achieve this goal, however, a leader had to control most of the areas seen on this map (pp. 16/17), including Ephraim as we shall see later. Northern Israel realized this dream in the days of king Ahab when his control stretched from the Medeba plateau to Lower Gilead and north beyond the Jezreel valley to the region of Hazor and Dan. In a few decades, however, Hazael of Damascus violently seized these same trade routes and campaigned south along the coastal highway to Gath, just S of Ekron in the SW corner of this map. Later, the imperial armies of Assyria overran these same areas and in -721 Israel’s capital of Samaria fell and ‘Samaria’ became just another imperial province. The region’s open character became its Achilles heel.

B. Ephraim

A second major subdivision of the central hill country is a region we call ‘Ephraim,’ outlined by subdivisional lines (HL in green) on pp. 4/5. Find this region on this map and note how it differs from Samaria to the N. Have this map open as you consider the following geobasics.

Geobasics (cf. pp. 4/5)

- Unlike Samaria, Ephraim is one broad, uplifted limestone region stretching from the Rift to the coastal plain, with one main uplift and several side uplifts (not shown).
- Ephraim’s elevated hill country draws abundant rainfall which erodes long, V-shaped canyons to the W and deep, shorter canyons to the E which plunge into the Rift.
- Rough, secluded, western slopes in Ephraim create a safe refuge, the Bible’s ‘remote interior of Ephraim,’ drained by two main canyon systems (Shiloh and Natuf).
- Travel in Ephraim is challenging and avoids V-shaped canyons, keeping a lone N-S route E of major canyons and restricting other routes to high, unbroken ridges.
- Unlike Samaria, Ephraim has no easy access from the coastal highways nor from the Rift, although a ridge route via Timnath-serah reaches Bethel and continues to Jericho.
- Ephraim has no central site like Shechem in Samaria, but Bethel was a major center on its southern flank, and Shiloh provided a central sanctuary for the early Israelite tribes.
- The above features set Ephraim apart from Samaria to the N and Judah to the S.

Turn to pp. 16/17: SHARON, SAMARIA, EPHRAIM AND UPPER GILEAD map

- HL in green (if not already HL): Ephraim, Judah and Wilderness
- HL in red/pink: In Hill Country—Bethel, Timnath-serah/heres, Acrabeta, Shiloh, Mizpah, Ramah, Gibeah, Jerusalem, Gibeon, Upper Beth-horon, Kiriath-jearim, Michmash, Ai, Ophrah; In Shephelah—Lower Beth-horon, Aijalon, Beth-shemesh
- HL in yellow: In Hill Country—Shiloh canyon, Natuf canyon, Baal Hazor, Mt. Zemaraim (SW of Bethel), Central Benjamin Plateau, Mt. Ephron, Mt. Seir (in Judah, not Edom), Sorek canyon, Chesalon canyon; In Wilderness—Ascent of Adummim, Zeboim valley, Suweinit canyon; In Shepherlah—Aijalon valley, Sorek valley
- HL in yellow on red routes: 1) from Michmethath to S of Jerusalem (off map) via Bethel and Gibeah; 2) from Bethel to Aphek on the coastal plain via Timnath-serah/heres; 3) from Jerusalem to Jericho via Ascent of Adummim; 4) from Bethel to Jericho via Ai and Zeboim valley; 5) from Ramah to Jericho via Michmash; 6) from Bethel to Jericho via Gibeath; 7) from Ramah to Aijalon via Gibeon and Kiriath-jearim; 8) from Gibeath to Lower Beth-horon via Gibeon and Upper Beth-horon
- Black write-in: REMOTE INTERIOR OF EPHRAIM in small caps in the blank space between Shiloh and Shiloh canyon and between Arus and Timnath-serah/heres
With the narrow edge of your green pen HL the thin, solid black lines around:
1) region stretching from N of Bethel to Gibeah which includes the central Benjamin plateau; 2) region of Ai SE of Bethel which includes Michmash (the line runs through this name); 3) region just W of Jerusalem (unnamed Jerusalem plateau).

In this study we use the term 'Ephraim' in a specific regional sense for the broad, uplifted limestone hill country from the coastal plain to the Rift (pp. 4/5). Ephraim, the younger of Joseph’s two sons in Egypt, surprisingly received Jacob’s patriarchal blessing and became the prominent tribe of early Israelite times. This tribe settled the area around the name ‘Ephraim’ on p. 16, but its allotted territory extended N of our broken subdivisional line, from Acrabeta to the region of Taanath-shiloh. The Bible sometime uses the term ‘hill country of Ephraim’ (or ‘mount Ephraim’) for much of the central hill country seen on this map, that part of the Israelite heartland dominated by the tribe of Ephraim, in contrast to Judah’s territory to the S.

REMOTE INTERIOR OF EPHRAIM—Much of the broad region of Ephraim consists of high, naturally-terraced slopes of bedded limestone rising from rocky streambeds deep within this secluded hill country. These streambeds combine to form catchment systems flowing westward to the coastal plain and the Mediterranean. The largest of these is the Shiloh system in the center of Ephraim. Its tributaries begin far to the E in the areas of Bethel, Shiloh and Acrabeta. From there they cut deep V-shaped canyons westward through Ephraim’s limestone uplifts (only Ephraim’s main central uplift appears on our maps). Find the HL name ‘Shiloh canyon’ on this map. By this point the Shiloh system’s three major tributaries have merged into one streambed which flows out onto the coastal plain SE of Aphek. Outline the Shiloh system by running two fingers from the name ‘Shiloh canyon’ to Bethel and Acrabeta.

The Shiloh system makes up much of what the Bible calls the ‘Remote Interior of Ephraim,’ a name you have written on this map. Scrub-forests once covered the steep, terraced slopes of this off-the-road region. Early Israelites settled more inviting regions, and then complained that they still lacked space. Joshua thus told them, ‘Go up into the scrub forests and clear out an area for yourselves.’ Villages arose around the area’s numerous small springs, and their inhabitants constructed small rock barriers along the edge of limestone beds to impede erosion of rich ‘terra rossa’ soil. Row upon row of olive trees soon covered these slopes. Olive oil remains this area’s main product as Arab villages dutifully repair their terraces, tend their olive trees and harvest, crush and store their yearly yield each fall.

This hidden heart of Ephraim was more than a center for the production of olive oil. The maze of canyons was a natural haven and hideaway, an area avoided by outsiders. As such it served early Israelites and later Maccabees well. While more hospitable areas for settlement lay around this remote interior, it made Ephraim a natural barrier between open Samaria to the N and the vulnerable central Benjamin plateau to the S of Bethel (discussed below).

EASTERN MOUNTAIN VALLEYS AND N-S HIGHWAY—Early Israelites first settled more attractive areas in and around Ephraim’s remote interior, as well as in Samaria to the N. One of these coveted areas in Ephraim lies along both sides of the region’s surface watershed, which runs S of Acrabeta, E of Shiloh and through Baal Hazor to Bethel. Small mountain valleys filled with rich ‘terra rossa’ soil (light green areas on this map) lie on both sides of this watershed. On the E, a series of beautiful valleys on plateaus of various levels suddenly give way to canyons which drop head long into the Rift valley, 1000m/3300 ft below. As one would expect E of the watershed, cereal production and herds of sheep and goats overtake olive orchards.

Fertile valleys W of Ephraim’s watershed include the beautiful Shiloh valley, S of the site by the same name on pp. 16/17. From the days of Joshua it served as a secluded central sanctuary for early Israelite tribes, safely situated E of the remote interior. The region’s N-S route
makes its way through this upper part of Shiloh system. This route runs S of Shechem via the Michmethath valley and crosses the north tributary of the Shiloh system and keeps to the edge of productive fields in the Lebanon valley, which drains to the Shiloh’s central tributary. From there the route could ascend to Shiloh, but it makes a steep ascent southward (the ‘ascent of Lebanon’) to high ground which skirts W of the Shiloh valley. It then descends into the southern tributary of the Shiloh system and continues on to ascend another tributary to the Bethel plateau (thin line HL in green). While this path is challenging, other routes are longer and more difficult. Biblical events along this unique Shechem-Bethel highway stretch from the patriarchs to the apostles, but the off-the-road, Israelite tribal sanctuary site at Shiloh was forsaken, left it in ruins by a vicious Philistine invasion in of days of Samuel.

THE ARUS ROAD: SAMARIA TO APHEK—The junction at the southern end of the Michmethath valley may not appear often in historical sources, but when it does it signals that a choice was made by one travelling S from Shechem. At this point one chooses either to continue S along the challenging and potentially dangerous route described above or to veer SW along high ground to Aphek via ‘the village called Arus.’ By choosing this route to exit the hill country the Roman general Varus wisely avoided the rough interior of Ephraim and its Shiloh system altogether. Scouts, local informants or the memory of defeat centuries before of a Greek army on the road to Bethel may well have convinced him to turn off the hill country route to this Arus road. It is no coincidence that today’s Ariel, one of the largest Israeli settlements, is located along this route just SE of Arus of the Roman times. Strategic roads seldom become non-strategic.

THE TIMNAH ROAD: BETHEL TO APHEK—The Bethel/Gophna/Berzaith region is Ephraim’s most important road junction. The Christian Arab village of Jifna (ancient Gophna), nestled in a lush, spring-fed valley and surrounded by fertile slopes, is one of Ephraim’s most alluring regions. Ephraim’s all-important center of Bethel to the SE dominates a high ridge and adjacent small plateaus (thin line HL in green) which attract routes from all directions. Here a direct ridge route linking Jericho to Aphek intersect the central hill country’s N-S road from Shechem to Judah. It is no surprise that the prominent tribe of Ephraim regarded Bethel as its great sentinel on its southern flank. We hear of Bethel from Abraham’s day to Roman times. Our concern here, however, is the route which connects Bethel to Aphek via Timnah (Timnath-serah/Timnath-heres), Thamma of Greek and Roman times. The inheritance of Joshua the Ephraimite, Israel’s renowned first leader in the Land Between, was at Timnath-serah/heres where this ridge route broadens to a small plateau atop fertile slopes. This HL route (pp. 16/17) along the Timnah ridge divides the Shiloh system to the N from the Natuf and other systems to the S. As a long, continuous ridge through Ephraim, it links Aphek on the coastal highway with crossroads in the strategic region of Birzaith, Gophna and Bethel.

COMPARING REGIONAL ROUTES—Before we discuss routes and regions S of Bethel we pause to compare Ephraim’s triangle of routes with other regions in the central hill country.

1. **Samaria’s valley roads:** Most routes radiate from Shechem along various valleys leading to the coastal plain, to the Rift or toward Ephraim.

2. **Ephraim’s ridge routes:** Ridge routes connect southern Samaria with Aphek via Arus and the region of Bethel with Aphek via Timnath-serah/heres.

3. **The N-S road through Ephraim:** This is the most problematic HL route since it must cross high ground between Shiloh’s various tributaries and navigate deep valleys.

4. **Routes S of Bethel:** Take a moment to survey these routes and compare them with those in Samaria and Ephraim. It is clear that we are entering a more concentrated and complex region, the central Benjamin plateau and its various approaches.
CENTRAL BENJAMIN PLATEAU—Ephraim, with its rugged interior, limestone terraces, olives and springs, ends S of the Bethel. Deep canyons define the Bethel plateau, a narrow, uneven highland which stretches from the slopes of Baal Hazor through Bethel to Mt. Zemaraim (thin line HL in green). South of Mt. Zemaraim elevations fall as the Bethel plateau gives way to a broader, more uniform area which we call the ‘central Benjamin plateau’ (name HL in yellow). Limestone ridges and canyons draining to the Aijalon valley define this plateau on the W, while a larger region of limestone and chalk canyons descend E to the region of Jericho in the Rift. The territory of the tribe of Benjamin, Joseph’s younger brother, extended from the region of Kiriath-jeearim through the central Benjamin plateau and Jericho to the Jordan. The name ‘Benjamin’ is not on p. 16 for lack of space, but it appears on p. 18.

The central Benjamin plateau (CBP) is a lower saddle between Ephraim and Judah. Since it is easily accessible two themes dominate its history: 1) Invaders from outside the hill country can more easily take over this area and thereby split the country (and the Israelites); 2) Israelites in Ephraim to the N and Judah to the S both see this lower middle ground of Benjamin as their access to both the coastal plain and to the eastern heights via Jericho and roads N of the Dead Sea. Biblical history is therefore more intense within the territory of Benjamin and its surroundings than in any other area in the Land Between. In light of these realities note the following features and routes. (See Benjamin’s Geobasics statements on p. 155.)

Western approaches: The broad Aijalon valley allows invaders to reach the foot of the hill country, from Lower Beth-horon to Aijalon. From here the shortest way to the CBP is via the ‘ascent of Beth-horon’ to Upper Beth-horon and along a convenient ridge route to Gibeon or Mizpah. Other routes include the ascent from Aijalon to Kiriath-jeearim and from there to Gibeon on the CBP. The Kiriath-jeearim-Jerusalem route, however, must cross the Chesalon and Sorek canyons.

Eastern approaches: This map clearly shows the importance of the springs at and around Jericho. Three basic routes ascend to the Bethel plateau, to the CBP or to Jerusalem. The most important of these uses the Zeboim valley to pass through the chalk wilderness and reach the limestone, agricultural region of Ai (thin line HL in green around small area). From here a short ridge leads to Bethel, or routes cross the Suweinit canyon to reach Geba or Ramah on the CBP. The well-known Jericho-Jerusalem road climbs a ridge above the Kelt canyon to the Ascent of Adummim, and from there continues a challenging path toward Jerusalem.

Ephraim’s priorities: Obviously, the CBP absorbs many of the western and eastern approaches. From its higher but smaller plateau, Bethel of Ephraim regards the CBP as part of its domain, especially given the close family relations Benjamin has to the House of Joseph and its strong tribe of Ephraim. Indeed, in the area of Mt. Zemaraim and in the region of Ai it is difficult to sort where Ephraim ends and Benjamin begins. The Bible actually calls the area between Ramah and Mizpah the ‘hill country of Ephraim.’ By default, therefore, the land of Benjamin falls under Ephraim’s shadow.

Judah’s opportunity: Below we discuss this topic in more detail, but here it is important to note (at the bottom of p. 16) that Jerusalem has links 1) to Jericho by a main eastern route and 2) to the CBP by a narrow neck via Gibeah (the capital of Saul of Benjamin). Whoever controls Jerusalem needs the CBP, both as a defense against attack from the N as well as a springboard to expand both to the W and to the E.

We return to the central Benjamin plateau in our study of Judah, but it is already clear that this small area was a miniature ‘land between’ in the central hill country. It is no surprise that elderly Jacob saw his beloved youngest son becoming a ferocious warrior, constantly defending its vulnerable territory: ‘Benjamin, a wolf tearing to pieces in the morning, eating on and
dividing the catch at the end of the day.' Benjamin’s close family connections with Ephraim and its geographical link to adjacent Bethel placed it solidly in the orbit of the powerful House of Joseph to the N. Following the devastation of the Philistine campaign to Shiloh in the heart of Ephraim the Israelites pressured the prophet Samuel for a military/political leader. The lot fell on Saul of Benjamin. Judah’s time had not yet come, but Jacob’s patriarchal blessing also stated that: ‘A sceptre (the right to rule) will not depart from Judah ... to him is the people’s obedience.’ Benjamin would become the battlefield between Judah and Ephraim.

C. JUDAH

Judah in the S plays a major part in the history of the Land Between. A subdivisional line (HL in green, pp. 4/5) divides Judah into a chalk wilderness and a limestone hill country, bordered by the Shephelah lowland on the W. Such distinct divisions are in contrast to broad, uplifted limestones in Ephraim to the N. Keep this map open as you read Judah’s geobasics.

**Geobasics** (cf. pp. 4/5 and 18/19)

- While Ephraim’s central uplift disappears beneath the Shephelah, Judah’s southern uplift emerges to create a fertile limestone hill country that rises to summits around Hebron.
- Stress between these two uplifts fragments the area W of Jerusalem where erosion has created deep canyons within the Sorek system’s three main tributaries (named on p. 18).
- Runoff from Mizpah on the central Benjamin plateau, Jerusalem and Bethlehem flows through the Sorek system’s canyons before reaching the Shephelah’s Sorek valley.
- The hill country’s N-S highway keeps to the edge of the chalk wilderness, far to the E, in order to avoid the Sorek system until it reaches the area SW of Bethlehem.
- Judah’s hill country follows its uplift from the Bethlehem area to the ‘crown of Hebron,’ a high, well-watered region whose southern/Negev slopes descend to the arid Negev basin.
- Judah’s chalky, arid wilderness, E of its central limestone uplift, falls into the Dead Sea chasm, while to the W ridges plunge and V-shaped canyons drain into the Shephelah.
- Hebron dominates Judah’s heartland as far as Bethlehem where the Sorek system limits passage N to the central Benjamin plateau to one route passing Jerusalem and Gibeah.
- Secluded Judah, shut in by an arid S and the wilderness with its Dead Sea chasm needs the central Benjamin plateau in order to expand beyond its hill country heartland.

Turn to pp. 18/19: Philistia, Judah, the Rift, and Moab map

- HL in green: Ephraim, Benjamin, Judah, Wilderness and Shephelah
- HL in red/pink: In Hill Country—Shiloh, Timnath-serah/heres, Bethel, Ophrah, Ai, Michmash, Mizpah, Ramah, Gibeah, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Gibeon, Upper Beth-horon, Kiriat-jearim, Hebron, Beth-zur, Adoraim, Debir, Carmel (in Judah), Tekoa;
  In Wilderness—En-gedi, Massada; In Negev Basin—Arad (T. Arad), Aror (S in the eastern Negev basin), Beer-sheba (T. es-Saba); In Shephelah (S to N)—Eglon, Keilah, Socoh, Beth-shemesh, Aijalon, Lower Beth-horon
- HL in yellow (N to S): In Hill Country—Shiloh canyon, Natuf canyon, Remote Interior of Ephraim, Baal Hazor, Mt. Zemaraim (SW of Bethel), Central Benjamin Plateau, Mt. Seir, Chesalon canyon, Sorek canyon, Rephaim canyon, Arrub springs (W of Tekoa); In Wilderness—Suweinit canyon, Zeboim valley, Ascent of Adummim, Kidron canyon (appearing two times), David’s canyon, Arugot canyon, Hever canyon, Zeelim canyon; In Shephelah—Aijalon valley, Sorek valley, Ehah valley
HL in yellow on red routes (listed separately for your convenience)

1) **N-S hill country highway** from Lebonah (N edge) to Beer-sheba (T. es-Saba) in the Negev basin via Bethel, Ramah, Bethlehem, Beth-zechariah, Hebron and Debir

2) From **Bethel to Jericho** via Ophrah

3) From **Bethel to Jericho** via Ai and Zeboim valley

4) From **Ramah to Jericho** via Michmash and Zeboim valley

5) From **Jerusalem to Jericho** via Ascent of Adummim

6) From **Ramah to Aijalon** via Gibeon and Kiriath-jearim

7) From **Gibeath to Lower Beth-horon** via Gibeon and Upper Beth-horon

8) From **N-S highway SW of Bethlehem to Beth-shemesh** via Hushah and Beit Atab

9) From **Socoh in Elah valley to Hushah** (both ridge routes)

10) From **Hebron to Arad** (T. Arad) via Ziph, Carmel and Kerioth

11) From **Hebron to Eglon** via Adoraim

12) From **Halhul to Keilah** near crossroads via Beth-zur

With the narrow edge of your green pen HL the thin, solid black lines around:

1) region stretching from N of Bethel to Gibeah which includes the central Benjamin plateau;
2) region of Ai SE of Bethel which includes Michmash (the line runs through this name);
3) region just W of Jerusalem (unnamed Jerusalem plateau);
4) the crown of Hebron, well-watered, fertile high ground around the site of Hebron.

At first glance this map (pp. 18/19) may look threatening. A few observations, however, can bring clarity and insights to your marking. First of all, rather than Ephraim's broad, uplifted limestones, we have three parallel and distinct divisions in Judah (cf. pp. 18/19 with pp. 4-5).

1. **Limestone Hill Country**: The southern (Judean) uplift creates a hill country watered by winter storms, blessed by fertile soils (often on natural terraces), a heartland guarded from imperial highways but also removed from trade routes. Imperial armies entered this hill country only to put down revolts, but they easily isolated it from the outside.

2. **Chalk Wilderness**: Sufficient rainfall allows grains to grow in areas adjacent to the hill country. Herds graze elsewhere. Beyond this barren landscape lies Judah's last refuge, the Jeshimon, a rugged region of sheer canyon cliffs, plummeting into the Dead Sea chasm.

3. **Shephelah**: From its hill country heartland Judah covetously looked westward, hoping to expand into the alluvial valleys of this chalky limestone lowland. By the same token, when invaders overran this area, Judah became imprisoned, 'like a bird in a cage.'

Another subdivisional line runs across Judah just S of Bethlehem (HL in green pp. 4/5). In the wilderness it divides the more rugged 'Jeshimon' region to the S (the rugged canyons above the Dead Sea) from a more welcoming area to the N where winter encampments of bedouin almost reach the Rift. This same line in the hill country divides Judah's central uplift from canyons W of Bethlehem and in the Sorek system (see geobasics above; not named on our maps). The map on pp. 4/5 clearly shows this western 'bulge' toward Beth-shemesh (in the Shephelah), the southern end of the Ephraim uplift. Find this same subdivisional line on pp. 18/19 and again note how the three major canyons of the Sorek system finally unite in the Sorek valley by Beth-shemesh. Your HL Hushah-Beit Atab ridge route links Bethlehem with Beth-shemesh. Note how this same ridge also divides the Sorek system from canyons S of the ridge (a lower region). While Judah's tribal territory included nearly the entire rugged region S of Kiriath-jearim, it was different, set apart from Judah's long, uplifted heartland. The area presented serious obstacles for those traveling in all directions.

We now step back to consider the larger context of Judah on this map (on pp. 18/19). To the E the uninviting, arid wilderness above the Dead Sea chasm was Judah's final refuge and retreat. Judah's potential for expanding therefore lay in three other directions.
Descending southward to the broad Negev basin offered control of the southern trade corridor, but uncertain rainfall and desert marauders presented serious challenges.

Descending westward into the low hills and alluvial-filled valleys of the Shephelah offered agricultural potential but also exposed Judah to menacing coastal highways.

Expanding north of the Sorek system to the central Benjamin plateau offered access to the coastal highway and to trade routes east of the Rift, but taking Benjamin would incur the wrath of Ephraim, head of the house of Joseph and the northern tribes.

The three options above explain Judah’s history as a nation. Carefully consider them as you HL various sites, features and routes on this closer view of Judah below (pp. 20/21).

Turn to pp. 20/21: Judah’s Shephelah, Hills and Wilderness map

HL in green: Benjamin, Judah, Wilderness and Shephelah

HL in red/pink: In Hill Country—Bethel, Ai, Michmash, Mizpah, Ramah, Gibeon, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Gibeath, Upper Beth-horon, Kiriath-jearim, Hebron, Beth-zur, Adoraim, Debir, Carmel, Tekoa; In Negev Basin—Beer-sheba (T. es-Saba), Arad (T. Arad); In Shephelah (N to S)—Lower Beth-horon, Aijalon, Beth-shemesh, Socoh, Keilah, Eglon; In Wilderness—Massada, En-gedi

HL in yellow (N to S): In Hill Country—Central Benjamin Plateau, Mt. Ephron, Mt. Seir, Chesalon canyon, Sorek canyon, Rephaim canyon, Rephaim valley, Hinnom gorge (just S of Jerusalem), Gihon spring (by Jerusalem), Arrub springs (W of Tekoa); In Wilderness—Suweinit canyon, Zeboim valley, Ascent of Adummim, Kidron canyon (appearing two times), Kidron valley (just N of Jerusalem), David’s canyon, Arugot canyon, Hever canyon, Mishmar canyon, Zeelim canyon; In Shephelah—Aijalon valley, Sorek valley, Elah valley

HL in yellow on red routes (listed separately for your convenience):
1) N-S hill country highway from Bethel to Beer-sheba (T. es-Saba) in the Negev basin via Ramah, Bethlehem, Beth-zechariah, Hebron and Debir
2) From Bethel to Jericho via Ai and Zeboim valley;
3) From Ramah to Jericho via Michmash and Zeboim valley;
4) From Jerusalem to Jericho via Ascent of Adummim;
5) From Ramah to Aijalon via Gibeon and Kiriath-jearim;
6) From Gibeon to Lower Beth-horon via Gibeon and Upper Beth-horon;
7) From N-S highway SW of Bethlehem to Beth-shemesh via Hushah and Beit Atab
8) From Socoh in Elah valley to Hushah (both ridge routes)
9) From Hebron to Arad (T. Arad) via Ziph, Carmel and Kerioth
10) From Hebron to Eglon via Adoraim
11) From Hahhul to Keilah near crossroads via Beth-zur

With the narrow edge of your green pen HL the thin, solid black lines around:
1) region stretching from N of Bethel to Gibeah which includes the central Benjamin plateau; 2) region of Ai SE of Bethel which includes Michmash (the line runs through this name); 3) region just W of Jerusalem (unnamed Jerusalem plateau); 4) the crown of Hebron, well-watered, fertile high ground around the site of Hebron

The closer view of Judah on this map allows you to review three parallel regions: Judah’s hill country, Judah’s wilderness and the Shephelah lowland adjacent to Judah. We now look more carefully at three directions the nation of Judah could expand (S, W and N) from its hill country heartland, and we survey Judah’s wilderness refuge to the E. The close-up maps on pp. 20/21 and the rocks and soils map on pp. 4/5 are both useful reference in this summary study.
SOUTH: EXPANDING TO THE NEGEV BASIN—The crown of Hebron (thin line HL in green) dominates the southern hill country of Judah. Much of this fertile, well-watered highland drains SW into the Negev basin, passing the impressive site of Deir. Joined by other smaller streambeds the Hebron system empties into the Negev basin’s drainage system by Beer-sheba (T. es-Saba) and from there flows to the Mediterranean. The sites of Carmel and Juttah lie on the edge of another plateau, lower than the crown of Hebron. This area also drains SW into the Negev basin. Two of southern Judah’s uplifts (best seen on pp. 4/5) outline this area.

As elevations drop S of Hebron, rainfall decreases. The Carmel plateau, however, remains an area of farms and herds on the edge of Judah’s wilderness. This is reflected in the fascinating story of Nabal from nearby Maon but who had business in Carmel. The story’s details inform of the products of this unique area in southern Judah, from the land and from herds. The region’s importance is enhanced by the HL link between Hebron and Arad (T. Arad), as well as by a nearby route (not HL) to Eglon in the southern Shephelah via Deir. These routes, coupled with the road from Hebron to Beer-sheba (T. es-Saba) via Deir, closely linked southern Judah and the Negev basin with Hebron. Hebron potentially, therefore, commanded an area stretching from the Negev basin to Bethlehem. Judah ultimately needed the Negev basin, the land’s southern trade corridor, as we see in our later study of the southern arena.

WEST: EXPANDING TO THE SHEPHELAH—The Shephelah lowland also appears in a later study, but here we discuss connections between Judah’s hill country heartland and the Shephelah from points along the uplift and through the area of eroded canyons W of Bethlehem.

1. Descents from the Hebron area: Ridge routes to the Shephelah descend from elevations of some 1000m/3300ft to some 500m/1650ft. There are various descents between Adoraim in the S and Beth-zur in the N. They run westward following ridges which slowly descend and then drop suddenly into the Shephelah. The attractive Adoraim plateau lies some 100m/330ft below the crown of Hebron, and a nearby ridge leads to a point only some 200m/650ft above valleys around Eglon. The long, broad curve of the Beth-zur ridge gently descends to a point where one is again only 200m/650ft above the rolling landscape of the lowland. Other narrow ridges due W of Hebron are less convenient and more dangerous, especially for invaders ascending from the Shephelah. Thus the Beth-zur and Adoraim routes appear in historical documents.

2. Descents from the Bethlehem area: Obstacles W of Bethlehem and Jerusalem have left a singular and important ridge which we call the ‘Husan ridge,’ perhaps the ‘Hushah’ of the Bible. Our HL routes on pp. 20/21 show how this ridge avoids the rugged Sorek system and links the area of Bethlehem with the Timnah ridge and a Roman road leading to the heart of the Shephelah lowland. Another route descends to the Sorek valley via Beit Atab and then passes a natural feature called ‘Lehi,’ noted on RSM6 and RSM7. Here the men of Judah met the Philistines in the story of Samson.

3. The Rephaim valley bypass route: The significance of the Hushah/Husan ridge increases when one notes its connection to Jerusalem via a non-HL route descending into the Rephaim canyon at a convenient point below Bether. From here it climbs gently through the broad Rephaim valley to reach the N-S highway by Jerusalem. This lonely road avoided more rugged parts of the Sorek system and gave northern Judah (and Jerusalem!) direct access to the Hushah/Husan ridge and to two Shephelah valleys. It was along this ‘deserted route,’ as the Greek text of Acts 8:26 pinpoints it, that Philip met an Ethiopian eunuch returning home from pilgrimage in Jerusalem. As they proceeded they would have passed a flowing spring within the Rephaim.

The relevance of the above ridge routes to the Shephelah, both for invaders from outside Judah’s heartland and for Judah’s westward expansion, emerges in a later study.
EAST: RETREATING INTO THE WILDERNESS—(See Wilderness Geobasics statements on p. 155.)
The arid chalk wilderness on Judah’s eastern flank (brown on pp. 4/5) lies within the rain shadow of Judah’s higher hill country. This wilderness descends eastward and finally plunges along faulted cliffs into the Rift and the nearby Dead Sea. The hill country of Judah was removed from international highways, but Judah’s wilderness was far more secluded. It served as a final refuge from local invaders, such as the Philistines, as well as from imperial armies beyond the Land Between, armies which ascended into the hill country to contain Judah’s expansion or put down its revolts.

More often, however, wilderness areas adjacent to the hill country provided open grazing for shepherds, as we hear in the nativity account which states that ‘in that region (adjacent to Bethlehem) there were shepherds in open areas, keeping watch over their flocks by night.’ David knew this territory well, and his tender care as a shepherd serves as an example of God’s tender care for his people. Lookouts throughout this wilderness afford spectacular views of the Rift and distant eastern scarps rising abruptly from the Dead Sea to Moab’s tableland. Here the shepherd had time to contemplate the mercies of a Creator, who like the shepherd, provided sustenance and security to his people, ‘the flock which He tends.’ Psalms, prophets, Gospels and apostles all use the image of the shepherd and his sheep, as well as God’s provision and protection in such dangerous areas as the wilderness of the shepherd.

To the SE, beyond the limit of more cautious shepherds, one finds yawning canyons lined with sheer limestone cliffs falling perilously into the Rift. The Bible calls this rugged region the ‘Jeshimon,’ a no-man’s land between the shepherd’s domain and the Dead Sea chasm. Only locals dare venture into the Jeshimon where one is forced to gingerly navigate slippery slopes within a sustenance-deprived setting that threatens both life and limb. Springs often emerge deep within the canyons of the Jeshimon, sources of life supplied by underground aquifers flowing eastward from Judah’s central uplift. The most attractive springs are in the area of En-gedi, both the large ‘Arugot Canyon springs’ and smaller springs in and around ‘David’s canyon’ (p. 21). Such water sources in arid En-gedi’s subtropical climate made this region famous for dates, henna (a dye) and balsam used in balms and cosmetics. Springs around En-gedi offered relief to David and his mighty men as they hid from Saul’s search parties in the Jeshimon. Here, along the deep Rift faults, they may well have felt the earth quake for we hear echoes of such trembles in Psalm 18. David also found refuge at ‘the stronghold,’ perhaps at the natural ‘stronghold’ of Massada in the southern Jeshimon (pp. 4/5 and 21). At Massada, high above the Dead Sea, a set of parallel ‘step faults’ has left a large limestone block detached from adjacent limestones. [This powerful image of safety inspired Martin Luther’s famous hymn, ‘A mighty stronghold is our God.’] A thousand years after David, shortly after the close of the book of Acts, hundreds of zealous rebels fighting to throw off Roman rule made Massada their last stand. David’s long months in the Jeshimon and the Bible’s use of ‘stronghold’ (Hebrew, metzudah) no doubt galvanized their spirits. Today many in Israel continue to be inspired by Massada and what happened there. ‘The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust….’

NORTH: TO JERUSALEM AND BENJAMIN BETWEEN EPHRAIM AND JUDAH—Benjamin’s territory appears on the southern part of pp. 16/17 and also on the northern part of pp. 18/19 and 20/21. This is for good reason since an understanding of Jerusalem’s history depends upon viewing Benjamin’s territory from two different perspectives, from Ephraim and from Judah.

Ephraim of the House of Joseph regarded Benjamin’s territory as falling under its orbit. Ephraim’s sentinel site of Bethel conveniently opens onto the adjacent central Benjamin plateau. For reasons we discuss below, Benjamin’s territory extended to the Hinnom gorge on the southern edge of Jerusalem where it met the Judah’s border. Jerusalem (Jebus) was a non-Israelite Jebusite city nestled off the road in the upper Kidron canyon system on the edge
of the wilderness but hidden from it by the chalk-covered Mt. of Olives. To the W a series
of low ridges and valleys drains S into the broad Rephaim valley (see p. 20). David’s move of
his capital from Hebron to Jerusalem on the southern edge of Benjamin’s territory upset the
entire balance of tribal power in the hill country. The discussion which follow explains why.

Three distinct orbits have emerged from our study of the western uplifts. Each orbit is defined
by a set of geobasics which we review below in order to discuss Jerusalem’s unique position.

1 Samaria/Shechem Orbit: This open region of cross-faulting not only engenders trade
wars across the northern trade corridor but also encourages cultural exchange with
outside cultures. History demonstrates that Samaria is the first to reach out and the
first to be overcome from the outside. Rugged hill country in Ephraim’s orbit separates
Samaria and its natural center or hub at Shechem from the southern hill country.

2 Ephraim/Bethel Orbit: The central hill country’s main uplift and side uplifts create
this orbit’s large and rugged limestone block. Crossroads at Bethel serve as the orbit’s
main southern sentinel which overlooks the strategic central Benjamin plateau.

(Jerusalem’s location between these two orbits)

3 Judah/Hebron Orbit: The southern uplift of the central hill country emerges in the
Bethlehem region and culminates in the crown of Hebron. This orbit, unlike the
others, rises between a lonely arid wilderness and an action-packed Shephelah lowland.
Clan custom and tradition therefore rule in this orbit’s natural hub at Hebron.

At first glance it seems strange that the above summary does not include a ‘Jerusalem orbit.’
This is because Jerusalem occupies a semi-secluded position and not the center of a larger
natural hub. To appreciate this, note that the uplift W of Jerusalem creates a ‘bulge’ in the hill
country toward the Shephelah’s Sorek valley. Erosion within this bulge has left high ridges
and deep canyons, an obstacle which we call the ‘Sorek system.’ To flourish Jerusalem must
expand beyond its semi-secluded setting and control parts of two nearby orbits. Jerusalem has
done this in the past as seen in early Egyptian sources, in archaeological evidence of the city’s
impressive fortifications and in the city’s long history after David made it his capital.

Jerusalem’s unique position between orbits (shown above) allows it to gain prominence
in the hill country in spite of its semi-secluded, off-the-road and semi-secure position. The
central Benjamin plateau (the southern part of the Ephraim/Bethel orbit) lies N of Jerusalem,
and from this plateau there is easy access out of the hills to the northern Shephelah, coastal
highways and the port of Joppa. Descents to the E from this plateau reach Jericho, routes N
of the Dead Sea, the Medeba plateau and the highways of the eastern heights. A route does
descend to Jericho directly from Jerusalem, but to realize its greatest potential and to defend
itself the city must control the entire network of routes leaving and entering the central
Benjamin plateau. Competition on the plateau must cease and Jerusalem must reign supreme.

Territory directly N of Jerusalem is only half of the story. To realize its potential Jerusalem
must also control a network of routes connecting it to the central Shephelah, the southern
Shephelah beyond and to Judah’s most southwestern citadel, the imposing site of Lachish.
Jerusalem’s southern claim thus includes the upper Rephaim valley on the southern outskirts
of the city and Bethlehem (the northern part of the Judah/Hebron orbit), two avenues that
run on either side of deep canyons and high ground along the Judean uplift. Hill 923 stands
above these connections and appears on our maps. Both of these avenues lead to the high
Husan ridge (Hushah) between the rugged Sorek drainage system to the N and the Sansan
(‘Ribbed’) slopes descending to the S. By circumventing the rugged Sorek system the Husan
ridge offers a system of ridge routes descending to the Elah valley in the central Shephelah
and the Beit Atab route to the Sorek valley. This Bethlehem-Central Shephelah connection
REFERENCE MAP: JERUSALEM’S LINKS TO THE SHEPHELAH

This map helps you understand Jerusalem’s unique position. We note in the side bar when this map is a helpful reference. Color code your printed version as you find useful. The relief and road system reflect Biblical Backgrounds’ Regional Study Map 6 (see: www.bibback.com). The map below covers a smaller area and contains specific information related to your current study. Note the following features:

1. Jerusalem lies E of the rugged Sorek system and off the main N-S highway. Thicker and darker road systems potentially link it to the Shephelah.
2. Find two uplifts (thick broken lines), the ‘bulge’ to the W and the border of Benjamin’s territory.
3. The central Benjamin plateau falls within the territory of the tribe of Benjamin but under the shadow of Bethel in Ephraim to the N.
4. The Husan ridge route system and Bethlehem fall within the orbit of Hebron in Judah to the S.
therefore rivals those to the central Benjamin plateau and greatly enhances Jerusalem’s potential in the central hill country.

This short discussion reveals that the geobasics which surround Jerusalem invite it to expand to the N and the S in order to realize its potential. Indeed, Jerusalem could only flourish when it was able to access these surrounding routes. When it did it became a major hill country entity, and we should not be surprised to hear reactions from the direction of adjacent orbits.

**The entry of the Israelite tribes** into the central hill country dramatically changed Jerusalem’s status. However one interprets the events in Joshua it is clear that the king of Jerusalem and his allies in the southern hill country and the Shephelah would not tolerate a change in the geopolitical status quo by allowing Gibeonites in and around the central Benjamin plateau to ally themselves with the Israelites. They all knew that ultimately this would lead to problems.

As the Israelites explored the land and carved out tribal allotments, the issue of a Jerusalem, the central Benjamin plateau and the Husan ridge was no doubt in the minds of Israelite tribal leaders. Which of the two prominent tribes would hold these two important regions, the house of Joseph or the house of Judah—and to whom would the obviously problematic site of Jerusalem be given? The issue was resolved when tribal territories and their borders were defined. Benjamin (related and thus attached to the house of Joseph to the N!) received the central Benjamin plateau while Judah to the S received Bethlehem and the Husan system of routes. The Benjamin-Judah border, immediately south of the city, also ran right through the middle of the city’s fertile plateau to the W. This ‘rabinic-type’ solution left Jerusalem isolated, demoted and without hope, a city which could be left to the non-Israelite Jebusites.

The strategy of this tribal division was clearly to keep Jerusalem non-Israelite and at the same time restrain the potential of the city and its non-Israelite residents. It was hoped that this farsighted solution would prevent Jerusalem from arising once again, for were it to emerge under the leadership of either the northern house of Joseph or the southern house of Judah tribal conflict would inevitably ensue. No other explanation gives a reason for the unnatural tribal division in the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem. Within this context the cryptic mention of an attack on the city by ‘the men of Judah’ may well have been Judah’s response to some type of revolt by the city’s non-Israelite inhabitants. Judah, however, did not occupy the city, nor would they dare. To avoid Israelite tribal conflict Jerusalem had to remain ‘neutral.’ Interestingly, in the same context we are told that Benjamin ‘did not dispossess’ the Jebusites but that they continued to live with the Benjaminites. An outrage at Gibeah in this period and the subsequent civil war (placed at the end of the book of Judges to culminate the book’s message) decimated Benjamin and left the tribe in no shape to subdue Jerusalem’s impregnable fortifications, even had its tribal leaders desired to take such action.

**The rise of local nationalism and David** heralded events which changed Jerusalem and far beyond. Leading up to -1000, Jebusites lived in shackled Jerusalem, just inside Benjamin’s territory. The prophet Samuel, king Saul of Benjamin and the crown prince Jonathan, David’s close friend, had all died. Local nations were emerging and already competing when southern clans made David king of Judah at Hebron. Northern tribes then made him ‘king over Israel,’ but David remained in Hebron, certainly to the satisfaction of Judah’s clan leadership. They no doubt felt that David was still just the son of Jesse of Bethlehem, ‘little among the clans of Judah,’ and thus they had leverage over him. After all, overshadowed by Jerusalem in the past and now under the thumb of Hebron, Bethlehem of Judah was and would remain insignificant.

Ancient Hebron sits on a ridge overlooking modern Hebron in the valley below, a secure site in a secure region. This natural administrative center of Judah—within its fertile and well-watered plateau—served David well. Time spent with the Philistines, however, had
introduced David to the country’s geobasics, which were key to economic and political horizons beyond Judah’s provincial southern hill country. He knew of Philistine tactics in the central Benjamin plateau in the days of Samuel and Saul, and if he had not previously known of the importance of the Husan route system, it certainly hit home when he descended along this route to Saul’s camp and encountered Goliath. Ruling from provincial Hebron was an anomaly, and David knew he needed a new, secure site with the potential of expanding to meet the growth of the increasingly strong nations around him, including the Philistines who did not consider David a threat as long as he remained tucked away in southern Judah.

Then came a decision that changed history as David boldly did what no tribal leader had dared do. Leaving the ‘crown of Hebron’ David established an independent religious and political capital at Jebusite Jerusalem, making it a crown city with crown territory. The long Israelite check on Jebusite Jerusalem had kept the city non-Israelite, and now it was available for David. His intimate knowledge of the environs of Jerusalem came from his earlier trips between Bethlehem and Saul’s capital at Gibeah. On these journeys David must have turned aside to view the site from a prominent ridge S of the city (today a promenade with spectacular views), and certainly he overlooked it from the Mt. of Olives during his flight from Saul to Nob.

In short, the Israelite tribal allotments effectively neutralized Jerusalem and left it a lone site, off-the-road in Kidron’s hollow, secluded behind the Sorek system. The urgency of emerging nationalism allowed David to resurrect the city’s latent potential and from here confront surrounding nations. Judah’s presence in Benjamin, however, violated a long term, silent agreement, infringing on the territory of Benjamin and the quasi-authority of the House of Joseph over that tribe. David’s move also angered the clans of Hebron, since it reduced their standing and freed David from their immediate control. David was playing with ‘tribal fire.’

One of the most revealing moments in David’s takeover of Jerusalem came soon after his move from Hebron. Earlier David had worked for the Philistines but in so doing he cunningly protected clans in southern Judah. With David’s move to Jerusalem, however, the Philistines realized David’s true intentions. They knew that he was a shrewd tactician and warrior, but they could not tolerate his claim to Jerusalem’s potential. Thus we hear of Philistine forces attempting to cut David off from his tribe of Judah and the Husan connection to the Shephelah. They may actually have hoped for a northern revolt against David’s move to Jerusalem. The Philistine reaction, however, was too little and too late. David knew the Jerusalem-Bethlehem area far better than the Philistines, and in the second Philistine incursion David and his forces secretly made their way behind the Philistine camp and caught them off guard. What then happened solidified David’s prestige and bargaining power. The Philistines fled N to the central Benjamin plateau, and David and his militia chased them ‘from Gibeon to Gezer,’ along the same ridge route Joshua had pursued the king of Jerusalem and his allies centuries earlier. David won far more than a battle.

In the midst of these events the Ark of the Covenant was brought into David’s new capital via the central Benjamin plateau. The Ark was David’s wife (the daughter of Saul of Benjamin!) reveals that she knew what was actually happening. Benjamin was submitting to David of Judah. David, however, succeeded because the times in which he lived demanded a strong central Israelite authority, and at his new capital David fulfilled that need. We hear of little tribal reaction at the outset, but the seeds of later revolts were sown. David’s victories, his astute tribal policy and the need for Israelite survival in his day all combined to fulfill the revelatory insight of Jacob centuries earlier, ‘The rod of rule shall not change course from Judah ... to him belongs the obedience of the peoples.’ Under David and his son Solomon Jerusalem flourished since it once again was free to exploit its potential. The northern part of the Judah/Hebron orbit and the southern part of the Ephraim/Bethel orbit once again were working for the benefit of this semi-secluded, semi-secure, hill country city.
After Solomon’s death reality emerged. The stage was set for ‘the perfect storm,’ a revolt by the house of Joseph against the house of Judah and control of the central Benjamin plateau. Northern Israel and southern Judah, now commercially and politically divided, were easy prey for Egypt who did not waste time entering this same plateau to claim what it felt belonged to Egypt in the first place, the trade revenues of Solomon. Fifty years later, after both north and south were wasted and Damascus benefited, both sides declared a ‘cease-fire’ and compromised on control of the network of routes through Benjamin—but skirmishes continued to break out at strategic locations. In the midst of all of this Jerusalem’s potential was compromised.

Four centuries passed. Imperial Assyria overran the country and most inhabitants in the northern kingdom of Israel were exiled. For a brief moment under Josiah, there was promise for Jerusalem’s potential, but then Babylon arrived and Judah’s captivity ensured. Persia allowed Jews to resettle areas around Jerusalem.

Four more centuries passed, and Jerusalem’s potential emerged once again, this time under the Jewish Hasmonaeans, liberated from Greek domination by the fruits of the Maccabean revolt. There was no nation of northern Israel to resist Jerusalem’s expansion, but foreign transplants called Samaritans (brought to the land in the days of Assyrian domination) inhabited the region of Samaria. Jerusalem’s control reached N beyond the central Benjamin plateau and Bethel to encompass much of Ephraim’s territory, to Acrabeta on the edge of the region of Samaria. Isaiah’s vision of a future messianic age, however, was still not fulfilled. He had spoken of ‘a shoot springing forth from the stump of Jesse (of Judah)’ and described what ultimately was to become of that shoot. Not only would the ‘wolf dwell with the lamb, the leopard lie down with the young goat ...’ but tribal tensions also would resolve for ‘Ephraim would no longer be jealous of Judah....’ He also spoke of the rule of David’s ultimate successor which would ‘abound to peace without end, upon the throne of David (of Judah) and upon his kingdom, to secure it and sustain with justice and with righteousness—from this time and forever. The zealous fervor of the LORD of mighty multitudes will do this! The LORD has sent a word through Jacob—it falls upon Israel (the House of Joseph)....’

In a much larger sense Jerusalem’s potential has yet to be realized. Its coming glory awaits the return of ‘the son of David,’ proclaimed by prophets who witnessed the onslaught of Assyria’s cruel war machine. Only then will Jerusalem’s true potential emerge.

D. LOOKING AT THE BIG PICTURE: THE CENTRAL HILL COUNTRY

As we close our study of the central hill country, consider the following questions.

• How does the geological structure and rock types influence life, outlook and politics in the larger central hill country, from the region of Samaria in the N to Judah in the S?

• Explain the issues you would have to face in the central hill country (security, income from commerce, etc.) if you were an Israelite leader deciding where to settle.

• What are the differences between the region of Samaria’s connection to areas beyond the Jordan (Gilead and Medeba plateau) and Judah’s relationship with the eastern heights?

• What type of challenges did the tribe of Benjamin face from the prominent hill country tribes of Ephraim (of the house of Joseph) to the N and Judah to the S?

• If you were the king of Judah reigning in Hebron in which direction would you expand first in order to take control of the southern trade corridor?

• Does one overriding aspect of the central hill country stand out for you? If so, describe it.


E. Coastal Plain, Philistia and Shephelah

This study explores the coastal plain and the Shephelah lowland between the Mediterranean sea and the uplifted central hill country of Samaria, Ephraim and Judah. Much of this plain consists of deposited soils (described on p. 12) rather than rocks. Note the following maps.

Page 14 shows coastal plains N and S of the Carmel range.
Page 16 shows coastal plains S of the Carmel range and has a broken subdivisional line.
Pages 18 and 20 shows the southern coastal plain, alluvial basins and the Shephelah lowland.
Pages 4 and 12/13 present the entire coastal plain of the Central Arena.

Turn to pp. 4/5: CENTRAL ARENA map

- HL in green: Sharon Plain, Philistine Alluvial Plain and Shephelah (if not already HL)
- HL in green: 1) the fragments of the subdivisional line dividing the Shephelah from the coastal plain (from Hadid to T. Halif, leaving spaces open for valleys passing through this line; 2) the subdivisional line dividing the southern, arbitrary limit of the coastal plain from the western Negev and continuing SW off the map
- HL in red/pink: Along coast—N to S: Caesarea, Gath (in Sharon plain), Aphek, Joppa, Lod, Ekron, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza; In Shephelah—Gezer, Aijalon, LBh (Lower Beth-horon), Beth-shemesh, Azekah, Gath, Socoh, Mareshah, Lachish

Geobasics (cf. pp. 4, 16, 18 and 20)

- Imperial N-S highways flow across the southern coastal plain which is aligned with hill country uplifts and is the broadest coastal plain along the eastern Mediterranean.
- Ephraim's uplifted hill country limits the width of the Sharon plain, but the breadth of the southern coastal plain and its Shephelah lowland presents quite a different picture.
- Rains diminishes to the S and the Shephelah lowland disappears as the coastal plain blends into the western Negev and becomes covered with fine, wind-blown loess soil.
- The coastal plain consists of three main soils: coastal sand dunes (yellow), areas of brown-red sands (orange) and lower basins of alluvial deposits (green) from the hill country.
- Mediterranean currents carry sand from the mouth of Nile river and deposit it as southern coastal sands, often blown inland and sometimes covering low hills of brown-red sands.
- Brown-red sands are dune sand with a crust of alluvial material, often persisting along low, solidified-sand ridges (‘kurkar’) seen in the modest coastal relief on these maps.
- Large basins of alluvial deposits exist in the northern Sharon plain, by Aphek and by Lod and in what we call the Philistine alluvial plain, outlined by Ekron, Ashdod and Gath.
- The chalky, semi-sterile Shephelah lowland (light yellow) plays a special role in this coastal context since its alluvial valleys link the coastal plain with the hill country.

Rocks, soils and markings on p. 4/5 show the Central Arena’s eastern heights, its central abyss, its western uplifts and its coastal plain and adjacent Shephelah. A closer look reveals the thin, broken line dividing rocks from soils (clearly seen on pp. 14, 16, 18 and 20).

The coastal plain lacks the dramatic landscape of the Rift and the structural variety of the uplifted hill country, but it is not deficient in diversity. Its soils include coastal dunes of quartz sand (blown inland by coastal winds), low ridges of brown-red sands, basins of rich alluvia deposited by runoff and patches of fine, wind-blown loess along a vague southern frontier. All of these soils compete along a plain where past sea invasions and sea retreats produced fresh landscapes and renewed deposits. Today the features along this fascinating coastal plain continue to determine settlement, paths of routes and places where past battlefields await.
renewed conflict. Everything on this plain is changing and yet the geobasics do not change; the sands continue to blow and alluvia flows down from the hill country.

**Turn to pp. 10/11: Galilee, Golan, Jezreel and Lower Gilead map**
- HL in green: Sharon Plain
- HL in red/pink: Dor (if not already HL), Caesarea and Gath
- HL in yellow on red routes: the international coastal highway from Gath [-padalla] S by Socoh and to the S edge of this map

The map above is a general view of the northern Sharon and Dor plains while the map below provides a more detailed view. A discussion of these maps follows.

**Turn to pp. 14/15: Lake Galilee and Galilean Depression map**
- HL in green: Sharon Plain
- HL in red/pink: Dor (if not already HL), Caesarea and Gath

**Plain of Dor**—Both of these maps show the impact of uplifted Mt. Carmel and its promontory on the coastal plain (p. 2 distinguishes limestone Mt. Carmel from the rest of the longer Carmel range). Mt. Carmel delimits the narrow plain of Dor, a slender plain that exhibits the same soils as found on broader coastal plains: coastal sand dunes and 'kurkar' ridges covered by brown-red sands, which block drainage and create basins of alluvia. In past ages the renowned 'Carmel man' found sustenance and shelter along this plain. Later the famous port-city of Dor served eastern Mediterranean maritime shipping between Egypt, Phoenicia and the island of Cyprus. Other sites dotted this plain throughout the ages, but Dor dominated and gave the plain its present name. Circumventing the promontory of Mt. Carmel does not compare to difficulties along the Ladder of Tyre, and access to the Jezreel valley and its extensive internal network of roads made Dor better situated than Acco.

These maps are useful to contrast Dor's plain with the coastal plain between Mt. Carmel and the two sites of Acco (coastal and inland). Mediterranean currents carry Egypt's finest sands around Carmel's promontory and deposit them N of Mt. Carmel as dunes. These dunes provided early glass makers with needed raw material. Wind-blown sands still cover inland kurkar ridges and plague coastal routes. The Kishon stream, draining much of the Jezreel valley, can only reach the sea by hugging Mt. Carmel. The sands divert Aphek's springs northward through the sluggish and swampy Naaman river, and near Tel Akko they finally can empty into the sea. The action of sea, wind and geological pressures and faulting are the geobasics that shape the past and present form of these coastal plains.

**Sharon Plain**—A different picture meets us when we venture S of the Plain of Dor onto what is called the Sharon plain. Since Mt. Carmel gives way to the lower Shephelah of Carmel (written in on p. 14) wind-blown dune sands can move farther inland, aided by a lone southern finger of Mt. Carmel which tends to divert coastal winds into this region. We now turn to another map which presents this area in the context of the entire Sharon plain. As you turn to this map note the overlap of this area on p. 16.

**Turn to pp. 16/17: Sharon, Samaria, Ephraim and Upper Gilead map**
- HL in green: Sharon Plain, Joppa-Aphek-Gezer Triangle, Philistine Alluvial Plain and Shephelah (if not already HL, here and in subsequent markings)
- HL in red/pink: Along coast—N to S: Caesarea, Gath (in Sharon plain), Aphek, Joppa, Lod, Ekron; In Shephelah—Gezer, Aijalon, Lower Beth-horon and Beth-shemesh
Our discussion of the Sharon plain continues on p. 16 where coastal soils clearly distinguish the diverse northern Sharon (stretching from Caesarea to Socoh) from central Sharon (the area’s largest tract of brown-red sands). The broken subdivisional line S of central Sharon conveniently separates Sharon from the southern coastal plain, but historical sources sometimes consider the region of Aphek as southern ‘Sharon.’ Later we discuss this transitional zone between N and S, which we call the ‘Joppa-Aphek-Gezer triangle.’

Central Sharon consists of brown-red sands covering parallel inland ridges of calcified sandstone (‘kurkar’) aligned with the present coastline. These higher ridges divert runoff from the hill country to the N and to the S and forms swamps in low-lying areas where water is trapped by coastal ridges and sands (see p. 16).

In antiquity central Sharon was therefore a secluded and eschewed region, covered by large tracks of ancient oaks whose deep roots could reach underground water. Routes tended to avoid the area’s foreboding forest and thickets, keeping to a narrow passage at the edge of the hill country or along a less popular coastal route. Likewise central Sharon also did not invite settlement. Local inhabitants preferred higher ground at the edge of the hill country, above better drained basins of alluvia. A glance at p. 16 show a few of these settlements (Gath [-padalla], Yaham and Socoh) but an absence of sites within the central Sharon itself. There were a few sites along the coast and in nearby small alluvia basins.

Sharon’s ancient oak forests had already disappeared when Jews from the diaspora returned in number to this area (the last trees were cut to power steam engines of the Turkish railroad). These returnee’s therefore purchased what no one else wanted, the central Sharon. Modern Israeli technology and determination have transformed the area into large tracts of citrus groves and a myriad of collective settlements and cities. Wells tap the underground water of coastal aquifers, bringing it to the surface and distributing it by efficient irrigation methods. Today the famous ‘Jaffa orange’ and other fruits and flowers are common place in the markets of the West, but the visitor no longer sees the Sharon as it was in the days of the Bible.

Northern Sharon has special significance within the larger coastal plain and within Sharon itself. Above we noted that uplifted Mt. Carmel disappears and dunes move inland. Channels of alluvia and swamps separate tracts of brown-red sands resting on ‘kurkar’ ridges as runoff from much of Samaria’s hill country seeks passages through northern Sharon’s ridges and heavy dunes. Alluvial basins E of these sands offer a fertile setting for farmers and a staging ground for armies coming from Egypt and preparing to make their way through the Carmel passes to the coveted Jezreel valley.

Although the barrier of central Sharon tended to bar central Samaria from direct contact with the coast, the geobasics of northern Sharon provided a solution. On p. 16 note that the Shechem valley drains NW and that after the valley emerges from the hill country (by Socoh) its channel gathers additional runoff on its journey to the sea. The extensive Dothan drainage system to the N also gathers runoff as far E as Bezek and emerges at Gath [-padalla] where it also verges NW on its path to the sea, depositing alluvia on the way.

All of these geobasics, including the passes across the Carmel range, give the northern Sharon its special significance. Imperial armies often camped here, gathered (or pillaged) supplies before continuing their march, either N to the Jezreel valley or S to Aphek and the southern coastal plain. Such a setting explains why king Herod, in the years prior to the birth
of Jesus, chose the site of Strato’s Tower to build one of the ancient world’s greatest port-
cities, Caesarea, Rome’s gateway in and out of the Land Between. Herod and his architects
realized that this region was better situated than even Dor, and they overcame Dor’s greatest
weakness, the lack of a large and secure harbor. Caesarea became Dor’s successor as goods and
legions flowed to and from of the land via this man-made gateway. In later centuries, however,
Caesarea’s diligence waned, and the sands of Egypt’s Nile, carried N by Mediterranean
currents, brought sure but slow death to both port and city. To secure the hill country king
Herod also constructed Sebaste on the ruins of the city Samaria (where centuries earlier
northern Israel’s house of Omri wisely had created a grand, new capital) and linked it with
his grand port-city of Caesarea, ‘a bastion standing guard over the entire nation.’ More than
any other event in history Herod’s building of Sebaste and Caesarea reveals the importance of
geobasics in northern Sharon and its surroundings.

THE JOPPA-APHEK-GEZER TRIANGLE—The international highway (HL on p. 16) descends S
from Gath [-padalla] along a narrow passage between central Sharon and the hill country. On
its way nearby alluvia almost disappears but soon broadens into a large alluvial basin which
gathers runoff from the high and rough interior of Ephraim’s hill country with its extensive
Shiloh system. One of the country’s strongest springs emerges in the midst of this basin. The
site of Aphek sits on higher ground on the eastern edge of this outflow while swamps of fresh
water merge to form the Yarkon river. This meandering stream slowly makes its way to the sea
through an eroded channel on the southern edge of central Sharon. Surface runoff from the
hills and the springs surfacing at Aphek have created this impressive area of alluvia.

Nearly all international traffic had to pass through the bottleneck of Aphek, but it was not
only the gateway to the northern Sharon, the Jezreel valley and regions beyond. It was also
the gateway to the S for armies and travelers arriving here from the N. Here they found
refreshing springs and also a broad network of routes stretching across the southern coastal
plain. An Assyrian king underscores the importance of the Aphek springs, gateway to the S:
‘... I marched from Aphek toward Egypt via Raphia and the brook of Egypt—and on the way,
there is no stream! So I had to provide my army with well water by using chains and buckets.’

Aphek is also the focal point for two ridge routes descending from deep within the central hill
country. One route served Samaria’s Michmethath valley S of Shechem, descending to the
coastal plain via Arus. Another made its way along a solitary continuous ridge through the
rough interior of Ephraim via Timnah-serah, Joshua’s inheritance in Ephraim. It was part of a
highway that linked Aphek to Jericho via Bethel. Between these two hill country routes lay
Ephraim’s rough hill country, the tribal hub of early Israelite life.

It is therefore not surprising that the Ephraimites, ‘armed with the bow,’ tried to stop the
northward advance of the Philistines on the battlefield between Aphek and Ebenezer (p. 16).
From Shiloh, deep inside Ephraim, the Israelites carried the Ark of the Covenant to the
region of Aphek, certain that this would bring victory. They lost the battle, however, and
the Ephraimites were scattered, sons of Eli killed, and the Ark lost to the Philistines. Samuel
witnessed this tragedy, and David, Samuel’s disciple, must have recalled this event as he tried
to join the mobilization of Philistine forces at Aphek. Archaeological evidence reveals the
importance of Aphek, long before and long after the coming of the Israelites, with impressive
remains from the Bronze ages through Roman times and into later periods. Aphek was called
Antipatris in Jesus’ day, built by king Herod who named it in honor of his father, Antipater.

The site of Joppa (modern Jaffa) occupies an unusual position, situated on the coastline S
of central Sharon and on the NW corner of the southern coastal plain. It sits atop a high
promontory (some 30m/100f above the sea) and commands an excellent view of both sea and
land. An adjacent reef running parallel to the shore can function as a breakwater for a type of
natural anchorage, but when the sea is rough a maritime landing at Joppa is at best dangerous. There is reason to believe that in earlier times a small inland harbor lay in the hollow behind or E of the Joppa promontory and provided shelter for ancient mariners, much like the modern port of Haifa behind Carmel’s much larger promontory. Today the Aijalon drainage channel abruptly turns N (between Joppa and Azor), but it may have earlier drained directly to the sea near the Joppa promontory. If so, heavy alluvia may have accumulated in this area, filled the natural port and diverted the Aijalon to its current course, due N to join the Yarkon river channel (as it appears on this map). What is certain is that the Ottoman Turks built a sea wall on Joppa’s seaward side, still visible today, and that arriving at Joppa by small ferry boats from a distant, anchored ship was risky unless the sea was calm.

In spite of difficult docking and our lack of knowledge of the ancient port, Joppa is both renowned and legendary throughout history as a maritime port along the busy highways of the coastal plain, an emporium for goods coming and going between land and sea. The Hebrew Bible mentions the site several times and underscores its position by calling this part of the coast ‘the sea of Joppa.’ Joppa became an important Egyptian base when Egypt retook the land during its New Kingdom. Obviously, Egypt needed a service center for maritime communication and supplies for its land-based war machine in this strategic Joppa-Aphek-Gezer triangle. Transport across northern Sinai sands was much more difficult.

Throughout its long history both visitor and conqueror entered Joppa, right down to Napoleon in 1799 and countless western visitors since then. Much of the tourist trade of the nineteenth century entered the country via Joppa, while today, Israel’s imposing Ben Gurion airline terminal is located nearby on level land between Ono and Lod. As one flies in and out of this airport, a window seat offers a spectacular view of ancient Joppa which was alive with activity millennia before adjacent, modern Tel Aviv existed—and before Abraham entered the hill country rising to the E beyond the Aijalon valley. Our interest in the port-city of Joppa goes beyond the imperial struggles along this plain. Joppa served as a port for Jerusalem and this part of the hill country. It was the prize of any hill country leader strong enough to control the Shephelah, cut across international N-S highways and reach the sea. Thus for imperial and for local reasons Joppa is one of the key sites in the Joppa-Aphek-Gezer triangle, the transitional zone between the Sharon plain and the heart of the southern coastal plain.

The last site in the Joppa-Aphek-Gezer triangle is Gezer, a long, hot-dog shaped mound ‘cut off’ (in Hebrew ‘gezer’) from a nearby hill of eocene limestone (bottom, p. 16). The site of Gezer rises dramatically above the entire coastal plain and the mouth of the broad Aijalon valley. There is no comparable site along the entire coastal plain. Its geobasics and its history demonstrate that whoever controls Gezer not only controls this part of the coastal plain but also the front door into the hill country’s important Benjamin saddle, the central Benjamin plateau. We later discuss Gezer as part of the Shephelah, but for now it suffices to note that Egypt and Solomon both knew that without Gezer they could not claim control over the Land Between, and that Gezer’s fate is inseparable from that of Joppa and Aphek.

In summary, it is difficult to over-emphasize the importance of the Joppa-Aphek-Gezer triangle. Imperial powers could not expand N or S without first securing this region, and both historical and archaeological records illustrate this. On the other hand, local peoples in the neighboring hill country and along the southern coastal plain all coveted this same region with its network of routes. It secured the Aijalon valley, and therefore the hill country. It offered expansion to the southern coastal plain, to the north through Aphek and to the sea via the port of Joppa and a safe mooring for boats at the mouth of the Yarkon river. By the same token, the appearance of imperial armies, such as those of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Rome, meant that this same coastal plain was out of the control of the hill country, and that it could now serve as a base to invade the Shephelah and the hill country itself.
Within the Central Arena the Joppa-Aphek-Gezer triangle functions much like the Medeba plateau in the Eastern Heights and the central Benjamin plateau in the central hill country. All three regions lie precariously between N and S. Any power, imperial or local, which would aspire to total control of the Land Between had to control these three regions. Each them is a mini-land between within the greater Land Between. Earlier studies made this clear in term of the Medeba plateau and the central Benjamin plateau, and the purpose of our discussion above was to demonstrate that this is also true for the Joppa-Aphek-Gezer triangle.

SOUTHERN COASTAL PLAIN—The marking on the maps below covers part of the Joppa-Aphek-Gezer triangle, which we discussed above. Although the triangle is also part of the southern coastal plain, its specific geobasics and position in the Central Arena set it apart. Your next marking moves southward from this triangle of sites.

Turn to pp. 18/19: PHILISTIA, JUDAH, THE RIFT AND MOAB map

- HL in green: Joppa-Aphek-Gezer Triangle, Philistine Alluvial Plain and Shephelah
- HL in red/pink: Coastal plain (N to S)—Joppa, Lod, Gezer, Ekron, Gath, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza; In the Shephelah (if not already HL)—Lower Beth-horon, Aijalon, Zorah, Beth-shemesh, Azekah, Socoh, Keilah, Mareshah, Lachish and Eglon
- HL in yellow on red routes: 1) international highway from Sharuhen SW of Gaza N via Ashdod, Jabneel, Ono and off the N edge; 2) the branch of this highway from the 74m/243f elevation near Ashkelon NE via Kedron and Lod and off the map

Again we consider two maps in the same discussion, a general view above and a more detailed view below. The discussion follows the marking below.

Turn to pp. 20/21: JUDAH’S SHEPHELAH, HILLS AND WILDERNESS map

- HL in green: Philistine Alluvial Plain and Shephelah (if not already HL)
- HL in red/pink: In or by coastal plain (N to S)—Gezer, Ekron, Gath, Ashdod, Ashkelon; In the Shephelah (if not already HL)—Lower Beth-horon, Aijalon, Zorah, Beth-shemesh, Azekah, Socoh, Keilah, Mareshah, Lachish and Eglon
- HL in yellow on red routes: The two main branches of the international highway that you HL on p. 18, the branch via Ashdod and the branch via Kedron

The broad, southern coastal plain of the Central Arena (often called by the general term ‘Philistia’) is many things to many peoples. For Egypt’s security and expansion it is a ‘must control.’ For the northern invader from the region of Aram, Mesopotamia or the west it is the ‘must control’ region which serves as a springboard to the Nile and the riches of Egypt, ‘the bank’ of the Eastern Mediterranean as we call it. For hill country peoples it provides them with their sole access to the ports of the Mediterranean and its bustling maritime trade. For those who live here and control this plain or a major part of it, it offers them comfortable sustenance and potential control of the coastal end of the southern trade corridor which passes S of the hill country of Judah and the Dead Sea.

This southern plain is thus an inviting yet volatile, insecure coastal region whose history is littered with conflict and conquest. In those few periods when imperial armies waned or were busy elsewhere, peoples such as the Philistines, the Idumeans and even the Israelites had opportunity to exploit this area. These periods, however, were often short-lived.

The geobasics of the southern coastal plain have immense bearing upon settlement, commercial success and security. A glance at the broken, green rainfall line on pp. 12-13 reveals the limit of adequate rainfall for subsistence agriculture. This limit runs just S of the Philistine alluvial plain, and thus what is possible to the N of that line soon diminishes and
disappears to the S of it. The fertile hill country also descends and ceases, and with it the heavier runoff of water and rich alluvial. The Negev with it fine, wind-blown 'loess' soil, the result of millennia of dust storms, has the potential for agriculture, but rainfall in the western and eastern Negev basins is fickle at best. Unless carefully managed this powdery soil rapidly sheds its runoff into what the Bible calls 'afikim,' dry and eroded stream beds which become torrents during sudden cloudbursts. This setting is in stark contrast to the deep and rich alluvial soils a few miles to the NW in the Philistine alluvial plain and surrounding basins, including the valleys of the Shephelah as seen on these two maps (pp. 18 and 20).

EKRON, GATH, ASHDOD—Nestled between the higher, chalky hills of the Shephelah and rolling, kurkar ridges covered by brown-red sands, the alluvial basins of the southern coastal plain offer great potential. The Philistines soon realized this after failing in their attempt to penetrate Egypt's Nile delta. The map on p. 18 shows the five main Philistine cities mentioned in the Bible. Ekron (humble in stature) and Gath (towering above the plain) are both inland sites. Although they are not far from each other, the adjacent, broad Philistine alluvial plain and nearby alluvial valleys in the Shephelah offer more than sufficient resources for each city. Numerous installations for processing olive oil in and around Erkon testify to its potential. Ashdod (known in the book of Acts as Azotus) lay on a low, sandy rise slightly above the coastal, international highway which skirts the alluvial plain on the W. These three cities, Ekron, Gath and Ashdod are thus situated around the rich Philistine alluvial plain.

ASHKELON AND GAZA—The situation changes as one moves S. Higher ground with mixed soils now rise above the lower plain and agricultural potential becomes limited. The change is striking as you drive SW from Gath to Ashkelon; first you cross the rich alluvia of the plain and then enter rolling terrain with scrub brush and fragmented agriculture. Indeed, Ashkelon's setting is also far different than that of Ashdod, with its small coastal port of Ashdod-yam/sea to the W, beyond both the ever-changing dunes of sand and low hills of brown-red sand. By contrast Ashkelon does not sit in the midst or even on the edge of a large alluvial plain but rather directly upon unstable cliffs overlooking the great expanse of the Mediterranean sea, safe from the shifting sands. Its outlook is to maritime trade rather than inland comfort. Its geobasics emphasize connections with the sea and with those whose livelihood depends upon the commercial potential that the sea affords, particularly with ports on Egypt's nearby Nile delta, which is much easier reached via sea than over land. As history records, Egypt has always coveted Ashkelon.

To the S of Ashkelon is Gaza, the famous 'port of the desert.' This title might also apply to Ashkelon, but other sites interrupt Ashkelon's direct contact with the southern trade corridor while Gaza has only distant sites such as Gerar and Beer-sheba to make claims on southern trade. Thus, in a real sense Gaza stands alone, N of the great Nahal Besor. The central part of today's 'downtown' Gaza is built upon one huge, ancient tell, yet to be excavated. Its untold archaeological riches may therefore never be uncovered, but they are there awaiting the excavator's spade.

Gaza's actual seaport, Maoumas (not named on your maps), lies NW of Gaza directly on coastal dunes. When maritime commerce took priority over the highway linking Egypt to the Land Between and regions farther N, smaller boats, like those along the shores today, ferried both goods and people back and forth from ships anchoring safely from the shore. Today Gaza spreads from coastal villas lining the beach to crowded camps N of the central district. This 'Gaza Strip,' as always, is a bone of contention. Egypt's influence is ever-present today as in the past. Israelis in Ashkelon live in a world apart, although rockets reach their apartments. As in the past, attempts were made to tame and settle Gaza and beyond toward Egypt, but as in the past, for whatever reason, Israel pulled back, and Gaza was left, for better or for worse, on its own. History has a strange way of repeating itself over and over.
In summary, our discussion above has shown that the southern coastal plain is both broad and diverse. Various coastal and inland areas have specific roles that they play across this plain. Ashdod is not Ashkelon, neither is it Gath. The Philistine alluvial plain plays a central agricultural role that is missing in the S (E of Ashkelon and Gaza) where a different world emerges. In other words, local geobasics on the southern coastal plain create a wide variety of subregions which nevertheless have over-arching routes and priorities. When the Shephelah and hill country Israelites enter this region, complexity and conflict increase. How far could any hill country power—be it Israelite or Hasmonean—hope to push southwestward toward Gaza and Egypt beyond? Judah could overcome Gath and reach Ashdod but normally could not extend their control to Gaza. There was a natural limit, even during a vacuum of imperial authority, for no single, natural feature on the southern coastal plain marks a distinct, acceptable frontier. Thus the claims of the Hebrew prophets take on dramatic significance: ‘The seacoast shall become the possession of the remnant of the house of Judah.’

SUMMARIZING THE COASTAL PLAIN’S VARIETY AND CONFLICT—Before turning to the study of the complex region of the Shephelah lowland, we summarize the coastal plain of the Central Arena. This is meant to crystallize the coastal plains major divisions and themes.

Coastal variety. We stated before, ‘The coastal plain lacks the dramatic landscape of the Rift and the structural variety of the uplifted hill country, but it is not deficient in diversity.’ You now know that the coastal plain is a fascinating region. Its geobasics do not appear as lofty heights nor a deep abyss but as slight alterations in elevation and mere changes in soils throughout an area where sands, swamps or fertile plains make all the difference. In northern Sharon a staging ground appears near alluvial basins at the foot of Samaria’s hill country. This, and the nearby Carmel passes, drew the attention of king Herod who built both Sebaste along the Shechem valley and Caesarea by the sea. Central Sharon, by contrast, did not offer easy access to the Mediterranean. This changed in the Joppa-Aphek-Gezer triangle where alluvial basins again appear and a collection of routes create a mini-land between along the greater coastal plain. As the southern coastal plain broadens, a large basin of alluvia encouraged Philistine settlement around its perimeter, while Ashkelon, farther south, faced the sea and could be called ‘the Caesarea of the south;’ it stood by itself as a city on the coast. Gaza lies even farther S and like Ashkelon draws caravan routes from across the Southern Arena.

Coastal ports. The coastline of the Central Arena lacks natural ports. The estuaries of streams such as the Yarkon river could meet local needs, but not maritime shipping. Ferry services between ships and land no doubt facilitated exchange of goods and people. Archaeology continues the search for man-made ports at sites such as Ashkelon and Joppa, but Caesarea’s magnificent artificial harbor is there for all to see.

Coastal conflict. Military and cultural conflict between the cosmopolitan coast and the Israelite/Jewish interior was concentrated in the regions between Ashdod/Azotus and Aphek/Antipatris. This was the extent of Israelite/Jewish settlement in the heydays of the Israelites and the Hasmoneans. Ashkelon was simply too far removed from the hills and too attached to the sea. It was a Hellenized ‘free city’ in the centuries prior to the apostles and beyond the pale of any serious practicing Jew. In Jesus’ day Jews lived in Caesarea to the N, but tension with the city’s strong Gentile population was common. Religious distinction and mutual cultural contempt ran high. Jews, however, were predominant in and around the Joppa-Aphik-Gezer triangle, for under Augustus Caesar king Herod had secured Jewish settlement in this area, even as he allowed Greek culture and Roman rule to reign at Sebaste and Caesarea. So added to the coast’s variety and complexity was a strong diversity of culture in the days of Jesus.

The gospel on the coast. Imperial armies marching between the region of Aram and Egypt were not an uncommon sight along the coastal highway. In one of history’s most spectacular campaigns Alexander the Great marched S to Egypt before returning N to defeat Darius of...
of Persia in Mesopotamia. There Alexander became a world ruler. Three centuries later a small family left Egypt to return to the hill country of Judah, but the cruel reputation of king Herod’s son, Archelaus, during his short ten-year rule forced them to return to Nazareth in Galilee. Joseph, Mary and the young Jesus walked the same highways as previous human conquerors had trod in a journey that had far greater consequences than that of Alexander.

A few decades before the First Revolt (+66), the book of Acts records earth-shaking events: the ‘Good News’ left Jerusalem and invaded Ashdod/Azotus, Lod/Lydda, Joppa, and Caesarea. Philip journeyed to preach ‘to a city in Samaria’ and then joined an Ethiopian along ‘the lonely road to Gaza’ before finding himself ‘at Azotus (Jewish Ashdod). Journeying on he preached in all the towns (in Jewish territory) until he came to Caesarea.’ Soon the apostle Peter descended from Jerusalem to Lydda and on to Joppa. His startling vision overlooking the Mediterranean sea, home of the abhorred Gentiles, was immediately followed by a knock on the door that took Peter to a Roman centurion’s home in Caesarea. The setting of this entire pivotal story in Acts illustrates the contrasting regions and cultures along the coastal plain. In explaining this to Jews back in Jerusalem he could only say, ‘Could I stand in God’s way?’

THE SHEPHELAH: AN INTRODUCTION—Our study of the southern coastal plain, and particularly the region of the Philistine alluvial plain, sets the scene for our discussion of the action-packed region of the Shephelah, the lowlands between the coastal plain and the western foot of Judah’s hill country. We first define the Shephelah, present a specific set of geobasics and note its larger features before discussing its various regions.

Geobasics (cf. pp. 4, 18 and 20)

- The position of the Shephelah is unique since it adjoins the open coastal plain, the uplifted and closed hill country and the Negev basin on the edge of the arid south.
- Chalks, soft limestones and a ‘nari’ crust inhibit farming in the Shephelah’s low hills, but hill country runoff deposits fertile alluvia in the valleys and supports crops.
- The Azekah ridge is a significant feature in the Shephelah since it divides E from W and creates specific ‘gateways’ between the two, gateways guarded by specific sites.
- A system of E-W valleys offer easy access into the Shephelah from the W, but to the E these valleys abruptly confront the rising ridges and rugged ravines of the hill country.
- The wide Aijalon valley in the N ushers coastal invaders to the foot of the hill country where convenient ridge routes lead directly to the central Benjamin plateau.
• Access to the foot of the hill country is also available via the Sorek valley, but the rugged Sorek drainage system discourages entry except via the Beit Atab ascent.
• The Elah valley reaches the hill country via a well-defined path and exploits the chalk trough at the base of the hill country where ridge routes ascend to Bethlehem and Beth-zur.
• In the region of Mareshah the Azekah ridge disappears and a system of valleys reach a good way eastward to encounter ridges and canyons rising to the high crown of Hebron.
• The open region of Mareshah serves as hub for this part of the Shephelah while the site of Lachish served as a key fortress-city in the Shephelah’s outlying SW corner.
• Less rainfall in the S and a narrowing Shephelah restrict settlement to the E where defined routes of the southern trade corridor link the Shephelah with the Negev basin.

Most of the Shephelah's hills consist of either chalk or a type of chalky Eocene limestone (cf. p. 4). Precipitation penetrating these rocks returned to the surface carrying sediments and depositing them as a hard crust called 'nari.' This makes agriculture on the Shephelah’s hills all but impossible. Runoff from the hill country, however, has carried fertile alluvial soil down into the various valleys of the Shephelah. There this alluvia mixes with local soils and encourages farming in the valleys and settlement on nearby hills and ridges.

Adjacent hill country canyons merge along the Shephelah's eastern chalk trough. From there erosion cuts corridors through the soft rocks of the Shephelah to the coastal plain. Most of these Shephelah valleys empty into basins in the Philistine alluvial plain, and these basins overflow and cut through coastal ridges and thick sands to reach the sea. The paths this drainage takes is best seen on p. 20.

The E-W valleys of the Shephelah provide natural passageways between the coastal plain and the chalk trough at the foot of the hill country. These convenient avenues suddenly come to a halt along the chalk trough where they meet ridges and canyons ascending into the uplifted hill country (along the dark solid line on our various maps). The contrast between easy passage in the Shephelah and the challenge of the hill country is often very striking, enough to give an invading army reason to pause. Any commander would think twice before climbing narrow ridge routes ascending into the hills. Ascending through narrow, rocky and potentially dangerous canyon beds would be out of the question. Thus passage through the Shephelah is not a guarantee of entry into the hill country.

To whom does this Shephelah lowland belong? Obviously it is part and parcel of the southern coastal plain, but the abundance of fertile basins in the plain itself together with the Shephelah's broad alluvial outlets, make the eastern, internal valleys in the Shephelah less attractive to coastal inhabitants. Therefore, those from the hill country and elsewhere can settle inside the Shephelah, on sterile heights above its fertile valleys.

This scenario played out in the centuries after Egypt withdrew from the southern coastal plain. Israelis remained inside the Shephelah but faced the arrival of the so-called ‘Sea Peoples,’ who were technologically advanced new-comers to the coastal plain. The Bible calls them the Philistines, a name also reflected in the inscriptions of Ramses III. The geobasics of the Shephelah and adjacent regions set the stage for exciting events and escapades recorded primarily in the books of Judges (e.g., the story of Samson) but also throughout 1 Samuel. These stories take on new life as we explore the Shephelah's various regions.

NORTHERN SHEPHELAH: WIDE OPEN GATEWAYS—The Aijalon and Sorek valleys lie within the chalky hills of the northern Shephelah. Perhaps the best way to appreciate this region is to examine it carefully on p. 4. The map shows this region's chalky hills, its two main alluvial valleys (named on pp. 20 and 18) and an all-important uplift (broken yellow line) in the adjacent hill country. Before plunging beneath the Shephelah this uplift creates a definite

1 Sam 13:19-22
ANET 262-263
Judg 13-16;
1 Sam 4, 7, 13-14, 17
western ‘bulge’ clearly seen on p. 4. The hard limestone heights of this bulge afford marvelous views over the Shephelah’s lowland. Together with its hill country tributaries the Sorek canyon follows a diagonal path around this uplift (see pp. 18 and 20). This limestone obstacle effectively blocks direct access from the Sorek valley to the interior and the region of Jerusalem. The negative impact of this uplift is mitigated, however, in the area between the Aijalon valley and the central Benjamin plateau where routes ascend to the hill country. As the uplift falls to the S of the Sorek system, routes also reach the hill country of Judah (see p. 20).

Some of the Bible’s best known stories transpired within this small but very strategic northern Shephelah. A single statement in 1 Sam. 6:13 reflects this reality as a cart carrying the Ark of the Covenant was easily drawn along the Sorek valley and approached ‘the people of Beth-shemesh who were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley.’ These stories appear later in this study. We now HL a few of the routes in this region along which these events took place.

Turn to pp. 18/19: PHILISTIA, JUdAH, THE RIFT AND MOAB map

HL in yellow on red routes: 1) Upper Beth-horon to Lod via Lower Beth-horon and Modiin; 2) from Aijalon to Lod via Shaalbim; 3) Lower Beth-horon to Kedron on the coastal highway via Emmaus/Nicopolis; 4) the ridge descending from Beit Atab to Beth-shemesh and to Kidron via Timnah; 5) Lower Beth-horon to Beth-shemesh via Aijalon (partly within the chalk trough between the hill country and the Shephelah)

Turn to pp. 20/21: JUdAH’s SHEpHELAH, HILLS AND WILDERNESS map

HL in yellow on red routes: Since this map offers a detail view of the same area as pp. 18/19, compare these two maps and HL the same roads as you did above.

Find the following features and sites on the maps marked above.

1. The broad Aijalon valley is the ‘front door’ of the hill country, a thoroughfare to the base of ridge routes ascending to the central Benjamin plateau. Lower and Upper Beth-horon provides the most convenient access route to Gibeon and Jerusalem. The sentinel site of Gezer overlooks both the coastal highway and the Aijalon valley. Thus, when Solomon married an Egyptian princess and pharaoh made Gezer part of her dowry, Solomon’s capital at Jerusalem became secure from an attack by Egypt.

2. The Sorek valley is also an open corridor leading to the base of the hill country. The Sorek system (the Sorek, Chesalon and Rephaim canyons) east of Beth-shemesh obstructs entry into the hill country, except via the ascent to Beit Atab, Hushah (modern Husan) and Bethlehem. The story of Samson from Zorah and Philistines at Timnah and nearby Ekron attest that this valley belonged to the coastal plain. The Bible is very specific when it records events at ‘Lehi,’ located near the Beit Atab ascent. Here a large natural feature creates the form of a donkey’s ‘jawbone’ (Lehi in Hebrew). Find the feature named just W of Beit Atab on RSM6.

CENTRAL SHEPHELAH: AZEKAH RIDGE DIVIDES WEST AND EAST—Entering the central region of the Shephelah we find on p. 4 that a chalky limestone (yellow) has replaced the chalk (brown) hills farther north. This region of the Shephelah continues to offer little resistance to travel and its fertile valleys support farming. The Azekah ridge, however, creates a line between the western and eastern parts of the central Shephelah. We earlier found this ridge, but for review find it again as it runs SW from the HL name of Beth-shemesh on p. 20 through the site of Azekah to T. el-Judeida (not HL).

Easy access explains why challenges and conflicts arose in this central Shephelah, a transitional zone between those who control the coastal plain and those who control the hill country. Israelites in the hill country of Judah considered the Shephelah their western flank, but the
Philistines saw the same area as a natural extension of the coastal plain. The Azekah ridge allowed Philistines to live in the western zone while the Israelites of Judah inhabited the hills and valleys east of the Azekah ridge. The two lived side by side but did not overlap since the ridge offered a natural boundary between them.

This is no better illustrated than in the well-known story of David and Goliath. The Philistines penetrated into the Elah valley E of the Azekah ridge—‘to Socoh which belongs to Judah.’ Only David’s shrewd tactic in overcoming Goliath prevented the Philistines from using the eastern Elah valley as a launching pad to ridge routes leading to Bethlehem and Hebron. Had the Philistines been successful here, they could have devastated Judah as they earlier had ravaged the territory of Ephraim, the other prominent Israelite tribe. Clearly the geobasics of the region transform this story from flannel graph figures to the reality of what was at stake at this particular moment in history.

Turn to pp. 18/19: Philistia, JUdah, the rift and Moab map

HL in yellow on red routes: 1) Socoh in the Elah valley to Ashdod via Gath; 2) Gath to Gaza via Bureir; 3) Gath to Mareshah; 4) the ‘diagonal road’ from Beth-shemesh to Mareshah via Eleutheropolis/Beth Guvrin; 5) the continuation of the chalk trough road from Eshtaol (by Zorah) to Keilah; 6) Gath to Beth-zur via Libnah/T. Beida

Turn to pp. 20/21: Judah’s Shephelah, hills and wilderness map

HL in yellow on red routes: Since this map offers a detail view of the same area as pp. 18/19, compare these two maps and HL the same roads as you did above.

Find the following features and sites on the maps marked above.

- The strategic Elah valley offers ridge routes to the entire hill country of Judah. Natural routes ascend to Bethlehem, including a convenient ridge via Timnah and Hushah. The ridge at the southern extension of the Elah valley leads to Beth-zur and the crown of Hebron. Unlike the Aijalon and Sorek valleys, the Elah valley is constricted in the area of Azekah where the valley has broken through the ‘Azekah ridge,’ which runs SW and divides this part of the Shephelah into an eastern, hilly territory and the lower, western regions reaching Philistine Gath. The contest between David and Goliath illustrates the importance of the Elah valley and routes connecting the Azekah area with both Gath and Ekron (the connection to Ekron is not shown here but appears on our RSM6). Obviously, the Philistine threat posed great danger for Judah.

SOUTHERN SHEPHELAH: THE SOUTHERN TRADE CORRIDOR—We have considered the open northern Shephelah and the western and eastern divisions of central Shephelah that the Azekah ridge creates. We now consider an area immediately S of the Azekah ridge, the hub of roads around Mareshah and routes running S and SW into the southern Shephelah. This area is of special interest since it forms an important part of the southern trade corridor, a passage that absorbs trade routes from Arabia, Edom and the Red Sea and leads them to port-cities on the coastal plain, such as Ashkelon. We shall discuss the southern trade corridor in more detail in later studies, but for now simply note that it crosses the eastern Negev basin (p. 18) and reaches the southern coastal plain via the southern Shephelah.

Turn to pp. 18/19: Philistia, JUdah, the rift and Moab map

**Turn to pp. 20/21: Judah’s Shephelah, Hills and Wilderness map**

HL in yellow on red routes: Since this map offers a detail view of the same area as pp. 18/19, compare these two maps and HL the same roads as you did above.

The marking you have completed on these maps dramatically shows the flow of traffic from Ashkelon’s location (directly on the Mediterranean coast) through the southern Shephelah to the Negev basins. It also shows the pivotal position of the Mareshah: it serves as a hub that welcomes roads from Ashkelon, Gath, the northern and central Shephelah and the Negev basins. The geobasics of the southern Shephelah and southern hill country actually create a natural ‘funnel’ which gathers all of the above routes and forces them southwest through a narrow path along the line of Egлон/T. Eton, T. Beit Mirsim and T. Halif. Later, in our study of the southern arena, we again meet this special part of the southern trade corridor as it attracts caravans from across the arid south. To this network of routes we must also add the challenging ascents from the southern Shephelah to the crown of Hebron in the southern hill country. High, narrow ridge routes ascend to this crown in southern Judah. We now look more closely at features and sites on the maps you just marked.

1. Consider the area S of the Azekah ridge, beginning with the important road center around Mareshah and extending S through the probable site of Egлон to T. Beit Mirsim and T. Halif (the latter two not HL). Do you see how this region differs from the broad valleys of the northern Shephelah? Fertile basins of alluvia below Kh. Beit Maqdum and surrounding grazing lands made this an attractive area for farmers who no doubt serviced caravans passing through the southern trade corridor between the coastal plain and the arid south via the nearby Negev. The impressive sites of Eglon/T. Eton, T. Beit Mirsim and T. Halif all lay along this trade corridor.

2. Find the naturally fortified site of Lachish, built upon a semi-isolated knob protruding from an adjacent ridge. Note that Lachish lies almost as far W as Gath and Ekron. Its fortifications and historical record underscore its strategic position, both prior to and during its occupation by Israelites from Judah. When the mighty Assyrian war machine appeared upon the horizon, the prophet Micah sarcastically addresses outlying Lachish, ‘you, the beginning of sin to the daughters of Judah ... shall give goodbye gifts to Moresheth-gath,’ a more protected city perhaps located at T. el-Judeida, high on the southern tip of the Azekah ridge. Lachish was overshadowed when the Edomites entered the country (during and after the fall of Judah to Babylon) and made their capital at Mareshah, which in Greek became Marisa.

3. Note the areas of alluvia (green) extending SE and inland from the Philistine alluvia plain through T. el Areini, T. Zeita and Libnah/T. Bornat to the road center at Eleutheropolis/Beth Guvrin. The early Egyptian center at T. el-Areini, the major Roman/Byzantine civic center at Eleutheropolis (‘City of the Free’), extensive ruins at adjacent Mareshah and the imposing fortified site at nearby Lachish all testify to the commercial and administrative importance of the southern Shephelah.

4. Glance across the entire Shephelah and review names, roads and features. Note the Shephelah’s two N-S routes, one in or near the chalk ‘moat’ (S of Lower Beth-horon) and the ‘diagonal road’ (from Beth-shemesh and to the Mareshah region). While it is true that a series of E-W valleys cross the Shephelah and are linked by N-S routes, this is only part of the story. From north to south there is also a definite difference in the way the Shephelah works and how it is connected to the regions which surround it. In light of this, if you needed a Shephelah ‘capital’ where would you choose to build it?

When one compares the **northern Shephelah** (the Aijalon and Sorek valleys) and the **central Shephelah** (the Elah valley) with the **southern Shephelah** (S and SW of Mareshah) the
Shephelah’s distinct yet intertwined districts emerge. The Shephelah is no longer just another region in the Land Between. It is a dynamic collection of valleys, routes and sites which not only lie between the coastal plain and the hill country but also link the caravan routes of the arid south with ports and highways along the Mediterranean coast.

It is no surprise that the Edomites (known as the Idumeans of Hellenistic/Roman times) recognized the inherent economic value of the southern Shephelah. They did not halt their western migration in the arid south but linked the south with the region of Mareshah and thus held an all-important part of the larger southern trade corridor. These areas, together with the fruitful crown of Hebron, became ‘Idumea,’ and from Idumea came the commercial tycoon and astute geopolitician, Antipater—father of Herod the Idumean whom Rome crowned ‘king of the Jews.’ The inherent riches available in the southern Shephelah helped Antipater to promote his son Herod, and that changed the course of history in the Land Between and provides the setting for events in the Gospels and the book of Acts. These developments in the Shephelah prior to Jesus’ birth and the cultural diversity along the diverse coastal plain from Azotus to Caesarea provide a context for events recorded in the Gospels and the book of Acts.

F. LOOKING AT THE BIG PICTURE: WESTERN UPLIFTS, COASTAL PLAIN AND SHEPHELAH

Markings on pp. 4/5, 14/15, 16/17, 18/19 and 20/21 introduced the variety of the Western Uplifts and the Coastal Plain, as well as its relationship to the Eastern Heights studied earlier. With these maps in hand we now consider the position and importance of these areas within the framework of the entire country. Consider these questions as you do this.

- In your opinion what sets the western uplifts apart from other regions in the land?
- How would you characterize the region of Samaria’s relationships to northern areas of the land, both W and E of the Rift?
- How would you explain that there were three Israelite capitals in northern Israel (the region of Samaria) while Judah’s capital remained at Jerusalem once David established it?
- Compare the Shiloh drainage system and its ‘remote interior of Ephraim’ W of Shiloh with the Sorek system draining the central Benjamin plateau and the area W of Jerusalem?
- What are the most convenient avenues available to the sites of Shechem and Samaria to reach Mediterranean ports? How does Tirzah’s outlook differ from these two western sites?
- How would you compare northern Sharon with the Joppa-Aphek-Gezer triangle? Can you surmise why king Herod built Caesarea-on-the sea in the north and not at Joppa?
- How might you compare life in Timnath-sereh/heres to life in Aphek or Joppa? Where would you rather live and why?
- Why do the diverse regions between the Medeba plateau and the Joppa-Aphek-Gezer triangle invite conflict from both between local powers and outside invaders?
- How would you characterize life in the various regions of Judah—wilderness, hill country and in the Shephelah lowland—in terms of climate, economy and security?
- Can you explain why Micah would have called Bethlehem ‘little among Judah’s clans?’
- Contrast the different perspectives of the five major Philistine cities: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath and Ekron? Where would you choose to live if you were not a surfer?
- Plan your strategy to isolate Judah and Jerusalem if you were pharaoh of Egypt. Would your strategy be different if you were an Assyrian king descending from the N? If so, why?
- How is the Shephelah lowland between the coastal plain and Judah unique in the Land Between? If you were Rome where would you establish administrative centers here?
- Summarize three main insights you have gained in studying the Central Arena.
PLEASE NOTE: ‘Geobasics' for the regions of Benjamin and the Judean Wilderness appear below. ‘Texts' (or 'Personality in Texts) for Central Abyss and Western Uplifts is not inserted into the Geobasics Study Guide: Central Arena, version 4.3. Check the website for a newer versions.

Geobasics for Benjamin

- The small but strategic tribal territory of Benjamin borders the territory of Ephraim, the prominent tribe in the powerful House of Joseph (Benjamin's elder brother).
- The area of Benjamin exhibits great diversity, from the Jericho oasis in the Rift through a chalk wilderness and a limestone plateau to ridges overlooking the Aijalon valley.
- Benjamin, a saddle between heights in Ephraim and Judah, has access from both E and W; by taking Benjamin invaders ‘broke the back' of the central hill country, splitting it in two.
- Northern Israel and southern Judah coveted Benjamin since from here they could expand from the hill country onto the coastal highway and into the eastern heights via Jericho.
- The broad Aijalon valley, the short ascent between two Beth-horons and the ascent via Kiriath-jearim to Gibeon offer relatively easy western access in and out of Benjamin.
- Three main routes from Jericho to the hill country keep to ridges above the Kelt and Makkuk canyons: one to Jerusalem, one to Ramah and Bethel and one via Ophrah.
- A direct road to Bethel climbs to the shallow Zeboim valley, ascends to what we call the ‘region of Ai' and intersects routes to Ramah beyond a pass across the Suweinit canyon.
- The rolling central Benjamin plateau (CBP) with its chief city of Gibeon attracts roads from E and W and also hosts the Bethel-Jerusalem route, the hill country's N-S artery.

Geobasics for Wilderness of Judah

- The chalky wilderness lies between the hill country and limestone cliffs falling into the Dead Sea chasm; its secluded and sterile terrain serves as a refuge for fugitives from Judah.
- Since the wilderness descends behind higher hills rainfall quickly diminishes, but surface runoff from the hills cuts deep canyons through the softer chalk into bedded limestone.
- Areas near the hill country receive adequate rainfall for grains, especially E of Bethlehem and Tekoa, a bread basket where a myriad of threshing floors operate in late spring.
- The northern wilderness is home to shepherds and herds as it receives slightly more rain, and spring grass covers its chalky slopes, but aridity and ruggedness increase to the S.
- Shepherds roam chalky tracts E of Ziph in the southern wilderness, but erosion exposes deeper limestones and cuts gaping gorges to the Rift in what the Bible calls the Jeshimon.
- The central Arugot canyon drains much of Judah's interior and empties into the Dead Sea by En-gedi, a site enhanced by springs, a subtropical climate and a road to Tekoa.
- A series of deep canyons empty the region of the Jeshimon, including the great Zeelim canyon which divides the Jeshi-mon from grazing slopes to the S connected to the Negev.
- Faults above the Dead Sea, S of the Zeelim left a high, isolated block of limestone, an impressive natural strong-hold called Massada, fortified and adorned in Jesus' day.