

Leader's Guide: Context is the Key

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Context is the Key

Looking at the Forest

These leader's guides are designed to help stimulate our thinking in terms of how we can get the most out of the material and help others to fish out insights that perhaps are not so apparent to them. These documents are living papers and will be updated regularly. Feel free to add your own discussion topics!

We will list the section and page number(s) from *The Ezra 7¹⁰ Plan Book 1– First Love: A Heart to Understand* for easy referencing.

Geographical Context

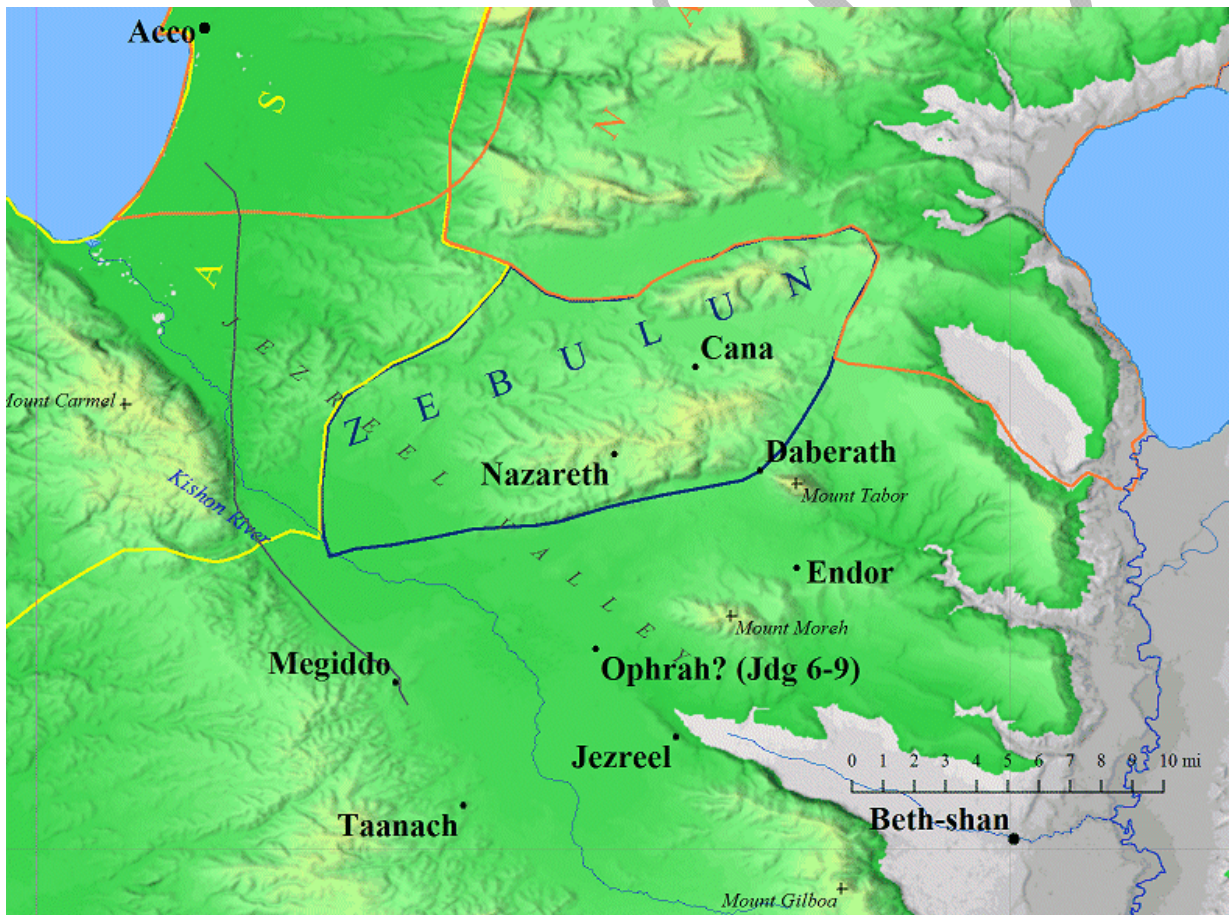
Pages 125 – 130

- ➊ Ask the group if they have any questions about the information in this section.
- ➋ Review the homework on pages 129 and 130. The following are some suggested answers to all the geographical homework listed.

Note: The maps used in these guides are in the public domain so that copyrights were not infringed. Some of the work was actually performed using better quality copyrighted maps, and then the results were transferred to these public domain maps. For those who are familiar with using Google Earth, the OpenBible web site has quite a few of the places listed in the Bible geo-coded for use with Google Earth at www.openbible.info/geo/. Using Google Earth also lets you take advantage of their measuring and elevation profiling tools.

- What Old Testament cities were near to Nazareth?
- What OT tribe would Nazareth be a part of?
- John 2:1 - Find the distance from Nazareth to Cana.

To determine the Old Testament cities that would be near to the New Testament city of Nazareth, we have to first accurately locate Nazareth and then superimpose that location onto an Old Testament map. For Google Earth users with OpenBible info this is a piece of cake. For others we have to locate Nazareth using features like the Sea of Galilee and the Kishon River that would also be named and located on an Old Testament map. Once we locate Nazareth on the Old Testament map we can pick a few cities and describe their location relative to Nazareth (i.e., so many miles SE or NW, etc.). Also we should make sure that we have located Nazareth on an Old Testament map that includes the boundaries of the twelve tribes of Israel to answer the next question. The last question can be answered using any decent map that shows Bible cities during the New Testament era. Pictures and answers follow:



Referring to the picture on page 2 of this guide, for the first question, we have compiled a few Old Testament cities and their relationship to the New Testament city of Nazareth.

City	Distance (mi)	Direction	City	Distance (mi)	Direction
Acco	19.3	NW	Daberath	4.3	E
Megiddo	10.5	SW	Endor	6.8	ESE
Taanach	13.3	SSW	Ophrah	6.9	S
Jezreel	10.2	SSE	Beth-shan	18.1	SE

For the second question, from the picture it is clear that Nazareth is within the tribal boundaries of Zebulun. Finally the last question, Cana is 3.9 miles northeast of Nazareth. So for the wedding at Cana, Mary and her Son Jesus did not have to travel very far (even if it was on foot).

- Find the area of the Decapolis and list its major cities.
- What U.S. metropolitan areas compare in size to it?

Referring to the picture on the next page we see that the cities of the Decapolis appear to be: Gergesa, Hippos, Abila, Gadara, Scythopolis, Pella, Gerasa, Philadelphia, Dion, Canatha (not shown but mentioned in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, copyright 1939 by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), Damascus (not shown but mentioned in the *ISBE* and located 60 miles northeast of the sea of Galilee), Raphana (out of the region on this map (other maps show this city close to Dion) like Damascus but still considered part of the Decapolis according to the *ISBE*).

Pliny the Elder, a Roman historian, lists the Decapolis as consisting of the following cities, although other sources claim there were additional cities as well:

Gerasa	Scythopolis (Beth-Shean)	Hippos	Gadara	Pella
Philadelphia	Al Husn	Capitolias (Dion)		
Canatha	Arabella	Raphana	Damascus	

Not counting the area around Damascus, the total area for the Decapolis is roughly 1400 square miles (simple map measurement). Using the 2000 U.S. Urbanized Areas data, metro areas near this land area include: New York-Newark (NY-NJ-CT): 3353 sq. mi., Los Angeles-Long Beach -Santa Ana CA: 1668 sq. mi., Chicago, IL: 2123 sq. mi., Philadelphia (PA, NJ, DE, MD): 1800 sq. mi., Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX: 1407 sq.

mi., Boston (MA, NH, RI):1736 sq. mi., Washington, DC-VA-MD: 1157 sq. mi., Detroit, MI: 1262 sq. mi., Houston, TX: 1295 sq. mi., Atlanta, GA: 1963 sq. mi.



- To build Solomon's Temple and to rebuild the Temple during Ezra's time, wood came from Tyre and Sidon. Chart the route the wood might have taken (see- 1Kings 5:8,9 and Ezra 3:7).

1Kings 5:8,9 *So Hiram sent word to Solomon, saying, 'I have heard the message which you have sent me; I will do what you desire concerning the cedar and cypress timber. My servants will bring them down from Lebanon to the sea; and I will make them into rafts to go by sea to the place where you direct me, and I will have them broken up there, and you shall carry them away. Then you shall accomplish my desire by giving food to my household.'*

Ezra 3:7 *Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters, and food, drink and oil to the Sidonians and to the Tyrians, to bring cedar wood from Lebanon to the sea at Joppa, according to the permission they had from Cyrus king of Persia.*

Note that there are 88 miles from Tyre to Joppa and 34 miles from Joppa to Jerusalem.



This graphic shows the change in ground elevation from Joppa to Jerusalem (courtesy of Google Earth). Must have been tough going on those hills!

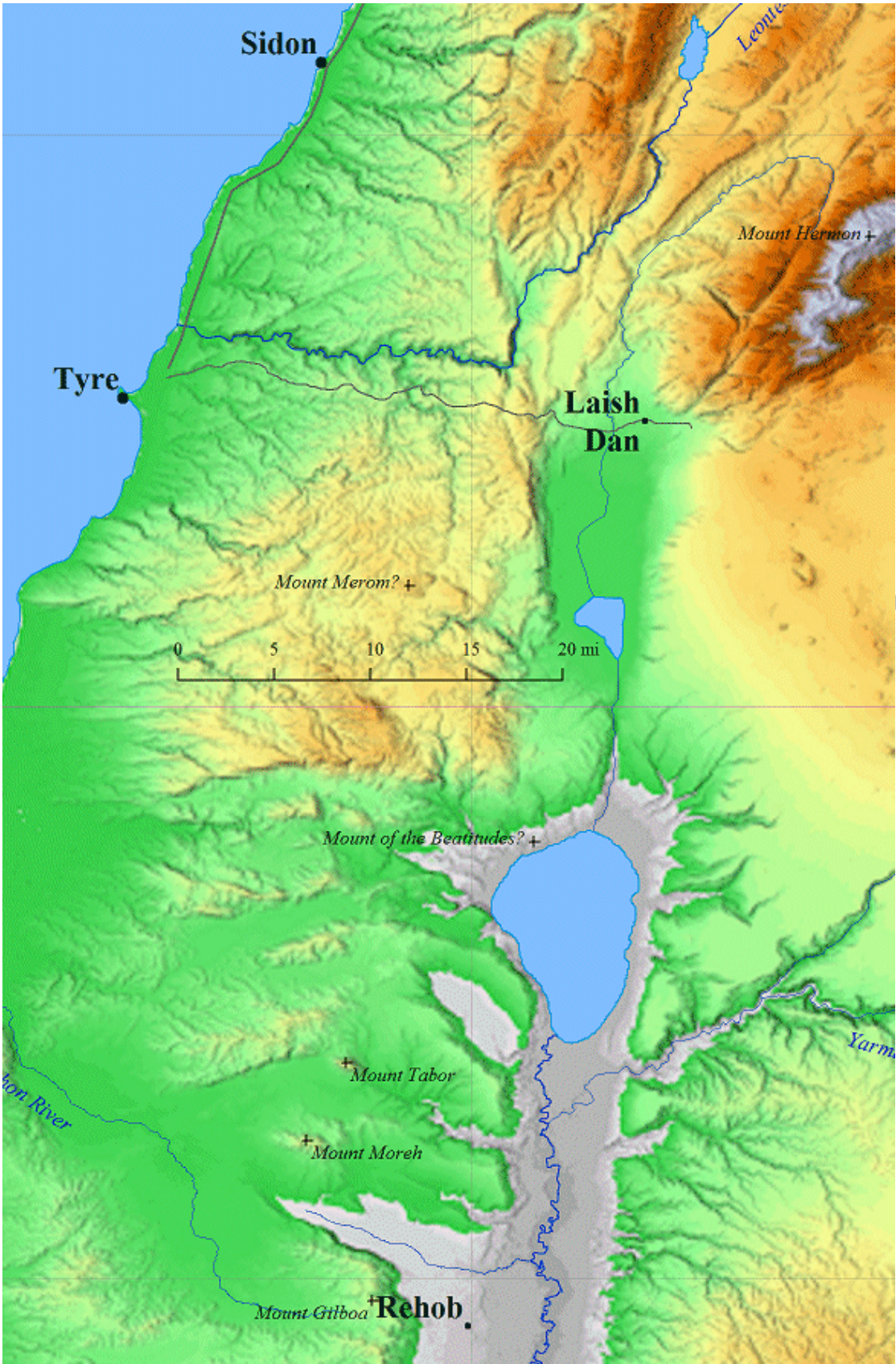


- Judges 18 – Find the town that the tribe of Dan conquered. How was it isolated (vs 27, 28)?
- What is the distance from Dan to Beersheba?

Judges 18:27,28 *Then they took what Micah had made and the priest who had belonged to him, and came to Laish, to a people quiet and secure, and struck them with the edge of the sword; and they burned the city with fire. And there was no one to deliver them, because it was far from Sidon and they had no dealings with anyone, and it was in the valley which is near Beth-rehob. And they rebuilt the city and lived in it.*

From the graphic on page 7 we can see that Laish (Dan) is isolated in the northern end of a valley. It is quite isolated due to the mountains and hills that surround it on three sides. It is 27 miles from Sidon and 26 miles from Tyre. The distance from Dan to Beersheba, a popular reference in the Old Testament since it covered the most northern and most southern big cities, was roughly 150 miles.

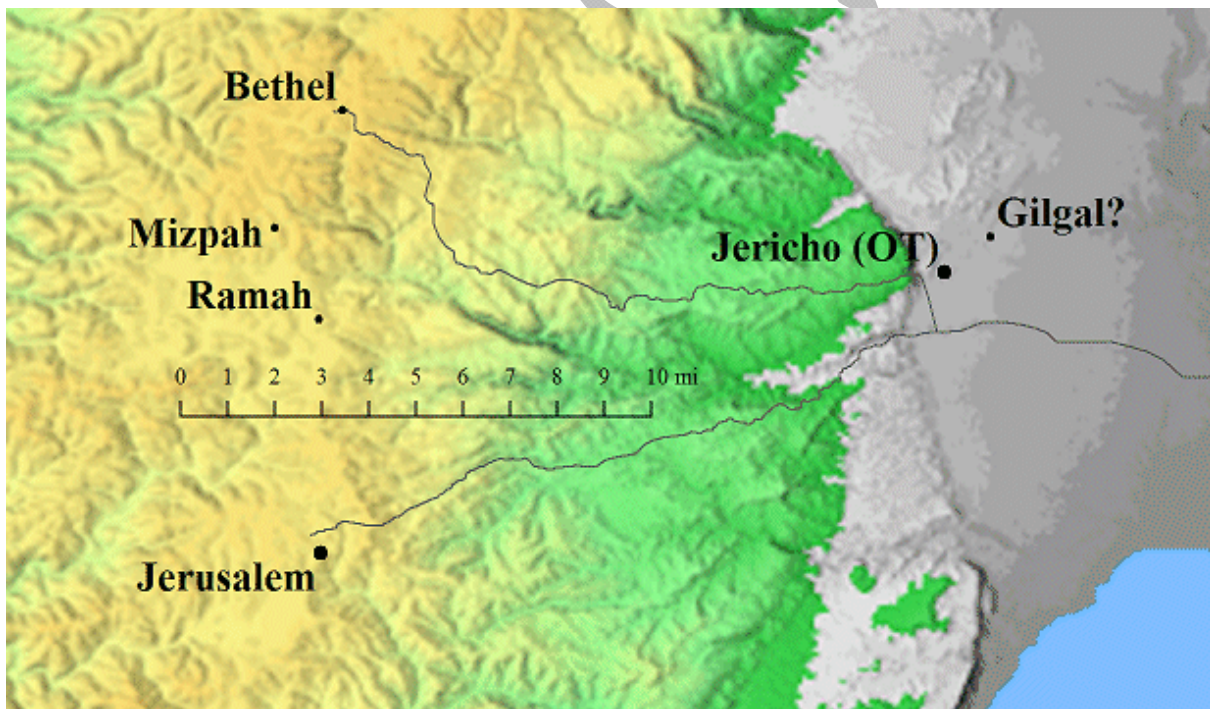




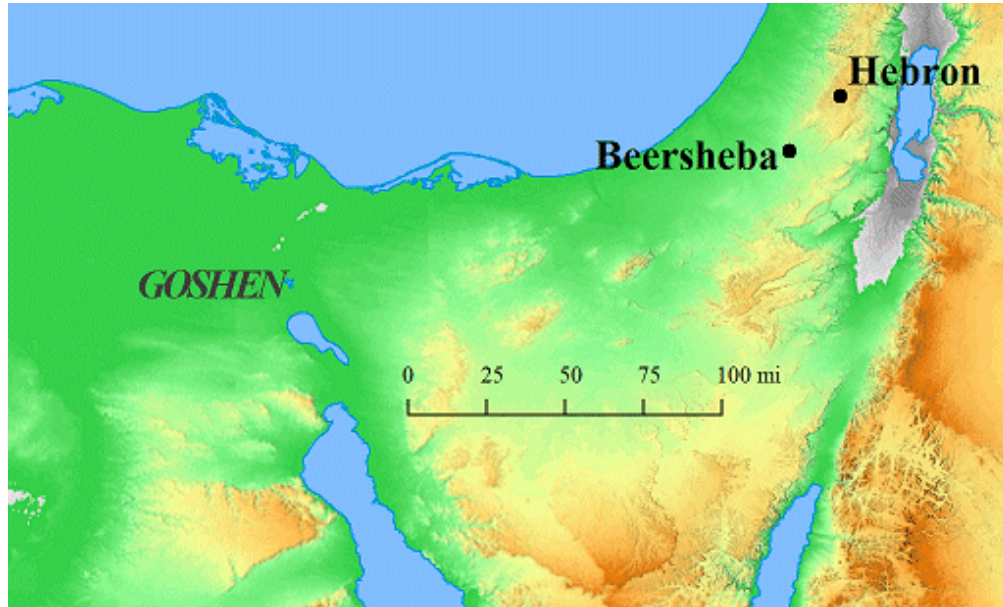
- 1Sam 7:15-17 – Samuel had an annual *preaching* circuit. How long was this loop of cities in miles?

1Samuel 7:15-17 *Now Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. He used to go annually on circuit to Bethel and Gilgal and Mizpah, and he judged Israel in all these places. Then his return was to Ramah, for his house was there, and there he judged Israel; and he built there an altar to the LORD.*

The distance between Mizpah and Bethel was about 3 miles, between Bethel and Gilgal following the roads was about 15 miles, and the trip back to Mizpah was also about 15 miles for a total circuit distance of 33 miles. The distance from Mizpah to Ramah was 2.2 miles.



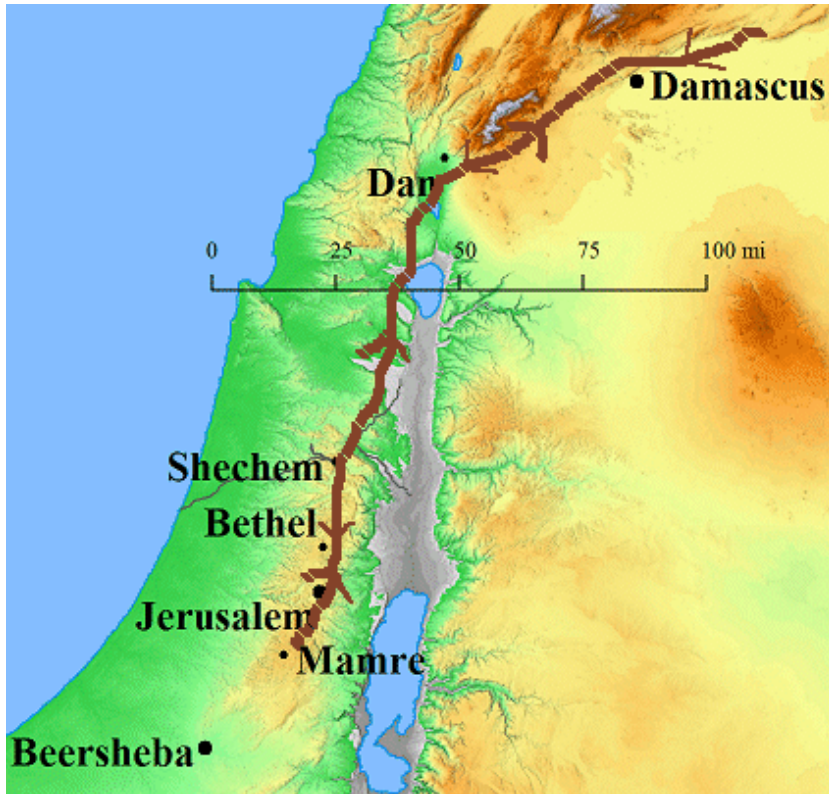
- To buy grain Jacob's sons traveled to Egypt. What was this distance (Hebron to the land of Goshen)?



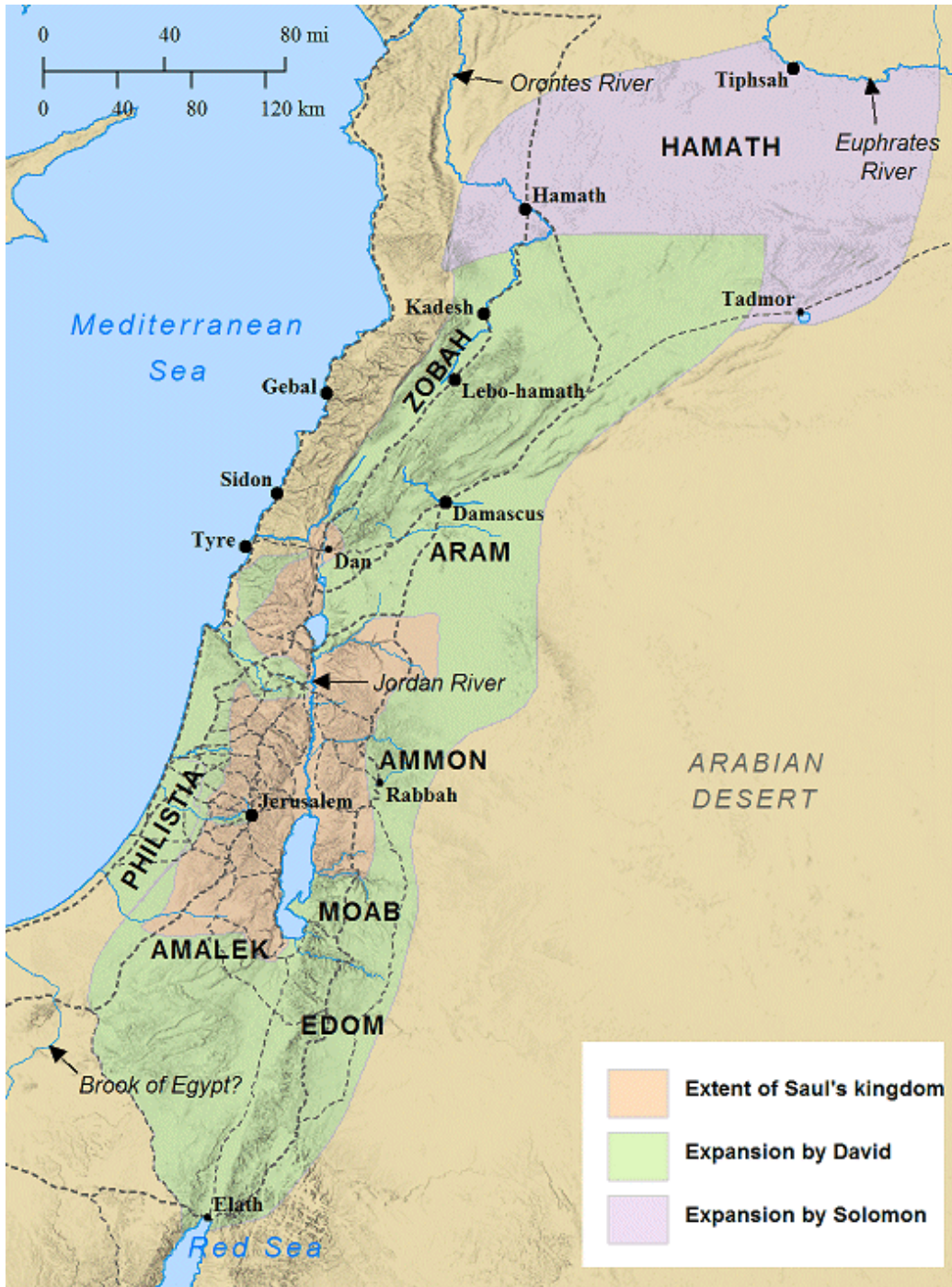
The distance was approximately 200 miles. On foot going 20 miles a day it could take at least ten days. Assuming they traveled by camel, horse, or donkey it would take less time — say four or five days.

➤ Gen 14:13-24 – How far did Abraham travel rescuing Lot and chasing the enemy?

Key cities mentioned are: Oaks east of Mamre, Dan, Hobah (northeast of Damascus?), valley of Shaveh, Salem (future Jerusalem). The precise location of Hobah is not known, so we can just estimate it as 30 miles northeast of Damascus (average location based on numerous sources). The valley of Shaveh is not precisely known but since the Kings of Salem and Sodom met Abraham after he rescued Lot, it may have been near Salem and Mamre. Total distance from Mamre to Hobah and back approximately 380 miles.



➤ Superimpose the boundaries of Israel in the time of King David onto a U.S. State.

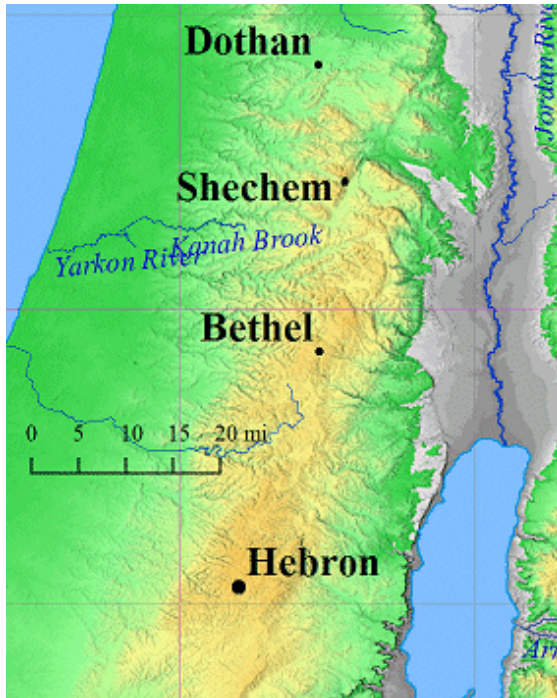


We will place the boundaries of this map from Elath in the south to Tiphshah in the north onto a map of the Eastern U.S. courtesy of Google Earth on the next page.



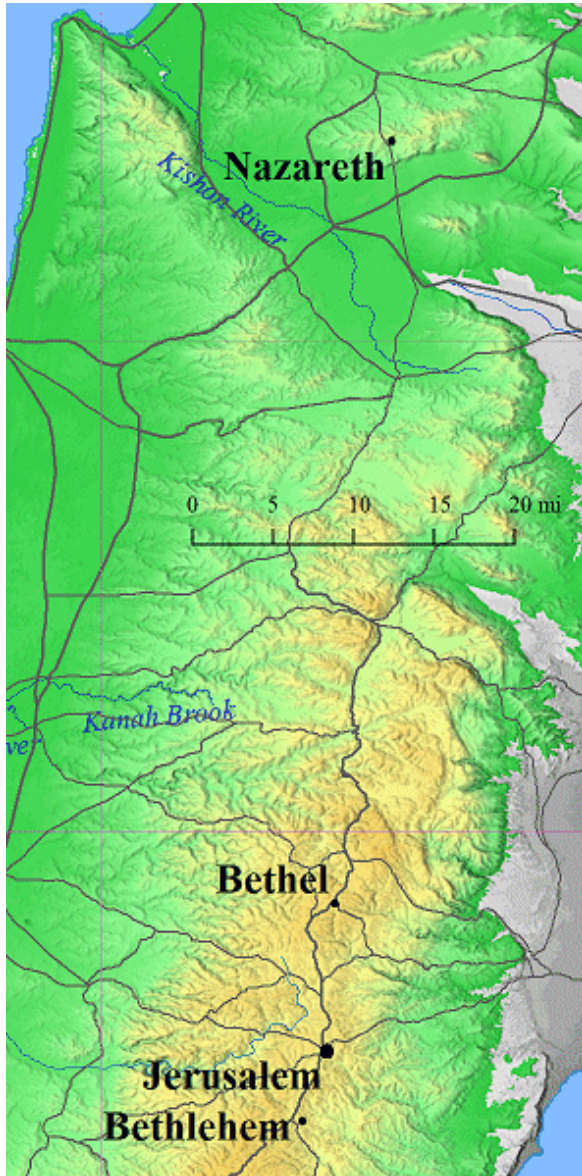
So we see the extent of David's and Solomon's kingdoms covers an area from South Carolina to Maryland. The area from Dan to Beersheba would fit into the State of Virginia.

- How far did Joseph travel to check on his brothers (Hebron to Dothan)?



David had to travel 62 miles from Hebron to Dothan.

- How far was Mary's trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem?
- Using a topographic map look at the elevation profile of this trip. List insights.



Following the roads of the day the trip would have been about 75 miles.

The ground elevation profile from Nazareth to Bethlehem is shown courtesy of Google Earth. We can clearly see that Nazareth is in the hills at the beginning of our profile, and once we travel south everything levels out through the Kishon River valley. Remember when the people in Nazareth were upset with Jesus and they wanted to push him off a steep cliff near the edge of Nazareth? Our topographic elevation profile bears this out. The ground elevation drops sharply just south of Nazareth! Once we cross the river valley it is mostly uphill until we get to Bethel. From there it is relatively mild slopes up and down until we reach Bethlehem as the trip is now following the top of the ridge,

