

PRAY THE LAND · FROM THE GOLAN

# Walking into the Pages

*A Companion to the Land of the Bible*

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Sixty-five holy sites, from Dan to Beersheba  
and down to the Red Sea.  
The full scripture, the geography, the living people,  
one Hebrew word, one question, and a prayer  
for every place your feet will stand.

Amitai (Tai) Elon

Licensed Tour Guide · Havat HaChaim · Natur · Golan Heights, Israel

*"I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem;  
they shall never be silent, day nor night."*

ISAIAH 62:6

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

# To the Reader

*a letter from the Golan*

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Friend,

There is a sentence I say at the start of every tour, on the first morning, before the bus moves.

Now that you are here in the Holy Land, it is as if you are opening the Bible and walking into its pages. The Bible becomes three-dimensional.

This book is that sentence, written down. Sixty-five places, from the springs of Dan in the north to the coral water of the Red Sea in the south. Every page works the same way, because every visit works the same way. First we open our Bibles and read the whole story out loud, standing where it happened, so the text is the guide and I am only the footnote. Then we look at the map and ask why here, of all places, because in this land geography is never an accident. Then we meet the people of the story as living people. Then we find the one thing your own eyes can verify, the detail that makes the page three-dimensional. Then one Hebrew word, because this land speaks Hebrew and every place name is hiding a sermon. Then one question for your pocket. And then we pray, because every place we go, we pray. That is not a habit. That is the reason we came.

You can walk this book with your feet, in the land, page by page and site by site. You can also walk it from your armchair, an ocean away, one page a day, sixty-five days through the whole land, and pray each page as you go. The watchmen of Pray the Land have been doing exactly that for a long time now, from nine nations, and this book belongs to them as much as to me.

Scripture here is quoted from the World English Bible, which is free for every reader in every country. Read aloud from whatever Bible your hands love best. The stories do not mind which translation carries them.

One more thing. This book is given, not sold. If it feeds you, share it whole with someone who prays, and if you want to walk these pages with me in person, with your church or your family, the gate of the farm is open.

B'ahava, from the Golan,

Tai

Amitai (Tai) Elon

Havat HaChaim · Natur · Golan Heights, Israel

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# Walking into the Pages

*The Site Library · from Dan to Beersheba, and down to the Red Sea*

*"Now that you are here in the Holy Land,  
it is as if you are opening the Bible and walking into its pages.  
The Bible becomes three-dimensional."*

## HOW EVERY TAI ELON TOUR BEGINS

### THE METHOD ON EVERY PAGE

Every site opens with the full passage, printed whole with verse numbers, so the group reads it aloud together from their own Bibles, standing in the place it happened. Then the geography: why God's story happened HERE, with a map of the land marking where you stand. Then the characters as living people. The 3D moment your own eyes can verify. One Hebrew word that unlocks the place. One question to carry. And because every visit ends the way every letter ends, a prayer that gathers the essence of the site, prayed together before we walk on. Scripture quoted from the World English Bible; read aloud from whichever translation your group carries.

### THE WHOLE LAND, NORTH TO SOUTH · BOLD PAGES ARE READY

#### I · THE FAR NORTH & GOLAN · COMPLETE

**Tel Dan · Banias · Caesarea Philippi · Mount Hermon  
lookout · Tel Hazor · Bethsaida · Gamla · Kursi**

#### II · AROUND THE SEA OF GALILEE · COMPLETE

**Chorazin · Capernaum · Tabgha · Mount of Beatitudes ·  
the Sea itself (the boat) · Magdala · Tiberias · The Jordan  
River**

#### III · LOWER GALILEE & THE VALLEYS · COMPLETE

**Cana · Nazareth & Mount Precipice · Mount Tabor ·  
Mount Carmel (Muhra) · Nain · Megiddo · Mount  
Gilboa & Ein Harod · Beit She'an**

#### IV · THE COAST · COMPLETE

**Acco · Caesarea Maritima · Jaffa · Ashkelon & Ashdod**

#### V · SAMARIA, HEART OF THE BIBLE · COMPLETE

**Samaria-Sebaste · Shechem & Jacob's Well · Mount  
Gerizim & Mount Ebal · Shiloh · Bethel · Ai**

#### VI · THE APPROACHES & THE MOUNT OF OLIVES · COMPLETE

**Nebi Samuel · Emmaus · Ein Karem · Mount of Olives ·  
Bethphage & Bethany · Gethsemane**

#### VII · WITHIN THE WALLS · COMPLETE

**City of David · Temple Mount · Moriah · The Eastern Gate  
· The Western Wall · Jerusalem through 3,000 Years ·  
Hezekiah's Tunnel & Pool of Siloam · Pool of Bethesda ·  
The Southern Steps · Pentecost · Via Dolorosa · Calvary ·  
Golgotha · The Empty Tomb · Mount Zion & the Upper  
Room · The Old City Today · Jerusalem United · 1967**

#### VIII · JUDEA & THE DESERT · COMPLETE

**Bethlehem · Herodion · Hebron · Jericho · Qumran · The  
Dead Sea · Ein Gedi · Masada**

#### IX · THE SOUTH · COMPLETE

**Beersheba · Tel Arad · Timna · Eilat & the Red Sea**

# Tel Dan

*the northern gate of the land · the springs where the Jordan is born*

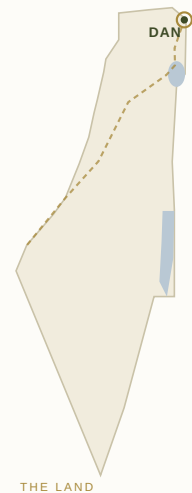
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>26</sup> Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom will return to David's house. <sup>27</sup> If this people goes up to offer sacrifices in Yahweh's house at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, even to Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me, and return to Rehoboam king of Judah." <sup>28</sup> So the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold; and he said to them, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Look and behold your gods, Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" <sup>29</sup> He set the one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. <sup>30</sup> This thing became a sin; for the people went even as far as Dan to worship before the one there.

1 KINGS 12:26–30 · ALSO: GENESIS 14:14 · JUDGES 18

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

"From Dan to Beersheba." This is where the Bible's map of Israel begins, the northernmost city of the land. The largest of the Jordan's three sources bursts out of the ground here, a whole river born in one forest. Dan sits on the great road to Damascus and Mesopotamia, the northern gate of the country: whoever came from the empires of the north entered the story here. Abraham chased the four kings "as far as Dan" to rescue Lot, and here archaeologists found a mud-brick city gate from the very age of Abraham.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Jeroboam.** A gifted young official who rebelled, won ten tribes, and then let fear do his theology. Afraid of losing his people to Jerusalem, he built them a nearer, easier god. The high place he built is still here, and you can stand on it. **Abraham.** Long before kings, the father of the nation passed this gate with 318 men, chasing an empire to bring back one nephew. Family was worth the whole journey north.

## THE 3D MOMENT

You stand on the actual high place, the platform of Jeroboam's calf, with a metal frame today marking where the altar stood. Then you walk through the Canaanite mud-brick gate that was already old when the Israelites arrived. And all around you, the river roars up out of the earth. Living water and man-made worship, side by side. Your eyes can compare them.

## THE HEBREW WORD

דָּן · **Dan**, "he judged." Named for the tribe, from Rachel's cry "God has judged me." At the north gate of the land, the name itself reminds you: every road into Israel passes under judgment and under promise at once.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Jeroboam built a nearer, easier worship because he was afraid. Where in your life have you chosen the convenient altar over the true one?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, we stand at the northern gate of Your land, where the river is born out of the rock. Keep us from the nearer, easier altars. You alone brought us up. You alone we worship. Let living water, and not convenience, decide where we bow. Amen.*

# Banias · Caesarea Philippi

at the foot of Mount Hermon, where a river bursts from the rock

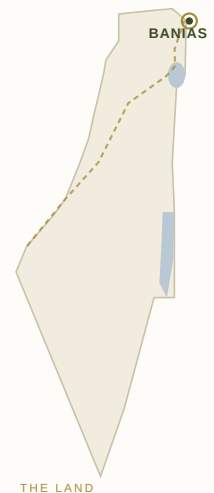
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" <sup>14</sup> They said, "Some say John the Baptizer, some, Elijah, and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." <sup>15</sup> He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup> Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven." <sup>20</sup> Then he commanded the disciples that they should tell no one that he was Jesus the Christ.

MATTHEW 16:13–20

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

This is the farthest north Jesus ever took the Twelve. The very edge of the land, where the international road leaves Israel for Damascus and the pagan world begins. Snowmelt from Hermon feeds the spring that pours from the cliff and becomes the Jordan. He walked them twenty-five miles from the lake, out of Jewish Galilee, to the loudest pagan shrine in the region, the cave of Pan, called the Gates of Hades, and asked His question there, at the border, in front of the competition.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Peter.** Shimon, a married fisherman from Bethsaida, a few hours' walk from here. Fast hands, faster mouth, the one who leaps before he looks. Here his mouth finally lands on the truth, and Jesus renames him Kefa, the rock. **Jesus.** Around thirty, at the northern edge of His whole earthly journey. From this point He turns and sets His face toward Jerusalem and the cross. Banias is the hinge of the Gospel: the truth is spoken, and the road turns south.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Stand facing the cliff. The niches carved for idols are still in the rock, empty. The cave of Pan is still there, silent. The spring still pours out and becomes the Jordan. Every god worshiped here is gone, and the One confessed here by one fisherman is worshiped this morning on every continent. Your eyes are looking at the scoreboard.

## THE HEBREW WORD

צור · **Tsur**, rock. The Psalms call God "my Tsur." Jesus stands in front of a literal cliff of false gods and builds His community on a different kind of rock: a person who says the truth out loud.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

Everyone repeats what the crowds say. What do you say, and would you say it here, in front of the competition?

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

Lord, we stand together at the gates. You said the gates shall not prevail. So we are not afraid of gates. Guard this land. Guard these families. Guard Your church. Amen.

# Mount Hermon Lookout

*the white shoulder of the land, where the dew is born*

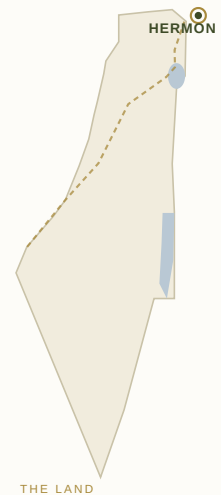
OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>1</sup> See how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to live together in unity! <sup>2</sup> It is like the precious oil on the head, that ran down on the beard, even Aaron's beard; that came down on the edge of his robes; <sup>3</sup> like the dew of Hermon, that comes down on the hills of Zion: for there Yahweh gives the blessing, even life forever more.

PSALM 133 · A SONG OF ASCENTS, OF DAVID

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Hermon is the roof of the land, a snow-covered massif rising over 2,800 meters where three countries meet today. Its melting snow and heavy night dew feed the springs of Dan and Banias, and those springs become the Jordan, and the Jordan becomes the life of the whole country. When the psalm says the dew of Hermon comes down on the hills of Zion, it is drawing a water line from this white mountain all the way to Jerusalem. Blessing in this land flows downhill, from here. An old tradition also looks at Hermon, the great "high mountain" of the north, as a candidate for the Mount of Transfiguration.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**David.** A shepherd who slept under open skies and knew what dew does: it arrives silently, at night, taking nothing, watering everything. When he needed a picture of brothers dwelling in unity, he did not choose a storm or a river. He chose the quietest water there is. **The pilgrim brothers.** Psalm 133 is a Song of Ascents, sung by families walking up to Jerusalem together, three festivals a year, from every corner of the land.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Look at the snow. You are standing in the Middle East, a land of desert and dust, and there is snow on the horizon for much of the year. Half the country can see this white shoulder on a clear day. The people below have always lifted their eyes to it and understood: the water that keeps us alive starts up there, where no one farms and no one irrigates. Grace has an address, and it is uphill.

## THE HEBREW WORD

טל · **Tal**, dew. Not rain that comes in seasons, but the faithfulness that arrives every single night without being asked. The rabbis note that in the land's prayers, rain is requested but dew is never stopped. Some mercies never take a day off.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*The psalm says blessing flows where brothers dwell in unity. Which brother, of blood or of faith, is waiting for you to close the distance?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You send the dew of Hermon all the way down to Zion. Send it down on us. Make us brothers who dwell together in unity, in our families, in our churches, in this land. And let the blessing You command there rest on every home represented on this bus. Amen.*

# Tel Hazor

*the head of all those kingdoms, on the highway to Damascus*

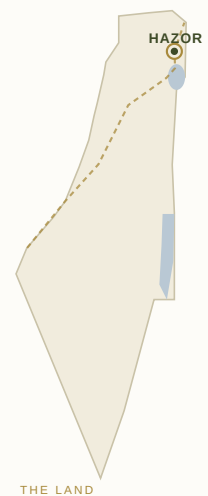
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>10</sup> Joshua turned back at that time, and took Hazor, and struck its king with the sword: for Hazor used to be the head of all those kingdoms. <sup>11</sup> They struck all the souls who were in it with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them. There was no one left who breathed. He burned Hazor with fire. <sup>12</sup> Joshua captured all the cities of those kings, with their kings, and he struck them with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed them; as Moses the servant of Yahweh commanded. <sup>13</sup> But as for the cities that stood on their mounds, Israel burned none of them, except Hazor only. Joshua burned that.

JOSHUA 11:10-13 · ALSO: JUDGES 4 · 1 KINGS 9:15

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Hazor is the largest biblical site in Israel, twenty times the size of ancient Jerusalem in its day. Why here? Because the Via Maris climbs from the Sea of Galilee toward Damascus through this exact corridor, and Hazor sat on it like a toll gate for the entire north. Scripture calls it "the head of all those kingdoms." Whoever ruled Hazor ruled the road, and whoever ruled the road taxed the world. Centuries after Joshua, Solomon rebuilt it as one of his three royal fortress cities, with Megiddo and Gezer, all three named in a single verse.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Jabin, king of Hazor.** The emperor of the north who assembled a coalition "as numerous as the sand on the seashore" against Israel, with horses and chariots, the superweapons of the age, and lost. A later Jabin of Hazor rises again in Judges 4 and falls to Deborah and Barak. The head of kingdoms kept growing back, until it did not. **Joshua.** The old general at the peak of his northern campaign. Of all the cities on their mounds, he burned Hazor alone. The head had to fall so the body would follow.

## THE 3D MOMENT

The excavations found the burn layer. A black stripe of ash from the 13th century BC runs through the tel, with scorched basalt and shattered Canaanite palace walls. You can look at the destruction the book of Joshua describes. And nearby stands a six-chambered gate whose floor plan matches Megiddo and Gezer almost stone for stone, three cities, one royal architect, exactly as 1 Kings 9:15 says. Archaeology shaking hands with the verse.

## THE HEBREW WORD

רֹשׁ · **Rosh**, head. Hazor was "rosh of all those kingdoms." The land keeps teaching the same lesson: every rosh that is not God gets buried in its own tel, layer upon layer, and the grass grows over it.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Joshua began the conquest of the north by toppling the head kingdom first. What is the head kingdom in your life, the one stronghold that, if it fell, would take the rest of the resistance with it?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You brought down the head of all those kingdoms. Bring down the head kingdom in us. Every stronghold that taxes our lives and calls itself king. You are our only Rosh. Reign alone. Amen.*

# Bethsaida

*hometown of fishermen, village of the second touch*

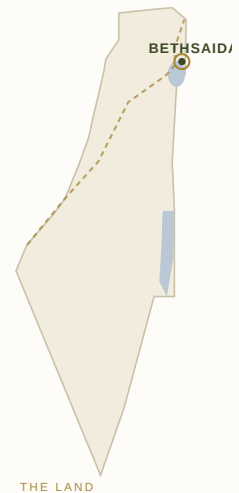
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>22</sup> He came to Bethsaida. They brought a blind man to him, and begged him to touch him. <sup>23</sup> He took hold of the blind man by the hand, and brought him out of the village. When he had spat on his eyes, and laid his hands on him, he asked him if he saw anything. <sup>24</sup> He looked up, and said, "I see men; for I see them like trees walking." <sup>25</sup> Then again he laid his hands on his eyes. He looked intently, and was restored, and saw everyone clearly. <sup>26</sup> He sent him away to his house, saying, "Don't enter into the village, nor tell anyone in the village."

MARK 8:22-26 · ALSO: JOHN 1:44 · LUKE 9:10

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Bethsaida, "house of the fisherman," stood where the Jordan pours into the top of the Sea of Galilee. This was the hometown of Peter, Andrew and Philip, the nursery of apostles: three of the twelve grew up in this one fishing village. It sat at the seam between the lake's Jewish west and the Gentile east, in Philip's territory, just across the river border from Capernaum. The ruins today stand back from the shoreline, because the water itself has moved over the centuries. Even the geography of this place refuses to stay finished.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**The blind man.** The only healing in all four Gospels that happens in two stages. After the first touch he sees shapes, men like trees walking. Jesus does not call it failure. He comes back around and touches him again, and then he sees everything clearly. **Philip.** The Bethsaida boy whose whole ministry became one sentence: come and see. When Greeks wanted to meet Jesus, they went to Philip, the man from the border town who spoke both worlds.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Stand in the basalt ruins and look for the water. It is not where it used to be. A fishing village that no longer touches the sea, and yet the anchors, hooks and net weights found here are in the museums. The place itself is a partway story, a between place, and that is exactly where the two-stage healing happened. The geography and the miracle preach the same sermon.

## THE HEBREW WORD

שׁוּב · **Shuv**, again, to return, to come back around. The root that gives us teshuva, the turning of the whole heart back to God. Jesus did shuv to the blind man. He came back around. He always comes back around.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Where in your life did the healing come only partway, and are you willing to wait for the second touch instead of calling the first one a failure?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, we thank You for the first touch. For the light that already broke into the dark. And we ask You, plainly, for the second. Come back around to every place in us that healed only partway, in our families, in this land. Lay Your hand on our eyes again. Until we see everything clearly. Amen.*

# Gamla

*the camel-hump city of the Golan, where the vultures ride the wind*

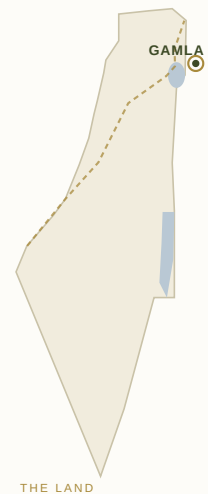
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>33</sup> But they, when they heard this, were cut to the heart, and were determined to kill them. <sup>34</sup> But one stood up in the council, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, honored by all the people, and commanded to put the apostles out for a little while. <sup>35</sup> He said to them, "You men of Israel, be careful concerning these men, what you are about to do. <sup>37</sup> Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the enrollment, and drew away some people after him. He also perished, and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered abroad. <sup>38</sup> Now I tell you, withdraw from these men, and leave them alone. For if this counsel or this work is of men, it will be overthrown. <sup>39</sup> But if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow it, and you would be found even to be fighting against God!"

ACTS 5:33–39 (ABRIDGED: V. 36 OMITTED FOR READING)

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Gamla rides a ridge shaped like a camel's hump in the heart of the Golan, the Jewish capital of this region in the days of the Second Temple. This is the home country of Judas of Galilee, the rebel Gamaliel names in his speech, the man whose revolt against the Roman census lit a fire that never fully went out. Two generations later that fire consumed Gamla itself: the city fell to Rome in the year 67, thousands died on these slopes, and it was never rebuilt. The Masada of the north, except this one is in the Bible's backyard, in your Golan.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Gamaliel.** The most respected teacher of his generation, Paul's own rabbi. In a room boiling with rage he stands up and offers the calmest test in scripture: if it is from men it will fall, if it is from God you cannot stop it. **Judas of Galilee.** The proof of the first half of the test. A man of this region, burning with zeal, who chose the sword. His movement scattered, his home city fell, his name survives as a warning inside another man's wisdom.

## THE 3D MOMENT

One of the oldest synagogues ever discovered stands at the entrance of the city, a synagogue where Golan Jews prayed while the Temple in Jerusalem still stood. And above the cliffs, the griffon vultures circle on the wind, one of the largest colonies in the country. Stones that outlived an empire below, wings that outlived everything above. Gamaliel's test, written on a hillside.

## THE HEBREW WORD

גַּמְלָה · **Gamal**, camel. The city is named for the shape of its own hill. In this land even the names are honest: the place simply tells you what it is, and then history tells you what it became.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Gamaliel's test cuts both ways. Which of your battles is truly God's work that cannot be stopped, and which is only yours, defended by zeal alone?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, if a work is from men, let it fall away from us. And if it is from You, let nothing overthrow it. Search everything we are building, on our farms, in our families, on this wall of prayer. Keep us from fighting against You while calling it faith. We would rather stand with You in a small thing than against You in a great one. Amen.*

# Kursi

*the other side of the sea, where one man became the first missionary*

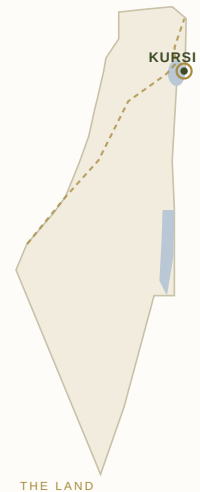
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>1</sup> They came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. <sup>2</sup> When he had come out of the boat, immediately a man with an unclean spirit met him out of the tombs. <sup>3</sup> He lived in the tombs. Nobody could bind him any more, not even with chains. <sup>5</sup> Always, night and day, in the tombs and in the mountains, he was crying out, and cutting himself with stones. <sup>6</sup> When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and bowed down to him. <sup>9</sup> He asked him, "What is your name?" He said to him, "My name is Legion, for we are many." <sup>13</sup> At once Jesus gave them permission. The unclean spirits came out and entered into the pigs. The herd of about two thousand rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and they were drowned in the sea. <sup>15</sup> They came to Jesus, and saw him who had been possessed by demons sitting, clothed, and in his right mind, even him who had the legion; and they were afraid. <sup>18</sup> As he was entering into the boat, he who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. <sup>19</sup> He didn't allow him, but said to him, "Go to your house, to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how he had mercy on you." <sup>20</sup> He went his way, and began to proclaim in Decapolis how Jesus had done great things for him, and everyone marveled.

MARK 5:1–20 (ABRIDGED: VV. 4, 7–8, 10–12, 14, 16–17 OMITTED FOR READING)

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Kursi is "the other side of the sea," the eastern shore, Gentile country, the pagan cities of the Decapolis. Jews of Galilee did not sail here, and this is the only recorded time Jesus did. He crossed a storm at night for this coast, met one man nobody could chain, healed him, and sailed back. And when the healed man begged to come along, Jesus gave him the strangest assignment in the Gospels: stay. Go home and tell. The first missionary to the Gentile world was not Peter and not Paul. It was a man from the Golan side of the lake with a story and no training. Byzantine believers later built the largest monastery in the Holy Land here, just to remember it.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**The man among the tombs.** No name, no family left, living naked among the dead, the strongest and loneliest man on the lake. One conversation later he is sitting, clothed, and in his right mind. The town knew him as its terror; the Decapolis came to know him as its preacher. **The townspeople.** They saw the miracle, counted the pigs, and asked Jesus to leave. Sometimes the frightening thing is not the demoniac. It is the healing, and what it might cost us.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Look at the shoreline of the eastern coast. It runs flat, beach after beach, except one place: here, where the slope drops steeply toward the water. The text says the herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea. There is exactly one steep bank on this entire shore, and you are standing on it. The page and the ground agree in front of your eyes.

## THE HEBREW WORD

שָׁלֵם · **Shalem**, whole. The root of shalom. The man had been many, "for we are many," and Jesus made him one again. Sitting, clothed, in his right mind. Wholeness is when all the scattered pieces of a person come home.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*The man begged to sail away with Jesus and was sent home instead. Your Decapolis is the place where your story carries the most weight. Who lives there, and have you told them?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You crossed a stormy sea for one broken man. Heal what no chains can hold in our lives. And make every one of us a messenger. Amen.*

# Chorazin

*the city of the unrecorded miracles*

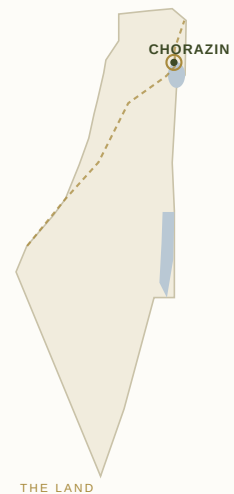
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>20</sup> Then he began to denounce the cities in which most of his mighty works had been done, because they didn't repent. <sup>21</sup> "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>22</sup> But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. <sup>23</sup> You, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, you will go down to Hades. For if the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done in you, it would have remained until today. <sup>24</sup> But I tell you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, on the day of judgment, than for you."

MATTHEW 11:20–24

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Chorazin sits on the basalt heights just above Capernaum, the third corner of what pilgrims call the evangelical triangle: Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum, the little triangle of towns where the text says MOST of His mighty works were done. Stop and hear that. The Gospels record about three dozen miracles. This verse says most of them happened here, in these three towns, and were never written down. You are standing in a city full of miracles that have no chapter and no verse. Only the woe over them was recorded.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Jesus in lament.** The woe here is not the shout of an angry judge. It is the oy of a grieving heart, the sound a man makes at a funeral. He had healed in these streets, taught in this synagogue, and the town nodded politely and went back to business. The opposite of faith in Chorazin was not hatred. It was politeness. **The people of Chorazin.** They saw more than almost anyone in history saw, and stayed exactly the same. They are the warning that seeing is not the same as turning.

## THE 3D MOMENT

The synagogue here held a stone chair, carved from basalt, and archaeologists found it: the Seat of Moses, the very kind of seat Jesus mentions in Matthew 23. It sits in the ruins (the original is in the Israel Museum). You can look at the seat of the teachers in the town that heard the greatest Teacher and did not move.

## THE HEBREW WORD

אֵי · **Oy**, woe. Not a curse word but a grief word, the sound of mourning. When Jesus says oy over a town, He is not slamming a door. He is weeping at one that would not open.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Most of His mighty works, unrecorded and unrepented. What has God already done in your life that you have seen, nodded at politely, and left unanswered?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, keep us from the politeness of Chorazin. We have seen Your works in our own lives, more than were ever written down. Let none of them be wasted on us. Turn us while the light is still on our streets. Amen.*

# Capernaum

*Kfar Nachum, His own city, on the Via Maris*

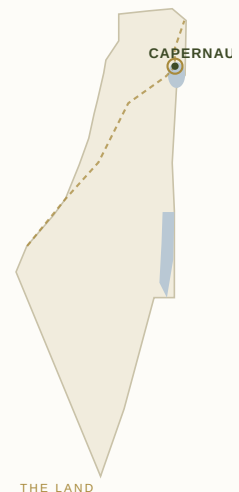
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>1</sup> When he entered again into Capernaum after some days, it was heard that he was in the house. <sup>2</sup> Immediately many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even around the door; and he spoke the word to them. <sup>3</sup> Four people came, carrying a paralytic to him. <sup>4</sup> When they could not come near to him for the crowd, they removed the roof where he was. When they had broken it up, they let down the mat that the paralytic was lying on. <sup>5</sup> Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you." <sup>6-7</sup> But there were some of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak blasphemies like that? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" <sup>8-9</sup> Immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you reason these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to tell the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven;' or to say, 'Arise, and take up your bed, and walk?'" <sup>10-11</sup> But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (he said to the paralytic) "I tell you, arise, take up your mat, and go to your house." <sup>12</sup> He arose, and immediately took up the mat, and went out in front of them all; so that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

MARK 2:1-12 · ALSO: MATTHEW 4:12-17 · MATTHEW 9:9

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Capernaum sits on the **Via Maris**, the Way of the Sea, the international highway connecting Egypt to Mesopotamia, the two superpowers of the ancient world. This is why Matthew had a tax booth here: it was a border-and-customs town between the territories of Herod Antipas and Philip. When Jesus "left Nazareth and came and lived in Capernaum, which is by the sea" (Matthew 4:13), He was not retiring to a quiet village. He planted the gospel on the busiest road on earth, so that everything said and done here traveled out with the caravans, exactly as Isaiah promised: by the way of the sea, the people sitting in darkness saw a great light.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Peter.** His actual house is here, under the modern church. His mother-in-law was healed in it: the loud fisherman had a wife, a family, a mortgage of worries, and he opened that ordinary home until it became headquarters. **The four friends.** Never named. Working men with a stretcher and a conviction, every person who ever carried somebody to Jesus who could not walk there alone.

## THE 3D MOMENT

You stand in the synagogue built directly on the black basalt floor of the one where He taught. Your feet stand one meter above stones His feet knew. Peter's house is thirty steps away, and the highway of the ancient world ran right past the front door. Village and superhighway in one glance: that is the strategy of God.

## THE HEBREW WORD

נְחָמָה · **Nechama**, comfort. Kfar Nachum, the Village of Comfort. Before He healed a single person here, the town's own name was already a promise.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Who carried you to the roof? And whose stretcher are you holding now?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, we come to You carrying each other. Whoever cannot carry their own weight today, we lower them to You right now, through the roof if we must. See our faith. Heal our friend. Amen.*

# Mount of Beatitudes

*the hillside above the Sea of Galilee*

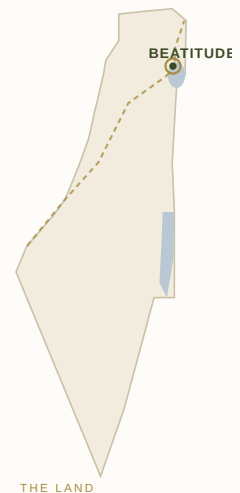
OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>1</sup> Seeing the multitudes, he went up onto the mountain. When he had sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> He opened his mouth and taught them, saying, <sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. <sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. <sup>5</sup> Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. <sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. <sup>8</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. <sup>9</sup> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God. <sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. <sup>11</sup> Blessed are you when people reproach you, persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, for my sake. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

MATTHEW 5:1-12

THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

The hill rises directly above the northwest corner of the lake, directly above the Via Maris. Below the slope, the traffic of empires rolled between Egypt and Mesopotamia; on the slope, a rabbi sat down and announced the constitution of a different kingdom. The geography is the sermon's frame: the kingdoms of the world pass on the road below, and the Kingdom of Heaven is proclaimed on the grass above them, within earshot.



THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**The crowd.** Galilean farmers and fishermen under Roman occupation, taxed to the bone, many sick, some desperate enough to walk for days. When He said "blessed are the poor," He was describing the audience. **Jesus the rabbi.** He sat down to teach, the posture of authority. A teacher in His early thirties from the village up the hill, redefining the word "blessed" for the rest of human history.

THE 3D MOMENT

The hillside is a natural amphitheater. Sound rolls down the slope toward the water; a voice at the top can be heard far below, a fact you can test with your own group. The land itself was the sound system. Creation cooperated with the sermon.

THE HEBREW WORD

אַשְׁרֵי · **Ashrei**, blessed, happy, on the right road. The word that opens the book of Psalms opens the sermon too. Not a feeling. A direction. Ashrei is the happiness of a person walking the right way, even uphill.

ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Which of the nine blessings describes your life right now, and can you hear it as a blessing?*

WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You blessed the mourners before You blessed anyone else. So we bring You ours. Every empty chair. Every heavy heart. Comfort them the way only You can. Amen.*

# Tabgha

*the seven springs, where little became enough*

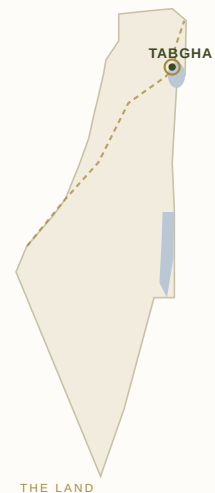
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>5</sup> Jesus therefore lifting up his eyes, and seeing that a great multitude was coming to him, said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?" <sup>6</sup> This he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. <sup>7</sup> Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that everyone of them may receive a little." <sup>8</sup> One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, <sup>9</sup> "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these among so many?" <sup>10</sup> Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in that place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. <sup>11</sup> Jesus took the loaves; and having given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to those who were sitting down; likewise also of the fish as much as they desired. <sup>12</sup> When they were filled, he said to his disciples, "Gather up the broken pieces which are left over, that nothing be lost." <sup>13</sup> So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with broken pieces from the five barley loaves, which were left over by those who had eaten.

JOHN 6:5–13

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Tabgha is Greek Heptapegon worn down by centuries of tongues: the Seven Springs. Warm mineral water rises here and slides into the lake, and the warmth draws the fish, which is why the fishermen of Capernaum worked these shores and why hungry crowds could find Jesus here, on the grassy edge between the springs and the water. A crossroads of paths along the northwest shore, close enough for a boy to arrive carrying his lunch. The mathematics of heaven happened at a fishing spot.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Philip.** The local boy from Bethsaida, tested with a question about bread. He answers with arithmetic: two hundred denarii would not be enough. Philip calculates. Jesus multiplies. **Andrew.** The bringer. He finds a boy with five loaves and brings him forward while admitting it makes no sense. **The boy.** Unnamed forever, the child whose lunch fed five thousand because he handed it over whole.

## THE 3D MOMENT

In the Church of the Multiplication, look at the famous mosaic by the altar: the basket holds only FOUR loaves. The fifth is not missing. The fifth is on the altar, the Byzantine artists' way of saying the miracle is still being distributed. Fifteen centuries later the sermon in the floor still preaches.

## THE HEBREW WORD

לֶחֶם · **Lechem**, bread. The most ordinary word in the language, and the one He chose to multiply. He does not usually make something from nothing. He makes enough from what is handed to Him.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Philip calculated and Andrew brought what there was. Which one are you today, and what five loaves are still in your hands?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You asked for the little that was there, and it fed everyone. Here is our little. Our five loaves, our two fish, our small strength. Take it, give thanks over it, and make it enough. And let nothing be lost. Amen.*

# The Sea of Galilee

*on the water, in the boat, where the wind obeys*

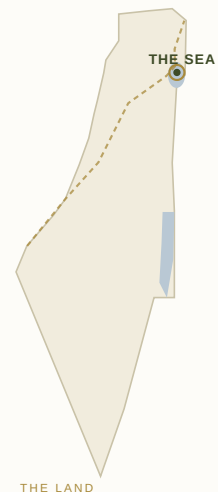
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>35</sup> On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let's go over to the other side." <sup>36</sup> Leaving the multitude, they took him with them, even as he was, in the boat. Other small boats were also with him. <sup>37</sup> A big wind storm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so much that the boat was already filled. <sup>38</sup> He himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion, and they woke him up, and told him, "Teacher, don't you care that we are dying?" <sup>39</sup> He awoke, and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" The wind ceased, and there was a great calm. <sup>40</sup> He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? How is it that you have no faith?" <sup>41</sup> They were greatly afraid, and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

MARK 4:35-41

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

The lake lies more than two hundred meters below sea level, a warm bowl of water ringed by cold heights, the Golan on one side and the cliffs of Arbel on the other. Cool air pours down those slopes through the gorges like water through funnels, and the storms arrive in minutes, out of nowhere, exactly as the text describes. The geography does not just allow the story. The geography wrote the weather report in the story. And this small harp of water carried more of the Gospel than any sea on earth.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**The fishermen.** Peter, Andrew, James and John had worked this water since boyhood. When professionals who know a lake say we are dying, the storm is real. Their fear is expert testimony. **Jesus asleep on the cushion.** The only detail of its kind in the Gospels: He was tired enough to sleep through a storm and untroubled enough to do it. Then He speaks to weather the way a man speaks to a dog, and it lies down.

## THE 3D MOMENT

In the museum at Kibbutz Ginosar rests a fishing boat pulled from the mud in 1986, carbon-dated to the first century, the very kind of boat this story happened in, found only because a drought lowered the water. Twenty-seven feet of wood that heard storms like this one. And out on the water, watch the Arbel gorges to the west. That is the door the wind comes through.

## THE HEBREW WORD

כִּנּוֹר · **Kinnor**, harp. The Kinneret is named for its shape, a harp of water. An instrument, not just a sea. On that night the disciples learned who is allowed to play it.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*The storm was real and the fear was professional. What storm are you rowing against right now, and have you woken Him about it, or are you still bailing water alone?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You speak to storms and they lie down. Speak to ours. The ones over this land, and the ones inside our own boats.  
Peace. Be still. And teach us to stop bailing alone while You are with us. Amen.*

# Magdala

*the tower town, home of the woman who saw Him first*

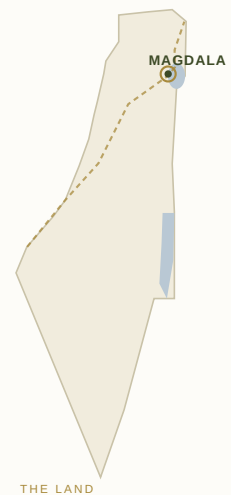
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>1</sup>Soon afterwards, he went about through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of God's Kingdom. With him were the twelve, <sup>2</sup>and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out; <sup>3</sup>and Joanna, the wife of Chuzas, Herod's steward; Susanna; and many others; who served them from their possessions.

LUKE 8:1-3 · ALSO: JOHN 20:11-18

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Magdala was the fish factory of the lake. Its Greek name, Taricheae, means "the place of salted fish": here the catch of the Kinneret was salted, packed and exported across the Roman world. A working town of boats, warehouses and money on the shore road between Tiberias and Capernaum. Out of this smell of salt and trade came the woman whose name carries the town forever, and whose possessions, Luke notes plainly, helped pay for the ministry of Jesus. The Gospel had funders, and one of them was a fish-town businesswoman.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Mary of Magdala.** Seven demons gone, and a life handed over whole. She funded the road, stood at the cross when most of the men had run, and on the third morning she was the first human being in history to see the risen Messiah. He said one word to her, her own name, and she recognized Him. The first preacher of the resurrection was a delivered woman from a fish town. **Joanna and Susanna.** Her partners in the quiet economy of the Kingdom, serving from their possessions.

## THE 3D MOMENT

In 2009, builders digging foundations here struck a first-century synagogue, one of the only ones in the country from the very years of the ministry, with the carved Magdala Stone at its center. Matthew says He taught in ALL the synagogues of Galilee. Your eyes are looking at one He almost certainly stood in, buried under mud for two thousand years and opened again in our own days.

## THE HEBREW WORD

מִגְדָּל · **Migdal**, tower. The town is named for a tower, and so is its daughter: Mary the Tower. God takes the person the town whispered about and builds the tallest testimony in the Gospels out of her.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*He called her by name and she recognized Him. When did you last hear your own name in His voice, and what did it turn you into?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You drove seven darknesses out of one woman and made her the first witness of the morning. Call us by name like that. Take what was broken in us and build a tower. And let us serve You from what we have, like the women who paid for the road. Amen.*

# Tiberias

*the emperor's city that ended up guarding the Word*

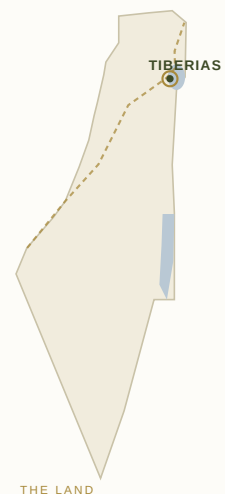
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>22</sup> On the next day, the multitude that stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, except the one in which his disciples had embarked, and that Jesus hadn't entered with his disciples into the boat, but his disciples had gone away alone. <sup>23</sup> However boats from Tiberias came near to the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks. <sup>24</sup> When the multitude therefore saw that Jesus wasn't there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats, and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. <sup>25</sup> When they found him on the other side of the sea, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" <sup>26</sup> Jesus answered them, "Most certainly I tell you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves, and were filled. <sup>27</sup> Don't work for the food which perishes, but for the food which remains to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For God the Father has sealed him."

JOHN 6:22-27

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Herod Antipas built this city new and named it for his patron, the emperor Tiberius: a Roman resort with a Roman name, planted partly over old graves, so that many observant Jews at first refused to set foot in it. The Gospels never record Jesus entering it, only boats from Tiberias circling the lake looking for Him. And then history turned the tables. After Jerusalem fell, the sages moved north, and this pagan-named city became one of the four holy cities of Judaism, where the Mishnah was sealed nearby, and where the Masoretes of Tiberias spent centuries fixing every letter and vowel of the Hebrew Bible.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Herod Antipas.** The fox. Builder of this city, killer of John the Baptist, the ruler who wanted to see a miracle and got silence at the trial. He named his capital for Rome and lost everything, exiled by Rome itself. **The crowd in the boats.** They chased Jesus around a lake for breakfast, and He loved them enough to say it to their faces: you seek the loaves, not the sign. Then He offered them the food that does not perish.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Open any Hebrew Bible, anywhere on earth, and look at the little dots and lines under the letters, the vowel points. That system was perfected here, by the Masoretes of Tiberias, families who counted every letter of scripture for generations so nothing would be lost. The emperor's resort became the safe-deposit box of the Word. Every Bible your group is holding has Tiberias hidden inside it.

## THE HEBREW WORD

**מסורה** · **Masorah**, that which is handed down, from masar, to hand over. The craft of passing the Word along unbroken, letter by letter, generation by generation. Tiberias is the city of the handing down.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Jesus separated the loaf-seekers from the sign-seekers with one sentence. Which are you chasing Him for today, and would you still row across the lake if the bread ran out?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, feed us with the food that remains. We thank You for every hidden guardian who handed Your Word down to us unbroken, letter by letter, from this shore. Make us faithful hands in that chain. And keep us seeking You, not only Your bread. Amen.*

# The Jordan River

*the water that runs through the whole story · two pages open in the same river*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · FIRST PAGE · THE STONES

<sup>1</sup> When all the nation had completely crossed over the Jordan, Yahweh spoke to Joshua, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Take twelve men out of the people, a man out of every tribe, <sup>3</sup> and command them, saying, 'Take from out of the middle of the Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones, and carry them over with you, and lay them down in the place where you'll camp tonight.'" <sup>5</sup> Joshua said to them, "Cross before the ark of Yahweh your God into the middle of the Jordan, and each of you pick up a stone and put it on your shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel; <sup>6</sup> that this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask in the future, saying, 'What do you mean by these stones?' <sup>7</sup> then you shall tell them, 'Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of Yahweh's covenant... These stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever.'"

JOSHUA 4:1-7 (ABRIDGED: V. 4 OMITTED FOR READING)

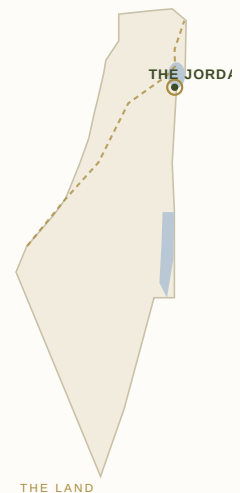
## SECOND PAGE · THE BAPTISM

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> But John would have hindered him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?" <sup>15</sup> But Jesus, answering, said to him, "Allow it now, for this is the fitting way for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed him. <sup>16</sup> Jesus, when he was baptized, went up directly from the water: and behold, the heavens were opened to him. He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming on him. <sup>17</sup> Behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

MATTHEW 3:13-17

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

The Jordan runs down the Great Rift Valley, the deepest scar on the face of the earth, falling from the snows of Hermon to the lowest place on the planet. In a land of mountains and desert, this green line is the border everyone must cross: Israel entering the promise, Elijah and Elisha, Naaman the Syrian, and finally the Messiah stepping into the sinners' line. The geography preaches: the way into the promise always goes through the water, and always goes down.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Joshua.** Moses' aide since his youth, now an old soldier carrying a whole nation's next step. God's word to him here: as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. **John the Baptist.** A priest's son who traded the Temple courts for camel hair and wild honey. He tried to refuse, baptized his own cousin, and heard the voice from heaven.

## THE 3D MOMENT

The river is smaller than everyone expects. That is the point. God's favorite canvas is the unimpressive: a shepherd boy, a fishing village, a narrow green river you can throw a stone across, and it runs through more of the Bible than any water on earth.

## THE HEBREW WORD

יָרַד · **Yarad**, to descend. The Yarden is "the descender." Everyone who enters it goes down. In this land, the way down keeps turning out to be the way through.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*What stone are you lifting out of your own crossing, so your children will have something to ask about?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You commanded us to remember out loud. So today we stack our stones. Let our children find our faith standing*

Walk this land with The riverbank. Amen. [golan.netlify.app](https://golan.netlify.app)

# Cana

where the best wine came last

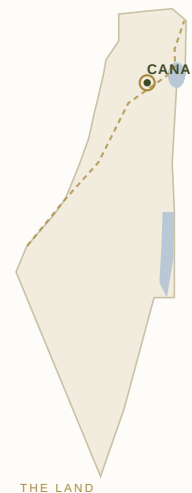
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>1</sup> The third day, there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there. <sup>2</sup> Jesus also was invited, with his disciples, to the marriage. <sup>3</sup> When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no wine." <sup>4</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with you and me? My hour has not yet come." <sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, "Whatever he says to you, do it." <sup>6</sup> Now there were six water pots of stone set there after the Jews' way of purifying, containing two or three metretres apiece. <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to them, "Fill the water pots with water." They filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup> He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the ruler of the feast." So they took it. <sup>9</sup> When the ruler of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and didn't know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the ruler of the feast called the bridegroom, <sup>10</sup> and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when the guests have drunk freely, then that which is worse. You have kept the good wine until now!" <sup>11</sup> This beginning of his signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

JOHN 2:1-11 · ALSO: JOHN 21:2

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Cana sits in the hills just north of Nazareth, on the road a Nazareth family would walk to reach the lake. A village wedding here was a whole town's celebration lasting days, and running out of wine was a family's public shame. The first sign did not happen in the Temple or on a mountain. It happened at a neighborhood party, to save a bridegroom from embarrassment. Heaven's opening move in the Gospel of John was an act of kindness at a family table. Nathanael, the disciple under the fig tree, was a Cana man.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Mary.** She does not ask her son for a miracle. She simply tells him the problem, they have no wine, and then gives the servants the best one-line sermon ever preached: whatever he says to you, do it. **The servants.** The only people at the feast who knew where the wine came from. The ruler tasted, the bridegroom got the credit, and the servants who obeyed held the secret. Obedience always knows things the head table never learns.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Look at the stone jars in the church here. Stone, not clay, because stone does not take on impurity under the purity laws. Six massive vessels for religious washing, each holding a hundred liters and more. Jesus filled the vessels of ritual to the brim and turned them into joy. The furniture of the miracle is the sermon.

## THE HEBREW WORD

שִׂמְחָה · **Simcha**, joy. The joy of a wedding, the joy commanded at the feasts, the joy this land is always fighting to keep. The first sign was not a rescue from danger. It was a rescue of joy. Heaven takes celebrations seriously.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Whatever he says to you, do it. What is the last thing He said to you that you have not yet done, and what jars are standing empty while you wait?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You saved the joy of a wedding before You ever calmed a storm. Save our joy. Fill the empty jars in our homes to the brim. And when we taste Your goodness late in the story, let us say it out loud: You kept the best wine until now.*  
Amen.

# Nazareth & Mount Precipice

*the hometown, and the cliff at the edge of it*

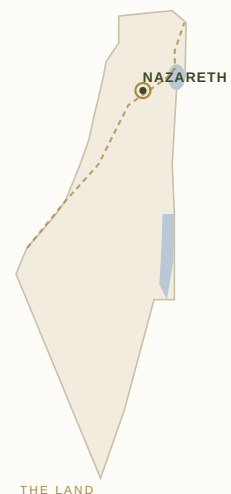
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>16</sup> He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. He entered, as was his custom, into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. <sup>17</sup> The book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. He opened the book, and found the place where it was written, <sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim release to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to deliver those who are crushed, <sup>19</sup> and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." <sup>20</sup> He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fastened on him. <sup>21</sup> He began to tell them, "Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." <sup>22</sup> All testified about him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, and they said, "Isn't this Joseph's son?" <sup>24</sup> He said, "Most certainly I tell you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown." <sup>28</sup> They were all filled with wrath in the synagogue, as they heard these things. <sup>29</sup> They rose up, threw him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill that their city was built on, that they might throw him off the cliff. <sup>30</sup> But he, passing through the middle of them, went his way.

LUKE 4:16-30 (ABRIDGED: VV. 23, 25-27 OMITTED FOR READING)

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Nazareth in His day was a village of a few hundred people, tucked in a bowl of hills off every major road, so small it appears nowhere in the Old Testament. That is the point Nathanael made: can anything good come from Nazareth? But climb to the Precipice at the village's edge and the secret opens. The whole Jezreel Valley lies at your feet: Tabor, Moreh, Gilboa, Carmel, Megiddo. The boy from the no-name village grew up looking out every day over the greatest battlefield map of the Old Testament. Hidden village, open Bible.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Jesus, the hometown boy.** He read Isaiah in the synagogue where He had heard it read since childhood, closed the scroll, and told His neighbors the words were now alive in the room. **The neighbors.** They had watched Him grow up, bought from the carpenter's shop, sat beside Him on Shabbat. In one hour they went from wondering at His words to marching Him toward a cliff. Familiarity is not faith. Sometimes it is faith's hardest enemy.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Stand on the Precipice, the traditional brow of the hill, and turn slowly. Nearly every battle of the Hebrew Bible's heartland is visible in one panorama: Deborah at Tabor, Gideon at Moreh, Saul at Gilboa, Josiah at Megiddo. He saw this view a thousand times before He ever preached a word. The geography of His childhood was a scroll laid open.

## THE HEBREW WORD

נֶצֶר · **Netzer**, branch, shoot. Nazareth carries the word inside its name. Isaiah promised a netzer would grow from the stump of Jesse, a green shoot out of a cut-down tree. The village's own name whispered the prophecy the whole time.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*No prophet is acceptable in his hometown. Where has God been speaking to you through something so familiar that you stopped hearing it?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You stood up in Your own hometown and read freedom out loud. Read it over us. Good news to the poor, healing to the broken hearted, release to the captives. And keep us from the blindness of the familiar, so You never have to pass through our midst and go on Your way. Amen.*

# Mount Tabor

*the mountain apart, where His face changed*

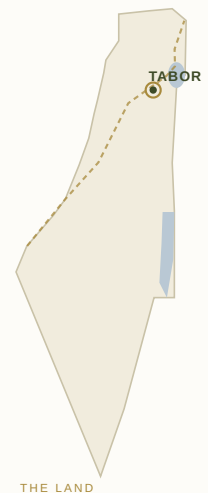
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>28</sup> About eight days after these sayings, he took with him Peter, John, and James, and went up onto the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup> As he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became white and dazzling. <sup>30</sup> Behold, two men were talking with him, who were Moses and Elijah, <sup>31</sup> who appeared in glory, and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup> Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they were fully awake, they saw his glory, and the two men who stood with him. <sup>33</sup> As they were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let's make three tents: one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah," not knowing what he said. <sup>34</sup> While he said these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered into the cloud. <sup>35</sup> A voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him!" <sup>36</sup> When the voice came, Jesus was found alone. They were silent, and told no one in those days any of the things which they had seen.

LUKE 9:28–36 · ALSO: JUDGES 4:6, 14

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Tabor rises alone, a perfect green dome standing apart from every ridge around it, visible from half the Galilee. The Psalms pair it with Hermon as the two mountains that sing. Long before the transfiguration, Deborah sent Barak down this slope with ten thousand men against the iron chariots of Sisera. A mountain of victory in the Old Testament became the mountain of glory in the New. Christian tradition has climbed here since the earliest centuries to remember the night the Law and the Prophets stood talking with the Son.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Moses and Elijah.** The Law and the Prophets in person, both men who once met God on a mountain, both men whose endings were mysteries. They speak with Jesus about His departure, in Greek His exodus, the word of Moses' own story. **Peter.** Half asleep, then blinded by glory, and his first instinct is construction: let's build three tents. He wants to freeze the moment. The cloud interrupts the building permit, and the voice gives the only command: listen to him.

## THE 3D MOMENT

From the summit terraces, look down. The Jezreel Valley spreads below like a painted map, and you can trace with a finger where Barak's men charged and where the Kishon swept the chariots away. Then remember what the three fishermen saw up here instead of a view: His face, altered. Some summits are about looking down. This one was about looking at Him.

## THE HEBREW WORD

**אָנאָן** · **Anan**, cloud. The cloud that led Israel through the desert, that filled the Tabernacle, that rested on Sinai. When the anan overshadowed Tabor, the disciples were standing inside the oldest sign of the Presence in the Bible. The cloud is not hiding God. The cloud is God, close.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Peter wanted to build and stay. The voice said listen and go down. Which mountain moment in your life are you still trying to build tents on instead of carrying down into the valley?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You let three fishermen see the glory for one night, and then You walked them back down the mountain. Change our faces on the way. Whatever You show us up here, let us carry it down into the valleys where the people are waiting. This is Your beloved Son. We are listening. Amen.*

# Mount Carmel · Muhraka

*the place of burning, where the fire fell*

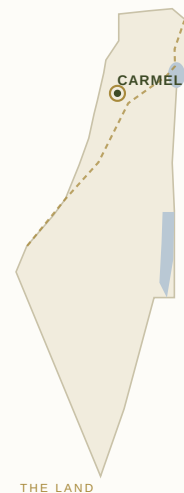
OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>21</sup> Elijah came near to all the people, and said, "How long will you waver between the two sides? If Yahweh is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." The people didn't say a word. <sup>36</sup> At the time of the evening offering, Elijah the prophet came near, and said, "Yahweh, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. <sup>37</sup> Hear me, Yahweh, hear me, that this people may know that you, Yahweh, are God, and that you have turned their heart back again." <sup>38</sup> Then Yahweh's fire fell, and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. <sup>39</sup> When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces. They said, "Yahweh, he is God! Yahweh, he is God!"

1 KINGS 18:21, 36–39 (READ THE FULL CONTEST IN VV. 20–40)

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Carmel is the rain gate of the land, the first ridge the sea clouds strike, green when everything else is brown. And Baal was sold to Israel as the rain god, the storm rider. So the drought was already a duel before Elijah ever proposed one: three rainless years on the rain god's own mountain. When Elijah called for the contest here, he was challenging Baal on Baal's home court, in front of the whole nation, at the end of a drought that had already proven who holds the sky. The Arabic name of this spot remembers the verdict: Muhraka, the place of burning.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Elijah.** One man against four hundred fifty, and against something worse than prophets: a nation that answered him not a word. He rebuilt a broken altar with twelve stones, drowned it in water, and prayed a prayer you can read aloud in under thirty seconds. The shortest prayer won the longest silence. **The people.** They wavered between two sides until the fire chose for them, and then they fell on their faces with one sentence: Yahweh, He is God. In Hebrew, that sentence is a name: Eliyahu.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Stand at the statue of Elijah and look at the view: the Kishon brook below, the Jezreel spread eastward, Tabor and Moreh and Gilboa in a line. Then hear the detail most visitors miss. Elijah's own name, Eliyahu, means My God is Yahweh. The answer to the contest was walking around inside the prophet's name the entire time. The people's final cry simply repeated what his mother named him.

## THE HEBREW WORD

אֲנֵנִי · **Aneni**, answer me. The heart of Elijah's prayer, hear me, answer me, and to this day the cry of Israel's prayers on fast days. One word, prayed by one man, and the sky tore open. Heaven is not moved by length.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*How long will you waver between the two sides? The people answered not a word. Where in your life are you still standing silent between two altars?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, answer us as You answered on Carmel. Not with fire we can boast of, but with the turning of hearts. End the drought in us. And when we waver between two opinions, choose us back, until we say with one voice: You are God.*  
*Amen.*

# Nain

*the village where a funeral turned around at the gate*

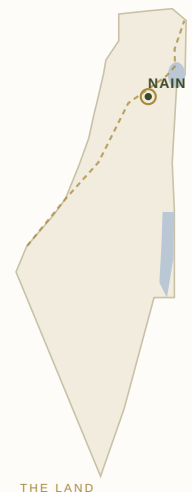
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>11</sup> Soon afterwards, he went to a city called Nain. Many of his disciples, along with a great multitude, went with him. <sup>12</sup> Now when he came near to the gate of the city, behold, one who was dead was carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. <sup>13</sup> When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said to her, "Don't cry." <sup>14</sup> He came near and touched the coffin, and the bearers stood still. He said, "Young man, I tell you, arise!" <sup>15</sup> He who was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother. <sup>16</sup> Fear took hold of all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and, "God has visited his people!" <sup>17</sup> This report went out concerning him in the whole of Judea, and in all the surrounding region.

LUKE 7:11-17 · ALSO: 2 KINGS 4:8-37

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Nain clings to the slope of the Hill of Moreh, and just around that same hill sits Shunem, where Elisha raised the Shunammite woman's son eight centuries earlier. Two funerals interrupted, two sons given back to two mothers, on the same small mountain. The crowd of Nain knew their Bible and their neighborhood, which is why their cry was so precise: a great prophet has arisen among us. Geography made the sermon for them. The old story and the new one stood on the same hill, looking at each other.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**The widow.** She has no name and says not one word in the story. Losing her only son meant losing her protector, her income, her future, everything. She did not ask Jesus for anything. He saw her, and that was the whole request. **Jesus, moved.** The text says He had compassion, and then He did the unthinkable: He touched the coffin, taking on impurity by every rule, stopping the bearers mid-step. Compassion that will not touch is only sentiment. His had hands.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Nain is still a small village today, and the ancient burial caves lie just outside it, on the road where the two crowds met: the funeral procession walking out, the Gospel procession walking in. Stand at the edge of the village and look at that meeting point. Every funeral walks out of some gate. Only once did Life Himself happen to be walking in.

## THE HEBREW WORD

רַחֲמִים · **Rachamim**, compassion, born from the word rechem, womb. Hebrew mercy is not a feeling in the chest. It is mother-love in the body, the ache of the womb for its child. When the text says He was moved with compassion for a mother, the language itself is a mother.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*He stopped a funeral because He saw one exhausted woman. Who around you is walking in a procession of grief, and what would it mean for you to stop the bearers?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You see the widow before she says a word. See ours. Every mother with an empty chair, every family this land has asked to bury a child. Touch what everyone else is afraid to touch. And give the children back to their mothers. Amen.*

# Megiddo

*twenty-six cities deep, the battlefield that named the last battle*

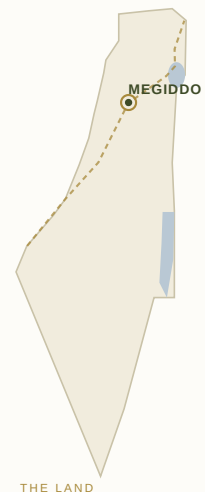
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>12</sup> The sixth poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates. Its water was dried up, that the way might be prepared for the kings that come from the sunrise. <sup>13</sup> I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits, something like frogs; <sup>14</sup> for they are spirits of demons, performing signs; which go out to the kings of the whole inhabited earth, to gather them together for the war of that great day of God, the Almighty. <sup>15</sup> "Behold, I come like a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his clothes, so that he doesn't walk naked, and they see his shame." <sup>16</sup> He gathered them together into the place which is called in Hebrew, Megiddo.

REVELATION 16:12-16 · ALSO: 1 KINGS 9:15 · 2 KINGS 23:29

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Megiddo guards the mouth of the Aruna pass, the narrow slot where the Via Maris squeezes through the Carmel ridge. Every army marching between Egypt and Mesopotamia had to thread this needle, so every empire fought for this hill: Pharaoh Thutmose fought here, Josiah king of Judah died here, and the armies kept coming for three thousand years, down to the British in 1918. Solomon fortified it with Hazor and Gezer. When John needed one word for the war at the end of the world, he chose this address: Har Megiddo, which the nations learned to say as Armageddon.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Josiah.** The best king Judah ever had, the boy who found the lost Torah and turned a nation, and he fell here, riding out to a battle that was not his. Even the righteous can die at Megiddo. The valley does not check credentials. **John the seer.** Exiled on Patmos, he reaches for the one place name every reader of the Hebrew Bible would feel in their stomach. He is saying: the last war will be fought where all the wars were fought, and God wins it.

## THE 3D MOMENT

The archaeologists' cut in the tel exposes the layers: twenty-six cities stacked one on top of another, each built on the ruins of the last, gate over gate, ash over ash. Run your eyes up that slice of the mound. That is what human power looks like in cross-section. Twenty-six kingdoms, one on top of the other, and the grass grows over all of them.

## THE HEBREW WORD

הַר מִגְדּוֹ · **Har Megiddo**, the mountain of Megiddo. Say it quickly and you hear the word the whole world knows: Armageddon. One of the most famous words on earth is simply Hebrew geography, this hill, this valley, this view.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Twenty-six cities believed their walls would hold. Blessed is he who watches, says the verse read on this hill. What are you trusting in that is really just one more layer waiting to happen?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, the wars of three thousand years are stacked under our feet, and the last word over this valley is Yours. Keep us watching. Keep us dressed and ready. And until that great day, make us people of peace standing in the world's favorite battlefield. Amen.*

# Mount Gilboa & Ein Harod

*the spring of trembling, where three hundred were enough*

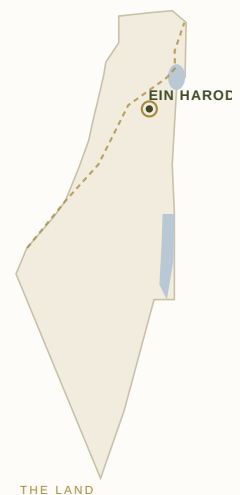
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>2</sup>Yahweh said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel brag against me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'"<sup>3</sup>Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead." So twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained. <sup>4</sup>Yahweh said to Gideon, "There are still too many people. Bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there." <sup>5</sup>"Everyone who laps of the water with his tongue, like a dog laps, you shall set him by himself; likewise everyone who bows down on his knees to drink." <sup>6</sup>The number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people bowed down on their knees to drink water. <sup>7</sup>Yahweh said to Gideon, "By the three hundred men who lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand."

JUDGES 7:2-7 (LIGHTLY ABRIDGED FOR READING · SEE ALSO 1 SAMUEL 31 · 2 SAMUEL 1:21)

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

The spring of Harod rises at the foot of Mount Gilboa, facing the Hill of Moreh across the valley where the Midianite camp lay like locusts. Gideon's army camped at the water with the enemy in plain sight, and it was here, at the drinking place, that God thinned thirty-two thousand men to three hundred. The same mountain carries the other story too: on these heights Saul and Jonathan fell, and David cried let there be no dew on you, mountains of Gilboa. One mountain, Israel's smallest victory and Israel's bitterest defeat, sharing a slope.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Gideon.** The man threshing wheat in a winepress, hiding from the enemy, whom the angel greeted as mighty warrior. God's greeting was a prophecy, not a description. At this spring he watched his army evaporate on God's orders and had to believe the arithmetic of heaven, where fewer is stronger. **The three hundred.** Chosen not for courage speeches but for how they drank water, alert, hand to mouth, eyes up. Nobody knew they were being tested. The exam was ordinary behavior when no one seemed to be watching.

## THE 3D MOMENT

The spring still flows. You can crouch at Ein Harod today, cup your hand, and drink exactly the way the three hundred drank, eyes up, facing the same Hill of Moreh they faced. And in spring, look up at Gilboa: after David's curse of no dew, the mountain's slopes bloom every year with the Gilboa iris, a flower found almost nowhere else. Even cursed mountains get grace in this land.

## THE HEBREW WORD

**תָּרַח · Chared,** trembling. Ein Harod is the spring of trembling, named inside the story itself: whoever is fearful and trembling may go home. Twenty-two thousand trembled and left, and no one shamed them. God builds victories only with the willing.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*The three hundred were chosen by how they did a small ordinary thing. What do your smallest unwatched habits say about who you are when the test comes?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You won this valley with three hundred so no one could brag. Thin us down to what is really Yours. Take our fear home in peace, keep our eyes up while we drink, and win Your victories through our too-few, so the glory has only one address. Amen.*

# Beit She'an

where the Jezreel Valley meets the Jordan Valley

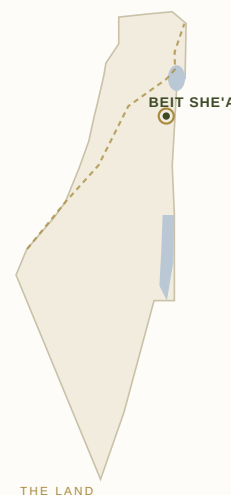
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>1</sup> Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain on Mount Gilboa. <sup>2</sup> The Philistines overtook Saul and his sons; and the Philistines killed Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, the sons of Saul. <sup>3</sup> The battle went hard against Saul, and the archers overtook him; and he was greatly distressed by reason of the archers. <sup>4</sup> Then Saul said to his armor bearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me!" But his armor bearer would not, for he was terrified. Therefore Saul took his sword, and fell on it. <sup>6</sup> So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armor bearer, and all his men, that same day together. <sup>8</sup> On the next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. <sup>10</sup> They put his armor in the house of the Ashtaroth, and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan. <sup>11</sup> When the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, <sup>12</sup> all the valiant men arose, went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth Shan; and they came to Jabesh, and burned them there. <sup>13</sup> They took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

1 SAMUEL 31:1–13 (ABRIDGED: VV. 5, 7, 9 OMITTED FOR READING)

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Beit She'an guards the meeting point of the land's two great corridors: the Jezreel Valley running east to west from the coast, and the Jordan Valley running north to south. The ancients said: if the Garden of Eden is in the land of Israel, its gate is at Beit She'an. Whoever held this junction held the flow of the world's traffic between Egypt, Mesopotamia and Arabia, and so Egyptians, Philistines, Greeks and Romans all planted themselves on this exact spot, layer upon layer under your feet.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Saul.** The tall shy farm boy who hid among the baggage on coronation day and ended as a king consumed by fear of a younger man. How does an anointed beginning come to this end? **David.** Not present, and that is the lesson. He answered his hunter's death with the most generous eulogy in scripture: how the mighty have fallen.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Climb the tel, turn west, and Gilboa fills the horizon: the actual mountain of the actual battle. Then look down at the Roman street of Scythopolis, snapped mid-column by one minute of earthquake in the year 749. Two empires in one turn of the head, both past tense. The text outlived them both.

## THE HEBREW WORD

בֵּית שֵׁאֲנָן · **Sha'an**, at ease, secure. Beit She'an, the house of ease, sat rich and confident at the crossroads. Scripture keeps warning about security that trusts in walls. The walls are the ruins you are standing on.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*The men of Yavesh-Gilad repaid a twenty-year-old kindness at the risk of their lives. Whose old kindness to you is still waiting for its answer?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, kingdoms rise and fall under our feet. Keep our hearts from trusting walls. Make us like the men of Yavesh-Gilad, who walked all night to honor a kindness. Let no old kindness die unanswered in us. Amen.*

# Acco

*the harbor of the north, where Paul knelt on the beach*

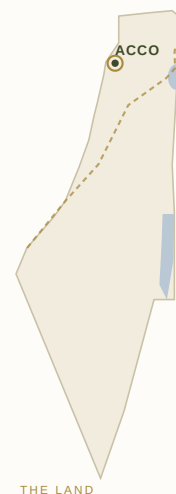
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>3</sup>When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left hand, we sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload her cargo. <sup>4</sup>Having found disciples, we stayed there seven days. These said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. <sup>5</sup>When those days were over, we departed and went on our journey. They all, with wives and children, brought us on our way until we were out of the city. Kneeling down on the beach, we prayed. <sup>6</sup>After saying goodbye to each other, we went on board the ship, and they returned home again. <sup>7</sup>When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais. We greeted the brothers, and stayed with them one day. <sup>8</sup>On the next day, we, who were Paul's companions, departed, and came to Caesarea.

ACTS 21:3-8 · PTOLEMAIS IS ACCO · ALSO: JUDGES 1:31

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Acco holds the only sheltered natural bay on the northern coast, which made it the key of the land for four thousand years: whoever wanted the Galilee landed here first. The tribe of Asher never managed to take it, Alexander marched past it, the Crusaders made it their capital, and Napoleon's eastern dream broke against its walls. In the New Testament it appears under its Greek name, Ptolemais, for one quiet day: Paul, sailing toward Jerusalem and toward his chains, stops here and spends a single day with the brothers. There was already a church in Acco before there was a church in Europe.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Paul, passing through.** He knows what waits in Jerusalem, the Spirit has said so in every port, and still he sails toward it, greeting the believers harbor by harbor like a man saying his goodbyes. **The brothers of Ptolemais.** Unnamed, unnumbered, a congregation history forgot in a city history fought over. One day with Paul, and then he was gone. Some people host an apostle for an evening and hold that evening for the rest of their lives.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Walk the sea wall of the old city and watch the waves hit the stones. The Crusader halls, the Ottoman walls, the minarets and the church towers stand in one skyline, layer against layer. This harbor watched empires arrive in ships and leave in ruins, and the one thing that stayed from Paul's single day here is the thing nobody could see from the water: the believers.

## THE HEBREW WORD

**עַד כֹּה** · **Ad koh**, until here. The old teachers heard Acco's name inside these words: the sea rages, and at this shore God says until here and no further, as He told the sea in the book of Job. Every breakwater in Acco preaches the verse.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Paul had one day in Acco and spent it with the brothers. If you knew you were passing through a place only once, who would get your one day?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You set a border for the sea: until here, no further. Set that border around this land and around our families. And teach us to spend our one day in every place the way Paul spent his, with the brothers, on our knees on the beach.*  
*Amen.*

# Caesarea Maritima

*Herod's harbor, where the door opened to the nations*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · FIRST PAGE · THE CENTURION

<sup>1</sup> Now there was a certain man in Caesarea, Cornelius by name, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, <sup>2</sup> a devout man, and one who feared God with all his house, who gave gifts for the needy generously to the people, and always prayed to God. <sup>3</sup> At about the ninth hour of the day, he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God coming to him, and saying to him, "Cornelius!" <sup>4</sup> He, fastening his eyes on him, and being frightened, said, "What is it, Lord?" He said to him, "Your prayers and your gifts to the needy have gone up for a memorial before God. <sup>5</sup> Now send men to Joppa, and get Simon, who is also called Peter."

ACTS 10:1-5

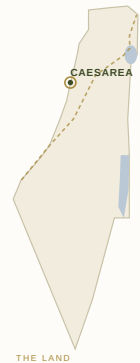
## SECOND PAGE · THE SPIRIT FALLS

<sup>44</sup> While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word. <sup>45</sup> They of the circumcision who believed were amazed, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was also poured out on the Gentiles. <sup>47</sup> "Can anyone forbid these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just like us." <sup>48</sup> He commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay some days.

ACTS 10:44-48 (V. 46 ABRIDGED)

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Herod the Great built this harbor from nothing on a straight coast with no bay, sinking concrete underwater, and named it for Caesar. It became the gate between this land and the Mediterranean world. Look what God did with Herod's gate: here the first Gentile household received the Spirit, and from this port Paul sailed to Rome. The gospel left Israel for the nations through the front door the empire itself had built.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Cornelius.** A Roman officer who prayed to the God of the people his empire occupied, and gave to their poor. Heaven kept the receipts: your prayers and your gifts have gone up for a memorial. **Peter.** He walked into a Gentile's house against every rule he was raised with, and while he was mid-sermon heaven interrupted him and settled the question itself. **Paul in chains.** Two years imprisoned here, then out through this harbor to Caesar.

## THE 3D MOMENT

In the Roman theater here they found a stone bearing the name Pontius Pilatus, the only inscription of Pilate ever discovered, named in stone in the city he governed from. Along the beach the aqueduct still marches toward the ruins of Herod's harbor, which the sea took back. The judge's name survived on a spare stone. The harbor did not.

## THE HEBREW WORD

שַׁעַר · **Sha'ar**, gate. Caesarea was the sea gate of the land, and God made it the gate of the gospel to the nations. When He wants a door, He will use the empire's own hinges.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Cornelius's quiet prayers and gifts were building a memorial before God he knew nothing about. What is your hidden faithfulness building right now?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You opened the door to the nations in the emperor's own city, and we who pray from the nations today walked in through it. Keep the door open. Remember the quiet prayers and hidden gifts, as You remembered the centurion's. And pour out Your Spirit again, mid-sermon. Amen.*

# Jaffa

*the old port where one prophet fled and one apostle woke*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · FIRST PAGE · THE RUNNER

<sup>1</sup>Now Yahweh's word came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, <sup>2</sup>"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach against it, for their wickedness has come up before me." <sup>3</sup>But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of Yahweh. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid its fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of Yahweh.

JONAH 1:1–3

## SECOND PAGE · THE DREAMER ON THE ROOF

<sup>9</sup>Now on the next day as they were on their journey, and got close to the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray at about noon. <sup>10</sup>He became hungry and desired to eat, but while they were preparing, he fell into a trance. <sup>11</sup>He saw heaven opened and a certain container descending to him, like a great sheet let down by four corners on the earth, <sup>12</sup>in which were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild animals, reptiles, and birds of the sky. <sup>13</sup>A voice came to him, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat!" <sup>14</sup>But Peter said, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." <sup>15</sup>A voice came to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed, you must not call unclean." <sup>16</sup>This was done three times, and immediately the vessel was received up into heaven.

ACTS 10:9–16

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Jaffa is one of the oldest working ports on earth. The cedars of Lebanon for both Temples floated in through this harbor, and for centuries it was the front door of the whole country. Two men met their calling to the nations here, eight hundred years apart, and answered in opposite directions. Jonah went down to Jaffa to sail away from the nations. Peter, praying on a Jaffa rooftop, was turned toward them. Same port, same call, two answers. The city is a hinge, and every visitor stands on it.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Jonah.** A real prophet with a real ticket, the only man in scripture who paid money to get away from God. He did not doubt that God would forgive Nineveh. He fled because he was sure He would. **Peter.** Hungry, on the roof of Simon the tanner, a host whose trade already made him ritually questionable. Peter was one step over the line before the vision ever came. Heaven usually finds us already standing near the thing it wants to teach us. **Tabitha.** Raised from death in this town, a woman famous only for good works. Jaffa's three stories are a runner, a dreamer, and a seamstress.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Stand in Old Jaffa near the traditional house of Simon the tanner and look at the harbor below. The same water. Jonah's ship and the cedar rafts for the Temple and the pilgrim boats all used this bay. Then look at the rooftops. Somewhere on one of them, the wall between Israel and the nations was taken down in a hungry man's dream before lunch.

## THE HEBREW WORD

יָפֹה · **Yafeh**, beautiful. Yafo carries its own compliment in its name. The city has been called beautiful for four thousand years, and the most beautiful thing that ever happened here was invisible: a door opening in a dream.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Jonah sailed from his call. Peter woke into his. When God points you toward your Nineveh, which direction do you buy a ticket in?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, Your word came to a runner and a dreamer in this same port, and You did not give up on either of them. Do not give up on us. What You have cleansed, we will not call unclean. And when You say arise and go, let us go up to our Nineveh, not down to the ships. Amen.*

# Ashkelon & Ashdod

*Philistine country, where the idol fell on its face*

OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>1</sup> Now the Philistines had taken God's ark, and they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. <sup>2</sup> The Philistines took God's ark, and brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. <sup>3</sup> When the people of Ashdod arose early on the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before Yahweh's ark. They took Dagon, and set him in his place again. <sup>4</sup> When they arose early on the following morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before Yahweh's ark; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off on the threshold. Only Dagon's torso was intact. <sup>5</sup> Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any who come into Dagon's house, step on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod, to this day.

1 SAMUEL 5:1-5 · ALSO: JUDGES 14:19 · 2 SAMUEL 1:20

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Ashkelon and Ashdod were two of the five lords' cities of the Philistines, the Sea Peoples who landed on this coast about when Israel came up from the desert, and the southern Via Maris ran right through their gates. Israel held the hills, the Philistines held the coast road, and the whole book of Judges and Samuel is the grinding of those two plates. Here the captured ark spent its strangest exile: no army rescued it. It simply stood in the enemy's temple, and the enemy's god kept falling on his face before it, until they begged it to leave.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Dagon.** A character with no lines. He falls, is propped up by his own priests, and falls again, this time losing his head and hands on his own threshold. The idol's maintenance crew is the sermon: a god who must be set back in his place each morning is not a god. **The priests of Ashdod.** They saw the evidence twice and responded by changing their doorstep etiquette instead of their hearts. Superstition is what remains when truth is refused. **Samson.** His fury reached Ashkelon too, one man against the lords of the coast.

## THE 3D MOMENT

In Ashkelon's national park stands the oldest arched city gate on earth, mud brick, from the days of Abraham, and the ancient wells and ramparts of the Sea Peoples' city. One small souvenir went out from here to every kitchen in the world: the little onion the Romans called the ascalonia, the scallion, named for Ashkelon. Empires fall, and a green onion carries the city's name forever.

## THE HEBREW WORD

פְּלֶשֶׁת · **Peleshet**, Philistia, this coastal strip. Centuries after the Philistines vanished, Rome renamed the whole land after them to erase Judea from the map, and the world learned the word Palestina. One Hebrew word explains two thousand years of headlines. The names of this land are never only names.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Dagon's priests kept lifting their god back onto his stand. What in your life keeps falling on its face, and you keep setting it back in its place instead of letting it fall?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, no ark of Yours needs our rescuing, and no idol can stand the night in the same room with You. Walk into the temples we have built and let what must fall, fall. We will not prop it up again in the morning. You alone stay standing.*  
*Amen.*

# Samaria-Sebaste

*the royal hill of the north, and the four lepers at the gate*

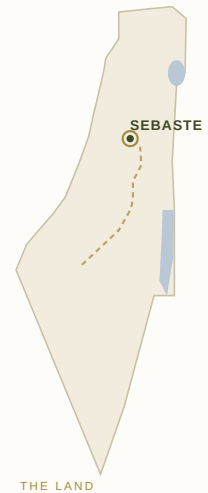
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>3</sup>Now there were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate. They said to one another, "Why do we sit here until we die? <sup>4</sup>If we say, 'We will enter into the city,' then the famine is in the city, and we will die there. If we sit still here, we also die. Now therefore come, and let us surrender to the army of the Syrians. If they save us alive, we will live; and if they kill us, we will only die." <sup>5</sup>They rose up in the twilight, to go to the camp of the Syrians. When they had come to the outermost part of the camp of the Syrians, behold, no man was there. <sup>6</sup>For the Lord had made the army of the Syrians to hear the sound of chariots, and the sound of horses, even the noise of a great army. <sup>8</sup>When these lepers came to the outermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and ate and drank, and carried away silver, gold, and clothing, and went and hid it. <sup>9</sup>Then they said to one another, "We aren't doing right. Today is a day of good news, and we keep silent. If we wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come, let's go and tell the king's household."

2 KINGS 7:3–9 (LIGHTLY ABRIDGED FOR READING) · ALSO: 1 KINGS 16:24

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Omri bought this hill for two talents of silver and built the capital of the northern kingdom on it, and for two centuries Samaria was the other Jerusalem, the seat of Ahab and Jezebel, the address of Elijah's quarrels and Elisha's miracles. The city sat on a proud round hill ringed by valleys, nearly impossible to storm, which is why armies chose to starve it instead. Centuries later Herod rebuilt it and named it Sebaste, for Augustus. The whole region carries the city's name: Samaria, in Hebrew Shomron, the watch-mountain.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**The four lepers.** The least qualified evangelists in scripture: outcasts at the gate with nothing left to lose, who discovered the deliverance before the king did. Their sentence at the tent door is a whole theology of testimony: today is a day of good news, and we keep silent.

**Ahab and Jezebel.** They ruled from this hill in an ivory palace, and pieces of the ivory are in the museums. Scripture mentioned the ivory house in passing. The spades found it.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Climb the tel through the Roman street of columns and stand on the summit among the palace foundations. The excavators found hundreds of carved ivories in the ruins, the actual luxury of the house of Ahab that the prophets thundered against. Below, the ring of valleys shows you why sieges, not battles, decided this city's fate. Pride chooses high ground. Famine finds it there.

## THE HEBREW WORD

שֹׁמֵר · **Shomer**, watchman. Shomron, Samaria, carries the watchman inside its name. The region where kings posted their watchmen is the same land Isaiah had in mind: I have set watchmen on your walls. The name of this hill is the job description of everyone who prays for this land.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Four lepers found the good news first and almost kept it. What deliverance have you already discovered that someone in the starving city is still waiting to hear?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, we do not want to be people who find the good news and keep silent. Make us like the four at the gate: the least likely, the first to know, the ones who went and told. Today is a day of good news. Send us to the king's household.*  
*Amen.*

# Shechem & Jacob's Well

*where the promise was first spoken, and living water was offered*

OPEN YOUR BIBLES · FIRST PAGE · THE FIRST PROMISE

<sup>6</sup> Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time, Canaanites were in the land. <sup>7</sup> Yahweh appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your offspring." He built an altar there to Yahweh, who had appeared to him.

GENESIS 12:6-7

SECOND PAGE · THE WELL AT NOON

<sup>5</sup> So he came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son, Joseph. <sup>6</sup> Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being tired from his journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. <sup>7</sup> A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." <sup>9</sup> The Samaritan woman therefore said to him, "How is it that you, being a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" <sup>10</sup> Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." <sup>13-14</sup> Jesus answered her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst again; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

JOHN 4:5-14 (ABRIDGED: VV. 8, 11-12 OMITTED FOR READING)

THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Shechem sits in the narrow pass between Gerizim and Ebal, exactly where the north-south Ridge Route of the Patriarchs crosses the east-west road from the Jordan to the sea. It is the crossroads of the hill country, which is why the Bible keeps returning here: Abram's first stop and first altar in the land, Jacob's purchased field, Joseph's bones, Joshua's covenant, and at the bottom of it all, a well Jacob dug that still gives water. The first sentence God ever spoke about this land to Abraham was spoken here: I will give this land to your offspring.



THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Abram, just arrived.** No map, no deed, no descendants, standing under a great oak in a land full of Canaanites, and God hands him a promise that has not stopped working since. His answer was not a speech. It was an altar. **The woman at the well.** She came alone at noon, the hour of no company, and left her jar behind to become the first evangelist of Samaria. Jesus gave the deepest teaching on living water to one person the world had filed away.

THE 3D MOMENT

The well is real and you can drink from it. Deep in the crypt of the church, Jacob's well still reaches down through forty meters of rock to living water, dug by the patriarch, used by the Samaritan woman, still cold on your lips today. Very few places on earth let you taste the same water two stories of the Bible tasted. This one does.

THE HEBREW WORD

אֵלֹן · **Elon**, a great oak. Abram received the promise at Elon Moreh, the oak of the teacher. In this land even the trees have names and callings. And if that word sounds familiar on this bus, ask your guide what his family name means, and watch him smile.

ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Abram answered an impossible promise with an altar, and the woman answered a hard truth with an open jar left behind. What would you need to leave at the well to run and tell?*

WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You spoke the first promise of this land under an oak, and You offered living water to a woman everyone else avoided. Speak to us at our wells. We are thirsty at noon like she was. Give us the water that becomes a spring inside, and we will leave our jars and go tell. Amen.*

# Mount Gerizim & Mount Ebal

*the valley of the blessing and the curse*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · FIRST PAGE · THE COMMAND

<sup>11</sup> Moses commanded the people the same day, saying, <sup>12</sup> "These shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people, when you have crossed over the Jordan: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. <sup>13</sup> These shall stand on Mount Ebal for the curse: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali."

DEUTERONOMY 27:11–13

## SECOND PAGE · THE FULFILLMENT

<sup>33</sup> All Israel, their elders and officers, and their judges, stood on both sides of the ark before the priests the Levites, who carried the ark of Yahweh's covenant, the foreigner as well as the native; half of them in front of Mount Gerizim, and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of Yahweh had commanded at the first, that they should bless the people of Israel. <sup>34</sup> Afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law. <sup>35</sup> There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua didn't read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the foreigners who were among them.

JOSHUA 8:33–35

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

The two mountains face each other across the narrow valley of Shechem, and the valley between them is a natural amphitheater: a voice on one slope carries clearly to the other, as guides and choirs have tested for centuries. Moses commanded the ceremony before Israel ever crossed the Jordan, six tribes on each mountain, the whole Torah read aloud between them, women, children and foreigners included. The nation's first act in the heart of the land was not a battle. It was a public reading of the Word, out loud, in stereo.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Joshua, reading.** Not a word of all that Moses commanded was left out. The general's greatest victory in Samaria was a reading. **The Samaritans.** A small community still lives on Gerizim today, still keeping Passover with sacrifices on the mountain they have held sacred for over two thousand years, the community the woman at the well belonged to. The argument she raised with Jesus, this mountain or Jerusalem, is still alive on this summit.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Look at the two slopes and your eyes will catch what every group catches: Gerizim's side is noticeably greener, Ebal's side more bare, the blessing mountain and the curse mountain wearing their roles. And on Ebal, archaeologists uncovered a great stone installation from Joshua's era that many identify as the altar of Joshua 8. The ceremony has a candidate address.

## THE HEBREW WORD

**בְּרַכָּה** · **Bracha**, blessing. Set before the people with its opposite, on two mountains you can point at. In this valley the choice of Deuteronomy stops being abstract: blessing and curse have coordinates, and you are standing between them.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Israel stood between two mountains and heard both read aloud. Life sets the same two slopes before you every morning. Which one are you standing closer to today?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You set before us the blessing and the curse and told us to choose life. We choose it here, out loud, between the two mountains. Read Your whole Word over us, not a line left out, and let our children and the strangers among us hear it too. Amen.*

# Shiloh

*where the Mishkan stood, and a woman invented whispered prayer*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>9</sup> So Hannah rose up after they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his seat by the doorpost of Yahweh's temple. <sup>10</sup> She was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to Yahweh, weeping bitterly. <sup>11</sup> She vowed a vow, and said, "Yahweh of Armies, if you will indeed look at the affliction of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a boy, then I will give him to Yahweh all the days of his life." <sup>12</sup> As she continued praying before Yahweh, Eli saw her mouth. <sup>13</sup> Now Hannah spoke in her heart. Only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli thought she was drunk. <sup>15</sup> Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit. I have not been drinking wine or strong drink, but I poured out my soul before Yahweh." <sup>17</sup> Then Eli answered, "Go in peace; and may the God of Israel grant your petition that you have asked of him." <sup>18</sup> So the woman went her way, and ate; and her facial expression wasn't sad any more.

1 SAMUEL 1:9–18 (ABRIDGED: VV. 14, 16 OMITTED FOR READING)

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Before Jerusalem, there was Shiloh. The Mishkan, the Tabernacle of the wilderness, rested here for close to four centuries by the old reckoning, tucked in a quiet bowl of hills just off the Ridge Route. Israel's festivals, sacrifices and pilgrimages all came here first. Here the boy Samuel heard his name called in the night, and here childless Hannah prayed the prayer that became the pattern: lips moving, voice unheard, soul poured out. When Jeremiah later wanted to warn Jerusalem that no holy place is automatic, he said: go to Shiloh, and see.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Hannah.** A woman in bitterness of soul who brought it directly to God and was mistaken for a drunk by the priest on duty. Her silent prayer became, in Jewish tradition, the model of all prayer: the Amidah is whispered to this day because of her. She asked for a son and gave him back, and the son was Samuel. **Eli.** The old priest who misjudged her in one verse and blessed her in the next. Even tired religion can still hand out a true blessing.

## THE 3D MOMENT

On the tel, archaeologists traced a flat cut platform whose dimensions fit the courtyard of the Mishkan described in the Torah, and the site today marks its likely footprint. Stand there and consider: for centuries this quiet hill was the address of the Presence, and today the wind crosses an empty floor. Go to Shiloh and see, said Jeremiah. You just did.

## THE HEBREW WORD

**תְּפִלָּה** · **Tefila**, prayer. At Shiloh the word learned its posture from Hannah: not performance, not volume, a soul poured out with the voice turned off. Every whispered prayer in every synagogue on earth is quoting her.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Hannah gave back the very thing she begged for. If God granted the request you are carrying right now, would you have the strength to dedicate it back to Him?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You heard a whisper at Shiloh over all the noise of the festival. Hear ours. We pour out our souls like Hannah, for the children we long for, the answers that delay, the requests too heavy to say out loud. Look, remember, and do not forget Your servants. Amen.*

# Bethel

*the house of God, and the gate of heaven*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>10</sup> Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran. <sup>11</sup> He came to a certain place, and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. He took one of the stones of the place, and put it under his head, and lay down in that place to sleep. <sup>12</sup> He dreamed. Behold, a stairway set upon the earth, and its top reached to heaven. Behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it. <sup>13</sup> Behold, Yahweh stood above it, and said, "I am Yahweh, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac. The land whereon you lie, to you will I give it, and to your offspring. <sup>15</sup> Behold, I am with you, and will keep you, wherever you go, and will bring you again into this land. For I will not leave you, until I have done that which I have spoken of to you." <sup>16</sup> Jacob awakened out of his sleep, and he said, "Surely Yahweh is in this place, and I didn't know it." <sup>17</sup> He was afraid, and said, "How dreadful is this place! This is none other than God's house, and this is the gate of heaven."

GENESIS 28:10–17 (ABRIDGED: V. 14 OMITTED FOR READING)

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

After Jerusalem, no city is named more often in the Bible than Bethel. It sits at a junction of the Ridge Route where the road west to the coast breaks off, one day's walk north of Jerusalem, which is why everyone kept passing through: Abraham camped between Bethel and Ai and called on the name of the Lord, Jacob slept here on a stone and met the stairway, and centuries later Jeroboam planted one of his two golden calves here, the twin of the one you saw at Dan. The gate of heaven and the counterfeit altar share one address. That is the whole Bible in one town.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Jacob, running.** A young man fleeing the mess he made, with a rock for a pillow and nothing to his name. God did not wait for him to become respectable. The stairway came down over a fugitive, and the promise came with it: I am with you, wherever you go, and I will bring you back. **Jeroboam, again.** The same king from the Dan page set his second calf here, betting that convenience beats covenant. Bethel heard both the truest word and the falsest worship this land produced.

## THE 3D MOMENT

The stones of Bethel are still scattered over the hill by the Arab village of Beitin, and any one of them could be a pillow. Lie your hand on one. Jacob's discovery was not that heaven has a gate, but where it was: in an ordinary place, on an ordinary night, in the middle of his running. Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it. That sentence is why your group is in this land.

## THE HEBREW WORD

בֵּית־אֵל · **Beit El**, the house of God. Jacob named the place before there was a house on it, before there was anything but a stone and a dream. In this land, the name comes first and the reality grows into it. Ask anyone who ever named a farm in faith.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it. What ordinary place in your life might already be a gate of heaven you have been sleeping through?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You met a runner in the dark with his head on a rock, and You promised to keep him wherever he went. Keep us like that. Open our eyes in the ordinary places, set Your stairway over our nights, and bring us back to this land, as You brought Jacob. Surely You are in this place. Now we know it. Amen.*

# Ai

*the ruin that taught Israel about hidden things*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>10</sup> Yahweh said to Joshua, "Get up! Why have you fallen on your face like that? <sup>11</sup> Israel has sinned. Yes, they have even transgressed my covenant which I commanded them. Yes, they have even taken some of the devoted things, and have also stolen, and also deceived. They have even put it among their own stuff. <sup>12</sup> Therefore the children of Israel can't stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become devoted for destruction. I will not be with you any more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you."

JOSHUA 7:10-12 · READ THE FULL STORY IN JOSHUA 7-8 · ALSO: GENESIS 13:3-4

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Ai lies just east of Bethel, and its name is its biography: Ai means the ruin, the heap. Fresh from the miracle of Jericho, Israel sent a small force up here and was routed, thirty-six men dead, the nation's heart melted. The problem was not military. One man, Achan, had hidden plunder from Jericho under his tent floor, and the hidden thing under one floor stopped an entire nation in its tracks. Long before all that, Abraham pitched his tent on the hill between Bethel and Ai and built an altar there. The oldest altar and the hardest lesson share this ridge.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Joshua, face down.** The general who marched around Jericho is flat on the ground, praying like a victim, and God interrupts the prayer meeting with a command: get up. Some moments call for intercession. This one called for housecleaning. **Achan.** He saw, he coveted, he took, he hid, the four verbs of every fall since Eden. He buried the treasure under the one floor he thought was private. In the covenant, nothing is.

## THE 3D MOMENT

The mound of et-Tell sits gray and quiet, a heap that has been a heap for a very long time, true to its name. Look from here back toward Bethel, one ridge over: the gate of heaven and the monument to hidden sin, within sight of each other. The land put the two lessons side by side so no pilgrim could take one without the other.

## THE HEBREW WORD

אֵי · **Ai**, a heap, a ruin. The city was named for what it was and became what it was named. Hidden things do that: left buried, they name the whole house after themselves.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*One hidden thing under one tent floor stopped a whole nation. What is buried under your floor, and how long has the whole camp been paying for it?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You told Joshua to get up and deal with the hidden thing. Say it to us. Search under our floors. We would rather dig it up with You today than be defeated by it tomorrow. Restore the camp, and lead us on from the ruin. Amen.*

# Nebi Samuel

*the lookout of the prophet, and the pilgrims' first sight of the city*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>5</sup> Samuel said, "Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to Yahweh for you." <sup>6</sup> They gathered together to Mizpah, and drew water, and poured it out before Yahweh, and fasted on that day, and said there, "We have sinned against Yahweh." Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpah. <sup>8</sup> The children of Israel said to Samuel, "Don't stop crying to Yahweh our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines." <sup>9</sup> Samuel took a suckling lamb, and offered it for a whole burnt offering to Yahweh. Samuel cried to Yahweh for Israel; and Yahweh answered him. <sup>10</sup> As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines came near to battle against Israel; but Yahweh thundered with a great thunder on that day on the Philistines, and confused them; and they were struck down before Israel. <sup>12</sup> Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer, saying, "Yahweh helped us until now."

1 SAMUEL 7:5–12 (ABRIDGED: VV. 7, 11 OMITTED FOR READING)

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

This summit north of Jerusalem is one of the highest points in the whole region, and many identify it with biblical Mizpah, the watchtower, Israel's old assembly ground where Samuel gathered the nation to repent and pray. Its later name remembers the prophet himself: Nebi Samuel, where tradition placed his tomb. For medieval pilgrims walking up from the coast this hill had a third name, the Mount of Joy, because from here, for the first time in the whole journey, they saw Jerusalem. Every road in this land finally turns into this view.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Samuel.** Hannah's whispered-for son became the man a nation begged: do not stop crying to God for us. He judged, he interceded, he poured water out like a confession, and while the sacrifice was still burning, heaven answered with thunder. **The people at Mizpah.** They came defeated and frightened, and their whole strategy was one intercessor and one honest sentence: we have sinned. It was enough.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Climb to the roof of the fortress-shrine and turn south. There it is: Jerusalem, spread on her hills, the view that made crusaders fall to their knees and name this the Mount of Joy. Then remember Samuel's stone: Ebenezer, the stone of help, Yahweh helped us until now. Every pilgrim who reaches this lookout is standing on their own Ebenezer. You made it this far because He helped you this far.

## THE HEBREW WORD

**מִצְפָּה** · **Mitzpa**, watchtower, lookout. The place where you stand guard and the place where you finally see. On this hill the two meanings become one: the nation's old watchtower is the pilgrim's first sight of the city of God.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Yahweh helped us until now, said Samuel, setting the stone. Stop and count: what would be written on your Ebenezer stone today?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, gather us like Mizpah. We pour out our hearts like water and say it plainly: we have sinned, and You have helped us until now. Set a stone in us that remembers. And from this lookout, let us see Your city the way the pilgrims saw it, with joy. Amen.*

# Emmaus

*the road where hearts burned and eyes opened*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · FIRST PAGE · THE ROAD

<sup>13</sup> Behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was sixty stadia from Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> They talked with each other about all of these things which had happened. <sup>15</sup> While they talked and questioned together, Jesus himself came near, and went with them. <sup>16</sup> But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

LUKE 24:13–16

## SECOND PAGE · THE TABLE

<sup>28</sup> They came near to the village, where they were going, and he acted like he would go further. <sup>29</sup> They urged him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is almost evening, and the day is almost over." He went in to stay with them. <sup>30</sup> When he had sat down at the table with them, he took the bread and gave thanks. Breaking it, he gave it to them. <sup>31</sup> Their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished out of their sight. <sup>32</sup> They said to one another, "Weren't our hearts burning within us, while he spoke to us along the way, and while he opened the Scriptures to us?"

LUKE 24:28–32 · READ THE WHOLE ROAD IN VV. 13–35

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Emmaus lay a walk of sixty stadia west of Jerusalem, down the roads that drain the city toward the coast, the direction of giving up. Two disciples left the city of the empty tomb walking away from it, and the risen Lord chose that road, of all roads, for His longest recorded Bible study. Several ruins along the western descent claim the name, and the argument between them hardly matters: the road itself is the site. Emmaus is every road walked in disappointment, and He still comes near on it.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Cleopas and his companion.** One named, one not, perhaps because the second seat on that road is reserved for the reader. They had the facts right and the hope gone: we were hoping he was the one. **The Stranger.** He asks questions He knows the answers to, opens Moses and the prophets, and lets Himself be recognized only in the breaking of bread. Then He vanishes, because once you have seen Him, the road back to Jerusalem is enough.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Walk any stretch of the old western road at evening and do what they did: talk it through. Sixty stadia is about three hours of walking, the length of an honest conversation. The two of them turned around that same night and walked it all again uphill, in the dark, because burning hearts do not wait for morning. Watch your own group at the end of this day. Burning hearts never do.

## THE HEBREW WORD

דרך · **Derech**, road, way. The first believers were not called Christians at first. They were called followers of the Derech, the Way. The faith was named after what happened on roads like this one: He comes near while you are still walking away.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*The two walked away from the city with the facts right and the hope gone. On which road of your life do you need Him to come near and open the Scriptures again?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, come near on our Emmaus roads. When we walk away with the facts right and the hope gone, walk with us anyway. Open the Scriptures until our hearts burn, stay with us when the day is almost over, and open our eyes in the breaking of the bread. Amen.*

# Ein Karem

*the spring of the vineyard, where two mothers met*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>39</sup> Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah, <sup>40</sup> and entered into the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup> She called out with a loud voice, and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! <sup>43</sup> Why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> For behold, when the voice of your greeting came into my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy! <sup>45</sup> Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of the things which have been spoken to her from the Lord!"

LUKE 1:39-45 · MARY ANSWERS WITH THE MAGNIFICAT, VV. 46-55

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Tradition places Elizabeth and Zacharias in this green village folded into the Judean hills west of Jerusalem, close enough for a priest to walk to his Temple duty. Its name tells you why people settled here: Ein Karem, the spring of the vineyard, living water in dry hills. Mary came into these hills with haste, a journey of several days from Nazareth, a young woman carrying an impossible announcement to the one person who would understand, because her older cousin was carrying an impossibility of her own.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Elizabeth.** Old, six months along after a lifetime of waiting, married to a priest who had been struck silent. She needed no explanation when Mary walked in. Her own child preached the first sermon about Jesus by leaping, wordless, in the womb. **Mary.** She had said yes days before, and then went with haste to the one house where the yes would be believed. The first thing faith looks for is a witness. Her answer to Elizabeth's blessing became the Magnificat, the most sung song in history.

## THE 3D MOMENT

The spring still runs at the center of the village, the same vein of water that made this hill livable, and the two churches on the slopes face each other like the two greetings of the story. Watch the groups from every nation singing the Magnificat in their own languages on the church wall, where it is written in ceramic in dozens of tongues. Mary said all generations will call me blessed, and you are standing inside the fulfillment, listening to it.

## THE HEBREW WORD

כֶּרֶם · **Kerem**, vineyard. Ein Karem, the spring of the vineyard. Vineyards are slow: you plant, you wait years, you believe in fruit you cannot see. Two women in this village carried exactly that kind of faith, and the vintage changed the world.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Mary went with haste to the one person who would believe her impossible news. Who is your Elizabeth, and when did you last make the journey to them?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You filled this village with impossible pregnancies and unstoppable songs. Give us Elizabeth's ear, to recognize the blessing when it walks through our door. Give us Mary's haste, to run toward the ones who strengthen faith. And let something leap in us again at the sound of Your coming. Amen.*

# Mount of Olives

*the ridge where the King descended, and wept*

OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>37</sup> As he was now getting near, at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works which they had seen, <sup>38</sup> saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest!" <sup>39</sup> Some of the Pharisees from the multitude said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" <sup>40</sup> He answered them, "I tell you that if these were silent, the stones would cry out." <sup>41</sup> When he came near, he saw the city and wept over it, <sup>42</sup> saying, "If you, even you, had known today the things which belong to your peace! But now, they are hidden from your eyes."

LUKE 19:37-42 · ALSO: ZECHARIAH 14:4 · ACTS 1:9-12

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

The Mount of Olives is the eastern wall of Jerusalem's world: a ridge higher than the Temple Mount, facing it across the narrow Kidron valley. Whoever descends its slope sees the whole city rise up to meet them, which is why the Palm Sunday road runs down this hill and why the crowds' shout and His weeping happened within the same few hundred meters. From this ridge He taught, here He wept, from here He ascended, and to this ridge Zechariah says the King returns: on that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Jesus, riding down.** The only day He accepted the crowd's worship, and in the middle of the singing He looked at the city and broke down crying, a King in tears over the city that would not know its hour. Rejoicing and weeping on the same donkey, on the same slope. **The crowd and the stones.** Rebuke them, said the officials. He answered that silence was not an option that exists: if these were silent, the stones would cry out. On this mountain of ancient stones, that was not a metaphor chosen at random.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Stand at the lookout and take in the view every pilgrim photographs: the golden city, the sealed Eastern Gate directly opposite, and below you, flowing down the slope, the oldest active cemetery on earth, generations of Jews buried facing the gates, waiting for resurrection morning exactly where Zechariah planted the promise. This whole mountainside is a congregation lying down, facing forward.

## THE HEBREW WORD

זַיִת · **Zayit**, olive. The tree of this ridge and of this land. The olive gives its light only when crushed, and the oil of these slopes lit the menorah of the Temple across the valley. Remember that word when we walk down to the olive press at the bottom of this hill.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*He wept over a city for missing the things that belong to its peace. If He looked at your life today, what hidden thing that belongs to your peace would He weep over?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. We will not be silent, lest the stones outsing us. Show us today the things that belong to our peace, while it is still today. And come back to this ridge soon, as You promised.*  
*Amen.*

# Bethphage & Bethany

*the house of the friend, where death was called outside*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>38</sup> Jesus therefore, again groaning in himself, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone lay against it. <sup>39</sup> Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days." <sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, "Didn't I tell you that if you believed, you would see God's glory?" <sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, "Father, I thank you that you listened to me. <sup>43</sup> When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" <sup>44</sup> He who was dead came out, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Free him, and let him go."

JOHN 11:38–44 (ABRIDGED: V. 42 OMITTED FOR READING) · READ THE WHOLE CHAPTER AT THE TOMB

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Two small villages on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, just over the ridge from Jerusalem, on the last stretch of the pilgrim road from Jericho. Bethphage is where the donkey was untied for the descent of Palm Sunday. Bethany was His Judean home: the house of Martha, Mary and Lazarus, the friends who fed Him and the table He returned to. Its name means house of the afflicted, and it earned the name honestly, and then one afternoon at its cemetery the affliction was ordered out loud to give back what it took.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Martha.** The practical one, arguing logistics at a tomb: Lord, there is a stench. Faith and realism wrestling in a single sentence, and Jesus does not scold her. He raises the stakes: you will see God's glory. **Lazarus.** The friend. The text never records a single word he spoke, before or after. He is famous forever for one thing only: he came out when he was called. **Jesus, groaning.** Twice the text says it. He wept at this village and groaned at this tomb. He does not perform the miracle coolly. He does it moved.

## THE 3D MOMENT

The tomb of Lazarus is still there in Bethany, cut in the rock, down worn steps into a cold chamber. Climb down into it, then climb back out into the sunlight, and feel what the story means with your legs. Every guest who walks up those steps is rehearsing the ending of the Book. Come out is the last command death ever hears.

## THE HEBREW WORD

בֵּית עֲנִיָּה · **Beit Anya**, house of the afflicted, house of the poor. He made His home in the town named for affliction. He still does. If your house has ever carried that name, know who chooses such addresses on purpose.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Lazarus came out alive but still bound, and Jesus turned to the community: free him, and let him go. Who around you is already alive in Christ but still wrapped, waiting for hands to unbind them?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You groaned at our graves and wept at our gates, and then You called the dead man by name. Call ours. Roll the stones we have given up on. And when the ones You raise come out still bound, make us the hands that unwrap them. Free them, and let them go. Amen.*

# Gethsemane

*the oil press, where the will of the Son was pressed*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>39</sup> He came out, and went, as his custom was, to the Mount of Olives. His disciples also followed him. <sup>40</sup> When he was at the place, he said to them, "Pray that you don't enter into temptation." <sup>41</sup> He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and he knelt down and prayed, <sup>42</sup> saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." <sup>43</sup> An angel from heaven appeared to him, strengthening him. <sup>44</sup> Being in agony he prayed more earnestly. His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. <sup>45</sup> When he rose up from his prayer, he came to the disciples, and found them sleeping because of grief, <sup>46</sup> and said to them, "Why do you sleep? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

LUKE 22:39-46

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Gethsemane lies at the foot of the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron from the Temple, exactly where an olive grove's working heart would be: Gat Shemen, the oil press. Olives from the whole ridge were carried down here to be crushed, and the name was waiting in the ground centuries before the night it explained. As his custom was, says Luke: this was His regular place of prayer, which is also how Judas knew where to bring the soldiers. He was betrayed at the address of His own faithfulness.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Jesus, a stone's throw away.** Close enough for the disciples to hear fragments, far enough to be alone with the cup. The prayer of this garden is the axis of the Gospel: not my will, but Yours. Everything after it, the trial, the cross, the tomb, was decided here, kneeling. **The sleeping three.** Peter, James and John, the same three from Tabor's glory, now unable to keep their eyes open in His agony. The Bible's honesty about its heroes is itself a comfort: He knows what we are made of, and He still says rise and pray.

## THE 3D MOMENT

The garden holds olive trees of enormous age, gnarled giants whose trunks have been carbon-dated to many centuries, growing from root systems that may be older still, shoots of shoots of the trees of that night. Put your hand on the bark. An olive tree never really dies: cut it down and it returns from the root. Of all the trees that could have witnessed that prayer, God planted the one that comes back.

## THE HEBREW WORD

גֶּתְשֶׁמַנִּי · **Gat Shemen**, oil press. Gethsemane. The place is named for the crushing that produces oil, and oil in this land means light and anointing. Messiah means the Anointed One. In the garden named for the press, the Anointed was pressed, and the light of the world was the yield.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Not my will, but Yours, be done. That sentence cost more here than it will ever cost us. What cup are you still negotiating over, a stone's throw from surrender?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, in the garden of the press You prayed the prayer that saved us: not my will, but Yours. Teach our mouths that sentence. Stay near us in our own dark gardens, wake us when we sleep through the hour, and let the crushing in our lives yield oil and not bitterness. Amen.*

# The City of David

*the narrow spur above the spring, where it all began*

OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>6</sup> The king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who spoke to David, saying, "The blind and the lame will keep you out of here," thinking, "David can't come in here." <sup>7</sup> Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion. This is David's city. <sup>8</sup> David said on that day, "Whoever strikes the Jebusites, let him go up to the watercourse." <sup>9</sup> David lived in the stronghold, and called it David's city. David built around from Millo and inward. <sup>10</sup> David grew greater and greater; for Yahweh, the God of Armies, was with him.

2 SAMUEL 5:6-10 (V. 8 LIGHTLY ABRIDGED FOR READING)

THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Here is the secret most pilgrims never learn until they stand on it: the original Jerusalem is not inside today's Old City walls. It is this narrow rocky spur running south from the Temple Mount, barely twelve acres, perched over the Gihon spring. Water and defense chose this hill, and David chose it for a third reason: it sat on the border between the tribes, belonging to none of them, a capital everyone could share. Three thousand years of Jerusalem begin on this little ridge. Everything else is expansion.



THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**David, around thirty.** Seven years a king in Hebron, now taking the one city no tribe had taken, possibly through the very watercourse the taunt was shouted over. He would reign here thirty-three years, sin here, repent here, write psalms here, and buy the threshing floor up the hill that became the Temple. **The Jebusites.** So confident in their walls that they manned them with a joke: the blind and the lame will keep you out. Overconfidence has been losing this city ever since.

THE 3D MOMENT

In the excavations, archaeologists found dozens of clay seal impressions, bullae, baked hard by the Babylonian fire that destroyed the city, and on them, names from the book of Jeremiah: Gemariah son of Shaphan, officials from the very chapters your group has read. The fire that burned the city preserved the signatures of the men in the Book. Judgment and preservation in one flame. You can see them with your own eyes.

THE HEBREW WORD

צִיּוֹן · **Tzion**, Zion. This verse is the word's first appearance in scripture: David took the stronghold of Zion. Every later Zion, in the Psalms, in the prophets, in the prayers of every exile, and in the name of the modern return, points back to this narrow spur of rock.

ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*David made his capital on ground that belonged to no tribe, so it could belong to all. What ground in your life needs to stop being territory and start being shared?*

WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, it all began here: a small hill, a spring, and a king You were with. Begin things in us again. Take the strongholds that mock us from their walls, build from the Millo inward, and be with us the way You were with David, greater and greater, for Your name. Amen.*

# The Temple Mount · Moriah

*the mountain where it is provided*

OPEN YOUR BIBLES · FIRST PAGE · THE BINDING

<sup>9</sup> They came to the place which God had told him of. Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood in order, bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, on the wood. <sup>11</sup> Yahweh's angel called to him out of the sky, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" He said, "Here I am." <sup>12</sup> He said, "Don't lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." <sup>13</sup> Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and saw that behind him was a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering instead of his son. <sup>14</sup> Abraham called the name of that place Yahweh Will Provide. As it is said to this day, "On Yahweh's mountain, it will be provided."

GENESIS 22:9–14 (ABRIDGED: V. 10 OMITTED FOR READING)

SECOND PAGE · THE SAME MOUNTAIN

<sup>1</sup> Then Solomon began to build Yahweh's house at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where Yahweh appeared to David his father, which he prepared in the place that David had appointed, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

2 CHRONICLES 3:1

THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

One verse ties the whole mountain together: Solomon built the Temple on Moriah, the mount of the binding of Isaac, on a threshing floor David insisted on buying at full price, saying he would not offer to God that which cost him nothing. Purchased ground, tested ground, provided-for ground. Two temples stood here and fell here, and the enormous platform your eyes see today is Herod's expansion of the second. No piece of earth carries more of the Bible's weight per square meter than this one.



THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Abraham and Isaac.** The father who did not withhold, the son who carried the wood up the hill, and the ram caught by its horns at the moment of provision. Christian pilgrims standing here feel the echo run forward: another Father, another Son, wood carried up a hill in this same city. **David the buyer, Solomon the builder.** One generation purchases in repentance, the next builds in peace. Most of God's houses are built exactly that way.

THE 3D MOMENT

Stand at any lookout over the platform and grasp what you are seeing: the largest man-made platform of the ancient world, and somewhere beneath the golden dome, the bedrock summit tradition calls the Foundation Stone, Even HaShtiya, where the binding was, where the Holy of Holies stood, where Jewish tradition says creation itself began. The mountain called It Will Be Provided is still the most watched, most prayed-over, most contested piece of ground on the planet. Names are prophecies here.

THE HEBREW WORD

יְרֵה · **Yireh**, He will see, He will provide. Yahweh Yireh, Abraham named it, and the saying survived: on the mountain of the Lord it will be provided. Seeing and providing are the same word in Hebrew, because what God sees, God supplies.

ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*David refused to offer what cost him nothing. What are you currently offering God that costs you nothing, and what would the full price look like?*

WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, on this mountain You saw, and You provided. See us now. Provide the ram we cannot see for the need we cannot carry. And as You watched over this mountain through fire and centuries, watch over everything we have laid on Your altar. On Your mountain, it will be provided. Amen.*

# The Eastern Gate

*the sealed gate, waiting for the glory to return the way it left*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · FIRST PAGE · THE GLORY ENTERS

<sup>1</sup>Afterward he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looks toward the east. <sup>2</sup>Behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth was illuminated with his glory. <sup>4</sup>Yahweh's glory came into the house by the way of the gate which faces toward the east.

EZEKIEL 43:1-4 (ABRIDGED: V. 3 OMITTED FOR READING)

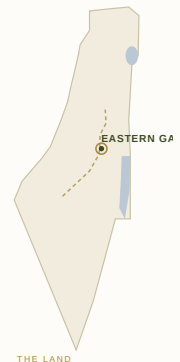
## SECOND PAGE · THE GATE IS SHUT

<sup>1</sup>Then he brought me back by the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary, which looks toward the east; and it was shut. <sup>2</sup>Yahweh said to me, "This gate shall be shut. It shall not be opened, no man shall enter in by it; for Yahweh, the God of Israel, has entered in by it. Therefore it shall be shut. <sup>3</sup>As for the prince, he shall sit in it as prince to eat bread before Yahweh."

EZEKIEL 44:1-3 (V. 3 LIGHTLY ABRIDGED)

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Of Jerusalem's eight gates, one stands sealed: the Eastern Gate, the Golden Gate, facing the Mount of Olives across the Kidron, the only gate that opens directly toward the rising sun and the returning King. Ezekiel saw the glory of God abandon the Temple eastward, over this valley, toward the mountain, and then saw it come back the same way, in by the east gate, and heard the verdict: this gate shall be shut, because the God of Israel has entered by it. The Ottomans walled it up five centuries ago. Prophecy does not mind who does the masonry.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Ezekiel, on his face.** The prophet who watched the glory leave is the one granted to watch it return, by the same gate, with a voice like many waters. God finishes His exits with entrances. **The sealers.** Suleiman's builders shut the gate in stone, and tradition says a cemetery was planted before it for good measure, to bar the way. Every attempt to lock this gate has only made it a better sermon: what man seals in fear, God has already scheduled in glory. And Zechariah adds the timetable's direction: on that day His feet stand on the Mount of Olives, directly opposite.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Stand on the Mount of Olives lookout and draw the straight line with your hand: the mountain under your feet, the Kidron below, and the sealed double arches of the Eastern Gate directly across, the only gate in the wall with no doorway, no traffic, no noise. Every other gate of Jerusalem is busy. This one is waiting. Your group is looking at the only piece of infrastructure on earth kept closed for an arrival.

## THE HEBREW WORD

שַׁעַר הָרַחֲמִים · **Sha'ar HaRachamim**, the Gate of Mercy, the gate's Hebrew name to this day. The world calls it Golden. Israel calls it Mercy. The sealed gate is named for the thing that will open it.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*The gate is shut because the glory entered, and waits because the glory returns. What in your life has God sealed not as punishment but as a reservation?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, the Gate of Mercy stands shut, holding Your place. Come back the way You left, from the east, with a voice like many waters, and let the earth shine with Your glory. Until that day, keep us like the gate: sealed for You, facing sunrise, waiting without rust. Amen.*

# The Western Wall

*the Kotel, where the prayers of the whole earth land*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>27</sup> "But will God in very deed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens can't contain you; how much less this house that I have built! <sup>28</sup> Yet have respect for the prayer of your servant, and for his supplication, Yahweh my God, to listen to the cry and to the prayer which your servant prays before you today; <sup>29</sup> that your eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which you have said, 'My name shall be there;' to listen to the prayer which your servant prays toward this place. <sup>30</sup> Listen to the supplication of your servant, and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Yes, hear in heaven, your dwelling place; and when you hear, forgive."

1 KINGS 8:27-30 · SOLOMON'S DEDICATION PRAYER · ALSO: ISAIAH 62:6

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

The Kotel is not a wall of the Temple itself. It is the western retaining wall of Herod's great platform, the closest place on earth an ordinary person can stand to where the Holy of Holies stood. Why do Jews pray here, and why do Jews everywhere face Jerusalem, and why do synagogues on every continent point at this city? Because of the prayer you just read: Solomon asked that every prayer prayed TOWARD this place would be heard in heaven. The Kotel is the address Solomon requested. Every prayer aimed here for three thousand years is taking him up on it.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Solomon, dedicating.** The wisest man alive stands before his own masterpiece and says the most honest sentence ever spoken at a dedication: heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house. He built the house and then immediately talked God out of the walls: not dwell here, but listen here. **The generations.** Exiles who wept by Babylon's rivers facing this direction, grandmothers who never arrived, paratroopers weeping at these stones in 1967. Every one of them prayed toward this place, as Solomon asked.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Lay your hand on the great Herodian stones, some weighing hundreds of tons, laid without mortar and standing through every conquest. Look at the notes folded into every crack, prayers mailed to the address Solomon opened. And look up: the swifts nest and wheel above the stones, the sparrow that found a home by Your altars, exactly as Psalm 84 promised. Then tell your group what Isaiah said over these ramparts: I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never be silent. Some of the watchmen are on the wall right now, and some are praying toward it from the far side of the world.

## THE HEBREW WORD

כֶּתֶל · **Kotel**, wall. The word appears once in scripture, in the Song of Songs: behold, he stands behind our kotel, gazing through the windows. The old teachers read it about this wall: the Presence never left it, He is just behind it, listening.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Solomon asked God not to dwell in the house but to listen toward it. Where is your listening place, the spot your prayers aim from, and when did you last stand there?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, Your eyes are open toward this place night and day, as Solomon asked. Then see us standing here, and see every watchman praying toward this wall from every nation. We have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem, and they will not be silent. Hear in heaven, Your dwelling place. And when You hear, forgive. Amen.*

# Jerusalem · Three Thousand Years

*one city, from David's spur to this morning's headlines*

OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>1</sup> I was glad when they said to me, "Let's go to Yahweh's house!" <sup>2</sup> Our feet are standing within your gates, Jerusalem; <sup>3</sup> Jerusalem, that is built as a city that is compact together; <sup>4</sup> where the tribes go up, even Yah's tribes, according to an ordinance for Israel, to give thanks to Yahweh's name. <sup>5</sup> For there are set thrones for judgment, the thrones of David's house. <sup>6</sup> Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Those who love you will prosper. <sup>7</sup> Peace be within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces. <sup>8</sup> For my brothers' and companions' sakes, I will now say, "Peace be within you." <sup>9</sup> For the sake of the house of Yahweh our God, I will seek your good.

PSALM 122 · A SONG OF ASCENTS, OF DAVID

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Hold the whole story in one breath. David takes the spur, around three thousand years ago. Solomon builds the house. Babylon burns it and drags the singers to the rivers of exile, where they swear: if I forget you, O Jerusalem. They return and rebuild. Herod makes it magnificent, Rome makes it rubble, and for nineteen centuries the city passes hand to hand, Byzantine, Arab, Crusader, Mamluk, Ottoman, British, while the exiles keep praying toward it three times a day from every corner of the earth. In 1948 the state returns and the city is cut in two. In 1967 the paratroopers reach the wall and weep. And this morning, children walked to school inside the gates your feet are standing in. The psalm is not history. It is a live broadcast.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**The pilgrims of every century.** The psalm was written for walkers: tribes going up, sandals on stone, the same three words in their mouths, our feet are standing. Roman-era pilgrims, medieval pilgrims who walked for a year, your own group who flew for a day. One unbroken procession, three thousand years long, and today you are the ones inside the gates. **The rememberers.** Every Jewish wedding for two thousand years has ended with a broken glass and this city's name, if I forget you. No city on earth has been remembered harder.

## THE 3D MOMENT

In the Jewish Quarter, children play on a playground beside a massive stretch of stone called the Broad Wall, built by King Hezekiah when Isaiah walked this city, twenty-seven centuries ago. That one glance is the whole lesson of Jerusalem: the deepest past and the ordinary present, side by side, a toddler's ball bouncing against Isaiah's wall. Every layer of this city is still in use. Nothing here ever fully becomes the past.

## THE HEBREW WORD

**יְרוּשָׁלַיִם · Yerushalayim.** The name ends in the Hebrew dual form, the ending reserved for things that come in pairs, like eyes and hands. The old teachers said: because there are two of her, the Jerusalem below and the Jerusalem above, and the city you are walking in is where they touch. And buried in her name is shalem: wholeness, peace. The city's name is a prayer the world is still learning to say.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Three thousand years of pilgrims said the same sentence: our feet are standing within your gates. Now it is your feet. What did you carry up here, and what will you leave?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, we pray for the peace of Jerusalem, as Your word commands. Peace within her walls. Peace in her houses and her schools and her markets, for our brothers' and companions' sakes. Guard the city where heaven and earth touch, and count our feet among the generations that stood glad within her gates. Amen.*

# Hezekiah's Tunnel & the Pool of Siloam

*the water under the city, and the pool called Sent*

OPEN YOUR BIBLES · FIRST PAGE · THE ENGINEER KING

<sup>30</sup> This same Hezekiah also stopped the upper spring of the waters of Gihon, and brought them straight down on the west side of David's city. Hezekiah prospered in all his works.

2 CHRONICLES 32:30 · ALSO: 2 KINGS 20:20

SECOND PAGE · THE POOL CALLED SENT

<sup>1</sup> As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, "Neither did this man sin, nor his parents; but, that the works of God might be revealed in him. <sup>5</sup> While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." <sup>6</sup> When he had said this, he spat on the ground, made mud with the saliva, anointed the blind man's eyes with the mud, <sup>7</sup> and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means "Sent"). So he went away, washed, and came back seeing.

JOHN 9:1-7 (ABRIDGED: V. 4 OMITTED FOR READING)

THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Seven centuries apart, one water system carries both stories. With Assyria marching, King Hezekiah's men cut a tunnel through a third of a mile of solid rock, two teams digging from opposite ends and meeting in the middle, to bring the Gihon spring safely inside the walls to a pool called Shiloach, Sent. To that same pool, in that same tunnel's water, Jesus sent a man born blind. From thirty thousand feet the whole Bible works like this tunnel: two testaments cut from opposite ends, meeting perfectly in the middle.



THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Hezekiah.** The king who prayed AND engineered, trusting God with his knees and preparing with his hands. His workers left a stone inscription at the meeting point describing the moment the two teams heard each other's picks through the rock. **The man born blind.** He never asked to be healed. Jesus saw him, the mud went on his eyes, and the command had an address. His obedience was a walk through the city, blind, wet-faced, to a pool named Sent. He was sent to Sent, and came back seeing.

THE 3D MOMENT

You can walk the tunnel today, knee-deep in the same living water, in the dark, hand on Hezekiah's chisel marks, and come out at the Pool of Siloam, whose broad ancient steps were uncovered in our own generation. The blind man's pool sat lost under debris for centuries, and now your group can stand on its stones. The Book keeps handing us back its addresses.

THE HEBREW WORD

שִׁלּוֹחַ · **Shiloach**, Sent. John pauses his own story to translate the pool's name, because the name is the sermon: a sent man, washing in a pool called Sent, healed by the One who was Sent. Every believer since is standing in that water.

ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*The blind man obeyed a strange command with mud still on his eyes. What has God already told you to do that only makes sense after the washing?*

WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You are the God of tunnels: You work in the dark, from both ends, and You meet us in the middle. Send us like the pool is named. Put Your hands on what we cannot see, tell us where to wash, and let us come back seeing. Amen.*

# The Pool of Bethesda

*the house of mercy, where the question was the healing*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>2</sup> Now in Jerusalem by the sheep gate, there is a pool, which is called in Hebrew, "Bethesda", having five porches. <sup>3</sup> In these lay a great multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, or paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. <sup>5</sup> A certain man was there, who had been sick for thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup> When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had been sick for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to be made well?" <sup>7</sup> The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I'm coming, another steps down before me." <sup>8</sup> Jesus said to him, "Arise, take up your mat, and walk." <sup>9</sup> Immediately, the man was made well, and took up his mat and walked. Now it was the Sabbath on that day.

JOHN 5:2-9 (ABRIDGED: V. 4 OMITTED FOR READING)

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

By the Sheep Gate, where the flocks for the Temple sacrifices entered the city, lay a double pool with five porticoes, and under the porticoes lay the people nobody had a sacrifice for: the blind, the lame, the paralyzed, a waiting room of last hopes. Skeptics long doubted John's five porches until archaeologists uncovered the double pool by the Church of Saint Anne, five colonnaded sides exactly as written. The name tells you what happened here before anything happened: Beit Chesda, house of mercy.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**The man of thirty-eight years.** Ask him about God and he answers about logistics: I have no one to put me in, someone always beats me. Thirty-eight years of almost. Jesus does not fix his theology or his queue position. He skips the water entirely. **Jesus, choosing one.** A multitude lay in those porches and He healed one man, who did not know His name, did not ask, and did not even answer the question. If grace waited for the right answer, the man would still be lying there. Grace picked him up anyway.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Stand at the railing above the excavated pools by Saint Anne's church and look down into the deep cuts of the double pool. Then step into the church itself and sing one line with your group: the Crusader stones hold an echo of several seconds, and a single verse of Amazing Grace becomes a choir. The house of mercy still has the best acoustics in Jerusalem. Mercy always echoes longer than we expect.

## THE HEBREW WORD

**חֶסֶד** · **Chesed**, mercy, covenant kindness. Beit Chesda, the house of chesed. The Bible's biggest little word: the loyal love that acts first and asks questions later. The pool was named for it centuries before the day chesed walked in on two feet.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Do you want to be made well? It sounds like a strange question until year thirty-eight, when the mat has become the identity. What mat has been under you so long that you have stopped wanting to stand?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, walk into our house of mercy. Find the ones who stopped answering the question, the thirty-eight-year cases, the ones with no one to carry them. Do not wait for our water to stir. Say the word You said here: arise. And we will carry the mats out as testimony. Amen.*

# The Southern Steps · Pentecost

*the birthplace of the church, on the stairs of the Temple*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · FIRST PAGE · THE WIND AND THE FIRE

<sup>1</sup> Now when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all with one accord in one place. <sup>2</sup> Suddenly there came from the sky a sound like the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> Tongues like fire appeared and were distributed to them, and one sat on each of them. <sup>4</sup> They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak. <sup>5</sup> Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under the sky. <sup>6</sup> When this sound was heard, the multitude came together, and were bewildered, because everyone heard them speaking in his own language.

ACTS 2:1-6

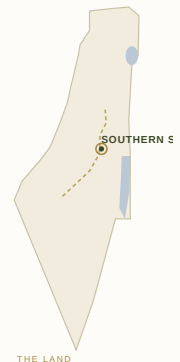
## SECOND PAGE · THE HARVEST

<sup>41</sup> Then those who gladly received his word were baptized. There were added that day about three thousand souls.

ACTS 2:41

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Read the story in its Jewish frame and it opens like a gate. Pentecost is Shavuot, the harvest feast, fifty days after Passover, when Jerusalem filled with pilgrims from every nation under the sky, the feast that also remembers the giving of the Torah at Sinai. At Sinai, tradition says, the Word went out in fire and in every language, and three thousand fell. At Shavuot in Jerusalem, the Spirit fell in fire and every language, and three thousand rose from the water. The church was not born at a new festival. It was born at the oldest one, right on schedule.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Peter, fifty days later.** The man who denied Him to a servant girl now stands up before the pilgrim crowds of the world and preaches the sermon of his life. Fifty days is enough time for God to rebuild a man. **The three thousand.** Pilgrims who came for a harvest feast and became the harvest. They needed immersion, and the south side of the Temple had what no other place in the city had: dozens of mikvaot, ritual baths, built for the festival crowds. The infrastructure of the old covenant baptized the first church.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Sit your group down on the Southern Steps themselves, the actual monumental stairway where pilgrims entered the Temple, where rabbis taught, where Jesus walked in and out of the house of His Father. These stones are original. Then walk them past the row of excavated mikvaot at the foot of the steps: the most likely baptistery of Acts chapter two, still open to the sky. Of every place in this land where you can say it happened right here, few say it louder than these stairs.

## THE HEBREW WORD

שבועות · **Shavuot**, weeks. The feast of the counted weeks, seven sevens from Passover to harvest. God had the church's birthday on the calendar since Leviticus. Nothing in the Book is improvised.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Peter fell at Passover and stood at Shavuot, fifty days later. What failure are you still counting days from, and do you believe fifty days is enough for God to rebuild you too?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You kept the appointment You set in Leviticus and birthed Your church on the harvest feast, on these stairs. Fall on us the same way. Fill our mouths with words every listener can understand, rebuild our Peters in fifty days, and bring the harvest up out of the water gladly, three thousand at a time. Amen.*

# The Via Dolorosa

*the way of sorrow, walked in the green tree*

OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>26</sup> When they led him away, they grabbed one Simon of Cyrene, coming from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it after Jesus. <sup>27</sup> A great multitude of the people followed him, including women who also mourned and lamented him. <sup>28</sup> But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, don't weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. <sup>31</sup> For if they do these things in the green tree, what will be done in the dry?"

LUKE 23:26-31 (ABRIDGED: VV. 29-30 OMITTED FOR READING)

THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

The Way of Sorrow threads today through the market streets of the Old City, from the area of the Antonia fortress toward Golgotha, fourteen stations deep in incense and noise. The exact Roman pavement lies meters below the present street, but the direction is true and the distance is short: the most consequential walk in history was a few hundred meters through a crowded city on a festival morning, past shoppers and soldiers and people who never looked up. The world's redemption elbowed its way through a market.



THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Simon of Cyrene.** A pilgrim from North Africa, in from the country, grabbed out of the crowd and handed the beam. He came to Jerusalem for Passover and left carrying the cross of the Lamb. Mark names his sons, Alexander and Rufus, as men the early church knew, which tells you what that forced walk did to his family. **The daughters of Jerusalem.** Even under the beam, His concern ran toward them: do not weep for me. He was comforting mourners on the way to His own execution. That is who walked this street.

THE 3D MOMENT

Walk it early, before the shops open, when the street is quiet enough to hear your own steps on the stone. Or walk it at full market roar, which is more honest: it looked like this, crowded and loud and mostly indifferent. Either way, watch your group's pace change. Nobody strolls the Via Dolorosa. The body understands this street before the mind does.

THE HEBREW WORD

דֶּרֶךְ הַיְסוּרִים · **Derech HaYisurim**, the way of the sufferings. Hebrew keeps the plural: not one sorrow but the gathered sorrows, His and ours, carried down one narrow street. Isaiah wrote the caption seven centuries early: surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.

ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Simon was grabbed from the crowd and made to carry it. Grace often starts as an interruption we did not volunteer for. What interruption in your life might actually be the cross you were chosen to carry behind Him?*

WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You walked the way of sorrows through an ordinary market morning, and You comforted the weeping while You bled. Give us Simon's shoulders when we are grabbed from the crowd. And as we walk Your street, let our hearts refuse to be one more face that never looked up. Amen.*

# Calvary · Golgotha

*the place of the skull, where it was finished*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>17</sup> He went out, bearing his cross, to the place called "The Place of a Skull", which is called in Hebrew, "Golgotha", <sup>18</sup> where they crucified him, and with him two others, on either side one, and Jesus in the middle. <sup>19</sup> Pilate wrote a title also, and put it on the cross. There was written, "JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS." <sup>20</sup> Therefore many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. <sup>25</sup> But there were standing by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup> Therefore when Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing there, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" <sup>27</sup> Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" <sup>28</sup> After this, Jesus, seeing that all things were now finished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I am thirsty." <sup>30</sup> When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, "It is finished." He bowed his head, and gave up his spirit.

JOHN 19:17-30 (ABRIDGED: VV. 21-24, 29 OMITTED FOR READING)

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

John gives the geography in one phrase: near the city. Executions were held outside the wall but beside the road, where every passerby could read the charge, and Pilate's sign in Hebrew, Latin and Greek turned the cross into a proclamation to the whole world whether Rome intended it or not. From thirty thousand feet, every altar in the Book has been pointing here: the ram on Moriah just up the ridge, the Passover lambs bleeding that same afternoon inside the Temple, Isaiah's suffering servant, all of it converging on one hill shaped like a skull, near the city, beside the road.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Jesus, in the middle.** Even His position preached: crucified between two others, numbered with the transgressors, exactly as Isaiah said. From the cross He ran a household: a mother given a son, a thief given paradise, a world given everything. **The women and John.** When nearly all the men had scattered, the women stood close enough to be spoken to. Love stood in range of the dying voice. **The last word.** One word in the Greek, tetelestai: finished, completed, and in the marketplace of that day, paid in full. Not a cry of defeat. A receipt.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Two sites hold the memory, and both are inside this page: the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where the rock of Calvary rises glassed-in beside the crowds, and Gordon's Calvary by the Garden Tomb, the skull-faced cliff where the quiet lets you think. Take your group to either, or both, and tell them the honest truth: the argument between the sites changes nothing. The word spoken on the real hill covers both, and covers them: paid in full.

## THE HEBREW WORD

גִּלְגֹּלֶת · **Gulgolet**, skull. Golgotha is simply the Hebrew word John translated for his readers. In the Torah, the census counted every head, every gulgolet, and each one owed a ransom. At the place of the Skull, the ransom for every counted head was paid at once.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*It is finished, He said. Not almost, not mostly, finished. What are you still trying to add to a payment that was made in full?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, at the place of the skull You said the word we could never say: finished. We bring You nothing but the counted heads You already ransomed. Let us stop paying a settled debt, stand with the women inside the range of Your voice, and live the rest of our days as people whose receipt reads paid in full. Amen.*

# The Empty Tomb

*the Holy Sepulchre and the Garden Tomb, and the linen lying folded*

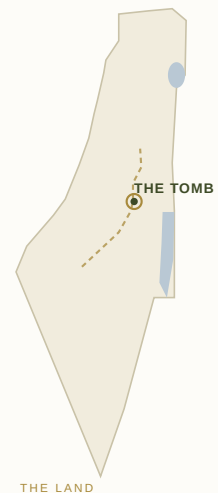
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>1</sup>Now on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went early, while it was still dark, to the tomb, and saw the stone taken away from the tomb. <sup>2</sup>Therefore she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have laid him!" <sup>3</sup>Therefore Peter and the other disciple went out, and they went toward the tomb. <sup>4</sup>They both ran together. The other disciple outran Peter, and came to the tomb first. <sup>5</sup>Stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths lying, yet he didn't enter in. <sup>6</sup>Then Simon Peter came, following him, and entered into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying, <sup>7</sup>and the cloth that had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup>So then the other disciple who came first to the tomb also entered in, and he saw and believed.

JOHN 20:1-8 · THE WOMAN FROM MAGDALA, FIRST AGAIN

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

John notes the geography with a gardener's precision: in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb. Calvary and the tomb were neighbors, which is why both memorial sites keep them side by side: the Holy Sepulchre holds Calvary and the tomb under one roof, and at the Garden Tomb the skull cliff and the rock-cut tomb sit a stone's throw apart. Death and resurrection happened within one garden's walk of each other. The distance between the worst day and the best day was a few dozen meters and one Shabbat.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Mary of Magdala, first again.** The delivered woman from the fish town, last at the cross, first at the tomb, first to run, and soon, first to see Him and hear her own name. **Peter and John, racing.** John gives us the footrace with a reporter's honesty, who outran whom, who stooped, who entered. **The folded cloth.** Grave robbers do not fold laundry. The head cloth rolled up in a place by itself is the quietest detail in the Gospel, and John says it is the one that made him believe: whatever happened in that tomb happened calmly.

## THE 3D MOMENT

At the Garden Tomb, your group will stand before a rock-cut tomb with a channel for a rolling stone, and on its wooden door four words that outrank every argument between the sites: HE IS NOT HERE. At the Sepulchre, they will stand in the two-thousand-year line of every nation shuffling toward a small empty room. Either way, the evidence your eyes verify is the same evidence John saw: the emptiness. This is the only shrine on earth venerated for what is NOT in it.

## THE HEBREW WORD

קם · **Kam**, risen, arisen. The shortest great word in the language. On this morning the watchmen's greeting was born, the one believers in this land still trade at Passover: Hu kam. He is risen. Two letters in Hebrew carry the whole of Easter.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*John saw the folded cloth and believed before he understood. What evidence has God already shown you that you have seen but not yet let yourself believe?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You left the tomb the way You do all things: unhurried, with the cloth folded. Meet us in the garden while it is still dark. Call us by name like You called Mary. And send us running like the two of them ran, out of breath, to say the two words this whole land whispers: He is risen. Amen.*

# Mount Zion & the Upper Room

*the table where the covenant was poured*

OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>14</sup> When the hour had come, he sat down with the twelve apostles. <sup>15</sup> He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, <sup>16</sup> for I tell you, I will no longer by any means eat of it until it is fulfilled in God's Kingdom." <sup>17</sup> He received a cup, and when he had given thanks, he said, "Take this, and share it among yourselves, <sup>18</sup> for I tell you, I will not drink at all again from the fruit of the vine, until God's Kingdom comes." <sup>19</sup> He took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in memory of me." <sup>20</sup> Likewise, he took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

LUKE 22:14-20

THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Mount Zion is the southwestern hill just outside today's walls, and tradition gathers the beginnings of the church onto it: the Upper Room of the last Passover, the room of the resurrection appearances, the waiting room of Acts chapter one. Understand the meal in its Jewish frame and every gesture ignites: a Passover seder has four cups, and the cup after supper, the third, is the cup of redemption, lifted over the words I will redeem you with an outstretched arm. That is the cup He chose. He took the redemption cup and filled it with Himself.



THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Jesus, the host.** I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you: the Greek doubles the longing, with desire I have desired. He was not dreading the table. He was longing for it, because at that table He could finally hand them the covenant He came to cut. **The twelve around it.** One would deny Him, one would betray Him, all would scatter, and He knew it, and He served them the bread anyway. The communion table has never required perfect guests. Only hungry ones.

THE 3D MOMENT

The Cenacle shown today on Mount Zion is a Crusader-era hall standing over far older layers, and below it lies the traditional tomb of David: the Upper Room over the resting king, the new covenant poured out literally above the old kingdom. Whatever the archaeology finally rules, every communion table on every continent this Sunday is the accurate replica. This room has more copies than any room in history.

THE HEBREW WORD

**בְּרִית** · **Brit**, covenant. In Hebrew you do not sign a covenant, you cut it, because covenants cost blood from the beginning. This cup is the new covenant in my blood: at that table the cutting and the cup became one thing, offered around a circle of men about to fail Him.

ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*He earnestly desired to eat that meal with the very people about to fail Him. Whose failure are you holding at arm's length that He would still set a table for?*

WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You longed for the table more than You feared the night. Give us that heart. Pour the cup of redemption over our houses, break bread with the ones who will fail us, and keep us at Your table until You drink it new with us in the Kingdom. Amen.*

# The Old City Today

*one square kilometer, four quarters, every century still open*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>12</sup> Walk about Zion, and go around her. Number its towers. <sup>13</sup> Mark well her bulwarks. Consider her palaces, that you may tell it to the next generation. <sup>14</sup> For this God is our God forever and ever. He will be our guide even to death.

PSALM 48:12-14 · THE PSALM COMMANDS THE WALKING TOUR

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

The Old City is one square kilometer holding four quarters, Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Armenian, wrapped in Ottoman walls built by Suleiman on far older lines. Eight gates, of which one, the Eastern, stands sealed, waiting. Within this square kilometer: the Kotel, the Sepulchre, the Temple platform, the markets, the rooftops, the bells and the calls to prayer and the Shabbat siren, all layered and simultaneous. Psalm 48 is the oldest walking tour in print, and its purpose clause is the whole reason guides exist: that you may tell it to the next generation.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**The keepers of the quarters.** The nun sweeping her doorstep, the shopkeeper who inherited his shelf from his grandfather, the yeshiva student hurrying to the wall, the Armenian priest in the world's oldest diaspora quarter. Four communities keeping four sets of keys to one square kilometer. Every one of them is a living page. **The pilgrims.** On any given morning the Old City hosts more languages than Pentecost. Walk slowly and you will hear the nations arriving, exactly as the prophets kept promising they would.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Take your group up to the ramparts walk or the rooftop lookout above the quarters, where all four quarters spread below in one view: domes, crosses, minarets and the golden Dome beyond, laundry lines over ancient stone. Then do what the psalm says, literally: walk about Zion, go around her, count the towers. The psalm is not describing the tour. The psalm IS the tour, and the next generation clause is riding home in your group's photographs.

## THE HEBREW WORD

רֹבָע · **Rova**, quarter. The Jewish Quarter is simply HaRova, THE quarter. One small Hebrew word carrying the weight of return: destroyed in 1948, rebuilt after 1967, children's bicycles now leaning on Byzantine columns.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*That you may tell it to the next generation, says the psalm. You have walked her and numbered her towers. Who exactly is your next generation, and when will you tell them?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, we walked about Zion today. We counted her towers and marked her walls, as Your word told us to. Now make us tellers. Give us the faces of the next generation across our tables, and the words to hand them this city. For this God is our God, forever and ever. Amen.*

# Jerusalem United · 1967

*the prophecy with children playing in it*

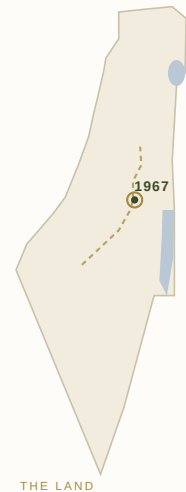
OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>3</sup> "I have returned to Zion, and will dwell in the middle of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called 'The City of Truth;' and the mountain of Yahweh of Armies, 'The Holy Mountain.' <sup>4</sup> Old men and old women will again dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, every man with his staff in his hand for very age. <sup>5</sup> The streets of the city will be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. <sup>6</sup> If it is marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be marvelous in my eyes?" says Yahweh of Armies. <sup>7</sup> "Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; <sup>8</sup> and I will bring them, and they will dwell within Jerusalem; and they will be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness."

ZECHARIAH 8:3-8 · WRITTEN TO A RUINED CITY, ~2,500 YEARS AGO

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

For nineteen years, 1948 to 1967, a wall of concrete and barbed wire cut this city in two, and no Jew could reach the Kotel. Then came three days in June. On the seventh of June 1967, the twenty-eighth of Iyar, paratroopers came through the Lions' Gate, and a radio crackled three words that made a nation weep: Har HaBayit b'yadenu, the Temple Mount is in our hands. Men who had fought all night stood at the wall and cried like children. Zechariah wrote his promise to a generation staring at ruins, and dared them to find it marvelous. From thirty thousand feet, the marvel has a date.



THE LAND

## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Zechariah.** A prophet of the ruins, promising grandmothers on benches and children playing ball to a city of ash. Notice what his sign of redemption is: not armies, not walls. Old age and play, the two most fragile things, safe in the streets. **The paratroopers at the wall.** Farm boys and clerks, mostly secular, who reached the stones their grandmothers prayed toward and found themselves weeping without knowing the words. The photograph of their faces became the mirror of a whole people.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Go to any playground in the Jewish Quarter at four in the afternoon, or watch the grandmothers on the benches along the rebuilt streets, and read Zechariah 8 out loud right there: old men and old women in the streets, boys and girls playing. Your group will be standing inside a fulfilled prophecy, watching it play tag. It is the only archaeological site in this land where the evidence is alive and laughing.

## THE HEBREW WORD

נִפְלָא · **Nifla**, marvelous, wonderful. God's own question in the passage: if it is marvelous in your eyes, should it not be marvelous in Mine? He invites the remnant to be amazed together with Him. Wonder, in this city, is a shared activity between heaven and the sidewalk.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Zechariah's proof of redemption was grandmothers and playing children, the fragile things safe at last. What fragile thing in your world would be the sign that God has truly returned to the middle of it?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You said You would return to Zion, and the streets are full of children to prove it. It is marvelous in our eyes. Keep the grandmothers on the benches and the boys and girls at their games, gather Your people from the east and the west, and dwell in the middle of this city, in truth and in righteousness. Amen.*

# Bethlehem

*the house of bread, where the Bread of Life was laid in a feeding trough*

OPEN YOUR BIBLES · FIRST PAGE · THE ADDRESS, ANNOUNCED EARLY

<sup>2</sup> But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, being small among the clans of Judah, out of you one will come out to me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings out are from of old, from ancient times.

MICAH 5:2 · WRITTEN SEVEN CENTURIES BEFORE

SECOND PAGE · THE NIGHT

<sup>4</sup> Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to David's city, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David; <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the day had come for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup> She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a feeding trough, because there was no room for them in the inn. <sup>8</sup> There were shepherds in the same country staying in the field, and keeping watch by night over their flock. <sup>10</sup> The angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be to all the people. <sup>11</sup> For there is born to you today, in David's city, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men."

LUKE 2:4-14 (ABRIDGED: VV. 5, 9, 12-13 OMITTED FOR READING)

THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Bethlehem sits on the Ridge Route just south of Jerusalem, close enough that the Temple flocks grazed its fields. Some traditions say the lambs for the Passover sacrifices were raised in these very pastures, watched by these very shepherds, which would make the angel's audience the men who raised lambs for the altar, told to go find the Lamb. Ruth gleaned these fields, David was anointed here, and Micah named this small town as the address seven hundred years in advance. God does not improvise His geography.



THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Mary and Joseph.** A young couple far from home, sorted by an empire's census into exactly the town the prophet named. Rome thought it was counting taxpayers. It was delivering a prophecy. **The shepherds.** Working men on night shift, the first audience of the best news ever announced. Heaven skipped the palace up the road and told the men in the field. It still works that way.

THE 3D MOMENT

In the Church of the Nativity, you enter through the Door of Humility, a stone doorway so low that every visitor must bow to come in, whatever their rank. Then down to the grotto and the fourteen-pointed star. Watch your group at that door. Nobody enters Bethlehem upright. The architecture preaches before the guide says a word.

THE HEBREW WORD

בֵּית לֶחֶם · **Beit Lechem**, house of bread. The One who would call Himself the Bread of Life was born in the house of bread and laid where food is laid, in a feeding trough. From the first hour, the message was the same: He came to be received.

ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Heaven announced the news to shepherds on night shift and made every visitor bow at the door. Where is your rank getting in the way of your entering?*

WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You chose the small town, the night shift, and the low door. Give us shepherds' ears for good news and the humility to bend at the entrance. Bread of Life, born in the house of bread, let us receive You the way a manger receives: simply, and with room. Amen.*

# Herodion

*the man-made mountain, in sight of the manger*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>1</sup>Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, <sup>2</sup>"Where is he who is born King of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east, and have come to worship him." <sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup>Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he asked them where the Christ would be born. <sup>5</sup>They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is written through the prophet, <sup>6</sup>'You Bethlehem, land of Judah, are in no way least among the princes of Judah: for out of you shall come a governor, who shall shepherd my people, Israel.'"

MATTHEW 2:1-6 · THE MASSACRE FOLLOWS IN V. 16

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Herod the Great sliced the top off one hill, piled it onto another, and built himself a cone-shaped mountain fortress you can see from Bethlehem, four kilometers away. That fact is the whole page: the king who ordered the children of Bethlehem killed built his monument within sight of the village he feared, and chose to be buried facing it. Two kings entered history a few kilometers and a few years apart. One built a mountain to be remembered. One was laid in a feeding trough.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Herod.** The greatest builder this land ever knew: Caesarea's harbor, the Temple platform, Masada's palaces, and this private mountain. He murdered sons, wives, and the infants of Bethlehem to hold a throne he lost anyway, to death, within a year or two of the child's birth.

**The wise men.** Foreigners who read the sky, asked the wrong palace, and then obeyed the star past it. They gave their treasures to a toddler in a village and went home by another way. History remembers them as wise. It calls Herod great only in stone.

## THE 3D MOMENT

In 2007, after a thirty-five-year search, archaeologist Ehud Netzer found Herod's tomb on the slope of this mountain: a shattered sarcophagus of rose-colored stone, deliberately smashed in antiquity. The king who moved a mountain to be remembered lies broken on its side, while the child he hunted is worshiped this morning in ten thousand languages. Climb the cone, look at Bethlehem, and let the view finish the sermon.

## THE HEBREW WORD

אָפֶר · **Afar**, dust. For dust you are, and to dust you shall return. Herod moved a mountain of afar to escape the verse, and became its illustration. In this land even the greatest builders end up as archaeology.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Herod built a mountain against being forgotten, and is remembered mainly for his fear. What are you building to be remembered by, and would the wise men call it wise?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, keep us from building mountains against our own smallness. Let us be like the travelers who followed Your light past the palace, worshiped low, and went home another way. And when we are dust, let what remains of us be worship, not walls. Amen.*

# Hebron

*the city of the friend, and the first deed in the Bible*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>17</sup> So the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, the cave which was in it, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all of its borders, were deeded <sup>18</sup> to Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city. <sup>19</sup> After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre (that is, Hebron), in the land of Canaan. <sup>20</sup> The field, and the cave that is in it, were deeded to Abraham by the children of Heth as a possession for a burial place.

GENESIS 23:17-20 · THE FULL NEGOTIATION IN VV. 3-16

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Hebron sits high on the Ridge Route, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities on earth, and it holds the Bible's first recorded real estate transaction. God had promised Abraham the whole land, and the only piece he ever legally owned he bought at full price, witnessed at the city gate: a field and a cave, for a grave. Sarah, Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah all rest here. David reigned here seven years before Jerusalem. The deed in Genesis 23 reads like a contract because it is one, and it is the oldest title deed still being argued over on planet earth.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Abraham, negotiating.** Offered the cave for free, he insists on paying the full four hundred shekels, weighed out before witnesses. A promise from God and a paid receipt from men: faith holds both without embarrassment. He is called in this land Avraham HaIvri, and something more: the friend of God. **Sarah.** The only woman in scripture whose age at death is recorded, a measure of her honor. The first possession of the promised land was purchased because of love for her.

## THE 3D MOMENT

The enormous enclosure over the Cave of Machpelah was built by Herod, and its lower courses match the Kotel's stones almost block for block: the same royal masonry over the tomb of the friend of God and around the mountain of His house. It is the only Herodian building on earth still standing complete, roof and all. The oldest deed in the Book is guarded by the best preserved building of the land.

## THE HEBREW WORD

חֵבְרוֹן · **Chaver**, friend. Hebron carries the word inside its name, and Isaiah supplies the title: Abraham, My friend. The city of the friend holds the family of the promise, together in one cave, waiting.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Abraham owned one field and a cave, and believed God for the whole land. What is the small paid-for beginning in your life that faith is asking you to see as a down payment on a promise?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You called Abraham Your friend, and he called You faithful. Teach us to buy our convictions at full price, before witnesses, and to bury our beloved in hope. And as the fathers and mothers rest in one cave, gather our families into one promise. Amen.*

# Jericho

*the oldest city on earth, where walls fall and grace climbs trees*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · FIRST PAGE · THE WALLS

<sup>2</sup>Yahweh said to Joshua, "Behold, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and the mighty men of valor. <sup>3</sup>All of your men of war shall march around the city, going around the city once. You shall do this six days. <sup>4</sup>Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day, you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets." <sup>20</sup>So the people shouted and the priests blew the trumpets. When the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted with a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight in front of him, and they took the city.

JOSHUA 6:2-4, 20

## SECOND PAGE · THE SYCAMORE

<sup>2</sup>There was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. <sup>4</sup>He ran on ahead, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was going to pass that way. <sup>5</sup>When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and saw him, and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." <sup>9</sup>Jesus said to him, "Today, salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup>For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost."

LUKE 19:2-10 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Jericho is the oldest city on earth and the lowest, an oasis on the desert floor where the springs meet the heat, guarding the fords of the Jordan. Whoever entered the land from the east met Jericho first, which is why Israel's first battle happened here and why Jesus' last road to Jerusalem passed through here. The city of the fallen walls became the city of the climbed tree: the first story tears defenses down from outside, the second melts them from inside, over dinner.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Joshua's marchers.** Six days of silent laps around a locked city, obeying a battle plan with no battle in it. The wall fell to obedience that looked like foolishness for a week. **Zacchaeus.** The little rich man whom Jericho hated, up a tree like a boy. Jesus invited Himself to the one house in town that scandalized everyone, and the wall around that heart went down like its city's famous ones: suddenly, and flat. Half my goods to the poor, fourfold to anyone wronged. Salvation, with receipts.

## THE 3D MOMENT

The tel of ancient Jericho holds a stone tower ten thousand years old, built before pottery was invented, and around the oasis the sycamore fig trees still grow, the exact climbable species of the story. Nearby, Elisha's spring still pours out sweet water, healed by the prophet with a bowl of salt. Oldest city, oldest tower, still-sweet spring, still-standing trees: in Jericho every prop of every story is still on stage.

## THE HEBREW WORD

שׁוֹפָר · **Shofar**, the ram's horn. Jericho fell to shofar blasts and a shout, the same horn that sounded at Sinai and sounds every new year, and the one Paul says will sound at the end. In this land, walls have always been afraid of that sound.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Jericho's walls fell to a week of obedience that looked ridiculous. What has God asked you to march around quietly, and which lap are you on?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You bring down walls, the stone ones and the ones around tax collectors' hearts. March us patiently, sound the shofar over our locked cities, and invite Yourself into the houses everyone else avoids, starting with ours. Today, let salvation come to this house. Amen.*

# Qumran

*the caves that kept the Word for two thousand years*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>3</sup> The voice of one who calls out, "Prepare the way of Yahweh in the wilderness! Make a level highway in the desert for our God. <sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low. <sup>5</sup> Yahweh's glory shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken it." <sup>6</sup> The voice of one saying, "Cry!" One said, "What shall I cry?" "All flesh is like grass, and all its glory is like the flower of the field. <sup>7</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades, because Yahweh's breath blows on it. <sup>8</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God stands forever."

ISAIAH 40:3-8 · THE VERSE THE QUMRAN COMMUNITY LIVED BY

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

A community of scribes withdrew to this shelf of desert above the Dead Sea to live out one verse: prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness. They copied scripture obsessively, and when Rome came in the year 68, they sealed their library in jars and hid it in the cliffs. In 1947, in the same season the modern state was being born, a shepherd boy threw a stone into a cave and heard pottery break. Out came the Dead Sea Scrolls: every book of the Hebrew Bible except Esther, a thousand years older than any copy previously known.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**The scribes.** Men who ruled their lines, washed before writing the Name, and copied with a fidelity that still humbles science. They thought they were preparing for the end of their world. They were preserving the Word for ours. **The shepherd boy.** Muhammed edh-Dhib, chasing a stray goat, made the greatest manuscript discovery in history with one bored throw of a stone. Heaven has always been comfortable using shepherds around here.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Stand at the lookout facing Cave 4, the honeycombed cliff that held tens of thousands of fragments. Then hold the fact your group came for: the Great Isaiah Scroll, complete, all sixty-six chapters, dated a good two centuries before Jesus, reads essentially as your Isaiah reads. And it contains the very verse: the grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever. The scroll survived to prove the sentence written on it.

## THE HEBREW WORD

דָּבָר · **Davar**, word. In Hebrew, davar means both word and thing, because a word from God is not a sound, it is a fact. The jars of Qumran held davar in both senses: words that turned out to be the most durable things in the desert.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*The scribes prepared for a future they never saw, and their faithfulness fed generations they never met. What are you copying carefully today for readers you will never know?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, the grass withered, the empires faded, and Your word stood forever in a clay jar. Make us keepers like the scribes and finders like the shepherd. Seal Your davar in us, and in the wilderness of our days, prepare Your way. Amen.*

# The Dead Sea

*the lowest place on earth, with a healing on its calendar*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>8</sup> Then he said to me, "These waters flow out toward the eastern region, and will go down into the Arabah. Then they will go toward the sea; and flow into the sea which will be made to flow out; and the waters will be healed. <sup>9</sup> It will happen, that every living creature which swarms, in every place where the rivers come, will live. Then there will be a very great multitude of fish; for these waters have come there, and the waters of the sea will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river comes. <sup>10</sup> It will happen, that fishermen will stand by it. From En Gedi even to En Eglaim will be a place for the spreading of nets. <sup>12</sup> By the river on its bank, on this side and on that side, will grow every tree for food, whose leaf won't wither, neither will its fruit fail. It will produce new fruit every month, because its waters issue out of the sanctuary. Its fruit will be for food, and its leaf for healing."

EZEKIEL 47:8–12 (ABRIDGED: V. 11 OMITTED FOR READING)

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

The lowest exposed place on the planet, more than four hundred meters below sea level, ten times saltier than the ocean, a sea with entrances and no exit. Water flows in and only evaporates, and that is the whole biology lesson: what only receives and never gives becomes the Dead Sea. Yet Ezekiel saw a river running from the sanctuary in Jerusalem down this desert, and the salt sea healed, with fishermen spreading nets at Ein Gedi. The deadest water on earth has a resurrection on its calendar.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Ezekiel, the measurer.** The exile priest is shown water trickling from the temple threshold, ankle deep, then knee deep, then a river that cannot be crossed, growing with no tributaries, deepening as it goes. That is how the things of God grow: from a trickle at the threshold, unexplainably. **Lot's wife, on the horizon.** The southern shore holds her old warning: the danger of this valley was never the salt in the water. It was the looking back.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Let your group float. There is no avoiding it and no reason to: this is the one sea on earth where sinking is impossible, where the water itself holds you up whether you believe it will or not. A guide can preach grace for an hour, or let the Dead Sea do it in thirty seconds. Then, floating, read Ezekiel aloud: one day, fish. The people bobbing like corks will never forget the prophecy.

## THE HEBREW WORD

רָפָא · **Rafa**, to heal. Ezekiel uses it about water: the sea shall be healed. If this sea is on the healing list, nothing on earth is past it. There is no such thing, in the Book, as terminally dead.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*The sea died from only receiving and never giving. Where in your life has the flow stopped at intake, and what would an outlet look like?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You promised a river from Your house that heals even this sea. Send it. Heal the saltiest places in us, the ones with intake and no outlet. Hold us up like these waters hold us, and let fruit grow on our banks every month, with leaves for healing. Amen.*

# Ein Gedi

*the spring of the wild goats, where David put down the knife*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>3</sup>He came to the sheep pens by the way, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were staying in the innermost parts of the cave. <sup>4</sup>David's men said to him, "Behold, the day of which Yahweh said to you, Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand." Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe secretly. <sup>5</sup>Afterward, David's heart struck him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt. <sup>6</sup>He said to his men, "Yahweh forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, Yahweh's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him." <sup>7</sup>So David checked his men with these words, and didn't allow them to rise against Saul. Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way.

1 SAMUEL 24:3-7 (V. 4 LIGHTLY ABRIDGED) · ALSO: SONG OF SONGS 1:14

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Ein Gedi is the desert's exception: waterfalls pouring down canyon walls above the Dead Sea, green ferns in a land of salt, the spring of the gedi, the wild goat. Because it is the only reliable water on this whole shore, everyone running for their lives has hidden here, and so the hunted David and the hunting king met in one of these caves. The Song of Songs remembers the oasis differently: my beloved is a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of Ein Gedi. Refuge and romance share the same water.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**David, knife in hand.** His enemy delivered to him in the dark, his men whispering that God arranged it, and all he takes is a corner of the robe, and even that makes his heart strike him. The future king's greatest victory at Ein Gedi was over his own opportunity. **Saul, unaware.** He walked into the cave with three thousand men outside and walked out alive because of one man's conscience inside. Some of us have been protected by mercies we never knew about. All of us, probably.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Hike the canyon to the waterfalls and watch the ibex, the wild goats of the name, stepping along cliff edges with their young, and the hyrax sunning on the rocks, both straight out of Psalm 104: the high mountains are for the wild goats, the rocks a refuge for the hyrax. The animals of the psalm still keep its address. Then find a cave mouth and let the group sit in its cool dark for one minute, the length of a spared life.

## THE HEBREW WORD

מַעְיָן · **Ma'ayan**, spring. In the desert, a ma'ayan is not scenery, it is the difference between life and death, which is why scripture keeps calling God one: the spring of living water. Ein Gedi is what that metaphor looks like with your shoes off.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*David's heart struck him over a corner of cloth. When did your conscience last strike you over something small, and did you listen while it was still small?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, be our Ein Gedi: water in the salt lands, a hiding place with a conscience. When our enemies are delivered into our hands, deliver us from our hands. Keep our hearts soft enough to be struck by small things, and lead us out of the cave clean. Amen.*

# Masada

*the fortress of the end, with resurrection buried under its floor*

OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>1</sup> I love you, Yahweh, my strength. <sup>2</sup> Yahweh is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower. <sup>3</sup> I call on Yahweh, who is worthy to be praised; and I am saved from my enemies.

PSALM 18:1–3 · DAVID KNEW THESE STRONGHOLDS: 1 SAMUEL 23:14

THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

A diamond-shaped rock rising sheer from the desert floor, ringed by cliffs, holding Herod's palaces and storerooms in the sky. David hid in the metzadot, the strongholds of this wilderness, long before Herod built here, and the psalm he wrote gave the mountain its meaning in advance: You are my fortress, my metzuda. In the year 73, after Jerusalem fell, the last rebels of the great revolt held this rock against a Roman legion, and when the ramp was finished, chose death as free people over slavery. The mountain has been Israel's hardest question ever since.



THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**The defenders.** Nine hundred sixty men, women and children, watching a ramp rise toward them day by day. Whatever one concludes about their final choice, their love of freedom was written at the price of everything they had. For decades, soldiers of the new Israel swore their oath on this summit: Masada shall not fall again. **David, earlier.** The difference between him and the defenders is the whole psalm: he hid in the strongholds but never called the rock his rock. My fortress, he said, is a Person. Stone Masada can fall. His cannot.

THE 3D MOMENT

Here is the detail that turns this mountain over. Under the floor of Masada's synagogue, the excavators found buried scroll fragments, and among them the vision of Ezekiel 37: the valley of dry bones, the promise that the dead nation would live again. The last free Jews of the revolt buried national resurrection under the floor of national death, and nineteen centuries later their descendants dug it up, in Hebrew, in a sovereign Israel. Read Ezekiel 37 on the summit at sunrise and try to finish it with a steady voice.

THE HEBREW WORD

מְצֻדָּה · **Metzuda**, fortress, stronghold. The mountain's name is a word from David's psalms, and the psalms keep making one correction: the metzuda that cannot be taken is not made of rock. It is the Rock.

ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*The defenders trusted a rock that could be ramped. David trusted a Rock that could not. Name your current fortress honestly: which kind is it?*

WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You are our metzuda, our high tower that no ramp reaches. We remember the ones who died free on this rock, and we read the dry bones prophecy they buried, standing in its fulfillment. Breathe on our slain, that they may live. And be Yourself our fortress, forever. Amen.*

# Beersheba

*the well of the oath, where the map of the promise ends and begins*

OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>30</sup> He said, "You shall take these seven ewe lambs from my hand, that it may be a witness to me, that I have dug this well." <sup>31</sup> Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because they both swore an oath there. <sup>32</sup> So they made a covenant at Beersheba. Abimelech rose up with Phicol, the captain of his army, and they returned into the land of the Philistines. <sup>33</sup> Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and called there on the name of Yahweh, the Everlasting God.

GENESIS 21:30–33 · FROM DAN TO BEERSHEBA: THE WHOLE LAND

THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

From Dan to Beersheba: we began this library at the northern gate, and here is the southern one, the last wells before the great desert, the edge where the sown land gives way to the wilderness. Abraham secured water rights here with seven lambs and an oath, Isaac re-dug the wells, Jacob left from here for Egypt, and the phrase from Dan to Beersheba became scripture's own way of saying: all of it, the whole land. Your feet have now touched both ends of the sentence.



THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Abraham, the well-digger.** He fought no battle here. He dug, he negotiated, he swore, he planted a tree he would never sit under full grown, and he called on the name of El Olam, the Everlasting God. Wells, oaths and slow trees: the unglamorous infrastructure of a promise. **Isaac, the re-digger.** His whole recorded career at these wells was opening again what his father dug and enemies stopped. Some generations are called to discover. Some are called to unstop. Both are covenant work.

THE 3D MOMENT

At Tel Beersheba stands a great reconstructed horned altar, found dismantled in the ruins, its stones reused in a wall, most likely taken apart in King Hezekiah's reforms: archaeology catching the Bible's kings in the act of obeying. And at the old city, a well by the gate is still shown as Abraham's. Dig sites come and go, but for four thousand years nobody has settled the Negev without doing exactly what Abraham did first: find water, keep oaths, plant trees.

THE HEBREW WORD

שְׁבוּעָה · **Shevua**, oath, twin of sheva, seven. Be'er Sheva: the well of the oath and of the seven lambs at once. Hebrew sews the two together because a real oath, like the number seven, means complete: nothing held back.

ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*Abraham planted a tamarisk, the slowest of desert trees, in the land of his sojourning. What are you planting that only your grandchildren will sit under?*

WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, Everlasting God, El Olam, You were called by that name first at this well. Be everlasting over our families. Guard our wells, keep our oaths, and give us the faith of the tamarisk planters, who watered what they would never see. From Dan to Beersheba, the land is Yours, and so are we. Amen.*

# Tel Arad

*the desert fortress with a temple in it, and the Name on broken pottery*

## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>1</sup>The Canaanite, the king of Arad, who lived in the South, heard that Israel came by the way of Atharim. He fought against Israel, and took some of them captive. <sup>2</sup>Israel vowed a vow to Yahweh, and said, "If you will indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities." <sup>3</sup>Yahweh listened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities.

NUMBERS 21:1-3 · ISRAEL'S FIRST VICTORY ON THE WAY UP

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Arad guarded the eastern Negev, where the road from the wilderness climbed toward the hill country, which is why the king of Arad struck at Israel in the wilderness years: he was defending the on-ramp to the land. The Canaanite city fell, and centuries later an Israelite fortress rose on the ridge above it, garrisoned by Judah's soldiers at the kingdom's desert edge. What the spade found inside that fortress made this quiet tel one of the most important sites in biblical archaeology.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**The garrison scribes.** The soldiers of Arad wrote supply orders on pottery shards, and dozens survived: bread, wine, oil, troop movements, and on one ostrakon, a line that stops the breath, a blessing by the house of Yahweh. Ordinary quartermasters, blessing in the Name between ration lists. Faith in this land has always lived in the paperwork too. **Israel, vowing.** The nation's first victory in the conquest generation came here, at the door of the south, from a vow kept on both sides.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Inside the fortress the excavators found the only full Israelite temple ever unearthed: courtyard, holy place, and a holy of holies with standing stones and two incense altars, a little Judahite sanctuary at the desert edge, apparently decommissioned, packed away with care, in the reforms of Judah's kings. The altars stand today in the Israel Museum. Your group can look at the actual furniture of the debate the books of Kings record.

## THE HEBREW WORD

קֶטֶרֶת · **Ketoret**, incense. The two small altars of Arad still bear traces of what was burned to heaven from the desert's edge. The psalmist gave the translation: let my prayer be set before You as ketoret. Prayer, in this land, has always risen from the frontier posts too.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*The soldiers of Arad blessed in God's Name inside their supply lists. Does the Name appear anywhere in your ordinary paperwork, or only in your Sabbath?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You met Israel at the door of the south and You met the garrison in its ration notes. Meet us in ours. Let our invoices and our messages carry Your blessing like the ostraca of Arad, and let our prayers rise like ketoret from whatever frontier You have posted us to. Amen.*

# Timna

*the copper hills of the promise, where the serpent was lifted up*

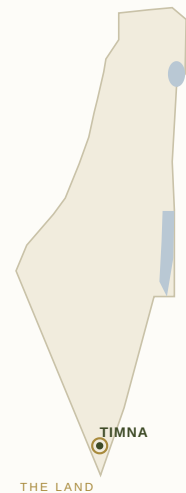
## OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>7</sup> For Yahweh your God brings you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of springs, and underground water flowing into valleys and hills; <sup>8</sup> a land of wheat and barley, and vines and fig trees and pomegranates; a land of olive trees and honey; <sup>9</sup> a land in which you shall eat bread without scarceness, you shall not lack anything in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you may dig copper. <sup>10</sup> You shall eat and be full, and you shall bless Yahweh your God for the good land which he has given you.

DEUTERONOMY 8:7-10 · ALSO: NUMBERS 21:4-9 · JOHN 3:14

## THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Moses promised a land out of whose hills you may dig copper, and Timna is the receipt: red sandstone cliffs veined with green ore, mined for thousands of years, with ancient shafts and smelting camps across the valley floor. And it was in this very Arava wilderness, on the way of the Red Sea, that the serpents struck the grumbling camp and Moses lifted a serpent of nechoshet, of copper-bronze, on a pole, so that everyone who looked would live. The metal of these hills became the Bible's strangest cure, and Jesus claimed the picture for the cross: as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.



## THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**The miners.** Egyptians and Midianites and, many argue, the workforce of Solomon's age, crawling into hand-cut shafts after green stone in killing heat. The wealth of empires was scraped out of these cliffs by unnamed hands. **The bitten, looking up.** The cure for the serpent's bite was not a medicine but a direction: look at the lifted thing and live. Faith, at its barest, is a turned gaze. It still is.

## THE 3D MOMENT

Stand under Solomon's Pillars, the great natural sandstone columns, and find the green copper streaks in the red rock with your own eyes: Deuteronomy 8:9 in mineral form. In the valley, a full-scale replica of the wilderness Tabernacle stands where the mining camps were, and the ancient shafts still pock the hills. The land keeps every receipt: the promise, the metal, and the tent.

## THE HEBREW WORD

נֶחֱשֶׁת · **Nechoshet**, copper, bronze. The word inside nachash, serpent, and inside the healing pole of the wilderness. Out of these hills came the metal; out of the metal, the sign; out of the sign, the sentence Jesus chose to explain His cross to Nicodemus at night.

## ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*The cure was a direction: look and live. From what wound are you currently demanding a process, when what is offered is a gaze?*

## WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, You put copper in the hills and healing on a pole. Lift our eyes. When we are bitten by our own grumbling in the long desert stretches, turn our gaze to the One lifted up, that whoever looks may live. And let us bless You for the good land, as You commanded: eat, be full, and bless. Amen.*

# Eilat & the Red Sea

*the end of the land, where the story keeps going*

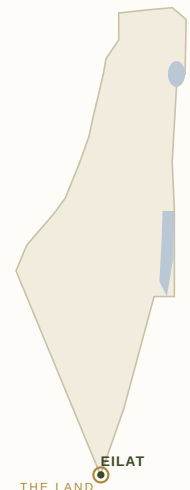
OPEN YOUR BIBLES · WE READ ALOUD TOGETHER

<sup>26</sup> King Solomon made a fleet of ships in Ezion Geber, which is beside Eloth, on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom. <sup>27</sup> Hiram sent in the fleet his servants, sailors who had knowledge of the sea, with the servants of Solomon. <sup>28</sup> They came to Ophir, and fetched from there gold, four hundred and twenty talents, and brought it to king Solomon.

1 KINGS 9:26–28 · ISRAEL'S GATE TO THE OCEANS

THE GEOGRAPHY · WHY HERE OF ALL PLACES

Here the land runs out. The mountains of Edom on one side, Sinai on the other, and between them the Red Sea reaching up to touch Israel's southern tip, where Solomon built his fleet at Ezion Geber beside Eloth and sent ships to Ophir for gold. Israel's camp paused at these shores on the wilderness road, and through this gulf the incense and gold of Arabia and Africa sailed into the story, the queen of Sheba's world flowing toward Jerusalem. The land ends at this water. The Book's reach never did.



THE CHARACTERS, AS LIVING PEOPLE

**Solomon, the shipbuilder.** The king of the golden age looked at a desert shoreline and saw a doorway to the world, partnering with Hiram's sailors who had knowledge of the sea. Wisdom includes knowing whose skills to borrow. **The pilgrims of your bus.** At the end of a journey from Dan to this shore, they have walked the whole sentence scripture uses for the land. They came as tourists. They stand here as witnesses.

THE 3D MOMENT

From the beach at Eilat you can see four countries in one slow turn: Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and the mountains of Saudi Arabia across the water, with coral reefs burning with color beneath the surface. It is the only place in the land where the map folds this tightly. End every journey here with the group facing north, back up the whole length of the land they walked, and read the first line of the library again: from Dan to Beersheba, and down to the Red Sea. They own the sentence now.

THE HEBREW WORD

סוף · **Suf**, reeds. Yam Suf, the Sea of Reeds, the Red Sea of the great deliverance. The ear hears another word inside it: sof, end. At the sea of reeds, at the end of the land, the oldest lesson of the Exodus still stands: what looks like the end is where God makes a road.

ONE QUESTION TO CARRY

*You have walked the land from Dan to this water. Of everything you stood on, read aloud, and prayed, what is the one stone you are carrying home?*

WE PRAY, BEFORE WE WALK ON

*Lord, the land ends here and Your faithfulness does not. Thank You for every site, every page, every prayer from Dan to this shore. Send us home like Solomon's ships, loaded with gold. And at every sea that looks like an end, make a road, as You always have. B'hava, from the land You love. Amen.*

THE END OF THE LAND

# The Story Keeps Going

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You have walked from Dan to Beersheba and down to the Red Sea. You read the stories where they happened, you met the people as people, you learned sixty-five Hebrew words, you carried sixty-five questions, and you prayed sixty-five prayers. The land ends at the water. What began in you does not have to.

If these pages fed you, three gates stand open. Join the wall of watchmen who pray for this land every day, and see your light on the map among the nations. Read the weekly letters from the Golan, where the land keeps writing new pages. And if the Lord puts it in your heart to walk these pages with your own feet, come. I will meet you at the airport with your Bible and mine, and we will open it together, standing inside it.

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.*

*Those who love you will prosper.*

PSALM 122:6

The living wall · [pray-the-land-golan.netlify.app](https://pray-the-land-golan.netlify.app)

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