

“For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills” (Deut 8:7).

The land that God brought Israel into is not a desert. Although some parts of the land are rocky desert, most of the land is “good land” consisting of valleys, plains, hills and mountains. Though relatively small, it is a land characterized by great geographical *variety*. That the Promised Land is not a desert is important since it serves as a metaphor for the earth which the Lord promises to the meek. It is a land where “you will lack nothing” (Deut 8:9).

The first section of the *Satellite Bible Atlas (SBA)* contains regional, geographical maps. These maps have no historical markings, but show the foundational land and site (city or town) locations for all the historical events marked out in subsequent *SBA* sections. The regional maps often give greater geographical detail than is visible on the historical maps.

The following text provides an introduction to some of the main geographical features on *SBA* Maps 1-1 through 1-17. See the *SBA* [web page](#) or [YouTube](#) page for additional video-graphic explanations of the regional maps.

Map 1-1 Satellite Map

The map pictures in the *SBA* were taken by a NASA satellite at mid-morning. When viewing the maps, light from the sun “comes” from over one’s right shoulder, which makes the shadows of deeper valleys appear on the *southern* slopes of the valleys. For instance, note the darker shadows on the south sides of the deep canyons that cut down to the Dead Sea (lower-right on map). Darker shadows define the *southern* slopes and *bottoms* of deep canyons on all *SBA* maps.

Although the Promised Land is relatively small, it serves as an important land bridge between three continents. See video [#1](#).

Map 1-2 Regions and Routes of the Land of Israel

The area represented on this map is only about 80 x 150 miles (130 x 240 kilometers). This relatively small land has a great variety of smaller geographical regions. Often each region is inhabited by a different people or ethnic group. The regional variety of the Promised Land and its effect on history are described in *SBA* video commentary [#2](#). Major routes in the Land are described in video [#3](#).

1-3 Regional Map: North

The area on this map (60 x 90 miles; 96 x 144 km) is part of four modern countries: Israel, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan (see Map 12-2). The different geographical regions on this map include part of the Sharon Plain (lower left). The hilly-mountainous region of Samaria extends to Mt. Carmel, which juts out to the Mediterranean Sea. The Jezreel Valley is the triangular-shaped plain that functions as an intersection of routes and separates Samaria from Lower Galilee (also a hilly region). The town of Nazareth, where Jesus grew up, is in Lower Galilee, looking down from a ridge toward the Jezreel Valley. In the center of the map, the Sea of Galilee, whose surface is 700 feet (215 m) below sea level, serves as a junction of routes. Jesus' public ministry in Galilee focused in Capernaum, Corazim, and Bethsaida, towns near the northern shore. Farther north, the Hulah Valley separates mountainous Upper Galilee from the Golan (Bashan) Plateau. The Upper Jordan River flows from the foot of Mt. Hermon through the Hulah Valley to the Sea of Galilee. The Lower Jordan River flows from the Sea of Galilee through the Lower Jordan Rift Valley, which separates Samaria from Gilead.

1-4 Jezreel Valley and Lower Galilee

This map is described in *SBA* video [#6](#). Turn the map 90 degrees clockwise for north orientation. Note the town of Nazareth, where Jesus grew up, in the center of the map. Nazareth sits in a hilly region of Lower Galilee at about 1,400 feet (440 m) in elevation. Just south of Nazareth, the Jezreel Valley is the prominent triangular-shaped plain whose sides are about 15 miles long (24 km). Together with the narrower Harod Valley that extends to the southeast, the Jezreel Valley looks like an arrowhead. As the main break in the mountainous regions to the north (Galilee) and south (Samaria), the flat Jezreel Valley functions as the intersection of both local and international routes. Militaries and merchants from surrounding nations pass through here. Mt. Carmel, where Elijah contested with 450 prophets of Baal, is west of the Jezreel Valley. Tradition places the contest with Baal at Muhraka ("flame") on the heights of Mt. Carmel (1555 ft; 485 m) overlooking the northwest tip of the Jezreel Valley, above Jokneam. Narrow valley passes from Jokneam and Megiddo go through Mt. Carmel to the Sharon Plain and beyond toward Egypt. Another route from the northwest tip of the Jezreel Valley follows the Kishon River along the foot of Mt. Carmel to the Plain of Asher and Acco. This route connects to Acco/Ptolemais and the Lebanese coast farther north.

A section of the Great International Route that connects Egypt to Mesopotamia traversed the Jezreel Valley from Megiddo to the foot of the Hill of Moreh. The route exited the Jezreel Valley near Mt. Tabor, heading northeast into Lower Galilee and beyond.

The southeast entrance-exit to the Jezreel Valley runs in the Harod Valley along the foot of Mt. Gilboa. Gideon chose 300 men at En Harod and later Saul, Israel's first king, died on Mt. Gilboa. The Harod Valley route connects the city of Jezreel with Beth-shan in the Lower Jordan Valley. A newly anointed king, Jehu, drove his chariot furiously up the Harod Valley route to reach the city of Jezreel, where he killed the kings of Israel and Judah, and had Queen Jezebel tossed out a palace window.

Lower Galilee is made up of a series of east-west mountain ridges and plains that have routes connecting the Plain of Asher (Mediterranean Sea) to the Sea of Galilee. As mentioned, Nazareth is on the southernmost of these ridges. Cana, where Jesus changed water into wine, is situated on the edge of the Bet Netofa Valley (just below *LOWER GALILEE* label).

Map 1-5 Sea of Galilee and Golan

The Sea of Galilee is a 12 x 7 mile (19 x 11 km) fresh water lake. Since it sits 700 feet (215 m) below sea level, the Sea of Galilee is the catchment for rains and snow-melt from Mt. Hermon, Galilee, and Golan. Routes from these same regions and the Rift Valley converge at the Sea of Galilee. Travel by boat across the lake was particularly important before the onset of motorized vehicles. The Galilean ministry of Jesus focused in the towns on the north side of the sea, especially in Capernaum, Corazim, and Bethsaida (Matt 11:20ff). North of the sea, the basalt (cooled volcanic lava) Corazim Sill ascends to 1,300 feet (400 m) before dropping down into the Hulah Valley near Hazor. The wide Hulah Valley separates rugged limestone Upper Galilee from basalt Upper Golan (Bashan). The Hulah Valley functions as the gateway to Israel from the north. The large city of Hazor (Josh 11:10) guarded the gateway, as did the city of Dan further north at the foot of Mt. Hermon. In New Testament times, Caesarea Philippi (Paniias in the Greek period) served a similar function. Both Dan and Caesarea Philippi were built over strong freshwater springs at the foot of Mt. Hermon. Rain and snow from the 9,232-foot (2,750 m) mountain feed the springs, sources of the Upper Jordan River which flows in the Hulah Valley, then cuts steeply through the Corazim Sill to the Sea of Galilee.

Map 1-6 Regional Map: Central (Judea and Samaria)

The four major longitudinal (north-south) zones that form the central part of the Land are: Coastal Plains, Hill Country, Jordan Rift Valley, and Transjordan (Plateau and Gilead). The heart of the biblical Promised Land is the Hill Country of Judea and Samaria. It is forested, mountainous terrain cut by deep canyons draining from a central watershed to either the Coastal Plains in the west or to the Rift Valley in the east. Major cities in the Hill Country like Hebron, Jerusalem, Bethel, and Shechem sit on the central watershed with elevations reaching 3,300 feet (1,000 m). The road

on the watershed ridge connecting these cities is called the Road of the Patriarchs. Off the watershed ridge in the Hill Country, north-south travel is virtually impossible because of the deep canyons.

Map 1-7 Samaria

The Hill Country of Samaria extends from the city of Bethel in the south to the Jezreel Valley in the north (cf. Map 1-2). The tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, descendants of Joseph, inherited this central region. Ephraim's territory in the southern half of the map is rugged hill country cut by deep canyons draining from the watershed near the town of Shiloh (where the Tabernacle was first set up in the Promised Land by Joshua). The road on the watershed, the Road of the Patriarchs, marked by the white line running north-south in the middle of the map, goes from Bethel (1¼" [3 cm] from bottom-center of map) past Shiloh. Manasseh's territory further north is also hilly, but more open with wide plains. The east-west Trans-Samaria Route travels in a series of wider valleys from the Sharon Plain in the west to the Jordan River in the east (cf. Map 1-6). All three of the capitals of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Shechem, Tirzah, and Samaria) sat along the Trans-Samaria Route. Shechem, positioned in the valley between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim, has strong patriarchal associations. God first promised Abraham's descendants the land and Jacob purchased land at Shechem. Jeroboam, the first king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, made Shechem his capital but then moved to Tirzah. The Omri/Ahab dynasty moved the capital from Tirzah to the hill of Samaria in 880 BC. Ahab built a temple to Baal in his capital at Samaria. The temple was made into a latrine during Jehu's coup. Video [#8](#) describes the Samaria region.

Map 1-8 Jerusalem Approaches

Rotating the map 90 degrees clockwise, Jerusalem sits in the center of the map, on the Hill Country watershed at about 2,500 feet elevation (750 m). Approaching Jerusalem is difficult. From the west, routes pass through valleys in the Shephelah (foothills) but then can only ascend into the Hill Country via a few difficult mountainous ridges (e.g., Beth-horon, Kiriath-jearim, and Rephaim Ridges). Deep canyons (of the Upper Sorek) flank Jerusalem's western side. On Jerusalem's east there is a steep descent of 4,000 feet in 15 miles (1,200 m in 24 km) through the barren, rocky Judean Wilderness to the Jordan Rift Valley and Dead Sea. Humanly speaking, there is no reason why the remote Hill Country town of Jerusalem should be a significant city. Sitting on the edge of a rocky desert with a limited water supply, it has none of the advantages of the world's great cities. Its significance derives only from its association with the divine. Video [#4](#) gives more description.

Map 1-9 Benjamin (East)

Rotating the map 90 degrees clockwise, Jerusalem is on the lower left side of the map. The land to the north and east of Jerusalem was allotted to the tribe of Benjamin. Jerusalem actually sits in Benjamin's territory (cf. Map 4-1). Jerusalem is most easily approached, or attacked, from the north. Therefore control of the region north of Jerusalem, called the Central Benjamin Plateau, is essential for its safety. The cities of Gibeah (Israel's first capital under King Saul), Ramah, Gibeon and Mizpah are all in Central Benjamin just a few miles from Jerusalem. To the east the barren Judean Wilderness descends abruptly down to the Rift Valley and Dead Sea. Deep canyons (darker shadows define the southern slopes and bottoms of the canyons) make travel difficult in the Judean Desert. The town of Jericho in the Rift Valley sits 800 feet [250 m] below sea level and absorbs all traffic coming from the east across the Jordan River (north of the Dead Sea). Routes heading up through wilderness into the Hill Country branch out from Jericho. The Zeboim Route ascends toward Michmash, Ai, and Bethel. Joshua would have used this route in conquering Ai. Another route, the Ascent of Adummim (Josh 15:7), climbs from Jericho to Jerusalem on ridges south of the deep Wadi Qilt (canyon). The Good Samaritan travelled along this route. So did Jesus when he journeyed to Jerusalem from Galilee via the Rift Valley, through Jericho. Videos [#4](#), [#5](#) and [#11](#) give more description.

Map 1-10 Judah: Hill Country, Shephelah, Coastal Plain

Jerusalem is up in the remote Hill Country at the center-right edge of this map. Along the Mediterranean Coast is the 10–15 mile wide (16–24 km.) Coastal Plain, both agriculturally rich and convenient for travel. A section of the International Route, the Via Maris or Way of the Sea, runs on the Coastal Plain. The Yarkon River in the north forces traffic from Joppa (modern Tel Aviv) on the coast inland to Aphek (where the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant). Foreigners often settled in the Coastal Plain, especially the Philistines as a nation (c. 1175 BC) during the period of the Judges. The Philistine cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ashdod sat astride the coastal branch of the International Highway. Gath and Ekron were on the parallel inland branch. But the Philistines weren't the only non-Israelites on the Coastal Plain. Foreign nations like Egypt, Aram, Assyria, and Babylon first secured the Coastal Plain before venturing up to Jerusalem in the Hill Country (Maps 6-1, 7-1, 7-7, 7-9). The buffer zone between the Coastal Plain and Hill Country is the Shephelah (foothills), shown in greater detail on Map 1-11.

Map 1-11 Shephelah of Judah

The Shephelah is a region of foothills and east-west valleys that functions as a buffer zone between the Coastal Plain and the Hill Country. Routes connecting the Coastal Plain to the Hill Country run in the wide valleys. Cities were built on the hills to control the routes. The main route from Joppa on the coast to Jerusalem in the hills runs through the Aijalon Valley (top of map) past the city of Gezer. Solomon fortified Gezer, and in the Hill Country, Beth-horon, and Kiriath-jearim (upper right on map), to secure the routes to his capital. A route connecting the Philistine city of Ekron with Beth-shemesh runs in the Sorek Valley. The Ark of the Covenant travelled along this route (1 Sam 6:12). So did Samson when he went from Zorah to Timnah, where he met a Philistine woman. Further south, David and Goliath squared off in the Elah Valley. The Philistines had come from Gath and camped between Azekah and Socoh, on the south side of the Elah Valley. On the lower left corner of the map is Lachish, a city sieged by both the Assyrian and Babylonian empires. If cities like Lachish in the Shephelah fell, invading empires could move up into the Hill Country, i.e., to Jerusalem. See video [#7](#).

Map 1-12 South Regional Map

The southern part of the Promised Land is called the Negev, which means both *south* and *dry*. Towns like Beersheba and Arad can flourish in the semi-arid northern part of the Negev. These towns strategically supervise the important Negev route that connects the Mediterranean Sea (Gaza) to the Dead Sea eastward. The Promised Land's southern border runs in the middle of this map from the south part of the Dead Sea, through the Wilderness of Zin to Kadesh-barnea (left-center of map), then off the map to the Mediterranean (cf. Map 3-4). Kadesh-barnea was the main Israelite camp during the 40-year Israelite sojourn in the desert. The first generation died in the high, rocky Wildernesses of Zin and Paran.

Further east, the Aravah is the section of the Rift Valley that separates the Israelite wilderness highlands from Edom (aka Mt. Seir). Routes in the Aravah connect the Dead Sea to Ezion-geber and Elath, port cities on the Gulf of Elath/Aqaba (bottom center on map). These ports were coveted by both Judah and Edom for trade connections to Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Indian Ocean (Map 5-6, 7-3, 7-4). Today, all manner of products (e.g., Asian automobiles) arrive at these ports. A route coming up from Elath-Aqaba to the Edom Plateau (Mt. Seir) forks into: (1) the King's Highway which runs along the edge of the Edomite Plateau, across the Zered Canyon and into Moab; and, (2) further east, the Way of the Wilderness which avoids the deep Zered and Arnon River canyons that drain into the Dead Sea. The Israelites travelled on the Way of the Wilderness past Edom and Moab enroute to the Promised Land (Map 3-2).

Two kingdoms inhabited the southern Trans-Rift Plateau. Edom descended from Jacob's brother Esau and is condemned in Scripture for despising God's covenant promises (Gen 25:32; Obadiah). Moab descended from Lot and settled further north between the Zered and Arnon Rivers. Videos [#13](#) and #14 give more description.

Map 1-13 Biblical Negev

Map 1-13 is a magnified version of the northern region of Map 1-12. The Bible most often uses the term "Negev" (as also spelled as Negeb) to refer to this region (Num 13:17), so this area can be called the "Biblical Negev." The Biblical Negev is a relatively flat plain that runs from the Coastal Plain in the west to the Judean Desert in the east (light green shading). The region is important as a route that connects the Mediterranean Sea (e.g., Gaza) to regions east of the Dead Sea. Towns and forts were built to guard the east-west route, as well as to control southern entrances into Israel's mountainous heartland.

The Biblical Negev has three parts: western, central, and eastern. The Central Negev is dominated by the city of Beersheba, which means "Well of the Oath/Promise." Abraham and Isaac named the area, confirming a treaty with Philistines and affirming their faith in God's *promise* that their descendants would inherit the land (Gen 21:31; 26:33).

The Western Negev Basin is agriculturally rich as it blends into the Coastal Plain. Abraham and Isaac both spent time in Gerar (Gen 20:1; 26:1). Near Gerar, the town of Ziklag was David's home for 16 months before he became king of Judah in Hebron. A raiding tribe of semi-nomadic Amalekites captured the families of David and his men, and then burned Ziklag (Map 5-4). David and his men pursued the Amalekites south beyond the Brook Besor, which drains all of the Biblical Negev to the Mediterranean Sea.

In the Eastern Negev Basin is Arad, an early Canaanite town that prospered from Dead Sea mining contemporaneously with Sodom. Later Israelites built a fortress and high place (temple) at the site. See video [#13](#).

Map 1-14 Dead Sea, Wilderness and Moab

The shores of the Dead Sea are more than 1,350 feet (420 m) *below* sea level, making it the lowest spot on the face of the earth. The depth of the Rift Valley at the Dead Sea is a main cause for the regional variety in the Promised Land.

The Dead Sea is about 50 miles (80 km) long and less than 10 miles (16 km) wide. It has two parts, separated by the Lisan (Tongue) Peninsula. The northern and larger part is over 1,000 feet (300 m) deep, but the

southern part is only 13 feet (4 m) deep. In the southern section minerals (potash, magnesium chloride, etc.) are mined through evaporation. Humans float in the Dead Sea because its water is more dense than we are, over 30% saline (average sea water is 3.5% saline). The biblical and modern Hebrew name is Salt Sea (Gen 14:3; Num 34:3). In addition, pieces of black asphalt or bitumen emerge from the Dead Sea. The 1st century AD historian Josephus called it the Lake of Asphaltis.

The main tributary is the Jordan River, but especially in winter, water rushes down steep slopes on its east and west. The main fresh water tributaries (Jordan, Arnon, Zered, and Jabbok Rivers) have dams today which prevent water from reaching the sea. In recent decades the northern part of the Dead Sea has been dropping about 3 feet (0.9 m) a year.

On the west, the Judean Desert is characterized by chalky limestone terrain that is cut by deep canyons and then cliffs that drop down to the Dead Sea. Important sites along the western shore include Masada (“Fortress”), built on a high rock plateau by the Hasmoneans and Herod the Great. Masada eventually became the last hold-out of Jewish resistors against Rome in AD 73. En-gedi, “Spring of the Young Goat,” is a fresh water oasis where David hid from Saul (1 Sam 24). There is really only one route leading up into the Hill Country from the Dead Sea. It starts at En-gedi and ascends to Tekoa, Herodium, and Bethlehem (cf. Map 6-4). Down on the northwest shore is Qumran, where most of the Dead Sea Scrolls were hidden in caves. Because of the arid climate of the region the ancient texts (many biblical) were preserved for 2,000 years.

On the east side is a high plateau whose cliffs drop off steeply to the Dead Sea. More rain falls on the east (15" in winter months) than in the rain-shadowed Judean Desert on the west. Most of the canyons descending from the eastern plateau have spring-fed perennial rivers, some with hot springs. The biggest rivers are the Zered (southern edge of map) and the Arnon (center). The site of Zoar, to which Lot fled when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, was located near the mouth of the Zered River. Sodom was nearby (within sight?) of Zoar. The Zered and Arnon River canyons formed the borders of ancient Moab, a people descended from Lot. The capital of Moab was Kir-haraseth.

North of the Arnon River is the Plateau, territory settled by Israelites under Moses (Map 3-3). On the northwestern rim of the Plateau is Mt. Nebo, from which Moses viewed the Promised Land. Below Mt. Nebo, the flat plain on the northeast side of the Dead Sea is called the “Plains of Moab.” The 2nd generation of Israelites camped here (e.g., Abel-Shittim) before miraculously crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land.

The route that travels north-south through Moab and the Plateau is part of the King's Highway. The King's Highway is fairly smooth going except where it must negotiate down, through and up out of the deep Zered and Arnon canyons.

Map 1-15 3D Views

The maps on page 1-15 and 1-16 show 3-D perspectives of the Land. To a great degree, the wide variety of landscapes in this relatively small land is due to elevation variation. These elevation differences can be seen on the 3-D maps. The top map on page 1-15 is east-oriented (north is to the left). In this straight-down view, four major geographical zones are evident. (1) The Coastal Plain, a relatively flat 10-mile [16-km] wide strip along the Mediterranean Sea. (2) The Hill Country, which rises to 3,300 feet (1,000 m) in the center and over 4,000 feet (1,250 m) in Upper Galilee. The Hill Country is bisected by the Jezreel Valley, the flat arrowhead-shaped plain. (3) The Rift Valley, which is part of the great Syro-African Rift. The Hulah Valley, Sea of Galilee, Jordan (Rift) Valley, and Dead Sea are segments of the Rift Valley. Much of the Rift Valley is below sea level. The Jordan River descends (Jordan means "descend") about 650 feet (200 m) from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea, which is 1,350 feet (420 m) below sea level. The Rift Valley functions as a trench separating higher ground on its east and west. (4) The Trans-Jordan (or Trans-Rift) Plateau east of the Rift Valley reaches 3,000-4,000 feet (900–1,250 m) in elevation. Gilead, in Trans-Jordan, is mountainous, cut by river canyons (e.g., the Jabbok River) flowing into the Jordan River. Golan, ancient Bashan, is a plateau of volcanic rock. To the north is Mt. Hermon, over 9,000 feet (2,800 m), snow-capped from November to April.

Some of these same features can be seen on the bottom map on Map 1-15, which also designates important site locations. Video commentaries [#2](#) and [#3](#) describe the size, varied geographical features, and major routes of the land of the Bible.

Map 1-16 3D View to Northwest

The same four major longitudinal geographical zones described for Map 1-15 are evident on this oblique 3-D view. (1) Coastal Plain, (2) Hill Country, (3) Rift Valley, and (4) Trans-Jordan Plateau. Major regions and cities are numbered on this map. Note, for instance, snow-capped Mt. Hermon (#31 near the top of the map) that rises up above the Hulah Valley (#15) and the Bashan (Golan) Plateau (#3). Jerusalem (#19) is in the Central Judean Hill Country (#23). The rocky Judean Wilderness (#24) on the east side of the Hill Country sits in a rain shadow as the land descends sharply to the Dead Sea (#8). Steep cliffs along the Dead Sea define the western edge of the Plateau (#35) and Moab (#29).

Conclusion

1. The Promised Land contains a wide variety of geographical terrain. Regions, though close in proximity to each another, vary significantly in character. The Promised Land is a “good land” (Num 13:27; Deut 8:7) which serves as a metaphor of the world to come (Heb 2:5). The variety of the Promised Land in this present world implies variety in the Promised Earth to come (Ps 37:11, Matt 5:5).

2. The Bible is full of detailed geography, e.g., city locations and regional names. There is overwhelming agreement between the geography described in the Bible and what we see in the land. In other words, the Bible “has it exactly right,” to the finest of details, concerning the geography associated with the historical narrative it presents.



*Archaeological ruins of Capernaum,
Jesus' hometown during his ministry in Galilee*