

DEVOTIONAL
TREASURES
— FROM THE —
HOLY LAND

*Encountering God through Scripture, Archaeology,
and Historical Geography of Israel*

JOHN DELANCEY

 CrossHouse

FOREWORD

Everyone who has an interest in the history and archaeology of the Bible will welcome this sound, straightforward devotional guide to the ancient sites of the Holy Land. Dr. DeLancey brings to the table careful research and years of first-hand interaction with the land, and experience as a pastor and masterful tour leader. Posters with the words “DeLancey Group” have graced many a bus in Israel, Egypt, and Jordan for two decades. Hence, this is not just another devotional book. *Devotional Treasures from the Holy Land* is a unique devotional guide to be enjoyed by those on tour in Israel – and those who can only take the trip using their mind’s eye.

In the world in which we live, there is a God-ordained correlation between the particulars of the biblical text in reference to the human events of the past, the historical geography of the Bible, archaeology, the transcendent and unchanging God of the Bible, *and you*. For this reason the land of Israel bids you to explore your rich and extensive spiritual heritage. “This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are *heirs together with Israel*, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 3:6).

This book bridges the oft artificially created canyon between biblical historical geography and theology. Pastor John helps his readers embrace both the historical and spiritual aspects of their journey. With a minimum of technical jargon, he uniquely blends detailed sketches of the biblical sites with careful informed analyses, followed by relevant spiritual applications.

Whether you read these treasures on location in Israel or from your armchair at home, I wholeheartedly recommend this book to you.

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INTRODUCTION

Knowing the land of Israel offers a unique perspective on Scripture. Understanding the context in which the stories of the Bible take place grants unparalleled insights into the text. Learning the “lay of the land” helps develop a “3-D view” of Scripture itself, bringing the Bible alive and the stories closer to our heart.

Reading the Bible isn’t just about gaining a deeper intellectual understanding of the land or the ancient text. It is also about looking for a spiritual value that touches the heart. When we explore the Scriptures, our walk with God is transformed. We may read a biblical narrative and discover something about the nature of God or uncover a biblical truth or practical lesson we can apply to our walk of faith. Each story in Scripture has the potential to impact our lives in a spiritual way.

There are many helpful informative books written about Israel, its history, and the many archaeological sites that can be visited. It is my hope that this book, with its devotional component, will uniquely engage and inspire a deeper walk with God. To achieve this goal, each of the 68 chapters is written with a devotional thought gleaned directly from the archaeological, historical, and geographical background each site has to offer. Each chapter will offer a concise, informational overview of a particular site. But the ultimate focus is the *devotional treasures* to be excavated. By attributing a primary biblical narrative to each site, I hope that this book will offer a spiritually refreshing and transforming experience that will help you apply the living Word of God to your life.

The study of archaeology and historical geography is a necessity for the student of the Bible who wishes to gain a more thorough appreciation of the Scriptures. Having studied archaeology in Israel, as well as having excavated there, I can attest to the undeniable value of uncovering an ancient wall, jar, or inscription that brings a biblical narrative alive. We can thank those in the archaeological field who spend countless unglamorous hours compiling and sharing the evidence that conveys a clearer understanding

of the Bible. Yet, as followers of Christ, there is more to discipleship than simply obtaining knowledge about a particular site or even about the Bible itself. Our walk of faith matures when we reflect on the God of the Bible.

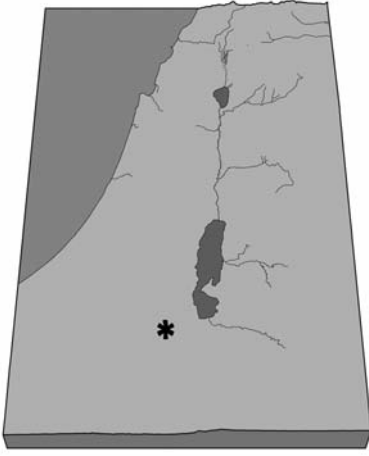
Many of the biblical sites and regions explored in this book are commonly visited by most tours. I have also chosen to feature a number of “off-the-beaten-path” sites that most tours do not include in their itineraries. I have even included a few impressive non-biblical sites. Despite not being mentioned in the Bible, a devotional thought can be gleaned from their exploration.

As a Christian pastor who regularly leads life-changing tours to Israel, I wrote this book unapologetically from a Christian perspective. I trust it provides a wonderful devotional resource for those of you who, at some point in your spiritual journey, have the privilege of traveling to the land of the Bible. I hope you will find this book the perfect companion as you experience Israel firsthand. While this book will help you become familiar with the archaeological, historical, and geographical background of each site, I pray that the blending of the biblical text with the devotional thought will deeply impact your life as a follower of Christ.

For many followers of Jesus who may never have the privilege of experiencing Israel firsthand, it is my prayer that this book will benefit you as well. May this book provide not only a “distance learning” understanding of the sites of the Bible, but also an inspirational opportunity to grow more deeply in your relationship with Christ.

May you discover the *timeless treasures* of the Bible along the way.

John DeLancey
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God's Dramatic Reform

Arad

Region: The Negev

Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left. In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David. In his twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of high places, Asherah poles, carved idols and cast images. Under his direction the altars of the Baals were torn down; he cut to pieces the incense altars that were above them, and smashed the Asherah poles, the idols and the images. These he broke to pieces and scattered over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. He burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and so he purged Judah and Jerusalem. In the towns of Manasseh, Ephraim and Simeon, as far as Naphtali, and in the ruins around them, he tore down the altars and the Asherah poles and crushed the idols to powder and cut to pieces all the incense altars throughout Israel. Then he went back to Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 34:1-7).

Welcome

When God brings about renewal among His people, He often does it in dramatic ways. Confronting the sins of people may be one of the most difficult things a spiritual leader does. Because of this, God uses the boldness of His people to accomplish His will.

The southern region of Israel called the Negev has become a developed region of Israel. Because this region receives only a few inches of rain a year, new techniques in irrigation make it possible for this region to sustain a growing population. Welcome to the region familiar to the Patriarchs of Israel: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Welcome to a city that tells a story of renewal. Welcome to Arad!

The Context

Arad was a city strategically located in this southern region of Israel. The city controlled ancient trade routes. Archaeologists discovered fortification walls and structures. In addition to the impressive fortification that encircled the lower city from earlier periods (Early Bronze Period, 3500 – 2000 BC), dwellings called broad room houses were found in the lower city. These have been called the “Arad House” by archaeologists, setting a standard size and dimension for the style of house found from this time period. Nearly 1,500 years following the initial establishment of Arad, the Israelites developed the upper portion of the city (called the Citadel) in the 11th Century BC.

In 1962 an impressive temple was discovered in this upper city. The temple was built in similar proportions to Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem (about 75 miles north of Arad in the Hill Country of Judah). It paints an accurate picture of the dilemma of disobedience that the people of God were facing. The temple found here was quite complete, with an altar of sacrifice as well as an inner court or Holy of Holies area. The entrance into the inner court of the temple was marked by two standing stones (called *massebot* in Hebrew), with an addition of two incense altars nearby. The names attributed to similar stones were *Jachin* and *Boaz* (1 Kings 7:21 and 2 Chronicles 3:17). Indeed, for the Israelites this temple made worship convenient. It avoided the necessary trip to Jerusalem. But oh, how wrong!

Scriptural Encounter

Mosaic Law prohibited the building of any kind of worship center outside Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 12). Built during the Divided Kingdom, this temple at Arad probably marked the practice of a corrupt form of worship, possibly even the worship of two deities: *Yahweh* and *Asherah*, a pagan god-

dess. Not only did God condemn the building of a worship center apart from Jerusalem, but He also condemned the dual worship of these two deities. This certainly crossed the line.

Enter Josiah. Not tolerating this corrupt form of worship, Josiah brought a quick end to this corrupt religious practice. The archaeological evidence suggests this. What Josiah apparently did to prevent any further use of this unlawful southern temple was to construct a separate stone wall right through the middle of the temple, thus bringing an end to this abomination. With this bold decision, Josiah completed the spiritual reform that Hezekiah started in Judah 100 years before.

Josiah knew God's heart. God longed for His people to return to Him with love and devotion. With passion and resolve in seeking God from an early age (2 Chronicles 34:3), Josiah longed for true reform to take root in Judah. Given the remarkable discovery of the Book of the Law (by Hilkiah) in the restoration project of the true Jerusalem temple (2 Chronicles 34:15), the purifying process continued in dramatic form. The scene in Jerusalem must have been unforgettable. The last section of 2 Chronicles 34 records this scene:

He went up to the temple of the LORD with the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the Levites—all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the LORD. The king stood by his pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD - to follow the LORD and keep his commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, and to obey the words of the covenant written in this book (2 Chronicles 34:30-31).

When God brings reform to our lives, He oftentimes takes us by the hand and brings about renewal one step at a time. He uses His inspired Word in similar ways. As the Apostle Paul says, ultimately it is the Word of God that has a way of “teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

Josiah's reforms were dramatic in scale. They were initiated quickly and soundly. Purification of hearts was the result. God's covenant was renewed. Obedience to God returned.

At times, God initiates dramatic change in our lives by the role of His Holy Word and through His Holy Spirit. As God worked in Josiah's heart to bring reform to God's people, He also works in our hearts. Spiritual renewal comes to us as we learn to yield our will to His. In fact, this yielding of our will is required.

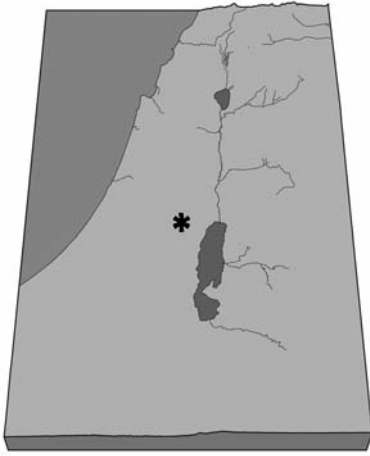
God also has a way of getting our attention quickly. Sometimes it's with direct revelation that He chooses to clearly reveal to us the areas of our lives that need refinement. It's as if God takes a black magic marker and draws a line down the middle of the page, and says, "You have a choice to make: Honor Me or not. Make your choice." While we are thankful for the times when God works like this, we can be equally grateful for the ever-so-patient ways God displays grace toward us. God knows how we often need to take baby steps toward reaching our goal of being like Christ. God does not deal with us legalistically. What He desires from us is a purified heart (2 Corinthians 7:1).

The expression "God isn't through with me yet" comes into play every time we find a part of our spiritual walk in need of evaluation. Hence, in each of us there is a need for reform. This means changing our ways when the situation calls for us to do so. We need to evaluate, discern, and change our way of life, if necessary, in order to conform to the ways of God.

If we are honest with ourselves, we are all guilty to some extent of setting up our own worship centers. Greed and pride often serve as the standing stones at the entrance of the inner court of our heart. It can lead to idolatry. Paul exhorts us to put to death "greed, which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5). The truth is we are all too inclined, at times, to worship things like our material possessions or self. We are all prone to get distracted from loving God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). Yet God rescues us from this practice by gently tearing down the walls that separate us from an intimate love-relationship with Him.

Treasure Thought and Personal Application

God is delighted when He sees within you a purified heart. It is only when your heart is right with Him that you can truly worship and live your life as a “living sacrifice” unto Him (Romans 12:1). Allow God to tear down any wall built within the temple of your heart that does not allow you to honor Him. Strive for purity!



Walking in the Dark by God's Light

Jerusalem:

City of David/ Hezekiah's Tunnel

Region: Hill Country of Judah

After all that Hezekiah had so faithfully done, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah. He laid siege to the fortified cities, thinking to conquer them for himself. When Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come and that he intended to make war on Jerusalem, he consulted with his officials and military staff about blocking off the water from the springs outside the city, and they helped him. A large force of men assembled, and they blocked all the springs and the stream that flowed through the land. "Why should the kings of Assyria come and find plenty of water?" they said. Then he worked hard repairing all the broken sections of the wall and building towers on it. He built another wall outside that one and reinforced the supporting terraces of the City of David. He also made large numbers of weapons and shields (2 Chronicles 32:1-5).

As for the other events of Hezekiah's reign, all his achievements and how he made the pool and the tunnel by which he brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah (2 Kings 20:20)?

Welcome

Virtually on every day in Jerusalem there is a new archaeological discovery. What archaeology uncovers are the evidences of centuries of biblical

history. Since the early 1800s, archaeological efforts in Jerusalem have revealed the Bible's historical precision. Further, it is the biblical text of Scripture that comes alive with greater meaning each time something new is unearthed. Whether it is a fortification wall, a house structure, ancient steps, a jar, or an inscription, archaeology has a unique way of shedding light on biblical history.

Predictably, past theories and understandings of biblical history are either being confirmed or corrected. What is found today may shed light on yesterday's misunderstanding or misinterpretation. Welcome to an area of Jerusalem where archaeology continues to play a critical role in bringing a new understanding of the Bible. Welcome to a world where ancient walls, tunnels, and pottery seemingly "talk back" to reveal details of the past. Welcome to the City of David and Hezekiah's Tunnel!

The Context

I have excavated in the City of David myself, and I can tell you that it is a dirty and dusty job. It is also a rewarding type of work, no matter how small or large the find may be. By definition, the location of the "City of David" (to be distinguished from Bethlehem) is just south of the Dung Gate and the "Southern Wall" excavations of the Temple. When David conquered the city of Jebus (the previous name), the city was a mere 300 yards long and about 100 yards wide. The city that David conquered and re-established as his kingdom capital was small, bounded by the Kidron Valley to the east and the Tyropoeon or "Cheesemakers" Valley (the name given by Josephus, the Jewish historian of the First Century AD) to the west.

Excavations beginning in the early 1800s have not only revealed the earliest walls and structures dating centuries before David (c. 1800-1500 BC), but they have also exposed evidence of David's presence as well as the ensuing centuries of Israelite history that would follow. The primary locations of these excavations are on the eastern slopes of the City of David. More excavations have also included the western and southern sides of the city. Discoveries include city walls, royal buildings, seal inscriptions, towers, a four-room house, and even an ancient toilet seat (perhaps belonging to the house of an individual named *Abiel*), but the most amazing discovery has been Hezekiah's Tunnel.

Scriptural Encounter

In 1830, a hexagonal clay prism, known as the “Taylor Prism,” was discovered among the ruins of Nineveh. It tells us that Sennacherib, the king of Assyria in the Eighth Century BC, had Hezekiah trapped in Jerusalem like a “bird in a cage.” Hezekiah and his engineers refortified the city walls and carved a 1,720 foot tunnel out of solid bedrock to bring the ever-flowing waters of the Gihon spring into the inner sections of the city (1 Kings 1:38, 45; 2 Kings 20; 2 Chronicles 29-32). The carving of the tunnel was a remarkable feat!

With a flashlight in hand, you can walk through this tunnel today and see the very chisel marks cut into the bedrock. An inscription found near the end of the tunnel, kept in storage at the Istanbul Museum, tells the remarkable story of how two teams of rock-cutters started at opposite ends. The inscription says that the two teams chiseled toward each other until they could literally hear the sound of the other picking before breaking through.

Hezekiah's Tunnel was discovered by American explorer Edward Robinson in 1838. In the 1860s, another explorer named Charles Warren is credited for having discovered a 52 foot vertical shaft that descends to the level of the water tunnel. We can only express thanks to 19th Century explorers and archaeologists like these for dedicating their lives to this cause here in the City of David.

Whether studying the story of David's capture of the city (2 Samuel 5) or how Hezekiah and his fellow citizens of Jerusalem withstood the massive Assyrian army in 701 BC, archaeology continues to shed light on how these events were achieved.

Like a royal inscription found on a piece of pottery here, God is more concerned about what is written on our heart. Often, like pottery that needs to be cleared of dirt and debris, God finds dirt and debris upon our hearts as well. It is God's Spirit who renews our spiritual walk (Titus 3:5).

Likewise, just as archaeology sheds light on the ancient past of the Bible, it is God's Spirit who reveals to the follower of Christ the pathways of God. Unlike walking through Hezekiah's Tunnel without a flashlight, God delights when we walk in the light of His way. God is pleased when we entrust our ways to His wisdom (Proverbs 3:5-6, Proverbs 4:6).

Treasure Thought and Personal Application

Thanks be to God for the light He sheds on our pathway. Like a flashlight radiating beams into the darkened tunnel of Hezekiah, God provides His Spirit for our enlightenment. God has provided the gift of illumination of His Spirit that enables us to walk through the dark tunnels of life with confidence. This requires us to put aside the “pitch darkness” of our own wisdom. Allow God’s Spirit to shed light on your life.