

Fifty Key Places of the Bible

Antioch This political and commercial center in Syria had a population of more than half a million people. Followers of Jesus were first called “Christians” here (Acts 11:26), and it became the launching point for Paul’s three missionary journeys.

Ashdod (*New Testament: Azotus*) This city had an unhappy experience with the ark of God during the time of the Philistines (1 Sam. 5:1–8) and opposed the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (Neh. 4:7–8) before hearing the gospel from Philip (Acts 8:40).

Babylon The capital city of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, which defeated Judah, destroyed Jerusalem, and exiled the Jews for seventy years (2 Kings 25:1–21). It became symbolic of the fate of world powers that oppose the advance of God’s kingdom (Rev. 18:10, 21).

Beersheba A city in the Negev frequently used for worship by Abraham’s family (Gen. 21:33; 26:23–25; 46:1). When joined with Dan, it was used to mark the northern and southern reaches of the promised land (Judg. 20:1; 2 Sam. 24:2).

Benjamin The high plateau between the tribal territories of Judah and Ephraim eased travel through the center of the mountainous interior of the promised land. It became the strategic internal crossroads allowing Jerusalem access to the world, and the world access to Jerusalem. Bible events linked with this region will naturally rise in importance (like Josh. 9–10).

Bethany A village near Jerusalem on the east side of the Mount of Olives often visited by Jesus because it was the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Jesus raised Lazarus here and ascended into heaven nearby (Luke 24:50; John 11:1, 18; 12:1).

Bethel A village on the border between Benjamin and Ephraim that became an important worship site for Abraham’s family (Gen. 12:8; 28:10–22; 35:1–7). Jeroboam tarnished its reputation by establishing a golden calf sanctuary here (1 Kings 12:28–33).

Bethlehem A village in Judah near Jerusalem that was the home of Ruth and Naomi, the hometown of David, and the birthplace of Jesus (Ruth 1:1, 22; 1 Sam. 16:1; Mic. 5:2; Luke 2:4–7).

Bethphage A village on the Mount of Olives, which was the presumed city limits of Jerusalem. Jesus rode a donkey into this village and into Jerusalem, fulfilling Old Testament promises about him (Matt. 21:1–5; Luke 19:28–35).

Bethsaida This town lay on the north side of the Sea of Galilee and was the home of Philip, Andrew, and Peter (John 1:44). This community had the chance to hear Jesus and see his miracles more frequently than others. Their failure to respond in faith resulted in sharp censure (Matt. 11:21).

Beth Shemesh A town set aside for the Levites on the east side of the Valley of Sorek (Josh. 21:16) whose residents mishandled the ark of the covenant, illustrating just how badly the faith of Israel had deteriorated before the reforms of Samuel began (1 Sam. 6:19–20).

Caesarea Maritima This thoroughly Roman port city built on the Mediterranean coast of Israel was the home of Cornelius and the place Peter learned that the gospel was destined for the gentiles (Acts 10:1–35). During his extended detention here, Paul learned how the Roman world worked prior to embarking for Rome (Acts 23:23–26:32).

Caesarea Philippi A city established at the base of Mount Hermon and at the headwaters of the Jordan River; it was enhanced by Herod Philip to serve as his regional capital. The pagan sanctuaries of this city became the setting for a discussion about Jesus’s identity, which led to Peter’s great confession (Matt. 16:13–20).

Capernaum A town built on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee near the International Highway that became known as Jesus’s “home” (Mark 2:1). Jesus moved here to fulfill Old Testament prophecy, establish a base of operations in Galilee, and provide international access to his message (Matt. 4:13–17; 11:23).

Colossae This was a leading city in the Roman province of Asia Minor along the east–west trade route that linked Ephesus with cities far to the east along the Euphrates River. Although the city is unmentioned in the book of Acts, believers there received a letter from Paul because of numerous heresies they had adopted (Col. 1:2).

Corinth Due to its advantageous geography between the Aegean and Adriatic Seas, Corinth became a leading commercial center in ancient Greece. The flow of traffic made it an attractive spot for Paul, who both visited (Acts 18:1–18) and sent letters to the Christians living in this morally challenged city (1–2 Cor.).

Damascus The capital city of Aram strategically located along ancient transportation routes (Isa. 7:8). Although a frequent opponent of God's kingdom during the Old Testament, the Jews here were quick to recognize Jesus as Messiah (Acts 9:2). When Saul went to address this "problem," Jesus met and converted him just before he arrived (Acts 9:3–22).

Dan This city was located along the International Highway, the critical lookout station that would first feel an attack from the north (Jer. 8:16). Its name became synonymous with the northern border of the promised land (Judg. 20:1; 2 Sam. 24:2). Jeroboam assured its ongoing censure by establishing a golden calf sanctuary here (1 Kings 12:28–30).

Dead Sea This unique inland lake formed the eastern border of the promised land (Num. 34:3, 12). It is the lowest place on the earth's surface (1,300 feet below sea level) and void of the kind of life we expect in a lake due to its high salt content (30 percent by weight). Ezekiel speaks of this dead body of water coming to life in the age to come (Ezek. 47:1–7).

Decapolis A group of sprawling Greco-Roman cities established along important transportation routes. They were marked with unique architecture and cultural experiences meant to sell Hellenism to the locals. For observant Jews this gentile country (east of the Sea of Galilee and associated with Hippos) was the fearsome "other side" (Mark 4:35) in which Jesus reached out to gentiles (Mark 5:20; 8:1–13).

Ephesus An important Roman city was destined to grow in this location where east–west overland routes meet east–west shipping lanes. Paul spent years at this hub of human movement, which provided a gateway into Asia (Acts 19:1–10; 20:17). Both Paul and John wrote letters to the Christians here (Ephesians; Rev. 2:1–7).

Gath One of the five major Philistine city-states, Gath was the home of Goliath (1 Sam. 17:4). After this giant's defeat and during the days Saul was seeking David's life, David sought refuge in this city. Here David learned Philistine battle strategies. Ironically he later used this information to defeat the Philistines and seize Gath (1 Sam. 27:2–4; 1 Chron. 18:1).

Gibeah A town in Benjamin along the central road system in the promised land that became the home of Saul. Its dark past (Judg. 19:12–26) casts a dark shadow across the rise of Israel's first king as Saul makes this town the first capital of Israel (1 Sam. 10:26). It becomes known as "Gibeah of Saul."

Gibeon Centrally located on a small rise in the middle of the Benjamin plateau, this village superintended the east–west route that connected Jerusalem to the world and the armies of the world to Jerusalem. Deception allowed its residents to maintain some autonomy at the time of Joshua's conquest (Josh. 9). Later this Levitical city became the home of the tabernacle and bronze altar (1 Chron. 16:39; 2 Chron. 1:3, 5), a worship center at which Solomon asked for and received the gift of wisdom (1 Kings 3:4–15).

Hazor An important intersection of the International Highway just south of Hazor fostered the development of a major city in this location. Although Canaanite Hazor was defeated by Joshua (Josh. 11:10), it rose again to fight against Israel at the time of Deborah and Barak (Judg. 4:2). Solomon later fortified this location for Israel's use (1 Kings 9:15).

Hebron A town in Judah located along the central Ridge Route. Abram built a memorial altar here to recall the land promises his family had been given (Gen. 13:14–18) and later purchased the cave of Machpelah, which served as the family tomb (Gen. 23:17–20). Its religious role continued as a Levitical city (Josh. 21:11), and it became the capital of David during the time of the civil war that followed Saul's death (2 Sam. 2:11).

Jericho The area of Old and New Testament Jericho was an oasis on the edge of the Judean wilderness from which roads traveled to the interior of the promised land. The Lord gave this city into Joshua's hands (Josh. 6). Near here Elijah left the stage of history (2 Kings 2:5) and the "new" Elijah, John the Baptist, entered (Matt. 3:1; John 1:28). Jesus healed Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46) and welcomed Zacchaeus into the kingdom of God (Luke 19:1-2).

Jerusalem This city plays a more powerful role in Bible communication than any other place. It became the political capital of Israel (2 Sam. 5:1-12), the religious center of Judaism, and home of the ark (2 Sam. 6) and the Lord's temple (1 Kings 5-8). "Jerusalem" frequently personifies God's people and their fate (Ps. 87; Lam. 1). It is where Jesus was crucified and raised to life and is the city that anticipates his return in glory (Rev. 21:1-2).

Jezreel Valley This triangular valley interrupts the central mountain range allowing the easiest east-west passage for international travelers. Its agricultural and transportation advantages were shared by four Israelite tribes. Key cities like Megiddo developed along its perimeter to control military movement and collect tax revenue. The flat terrain and economic value made it a battleground. Saul and Josiah died in battles here (1 Sam. 29:11; 2 Kings 23:29).

Joppa The Old Testament seaport of Israel via which timber was brought into the promised land for the building of the temple at Jerusalem (2 Chron. 2:16; Ezra 3:7) and from which Jonah fled when directed to go to Nineveh (Jon. 1:3). Here Peter raised Dorcas and received a vision that led him to witness to gentiles in Caesarea Maritima (Acts 9:36-10:23).

Jordan River This meandering river connects the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. It was the eastern boundary of Canaan (Num. 34:12) mentioned frequently in connection with Israel's entry into the promised land (Deut. 4:14; 11:11; Josh. 1:2) and miraculously dried up ahead of them (Josh. 3-4). Jesus's public ministry began when he was baptized in this river (Mark 1:9).

Judean wilderness Steep terrain, poor soil, and lack of rainfall make this region hostile to sustained human settlement. David hid here from the murderous hand of Saul (1 Sam. 24:1; 26:1-3). It provided the austere setting for John the Baptist's somber message (Isa. 40:3; Matt. 3:1) and the setting for Jesus's temptation (Matt. 4:1-4).

Kiriath Jearim A town in the mountains of Judah that became the home for the ark of the covenant for twenty years during the time of Samuel (1 Sam. 6:21; 7:1-2). David brought it from there to Jerusalem (1 Chron. 13:5-6).

Megiddo The most strategically located city in the ancient world guarding a narrow pass on the edge of the Jezreel Valley and along the International Highway. Although taken by Joshua (Josh. 12:21), Manasseh failed to hold it (Judg. 1:27). Megiddo finally comes to Israelite hands and is fortified by Solomon (1 Kings 9:15). King Josiah died in battle with Egypt here (2 Kings 23:29-30).

Mount Carmel A thirty-mile mountain ridge that blocks north-south travel on the coastal plain, then channels the flow of traffic through chalk valleys that bisect this ridge and empty into the Jezreel Valley. It became the site of Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18).

Mount Ebal This mountain rises just north of the Shechem pass and was the geographical focus of the rededication ceremony held by Joshua at the start of the conquest. Here Joshua erected stone pillars inscribed with the law together with an altar (Deut. 27:1-8; Josh. 8:30-32). The tribes announcing the curses for covenant disobedience stood on this mountain (Deut. 27:13; Josh. 8:33-35).

Mount Moreh This mountain in the Jezreel Valley was used by Gideon as he prepared to attack the Midianite invaders (Judg. 7:1). It also hosted two parallel miracles in villages on its flanks. Elisha raised a boy to life in Shunem (2 Kings 4:8, 32-37). Jesus raised a young man at Nain (Luke 7:11-17).

Mount of Olives This extended mountain ridge rose east of and higher than the city of Jerusalem. It hosted a number of important events in the last week of Jesus's life, including his riding a donkey into Bethphage (Matt. 21:1), his triumphal entry on Palm Sunday (Luke 19:37), his reflection on the end times (Matt. 24:3), and his struggle in prayer in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:30).

Mount Sinai

Following the Israelites' extended stay in Egypt, the Lord led them here before he led them to the promised land in order to visually present himself to them and to organize them as his covenant people (Exod. 19:2–16). The mountain became emblematic of the Mosaic covenant (Neh. 9:13; Gal. 4:24–25).

Mount Tabor

This dome-shaped mountain in the Jezreel Valley made it a striking landmark celebrated with Mount Hermon as an iconic symbol of God's creative work (Ps. 89:12). It was the staging area for Barak and Deborah's attack on the Canaanite forces gathered in the valley below (Judg. 4:6, 12, 14).

Nazareth

A small, geographically isolated village on a ridge north of the Jezreel Valley. It was the setting for the announcement of Jesus's unique birth (Luke 1:26) and became the childhood home of Jesus (Luke 2:39). By living there, Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies made about him (Matt. 2:23). Public disdain for those living in Nazareth affected the way people thought about Jesus (John 1:46; 19:19).

Nineveh

This metropolis at the top of the Fertile Crescent's arch was the pagan city to which the Lord sent Jonah to teach him about the breadth of God's kingdom (Jon. 1–4). Jesus used it to drive home this point (Matt. 12:41). It eventually became capital of the empire of Assyria and the focus of the book of Nahum because it wickedly overplayed its role as divine corrector of God's people.

Philippi

This city was a Roman colony and leading city in the district of Macedonia, which was visited by Paul (Acts 16:12; 20:6). He followed up his visits with a letter of thanks and encouragement preserved in Philippians.

Rome

The capital city of the Roman Empire and natural transportation hub that connected its far-flung holdings via sea-lanes and roadways. Pentecost converts carried news of Jesus here (Acts 2:10). Paul wrote the believers a letter (Romans) that anticipates a later visit (Acts 19:21; 23:11). That important visit happened when Paul made an appeal to have his case heard by the emperor in Rome (Acts 25:25; 28:14).

Samaria

Omri made this city the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 16:24). Ahab and Jezebel built a sanctuary to Baal here (1 Kings 16:32) that brought condemnation of the place from the prophets and started kingdom and capital on a slide that would result in their destruction by Assyria (2 Kings 17:5–6).

Sea of Galilee

This low-elevation, inland lake has a high profile in the Gospels because many days of Jesus's ministry were spent on its waters and shorelines. Jesus called disciples from fishermen plying its waters (Matt. 4:18), miraculously fed thousands on its shoreline (Matt. 15:29), and stilled its storms (Matt. 8:24).

Shechem

This town was the highest profile worship site in the promised land prior to the time Joshua set up the tabernacle at Shiloh. Shechem became intimately linked to the Abrahamic covenant as the site of the first theophany in the promised land (Gen. 12:6–7). It was linked to the Mosaic covenant, as Joshua renewed the covenant here at the close of the conquest (Josh. 24:1–27).

Shiloh

The sanctuary city became the home of the tabernacle at the time of Joshua (Josh. 18:1) and was where the final distribution of the land took place (Josh. 18:8–10). Although Samuel was called to service here (1 Sam. 3), the failure of the priests and people to maintain the sanctity of the site led to its destruction by the Philistines (1 Sam. 2:27–36; Ps. 78:60; Jer. 7:12–14).

Sychar

This New Testament Samaritan village lay adjacent to the site of Old Testament Shechem. Jesus declared himself to be Messiah in this place so intimately linked to the covenants that anticipated his arrival and identified the non-Jewish Samaritans as the field ripe for harvesting (John 4:1–42).

Thessalonica

As the chief port of Macedonia, this city offered the bridge between the Thermaic Gulf and the Egnatian Way. It was an open cultural center in which new ideas would find an interested audience. Paul visited this city and wrote back-to-back letters to the Christians there (Acts 17:1–9; 1–2 Thess.).