

CHAPTER 5

BIBLE GEOGRAPHY

The Bible is not a make believe storybook about imaginary people in imaginary places (such as Peter Pan in "Never Never Land" or Alice in "Wonderland"). The Bible is a **true record** of REAL people who lived in REAL places on this earth. These people (such as Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, Peter, Paul, Luke) were surrounded by REAL cities and REAL countries and REAL mountains and REAL rivers and REAL seas, just like we are. **Geography** is "a study (or description) of the EARTH," and in this lesson we want to study that part of the earth where the events of the Bible took place.

The Book of Mormon and the Bible

Although Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon church, claimed that his *Book of Mormon* is "the most correct of any book upon the earth," archaeology has repeatedly failed to substantiate its claims about events that supposedly occurred long ago in the Americas.

I remember writing to the Smithsonian Institute to inquire about whether there was any evidence supporting the claims of Mormonism, only to be told in unequivocal terms that its archaeologists see "no direct connection between the archaeology of the New World and the subject matter of the book."

As authors John Ankerberg and John Weldon concluded in a book on the topic, "No *Book of Mormon* cities have ever been located, no *Book of Mormon* person, place, nation, or name has ever been found, no *Book of Mormon* artifacts, no *Book of Mormon* scriptures, no *Book of Mormon* inscriptions...nothing which demonstrates the *Book of Mormon* is anything other than myth or invention has ever been found."

However, the story is totally different for the New Testament. Australian archaeologist Clifford Wilson wrote, "Those who know the facts now recognize that the New Testament must be accepted as a remarkably accurate source book."

Luke's gospel as well as the book of Acts which he also authored contain numerous references to geographic locations. Given the large portion of the New Testament written by Luke, it's extremely significant that he has been established to be a scrupulously accurate historian, even in the smallest details. One prominent archaeologist carefully examined Luke's references to thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities, and nine islands, finding not a single mistake. If Luke was so painstakingly accurate in his historical reporting, on what logical basis may we assume he was inaccurate in his reporting of matters that were far more important, such as the resurrection of Christ?

[From *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel, pages 107, 98-99]

Most of us are quite familiar with that part of the earth called "North America." We are acquainted with the great cities of North America (New York, Los Angeles, Chicago), the great rivers (the Mississippi, the Hudson, the Colorado), the great mountain ranges (the Rocky Mountains, the White Mountains, the Smoky Mountains), the great bodies of water (the Atlantic Ocean, the Great Lakes, the Great Salt Lake) and the great countries (the United States, Canada, Mexico).

Most of us are less familiar with another part of the world called "The Middle East" (although we are hearing and seeing more and more about this volatile section of the world on the news and in the newspapers) or another part called "Mesopotamia" (the fertile region between the Tigris and Euphrates River, the home of the great ancient civilizations). We are also less familiar with that section of the world which at one time comprised the Roman empire (including the lands bordering the Mediterranean Sea). These are the lands of the Bible. It is here that earth's most important events have taken place and will take place.

To help you become more familiar with this part of the world, answer the following questions and then see if you can locate the answers on a map. Your Bible may have maps in the back.

1. Where did God say the Messiah would be born (Micah 5:2)?
 _____ This was a small and insignificant village located not far from Jerusalem. It was the birthplace of the most important Person in the history of the world.
2. In what city was Christ raised as a boy and where did He live as a young man (Luke 2:39,51-52)? _____

Many Christians are unaware that skeptics have been asserting for a long time that Nazareth never existed during the time when the New Testament says Jesus spent his childhood there. In an article called "Where Jesus Never Walked," atheist Frank Zindler noted that Nazareth is not mentioned in the Old Testament, by the apostle Paul, by the Talmud (although sixty-three other Galilean towns are cited), or by Josephus (who listed forty-five other villages and cities of Galilee, including Japha, which was located just over a mile from present-day Nazareth).

Did the gospel writers just invent an imaginary town which never really existed? The evidence suggests otherwise: When Jerusalem fell in A.D. 70, priests were no longer needed in the temple because it had been destroyed, so they were sent out to various other locations, even up into Galilee. Archaeologists have found a list in Aramaic describing the twenty-four "courses," or families, of priests who were relocated, and one of them was registered as having been moved to Nazareth. That shows that this tiny village must have been there at the time.

In addition, there have been archaeological digs that have uncovered first-century tombs in the vicinity of Nazareth, which would establish the village's limits because by Jewish law burials had to take place outside the town proper. Renowned archaeologist Jack Finegan, in a book published by

Princeton University Press, offers this conclusion: "From the tombs...it can be concluded that Nazareth was a strongly Jewish settlement in the Roman period." We thank the Lord for the amazing accuracy of His Word.

[From *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel, pages 102-103]

3. In what city was Christ crucified (Rev. 11:8)? _____
This city will someday be the capital of the world (see Isaiah 2:2-3).
4. Where will the Lord Jesus stand when He returns to the earth as Judge (Zechariah 14:4)? _____
5. Where did Noah's ark rest upon land (Genesis 8:4)? _____
6. Where was Abram's (Abraham's) original home before he went to Haran and then to the land of Canaan (Genesis 11:31)? _____
7. Where was Joseph sold into slavery (Genesis 37:36)? _____
8. Into what river were the male Israelite babies thrown or cast (Exodus 1:22)?

9. What body of water did the children of Israel cross under Moses' leadership and by the miraculous power of God (Exodus 14:21-22)?

10. On what mountain were the Ten Commandments given (Exodus 19:20; see chapter 20)? _____
11. What body of water did the children of Israel cross under Joshua (Joshua 3:14-17)? _____
12. Where did Elijah (and Elijah's God) defeat the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:19-20)? _____
13. Where did God tell Jonah to go (Jonah 1:1-2)? _____
Where did Jonah decide *he* wanted to go (verse 3)?

14. In what great body of water did Jonah get swallowed by the great fish (Jonah 1:11-12)? _____
15. To what country was Daniel carried captive (compare Daniel 1:1)?

16. In what great Persian city did Queen Esther live (Esther 1:2)? _____
17. Where was Jesus baptized (Matthew 3:13)? _____

18. In what body of water did Andrew, Peter, James and John fish (Matthew 4:18)?

19. Where was the capital of the Roman empire (Acts 28:14)?

20. The road on which Paul was traveling when he was saved led to what city (Acts 9:2-3)? _____
21. From what great church were Paul and Barnabas sent out (Acts 13:1-3)?

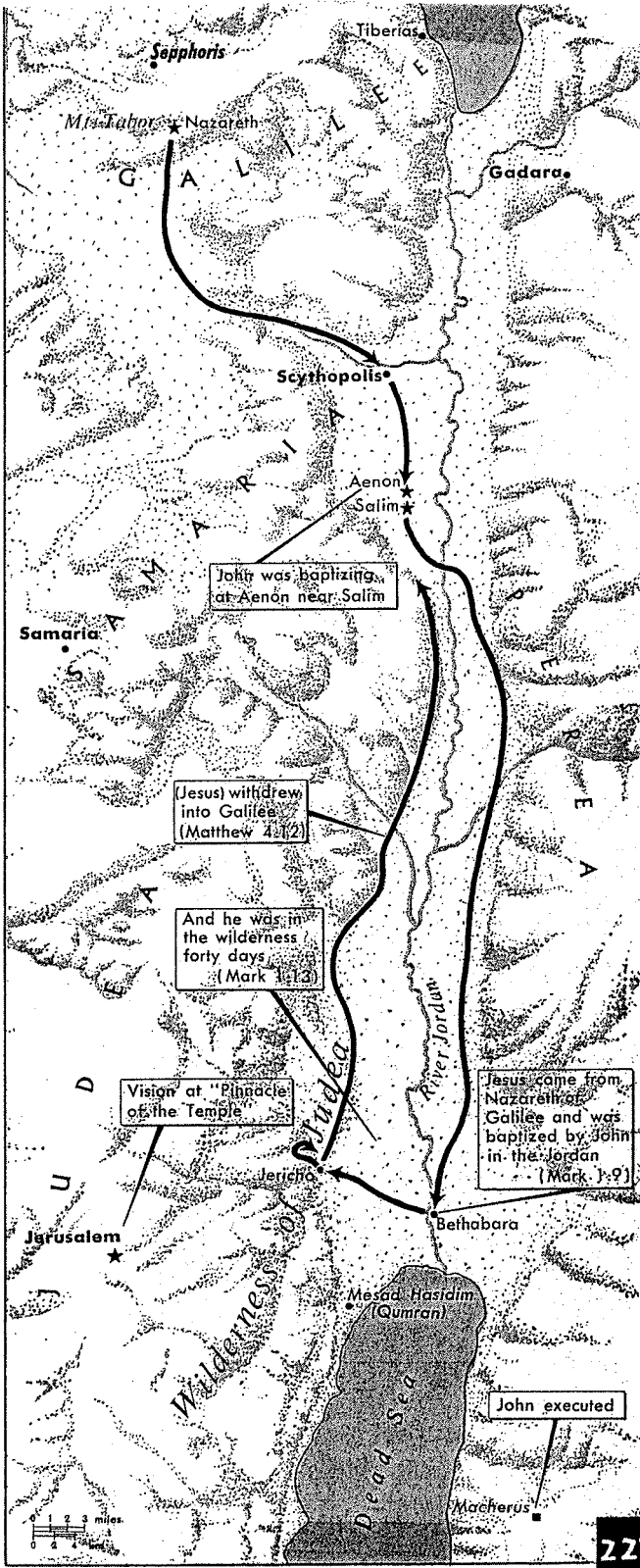
22. Where did the Corinthians live (1 Corinthians 1:2)? _____
23. On what island was Paul shipwrecked (Acts 28:1)? _____
24. Where did Paul leave Pastor Titus (Titus 1:5)? _____
25. Where was John when he wrote the book of Revelation (Rev. 1:9)?
_____ What churches did the Apostle John
write to (Revelation 1:4,11)?

HOW TO USE THE MAPS IN YOUR BIBLE

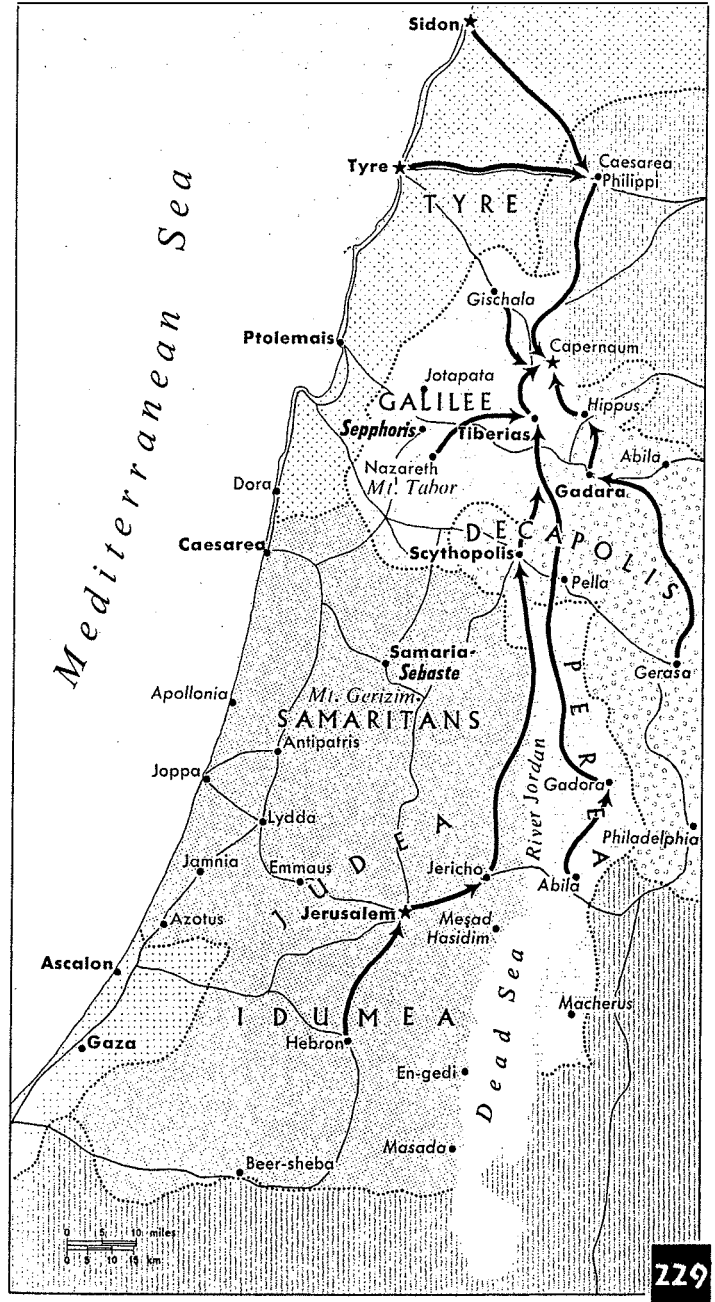
- 1) The maps in your Bible should be numbered (MAP 1, MAP 2, etc.).
- 2) Look up the city or place that you want to find in the INDEX TO MAPS.
- 3) The index will tell you which map to look at (it may say MAP 5).
- 4) The index will tell you where on that map to look (it may say F4).
- 5) Your Sunday School teacher will show you how to do this.

The more you learn about Bible geography, the more meaningful your Bible will become. Even though you may never have an opportunity to visit the holy land, you can become closely acquainted with the lands of the Bible, and you will be able to read God's Word as if you were actually there! You shall then better understand that there is a very REAL God who is very much concerned about very REAL people who live in a very REAL world and who need a very REAL Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ!

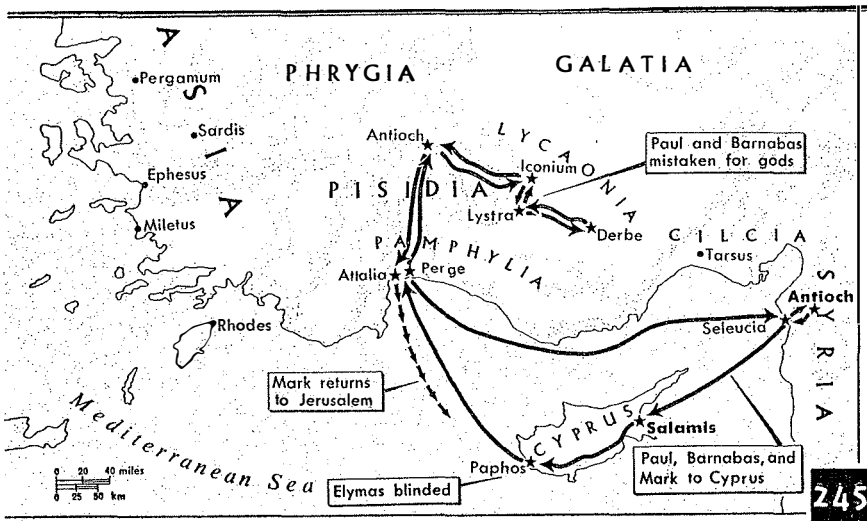
THE BAPTISM OF JESUS AND THE SOJOURN IN THE DESERT



THE HOLY LAND IN THE TIME OF JESUS

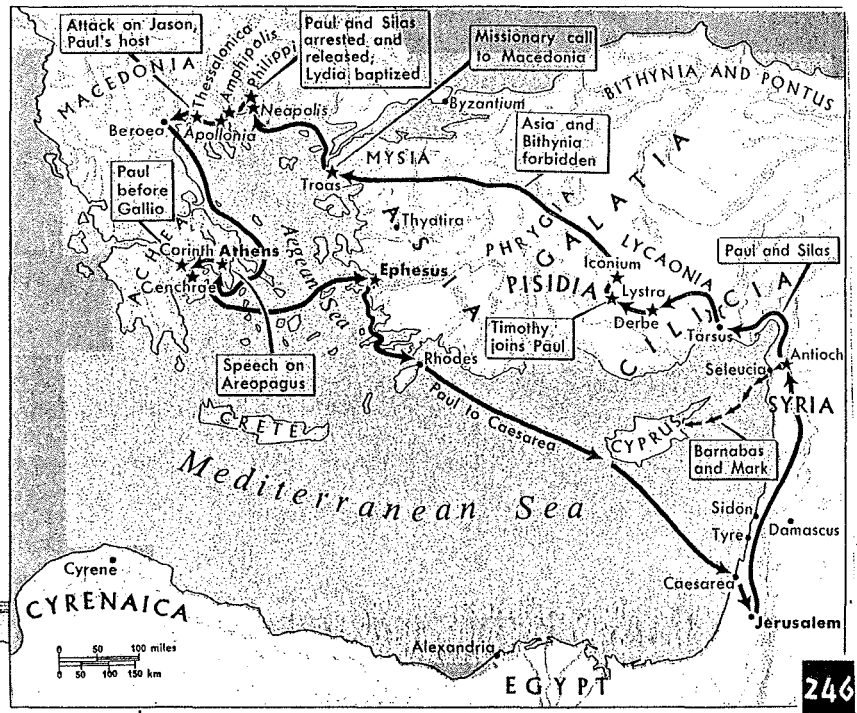


The maps on these two pages are taken from *The MacMillan Bible Atlas* by Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, published by the MacMillan Company, New York (1968).



THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY OF PAUL

THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY OF PAUL



THE THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY OF PAUL