



Ep #489_“Where” Matters, The Place of the Bible

0:00:00.6 Speaker 1: Sonja created the Love The word Bible study method just for you. Based on Mary's personal practice and formulated for your personality and temperament. Get your Love The Word meditations every Monday morning by signing up at biblestudyevangelista.com. Now here's Sonja. If you like having Bible Study In Your Pocket and you have an iPhone or iPad, why not leave a review? Search Bible Study Evangelista in iTunes and tell everyone how you're loving and lifting all you've been given. Here's Sonja.

0:00:45.8 Sonja Corbitt: It is the Sacred Healing 12:30 podcast. And I'm Sonja Corbitt, your Catholic Evangelista. We're in our series on how to study and interpret the Bible following along in the book Ignite that I wrote with Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers about how to read and study the Bible. We've talked about the who of the Bible. We know now that the who is both God, I am who I am and the people of Israel who are God's people. And by extension, because there are elder brothers in the faith, we also are the who, particularly of the New Testament but of the whole Bible. The who of the Bible then is God, the Israelites and us. We talked about the who. We talked about the what, and that was the covenant discussion. And the seven covenants are one of two ways to understand the Bible in a thematic way.

0:01:32.5 SC: The what of the Bible is God's love for humanity for you. And the Bible is the story of that love. And the seven covenants we looked at, they increase in scope from a marriage to a family, to a tribe, to a nation, to a kingdom, to the world, and then to a new covenant with creation in Christ. And so covenants are one way to understand the Bible from beginning to end. And a second way is the tabernacle in which God revealed his desire from the beginning of the Bible at creation, all the way to the end, in Revelation, he reveals this desire to tabernacle or to live with us in humanity, in you, in me as temples of the Holy Spirit. And to give himself to us, particularly in the Eucharist. And we'll cover the tabernacle in the how portion of our series. But the what of the Bible is the love of God for humanity and for people and even the cosmos.

0:02:25.1 SC: And today we're gonna talk about the where, we're gonna talk about the Holy Land. I actually love this subject. I remember in one of my seminary classes, we were doing an Old Testament survey and it included all this information on the Holy Land. And I was totally blown away 'cause I mean, I grew up in my mother's womb hearing these stories. She always made sure I had these little Bible story books. And then later as I got older, the younger years, they were all pictures. But as I got older, they were fewer pictures and more of the meat of the story and they were fleshed out a little more. And then when I got old enough, I was able to read the stories for myself. And we were in vacation Bible school frequently and we had Bible drills and I went to Bible camp and I loved all of that, but I knew the stories.

0:03:11.0 SC: But in my first seminary class, in learning this information and looking at the maps

and pinpointing all the places of the stories, I was just totally blown away. I don't know why I had this disconnect in my head, but suddenly I understood that this was a real place and these stories weren't just stories. I remember this happened in a similar way when I was homeschooling and my oldest son was working on a timeline in history. And I think this probably will happen to you, I hope anyway, when we look at the when of the Bible and the Bible timeline, and we started at creation. So I began with evolution and dinosaurs and all that and with Genesis. And I remember putting all of that on the timeline creation and dinosaurs and cuneiform and the Sumerian civilization and the Egyptians and the Exodus and all this mixture of what was sacred or Christian history, along with what was secular, the stuff that I learned, like in world civilization and that kind of thing.

0:04:13.8 SC: But something clicked in my head and I realized first of all that these are real people and they're on the same timeline that I inhabit. They're just way behind. And I don't know, I don't know why there was this, I don't know, I don't know why, the stories just seem to be stories until these two situations. But I suddenly understood these people to be real and the time to be real. And they weren't just stories that I cherished and loved. These were actual people, people that really lived. And when I learned about the Holy Land and the geography and the agriculture and the rainfall and the climate, all of those stories in the Bible suddenly took on this really beautiful three dimensional nature. And they just, they just came alive. And I hope that happens for you today. I think probably the strongest sense of the reality of the Bible and the people in the Bible is my first Holy Land trip.

0:05:15.3 SC: And I know I've told you this before, but I always have new listeners. So my first Holy Land trip, I went with a group of people that I didn't know, didn't know a soul, and I went and I was alone, didn't have my family, and we were on the Sea of Galilee in the Jesus boat is what they called it. And I was standing up front with my arms spread out in the bow of this boat on the Sea of Galilee where Jesus walked and the disciples fished and I was just standing there by myself. Everybody else was kind of down in the belly of the boat singing praise songs. And, and we were headed over to the side of the lake or the sea is called in the Bible, sometimes the Sea of Galilee. But we were headed over to the other side to where Jesus preached the sermon on the Mount.

0:06:08.2 SC: And I was up there by myself and I was just thanking God for allowing me to experience all that I had experienced to that point. And the beauty of the land and just the, it was just so wondrous for so many reasons, but mostly it was so much like coming home, really, which I'll talk about a little more in a moment. But I was just praising Jesus and he said to me very clearly, I just wanted you to see my place. And I thought, holy moly. Well, of course, of course Jesus has a place, but I hadn't ever really thought about him wanting us to see it and to know it until that moment. And not just to see it and to know it, but to visit it and to experience it and to experience him in it. So if you can ever make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, I want you to come with me.

0:07:03.7 SC: But if you, if you can't come with me, go with somebody at some point. Did you know there's a plenary indulgence attached to that? If you make a pilgrimage to Rome or to the Holy Land, there is a plenary indulgence attached to a pilgrimage like that. But in any case, it truly, they call it the Fifth Gospel because it just brings your whole faith alive. It is amazing. And you may be even asking, Sacred Healing 12:30, what's that got to do with healing? Any of this Bible stuff? Well, first of all, places are important. Places are about bodies and humans are not just spirit, but we're flesh. And in fact, sometimes we need to be reminded that we're not just flesh, we're spirit, because we live in this body and we cater to it so much. But man is a union of body and spirit.

0:07:56.1 SC: And so we have body image wounds and some of you have racial wounds and some of you have physical abuse and sexual wounds. We have wounds of the body, which are wounds of place. And so places are important. And the Bible is important for healing because nothing heals like God's love. And God pours his love out in great measure through the scriptures. He does it individually that way. He does it specifically that way through the power of his word. And so that's why we're looking at how to study and interpret and read the Bible so that we can understand more of it when we pick it up. And we're looking particularly today at the where of the Bible, the places of the Bible, the land of the Bible, because we are people of places as Jesus is a person of a place. And so I've included a couple of crude maps in the show notes, and they're not accurate as far as the exact places are now because they're not contemporary maps.

0:09:03.0 SC: But one of them is the topography. And it is kind of hard to see, but at least you can get the shading to sort of understand how the land rolls up from the coast to the mountain and then back down into the Jordan Valley and then back up again to the east. You can sort of get, with the maps that I've provided, you can sort of get a good idea of a lot of what we're gonna talk about today. But you can look at any map, a topography map online of the Holy Land. You can find all of, a bunch of maps a lot of times in the backs of your Bibles. So follow along and we are gonna explore this land today. One of the maps that I included shows you the Fertile Crescent and you can see where Abraham was called out of Ur.

0:09:45.2 SC: And you can see how far that trip took him. I also included a map of the natural regions of the Holy Land. And I made an infographic of the four regions. So you can see that there are four strips and they each have particular characteristics and even different climates because there are different elevations, which means that there are different agricultural endeavors. But those four strips are called the Coastal Plains, the Central Highlands, the Jordan Valley, and the Eastern Highlands. Again, you can see that infographic in the show notes. And we're gonna talk about each of those strips of land, those natural regions. And if you're looking at a geographical map or that particular map, I drew lines from north to south to show you just about where those regions would be separated or delineated. And you can see that the whole Holy Land is only at its widest part, about 60 or 70 miles wide down at the south and at the top it's barely 40 and the length is just a little bit over a hundred.

0:10:46.8 SC: So the area is very small and that is, important for a lot of reasons that we'll get into as we kind of go through the show today. But if you look at the other picture of the Fertile Crescent, you can see even better that you have all of this area. The Arabian Desert is now what we call Iraq and Iran. And Lebanon is there. And you can see the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers. The Persian Gulf right there where Kuwait is. All of this is desert except for the area right there shaded in dark. And you can see where the rivers are. And that's important because the rivers flood and that causes the land to be really fertile. And you can see that the land that we're calling the Holy Land Israel and and Palestine nowadays, it's in this little crook on the right of the Mediterranean Sea.

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0:12:02.9 SC: Let's get social. I'm no longer on Facebook. So come and connect with me in the new Catholic evangelista community. Visit biblestudyevangelista.com and click community on the menu or scroll down to the radio notes and click the link to our community. We're sharing picks and

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0:12:27.2 Speaker 1: Did you know you can get Bible Study Evangelista radio notes and podcasts delivered to your inbox every Monday morning? Redeem your Mondays, join thousands of your fellow listeners by subscribing at biblestudyevangelista.com. Now here's Sonja.

0:12:54.3 SC: Relative to the rest of the world, this Holy Land area is very, very small, but it was hugely strategic in military and economic terms, especially because the camel caravans traveled these major trade routes down from Egypt along the Mediterranean coast through the Middle East, and up into now what we call Southern Europe and Asia. And so the nations and the civilizations were constantly trying to take the land from the Israelites because it was so strategic. It was a land bridge, a natural land bridge between these two huge areas of the world. And so at this point, it might be important to make the distinction that God didn't choose the land because it was holy. And that's true of everything that God chooses, that he has created. The thing is holy or the land is holy, or the person is holy because God chose it. Now, I don't know about you, but a lot of times, for instance, even with Mary, she's full of grace and she's holy.

0:13:51.5 SC: And we think that God chose Mary 'cause she was so holy. But it's actually the opposite. Mary was holy because God chose her and he made her holy because he was gonna choose her and the purpose for which he chose her. So that's true of us, and it's true of the land. He always equips us to do the thing that he's called us to do when he says be holy, it's because he will make us holy. We're not automatically holy and then he chooses us. And the same is true of the land. The land is holy because God chose that land to reveal himself and to become incarnate. And he began that revelation of himself to Adam and Eve in that same area. The church actually teaches that all of us did indeed descend from one man and one woman, a specific man and a specific woman.

0:14:36.9 SC: And biology back in, I think 2013 or so, there was an article or a study or something that came out that talked about how genetics has discovered that there is actually one man and one woman that shares their DNA with most of the rest of us. Now they date it way back like 150,000 years ago, which would've been pre-awareness, pre-conscious people or pre-conscious beings, humanoids we might say. But anyway, I'm digressing. The point is that, that all of that actually began in the same place, the same area, at that Garden of Eden, especially around in that Holy Land. The Garden of Eden is actually thought to have been probably down in Africa somewhere, but that whole land, that area was always considered by the ancients to be the belly button of the earth. The navel of the earth is what the theologians called it.

0:15:29.7 SC: And I think that's kind of funny because that whole area sort of has that nickname, but specifically Jerusalem, because Jerusalem is the capital of the Holy Land. And the church of the Holy Sepulchre is said to have to be located on that actual spot that is the belly button of the earth, which I'll go back to that in a few moments. But the Holy Land is important because it's the land where Jesus lived and worked and where his ministry took place. And all that is in that one little strip of earth that you can see on that map. And I think that's cool. So place is important. It's important to understanding an issue or a story. And as we look at the Bible, it is the love story of God for humanity and everything that he's made. And in order to understand him, we really need to understand something about the place in which he chose to reveal himself.

0:16:18.8 SC: So places are important. This is why when you study literature, you always look at the setting and the setting always includes the place. I remember my trip to Poland back in, in my early twenties. My husband and I went to Poland on a mission trip and I had developed this sinus issue and I went down into the village to try to find something that resembled Sudafed. And I was just skipping through the streets, I was so happy to be there and I was saying hi to everybody and I was surprised when nobody met my eyes. Nobody even looked up really from their feet when they walked. And I started to feel strange for being so happy in a place where people clearly weren't that happy. And I went back to the church that night and we all gathered for dinner and I asked, "What's going on here?"

0:17:11.7 SC: And that's when they enlightened me to the recent history of Poland under communism and all they went through. And I mean, that was another one of those stories. I had heard the stories of World War II and the Nazis and all that, but these people experienced it. And so I came away from that conversation with a new understanding of the people. And that's the whole point for why we're studying and looking at the where of the Bible today. Because a lot of people read the Bible like it's just sort of some spiritual book. And I did it too. I didn't mean to, but we read it like it's detached from history and the events of history and the consequences and the sequences of history. But it's our sacred history. If our process of revelation has been this self-disclosure of God, from person to persons, from God to us, and if God entered history as a person through a particular race of people at a special place in the world during a specific historical place in time, and if that same Jewish race of people also experienced and wrote most of what's in the Bible, in and from that particular geographical place, then what might the where of the Bible tell us about God?

0:18:30.1 SC: And that is an extremely important question. It tells us a lot, just like he did in the times of the Bible. God wants to speak to you, to us, in our own time and our own work, our own relationships, our geographical location. We're not here accidentally, we don't live in America accidentally. Or for those of you who are my British or French or Polish or Australian or Canadian listeners, wherever we live, we live there for a particular reason, in a particular time of history. And we have particular family members for certain reasons, reasons maybe only God knows, but he planned. And all of that is important. If we're gonna understand God's way with us, we have to understand his ways with the people that are in the Bible.

0:19:15.0 SC: It's important that we know something of the when and the where and the through whom everything happened, 'cause we wanna be able to visualize the places while we're reading. Especially, this is what's so good about a trip to the Holy Land, as you can actually see the actual place, the people and the time, and the land constitute the arena in which God chose to speak, he chose to act and he chose to intervene uniquely in history. And I think it's fascinating that almost every human author of every single book of the Bible was part of that area we call the Holy Land. Almost all of them were Jewish.

0:19:50.0 SC: And I mentioned in earlier shows in the series that the Bible is collected into one book for us, but for them, they were scrolls, and there were a bunch of them. Every single Old Testament book, and every single New Testament book that you have in your Bible, it was a single scroll or a series of scrolls or parchments, and each one was a separate book or a series, as I said earlier in other shows that word Biblia means books, it's a library, so it's not just one volume, even though we have it collected for us and it's in a neat convenient little package, with it's nice little divisions into chapters and verses and chapter headings and all that.

0:20:29.4 SC: But we have to remember that the Bible is a library of books, we have to always keep that in mind. Every author almost, of every book of the Bible was Jewish, and they all lived in this area. The Old Testament books particularly, were written in Hebrew and Aramaic, Hebrew is the language of symbols and pictures. Symbols meaning that the alphabet is... It looks different, and then the alphabet creates words that create pictures, it's not a really specific language. For instance, the Old Testament says that, the people's teeth were cleaned or clean, in order to say that there was a famine in the land and they didn't have food.

0:21:11.9 SC: So their teeth were clean. So you can see how the Hebrew language is a picture language and you read Hebrew from right to left rather than left to right, that's a little bit of trivia if you didn't know. Aramaic and Hebrew are actually different languages, they're very closely related, their Semitic languages. Aramaic is the language of the Syrians and the Hebrew language is, of course, the Israelite language, and both of them were used to write some of the Old Testament. And Aramaic was the language of those nations, Persia, Assyria and Babylonia, that are...

0:21:45.1 SC: We see those featured in the Old Testament surrounding the history of God's people, and Hebrew continued to be used as a liturgical language in the worship, particularly after it was ceased to be spoken. And that's actually true of Latin as well, but there's no Latin in the Bible. That was a translation of the Bible by Jerome. Aramaic is not a changed form of Hebrew, but it's a whole different language. They're called Semitic languages, Akkadian, Arabic, Aramaic, Ethiopic, Hebrew and Phoenician. They all come from that area. The term Semitic comes from Shem, one of the three sons of Noah in the Book of Genesis.

0:22:26.9 SC: He said to have been one of the believing sons, and so he's the ancestor of those people of that area, and so the word Semite became a designation for those people. Aramaic and Hebrew are Semitic Languages. The New Testament was written in Greek mostly, but it also has some Hebrew and Aramaic because the authors of those books were mostly Jewish. Every biblical prophet, except Moses, who was buried outside that promised land, the Holy Land, they all lived at least a little while in the Holy Land, they lived and they wrote from that context, and we can't understand Jesus or even ourselves as a people of faith without that context. For instance, Romans 11-16 says, "If the first fruit of Judaism is holy, then the lump of Christianity is holy."

0:23:15.2 SC: "If the root is holy, then so are the branches." And so Paul is saying that Christians grafted into the olive tree of faith, because the olive tree had a real significance in the Holy Land, and it still does, it's a very arid climate and olives grow well there in the Mediterranean. All of our olive oil comes from Italy and Middle East and Spain, and all those areas around that Mediterranean Sea. They use olive oil for light, for healing and for anointing the priests and the kings.

[music]

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0:24:01.6 SC: Losing it more often, or lost yourself entirely. Binging on food, alcohol or your phone? Feeling exhausted, anxious, angry, scared. You've done all the novenas, all the consecration, adoration, daily mass, Bible study, therapy and deliverance prayers. Why has none of it given you permanent relief? Does God not care? He does care, but you can't feel it because you need to be cherished, you need to be healed. In Sacred Healing 12:30, I teach you how to live authentically

from the holistic love of God in the power of Mark 12:30. Heart, soul, mind and strength. I teach you how to be cherished, I teach you how to guard your peace, I teach you how to love authentically, I teach you how to heal deeply, I teach you how to feel better because you can only love God with all your heart soul, mind and strength, if they are healing and whole in him. The love you were made for is only a mouse click away, go to biblestudyevangelista.com to stop the emotional vomit and start experiencing the miracle of living authentically from the healing love of God in your heart, soul, mind and body.

[music]

0:25:25.9 SC: Knowing something about the land and the place of the Bible gives us a little more information about what the authors are trying to say when they use certain images. Another example is the fig tree. In our Gospel of John study, we're gonna look in chapter one on Nathaniel's exclamation, that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus refers to that fig tree, he refers to a fig tree in chapter one, and then suddenly Nathaniel just, he is bowled over by the fact that this is definitely indeed the Christ, and why is that? If you don't know something about the land and the tree, and what the author John is trying to say there, you just read that, and, "Oh, that's a nice little parenthesis in the middle of this whole first and second chapter that is trying to draw our attention back to creation." Why in the world would he say something about the fig tree in the middle of that?

0:26:21.6 SC: Well, when we get there to the Gospel of John, I'm gonna tell you why. But that's another example. Here's another one, so Elijah's cave, not long ago, in the readings, there was the story of Elijah and the cave and how he heard the whisper of God there, and I, just in my mind when I read it, I was thinking Mount Carmel, because when I went to the Holy Land, we went to that actual cave and that... Or I thought it was that actual cave, but a cave, Elijah's cave, but it was up in Mount Carmel, which in a moment, I'm gonna show you where that is. I thought that that's the cave that it was talking about in the readings, but it actually says Horeb, and unless you look up Horeb on a map, you don't realize it's actually Mount Sinai, it's the place where the law was given to Moses.

0:27:07.5 SC: The place that the Israelites went round and round for 40 years, so there's all kinds of topographical and agricultural and climatic and geographical information that helps to contribute to our understanding of the Bible and what it's saying, and what it wants us to know. And what the message is, and as I said, the ancients called that area the navel of the Earth or the belly button of the earth. And to this day, the land of Israel is more than just a place for the Jewish people. They don't recognize Jesus as their Messiah. They still hold only to the Old Testament law, mainly the first five books, the Torah, actually, there are different factions in even the Jewish thinking, and we see that in the readings too.

0:27:49.3 SC: Here's something else that you wouldn't know. So the Sadducees, I think I mentioned this in a previous show, the Sadducees only held to those first five books as being the actual law, whereas the Pharisees read the whole old testament as the law, and either way, the Old Testament was their scripture, and they don't, as a people, they don't... The Jews don't recognize Jesus as their Messiah. So for them, none of those Old Testament prophecies have been fulfilled, they don't understand Jesus as any of the fulfillment of those prophecies, so they're still looking for a literal physical fulfillment of those promises in the same way that the events of the Old Testament were actual literal and physical.

0:28:31.2 SC: Because you can see because we are spirit and body, God used all of those literal things in the Old Testament, the need for water and food, and leadership and protection, and a law, particularly in the Exodus, he used all that stuff in a literal way to teach them to depend on him for all of their actual physical needs. And then later Jesus came to show us that God, he works even more deeply, he's more interested even in the spiritual needs that go along with the physical, so Jesus turned all those literal examples into deeper spiritual realities for us, he is the living water, he is the bread of life, he is the Tabernacle or the Temple that will be destroyed and raised again in three days.

0:29:12.8 SC: My point though, is that for the Jews, because they're so literal, the land, even today is very central, it's primary. They say actually, that it is a body for the soul of the Jewish people. So they say that a Jew doesn't travel to Israel, instead they say he returns there, whether he's ever been there or not. And I have to say that that's how I felt when I went to the Holy Land. It felt like a returning, it felt like a going home to that land, I don't know what it was about it, it was just... It was especially...

0:29:43.6 SC: There was a particular place that we went to that was in... It was this little path between... It was down to Capernaum, it was called the Valley of the Doves, and it was silent and solitary, it was just this little footpath and there were animals on either side, it was just the most meditative place, and I could just... First of all, the path was so narrow, I kept thinking I'm walking, my feet I know are touching ground that Jesus walked on, like literally, my feet literally had to have touched some of the places where his feet fell because the path was so narrow and it did, it felt like coming home.

0:30:27.1 SC: It felt like being in the... I don't know, I can't describe it. Everybody should do it, right? But the Jewish people, they have this idea that it's a land with a soul of its own, it's a divinely blessed land, and that's what it feels like. But it's blessed because God revealed himself there, he incarnated himself there in Christ, it's a specific well-defined, very special piece of earth to which the Jewish destiny began, but is also tied, it'll be that way even to the end. We know in St. Paul, and in the Book of Revelation, and in the Old Testament too, it all says that in the end, the Jewish people are gonna be called back to Christ and they're gonna understand him to be the Messiah, and they're gonna accept him as such.

0:31:15.0 SC: Now, that hasn't come yet and getting a little bit ahead, but the point is that the land has everything to do with Judaism and the Jewish destiny, and it's tied to us too, we are part of that land because of that they are our elder brothers and sisters, according to the catechism. So the point is that the land is central to Jewish existence, and because Jesus and the disciples and everybody in the New Testament was, or almost all of them were also Jewish, that land is central to our existence as well. Spiritually speaking, especially, but really in every way. Jewish tradition actually teaches that God created the world like an embryo, just as the embryo begins at the navel and continues to grow from that point, so too the world, the holy one blessed be, he began the world from its navel. From there it was stretched, hither and yon. Where is its navel? Jerusalem and Jerusalem's navel itself, the altar, now that's obviously the altar in the temple, and not the cross as we know it.

0:32:16.7 SC: But following our elder, Jewish brothers in the faith, St. Jerome and other Christian geographers of the Middle Ages, they also use that terminology, that Jerusalem was the center or the belly button of the world, and so later there was a stone set in the floor in the Church of The Holy Sepulchre, that's the traditional site of the burial and the resurrection of Jesus. And so tradition

tells us that that is the thought to be anyway, the exact spot of the navel of the Earth from which the embryo of Christianity developed and spread. I just think that's amazing. I always thought it was weird that the Catholic church was the one that had all the art and the holy places.

0:33:00.1 SC: And when you travel to the Holy Land, it's the Catholic churches that are on those sites. Or the Greek Orthodox churches, or the Coptic churches, but they all are very, very Catholic in the way that they look and feel, and I thought that was kinda strange because why do Catholics have possession of all these places and all of this ancient Christian stuff? Well, it's because the church is the church of history, it's the church that was the beginning in the beginning, and the church has guarded those relics and those places and that art work from the very first beginnings of the Church, and so Christians can also maybe argue that the Holy Land is the center of nations, and some of our church fathers do argue that it's also our Holy Land, so going to the Holy Land, as I said, was like going home in a deep, real sense, and I bet some of you who have been, you probably felt that, if you knew anything about the Bible anyway.

0:33:52.4 SC: If you didn't know anything about the Bible, it probably didn't mean a whole lot to you, but if you do, there's this real sense of coming home, and that's not even purely geographical, it's just true because Jesus came from there and so did the disciples. It's a region, a place, it's distinct from all others, it's the center of world history, it's the center of geography, in the sense that it's the center of the promised land, at least for Christians, and it's the land that God promised to Abraham 2000 years before Jesus was born, before he lived and he died there. It's in that Holy Land that Christianity was born. And it survived the Roman Empire, and it changed the course of human history. And even with all that being true, like anything else, God didn't choose it because it was holy, it's holy because God chose it as the location for revealing himself. And for those who believe in providence, that middle eastern setting for this love story of salvation cannot be accidental. The word Palestine actually originated from the root Philistine, and I'll talk about that a little more in a moment.

0:34:54.9 SC: I'm gonna use the term Palestine because one of our maps uses that word, and I know that that's gonna bug some people, because I've done this, something similar to this show before and it bugged people. But I wanna explain a few things, I'm not speaking in political terms, first of all. When I talk about Palestine, rather than using the word Israel, they mean that they don't mean the same thing in political sociological terms today, but the area... I'm just talking about the geography, when I use the word Palestine, I'm just using that as the term for the Holy Land, Israel, Palestine, that area, the Holy Land. But I will tell you that when we were in the Holy Land, every trip I've ever been on. We spent time with the families, particularly in Bethlehem, which is surrounded by Israel.

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0:36:00.3 S1: If you love having Bible Study In Your Pocket, you can become a friend of the show, click on the yellow friend of the show, button on biblestudyevangelista.com and become a supporter of any amount and any frequency. Now, here's Sonja.

[music]

0:36:28.8 SC: If you'll notice a contemporary map, Israel pushes all the way up against Palestine

and into Bethlehem. Not quite... I'm being very general here, but they're very close together. Let's just say that, and the Christians in Bethlehem told us about the persecution that they undergo at the hands of the Israelis because they're enemies, right. The Israelis, and I'm not being political, I'm just telling you what they said the Christians there, talk about the persecution both from the Palestinians who are often Muslim, and then the Israelis who are Jewish, so there's this constant religious contention going on in that area. So just know that when I use the word Palestine, I'm not... Or even Israel, I'm not speaking in contemporary terms, I'm not trying to be political, I'm not even being religious, I'm just using it as a term for that area, alright. There's the qualification and the reason I'm doing that is because the word Palestine originates from the root, Philistine or Philistia, and if you look on your maps, they were the notorious Israelite enemies and the people of Goliath. A map of the natural regions of the Holy Land on that far left-hand side, you can see that plane of Philistia. And that's where the Philistines were, and that's where the word Palestine comes from.

0:37:45.0 SC: They're first mentioned in the Bible as from Noah in Genesis 10:14, and they occupied that little western section. And from a geographical point of view, that land of Philistia, if you look at the Fertile Crescent map in the show notes, you can see that that land of Philistia bridges the European and the African and the Asian continents. And they all converge on that Eastern Seaboard right there on the Mediterranean. And that's why this area was so important. People, the citizens of this area, they always traveled on these trade routes, both by sea and by land. The sea trade routes went here because it was central to the whole area on the map. And the camel caravans would go from the land, from the neck of the Northern part of Philistia all the way down to the left of the Jordan River toward Egypt, which you can see on the lower side of a map.

0:38:34.3 SC: And they would travel from Egypt through Philistia, up from the Jordan River to the north, all the way up into Damascus in the Far East. There were all kinds of trade routes there. It actually, one of them was called the King's Highway. You've probably heard of that. But that land was invaded from all these directions because it was such an advantageous place on the map. It connected all of these areas and so militarily and economically and just for travel, it was a really strategic area. And so they were battling, the people of God were battling all the time all of these civilizations and militaries. They were constantly under pressure from all of these directions because it was such a strategic land, a promised land. But ultimately it was an advantage when the Christian message, the Gospel needed to be sent. It went all over the place from this central navel, this central location, so that the whole world could be evangelized with the Gospel of Jesus.

0:39:38.5 SC: And so in its widest sense that Holy Land includes the whole Fertile Crescent, and that's the semicircle that sweeps from Mesopotamia and the Euphrates River. And that's where God called Abraham. He didn't know where he was going, but he was going to Philistia, that promised land that God had promised him. And it's also that land of Egypt. Down on the left is the Nile where baby Moses was drawn out of the river reeds and he became the prince. And you can see the shortness of that distance between Egypt and Mount Sinai and the Eastern side of the Jordan River. You can see Egypt at the top, but on the bottom map of the Palestinian natural regions, the land itself is only about a 100 miles long and 50 or 60 miles wide. It's really small, as I mentioned.

0:40:17.7 SC: And all of the people there, because it was so small, they were related. They were basically cousins. So they all knew each other. And if you go to the Holy Land, it's still that way. I hope at this point you're realizing that we're not only the people of the Bible, but we're also the people of the land. And in a narrow sense, the land of Palestine is the promised land literally. It's a rich land. It's fertile. It's naturally separated into four geographical strips that you can see on that

map that run North to South. And it was called a land flowing with milk and honey in Exodus 3:8, and the most glorious of all lands in Ezekiel 26. And it was so fruitful, remember, that the spies who were sent in to look at it, brought back a single cluster of grapes that the Bible says it was so heavy, it had to be carried by two men.

0:41:02.4 SC: And if the land was that fruitful, and if that was a metaphor for the spiritual fruitfulness of the Promised Land in Christ, then just think about that. I mean, what might that mean for you? That's a literal land. And it's so fruitful it takes two men to carry one cluster of grapes. So then what is the spiritual promised land supposed to be like for us? It's everything Jesus said it was. Jesus said the kingdom is in us. It's here, the spiritual fertility, that richness, it's all available to us right now in Christ, even here on Earth. It's that kind of fruitful. Now, when I teach about the Holy Land, like in talks or like in Fulfilled or Ignite, I use my left hand as a map. It's a coarse kind of map, but it's a map. So if you're not driving or something, I'd like for you to raise your left hand to your face and look at that Palestinian natural regions map. And we're gonna start with your middle finger at the top. That's where Mount Hermon is. And that was actually in the readings this week. When brothers live in unity, how pleasant it is. It's like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the heights of Zion. So you can see that Mount Hermon is at the very top of the Holy Land.

0:42:14.9 SC: Then I'd like for you to follow that middle finger all the way down the center of your palm, the center of your wrist, all the way to your elbow. That is the backbone of the Holy Land. It's the Jordan River. Snows and the dew from Mount Hermon flow down into the Sea of Galilee, sometimes called the Lake of Tiberius, that's its Roman name, into the Jordan River, which is the backbone of the land. It's settled that River Jordan is settled in a fault line. And it goes from the top of that land all the way down to the Dead Sea where the desert is. It's the lowest, the Dead Sea is the lowest elevation on earth. It's deserty, it's got pitch. It was because of the elevation and the fact that it's so low and dry and full of pitch, the pitch fires and the smell and the smoke and all that. It's considered an evil area. That's actually the area where the temptations of Christ took place. Now, that's the backbone. And if you look at your thumb, your thumb is Haifa. That's where Mount Carmel is. So let's say that your middle finger at the top is Mount Hermon, and the place where your middle finger meets the palm of your hand we'll say that that palm is the Sea of Galilee and the Sea of Galilee flows down in the River Jordan, down to the Dead Sea, which would be like your elbow.

0:43:30.7 SC: Imagine the bottom part of your elbow as being the lowest elevation. That's the Dead Sea. That's the Holy Land in a very crude map. Alright? But now look at the maps. If you look at the natural regions, the Lebanon mountain range is to the left on your hand. It would be like the pointer finger of your hand. So the Lebanon mountain range, and then the Hermon, well, it's actually all pretty much one, but there's a valley in between them. And it extends all the way from the North. Lebanon means white, by the way, for the snows. It extends all the way down to the Mediterranean Sea, which is to the West. And then the deserts are down to the East and the South. The word Jordan actually means descender because it comes from the top of the mountains all the way down to the deepest elevation down there at the Dead Sea.

0:44:21.2 SC: As I mentioned earlier, the hills start at the coastal plains, which are flat, and they roll up to the mountains on the left side of the river and then down into the river valley, and then back up to the right side of the mountains there, and then back down off the plains into the desert. So it's sort of this roly-poly thing, like an M. It's shaped like an M, the topography of that land, if you're looking from left to right. It's flat at the coast and it rolls down and then down into the valley

and then back up and then down again into the desert. You can see that really well if you'll look at a topographical map. The Sea of Galilee is where I stood in the Jesus boat and where the disciples fished and Jesus walked, and it's pretty small. It's funny, they would call it a sea 'cause it's really a little lake if you look at it. And it empties down into the river, the Jordan River. And then the land itself continues down to the Gulf of Aqaba. And that was a seaport for the kings, especially. The topography is what set separates it naturally into these four long strip like divisions that you see on that map. The Coastal Plains, the Central Highlands, the Jordan Valley, the Eastern Highlands, from West to East, the coastal plains go up from the Mediterranean, where the marshes and the pasture lands supported David's flocks. And then there were swaths of wild flowers like the Rose of Sharon in that area.

0:45:35.2 SC: They bloomed in perfusion there 'cause it was so fertile and it enjoys a lot of rainfall. It's kind of beachy. And then those plains rolled gently upward from the coastal seaports to the central highland mountain range. And those mountains from the central and eastern highlands, they tower over those planes. You can see those mountains from the coast on a really clear day. If you compare that to the topography map, you can see that the elevation is really high. The land rolls up to the mountains and then back down to the valley of the river and then back up and then plateaus off again. The central highlands, that second strip is where Jesus's childhood was and his public ministry took place around those hills of Galilee. That's where Nazareth is, where he lived. And as I mentioned on a clear day, the Mediterranean Sea is visible from that area. It's only about 17 miles to the West. Then at the foot of Mount Carmel, that range, there's this fortress town of Megiddo. And for centuries it guarded the entrance to the main mountain pass down to the south that leads to the hill country of Judea and Jerusalem, which is further down south.

0:46:45.2 SC: And the region between the two, that was the focus of Israel's history during the divided monarchy. I drew rude delineations between Samaria and Judah just to give you an idea of kind of where those would be. There wasn't like an official separation there, but I drew one in there so you could see. And there are 10 tribes were up to the north up in Samaria and then two down to the south. But they all occupied that area. And the two down south were the southern parts of Judea. The capital in the south was Jerusalem, the capital up north in Samaria, those 10 tribes called Israel, the capital there was Samaria. Place matters, doesn't it? It mattered to Jesus. This land is the place where God revealed himself most fully and it's the navel of the world from which both Judaism and Christianity and even Islam began. So to know something about the land is to know something about who Jesus is and what he wants us to know about him. What's your place in the spiritual promised land? Are you cultivating it? Is it bearing fruit?

0:47:51.8 Speaker 4: Thank you for listening to the Bible Study Evangelista Show. Find out more at biblestudyevangelista.com.