

People & Places — Geography Matters

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The stories of the Bible are tied to the geography of the Holy Land. Oftentimes when we read the Bible, we see what we're looking for. That means that we'll see some cool things, but because of that same effect, we'll miss what maybe the author intended.

This shows that it's a real story, but there's so much more than that. The details and the bigger scope of the story jump out simultaneously when we pay attention to the story.

Matthew 4:13-16

Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—
the people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the shadow of death
a light has dawned.”

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mt 4:13–16.

The geography contains layers of meaning — Isaiah’s prophecy is related to geography and land. There’s prophecy concerning people living outside of the land.



Each place represents people. Places matter because people matter; they live in those places. Those people who live there matter to God. And the revelation of who God is was written by the people in those places.

Nazereth

It’s a small town nestled in between larger cities. It’s much larger now however than in the past. Before there were motorways, access in and out was navigated around a mountain. This was a totally protected, tight-knit small town.



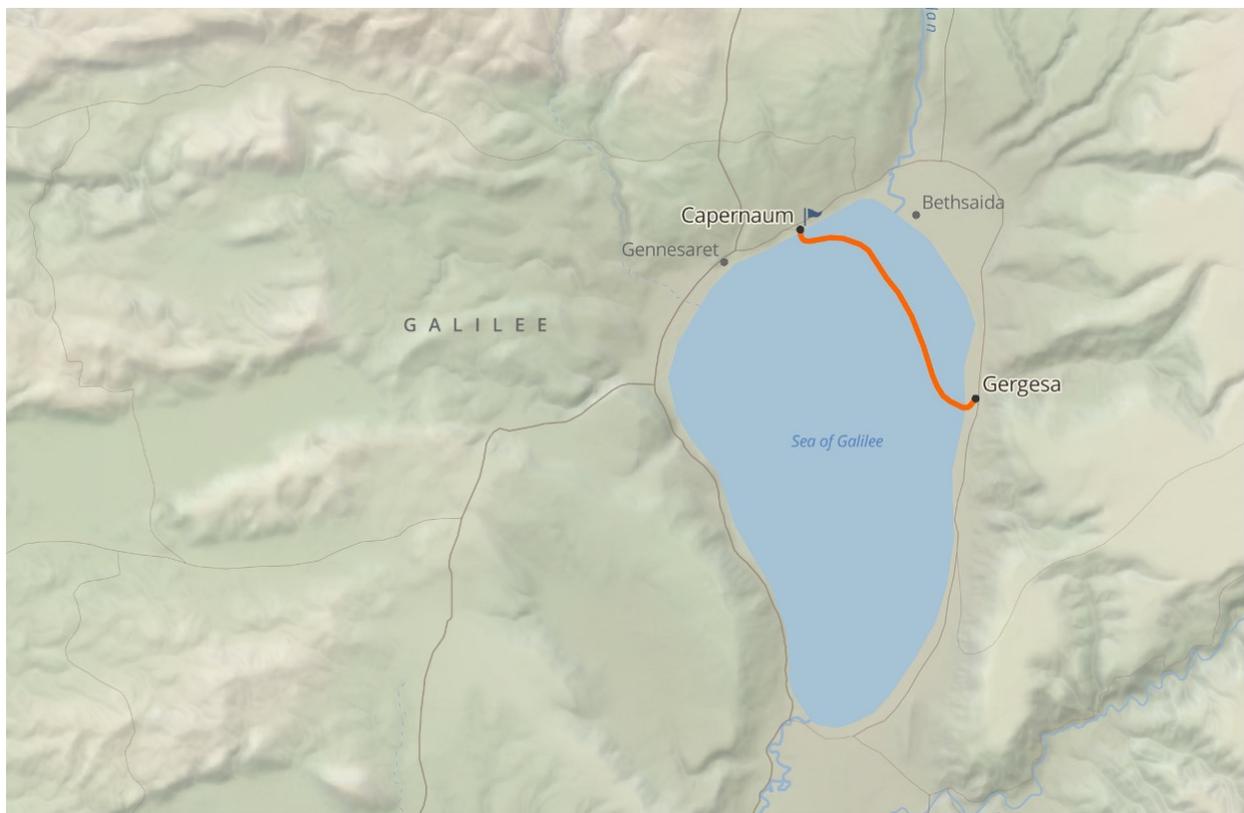
Jack, the modern day “Indiana Jones,” teaching on the ridge overlooking Jezreel valley.

On the top of the ridge of Nazereth, you can see Jezreel valley. King Saul fell on his sword here, Barak and Deborah, and Ahab and Jezebel. The Sea of Galilee can be seen from here.

Capernaum & Gerasenes

Jesus moved from secluded Nazereth to the town of Capernaum, a major route city right on the Sea of Galilee.

One story we read was when Jesus and company traveled to the other side of the lake. Word spread about who he was in Capernaum, especially to a people within a 3 mile radius. Jesus then said it was time to move out of Capernaum and land in the Gerasenes.



Up until this point, Jesus was ministering to a monocultural Jewish setting and set off to the east side of the lake where the Gentiles are. This place is highly developed with swimming pools, temples, markets, horse racing, temples, and a very complex, pluralistic, and intricate culture.

This was where Jesus wanted to expand his ministry. He had his mind on freeing the demoniac.



The approximate location where Jesus would have met the Gerasene demoniac.



Jesus then frees the demoniac and commissions him to minister to the Decapolis region. Jesus commands him to go back into a lost space, making him a missionary to tell them what the Lord has done. No seminary or formal training, but immediate telling of a story.

What is fascinating about this story is that the disciples were noticeably absent from the account in Mark 4. This may have been because the disciples did not want to reach the Gentiles.

A very cool aspect about this is that when Jesus returns to the Decapolis area, he ends up feeding 4000+ people. **Now where did those 4000 people come from?** Most likely from the ex-demoniac missionary. If one person can make a difference in the community and remove the cultural barriers that Jesus faced, think about what you can do.

Sometimes you can think very little of where you live, work, and recreate. Sometimes we can minimize our spaces as small and insignificant. Jesus has scattered us in Seattle around a lake. Why? Perhaps it's because the church needs to wake up and realize that where we live, work, and play matter to Jesus and he wants us to remove the cultural barriers that Jesus faces so that people can make Jesus King of their lives.



Jesus wants to make you his missionary to move into uncomfortable places and spaces so that we can invite people to a here and now Kingdom.

We know that one obstacle to obeying Jesus in this way is the perceived darkness and “pagan-ness” of the cultural around us. Cue Caesarea Philippi.

Caesarea Philippi

Think of how easy it is to worship God in the space where other Christians are. Is it the same level of easy to go out to where you work and do the same thing? Perhaps not so much.

Mt. Hermon — Historically a place of pagan worship because it had its own ecosystem. Back then, the fertility of this valley was attributed to other gods. In this space, a massive freshwater spring from collected rainwater was the location for altars and temples.



And now, they're all gone. But back then, Jewish men and women wouldn't go up there because of how spiritually charged this area was. But this was where Jesus chose to challenge people as to what his identity is.



It's all rubble now.

Matthew 16:13-20

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mt 16:13–20.



The gates of "Hades"

Who do they say that I am? And Jesus says to Peter that, “against this rock, I will build my church.” And to this day, his church is still going while the rest of these temples have crumbled to the ground.



That is why the church is not a building, but a people. Jesus builds his church on obedient people.

Jesus is still building his church against the gates of Hades, and the gates won't stop the church from expanding.

Jesus is the firstborn among the saints and his image is being formed in us. Our geography matters to Jesus now as much as it did then. He left an isolated town to go to a dynamic city and climb a pagan mountain which served as prime located for the gates of the underworld. And it was against that backdrop that he claimed he was in charge.



Jesus demonstrated that he has authority wherever he is. And he has made his temple in us — we are the holy of Holies. And when we walk into spaces where other gods and authorities try to rule and reign, we can go in with confidence knowing that Jesus is inviting us to take up his mission with his authority no matter where we are.