

How to Interpret the Bible Correctly: The Bridge of Bible Geography

As a student of God's Word for over 40 years, there is one simple question that fills my heart and mind as I read the Bible, "What does this passage mean?"

Bible teachers are called to explain the Bible, to help people understand what the Bible means, and how it fits together into one powerful message from God to us.

The only way to apply God's Word correctly is to understand first what God has said, what He meant, and then what response He desires from us. That is why we have started a monthly study of the elements of Biblical Interpretation.

Someone long ago told me that my job as a Bible Expositor was to build a bridge that transported people from where live in the present, back to what God said and did in the historic context of His Word: and then to bring them back into their daily lives understanding what God expected from them.

To build that bridge we must realize that there is a gap between them and us.

1. **A Gap of History** ("they lived in a very different time");
2. **A Gap of Geography** ("they lived in a very different place");
3. **A Gap of Culture** ("they lived in a very different way");
4. **A Gap of Language** ("they spoke in a very different way").

So the first elements of Biblical Interpretation are bridges that help us create understanding about the history, geography, culture, and language that surrounds the world of the Bible.

The Bible was set in Real History that is Archaeologically Verifiable

The historicity of many of the world's religious books is at times questionable; but God's Word has been continuously verified by each new archaeological find. We can place most of the Biblical characters into a timeline that opens the doors to understanding historic events in light of God's Word.

The Bible Portrays Literal Geographic Places

Biblical geography makes the Bible come alive. Since everything happened somewhere, it is vital to see the “where” of all of God's dealings with His people and plan.

The Bible Reflects Specific Cultures

The cultural setting of the Bible helps us to understand what God's Word says; but it does not give us a way to soften or remove the truths communicated by God. The Old Testament is sometimes set in the agricultural and nomadic culture of the promised lands. Other times in ancient civilizations that surrounded Israel. Just as the Gospels reflect first century Jewish culture, so Acts & the Epistles reflect the Greco-Roman world. There are incredible background books that open those cultures to us.

The Bible is Communicated by Picturesque Languages

God's Word was breathed out and written down in mostly Hebrew and Greek. Many times the more clearly you understand the meaning of the original words, the more clear the passage becomes. With modern computer Bible study programs, the study of centuries of language scholars is readily available to sift through.

We have covered over the last two months how the history and archaeology of the Bible give us great insights. Tonight we begin our look at Bible Geography.

Our understanding of Christ's Ministry in the Gospels is deepened as we see the Geography of the

Bible.

We can actually follow His footsteps today in Galilee, along the Jordan River, and in Jerusalem.

In Galilee pilgrims can see a segment of the short cut road between Nazareth and the north side of the Sea of Galilee near Magdala, the town of Mary of Magdala. They can also walk along the shore of the Sea of Galilee at Capernaum and “Mensa Christi”(Peter’s Primacy).

In Jerusalem pilgrims can walk the same Kidron Valley, and follow the steps next to the house of the High Priest or the steps from the south of the Temple, leading up to the temple Mount. These are all geographic places where He walked with the disciples. They can even stand on the Mount of Olives where Jesus Ascended and will return.

That is Bible Geography. That is why the third century Church Father named Jerome called the Holy Land, “the fifth Gospel”. It was in the Land of the Book that Jerome wrote, “For those who come with faith, the stones would speak to them about Him”.

Biblical Geography is a reminder. Everything happened somewhere, that is the catch phrase of history. The places where events in the Bible took place provide what that “Fifth Gospel of the Land”.

When we see the regions, and come to understand the geography, we can get a handle on how much of Biblical History was shaped by the geography.

It is amazing to see all the depths of Biblical insights that can come from the map and the lay of the Land of the Book.

Bible Geography illustrates how the topography of the Land of the Book impacts the Biblical Events: elevations, travel, agriculture, and weather.

- Down to Jericho
- Up to Jerusalem

- From Dan to Beersheba
- As the mountains surround Jerusalem
- Sodom like a well-watered garden

Bible Geography illustrates how some of the key features of geography frame the events of the Bible: such as mountains, lakes, rivers, and roads.

- Across the Lake/far country
- Arbel looking down at the Via Maris
- Matthew's tax-collectors booth as the place where the Roman Road (mile-marker) measured Rome's reach.
- John 21: called by the Sea, called while fishing, miraculous catch, made the denial by a fire; re-called by the Sea, met again while fishing, miraculous catch, restored by the fire.

How close the key Biblical sites are in proximity to each other.

- Last Supper Walk
- Crucifixion Events
- Galilee Ministry