

# The Geographical & Historical Settings of the Bible

## RS 155

Westmont College  
May Term 2020

**Professor of Record:**

Dr. Sandra Richter  
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**Office Hours:**

Tuesdays 3:15-4:45 pm  
Wednesdays 1:30-3:00 pm

\*Appointments can be made outside these hours via email

**Instructor:**

Paul Wright, PhD  
Jerusalem University College  
Jerusalem, Israel

**Course Description:** This intensive three-week course introduces students to the geography, history, and archaeology of the land of Israel via primary source material, map work, and on-site lectures and exploration. Students will prepare for the three-week intensive in Israel by approximately 20 hours of map work in which they will familiarize themselves with the topography and geography of the holy land through the lens of the biblical narrative. Upon arriving in Israel, students will tour and hike the entire country. They will be exposed to the real space and time of the biblical narrative they have mapped as well as the current populations. One day per week of classroom lecture will be complemented by six days per week of on-site exploration and lecture. Two exams mark the mid-point and final week of the class. This course will forever transform the characters in the pages of the Bible into real people, who lived in real places, and struggled with the very real issues of life and faith. It will also expose Westmont students to the conflicted realities of the "holy land" as they interact with each of the major faith groups and their holy sites.

**Prerequisites:** RS-001 Introduction to Old Testament; RS-010 Introduction to New Testament.

**GE Common Inquires:** As this course is set in a global context engaging people of many ethnic and religious identities, and as its content is the historical identity of ancient Israel and Judea viewed through the remains of their material culture, ancient historians, original inscriptions, and physical settings, this course meets two GE areas Thinking Globally and Thinking Historically. Students will be reading and discussing an array of primary and secondary materials. The primary materials will include the epigraphic and archaeological artifacts of Israel and Judea as well as the historians of the Greco-Roman world. The secondary materials will include current scholarship and Bible readings.

**Course Objectives/Learning Outcomes:** Upon completion of this course students will ...

1. Experience, enjoy and develop a love for the land of the Bible!
2. Demonstrate competence in the historical context of the Old & New Testaments (on-site discussions, exams, and impression reports).
3. Demonstrate competence in the geological, geographical, and hydrological context of the Old & New Testaments (on-site discussions, maps, exams, and impression reports).

4. Be able to describe and analyze the dynamics of Israelite and Judean artistic, economic, political, and social identities and thereby connect those realities to both their interpretation of the Bible and their interpretation of themselves (on-site discussions, exams, and impression reports).
5. Be able to analyze historical sources (epigraphy, archaeology, and first century texts) with appropriate attention to their contexts and messages, and how those contexts effect biblical interpretation (on-site discussions and impression reports).
6. Discover that their real time, real space, and real people engagement of Israel has totally transformed the way they read their Bibles and understand the great narrative of redemption.

### **COURSE PROCEDURES & REQUIREMENTS:**

#### **Course Procedures:**

This course is designed to get students out of the classroom and into the real space of Israel's story. Students will meet six times prior to departure, spending approximately twenty hours prior working through the narratives of the biblical text *geographically*. Students will identify the topography, soil, and waterways of the "holy land" on military-grade maps, and then map out biblical narratives. They will also study and be quizzed on the dates of major transitions and characters in the biblical text. Upon arrival in Israel, the "real space" encounter begins. For three weeks home base will be just outside the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem at **Jerusalem University College**. We will spend one day a week in the classroom; six days a week on the road exploring the areas mapped and attending to on-site lectures regarding the people and events situated in those spaces. There will be two exams.

#### **Course Materials:**

##### **Required:**

- a) A Bible in a modern translation such as NKJV, NASB, RSV or NIV (not a paraphrase)
- b) James M. Monson, *Regions on the Run*. Rockford, IL: Biblical Backgrounds, 1998
- c) Steven P. Lancaster and James M. Monson, *Regional Study Guide*, with supplement. Rockford, IL: Biblical Backgrounds, 1999-2001.
- d) Regional Study Maps 1-7
- e) *Historical Geography Notebook*. Jerusalem: Jerusalem University College, 1998.
- f) Syllabus Maps (James M. Monson, *Geographical Basics in the Land of the Bible*).

*The following are helpful for additional information, and are available in the JUC library:*

- a) Denis Baly, *The Geography of the Bible*. New and Revised ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.
- b) Yohanan Aharoni, Michael Avi-Yonah, Anson F. Rainey and Ze'ev Safrai, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*. 3rd ed. New York: Macmillan, 1993. (Republished in 2002 as *The Carta Bible Atlas*).
- c) Carl Rasmussen, *Zondervan NIV Atlas of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989.
- d) Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *The Holy Land*. 4th ed. Oxford Archaeological Guides, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- e) Efraim Orni and Elisha Efrat, *Geography of Israel*. 4th rev. ed. Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1980.

**Classroom Decorum:** Come prepared! Stay with the group. Bring hat, sunblock, water, and snacks. Take notes. Be pleasant!

## REQUIREMENTS

**Preparatory Meetings for Orientation, Lectures, and Map Work (20 Hours):** April 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, and May 6<sup>th</sup>. Seven maps are required *before* departure. These maps are available at [http://mail.bibback.com/RS\\_Maps.html](http://mail.bibback.com/RS_Maps.html)

**Enthusiastic and pleasant attendance**--Because of the nature of the course, attendance at all class sessions and on all field studies is required except for approved medical reasons. *Pleasant, compassionate* and *enthusiastic* attendance and participation is required as well. Know that special codes of conduct and regular inconveniences are built into a class of this nature and your cheerful compliance will be most welcome.

**Readings and Map Work**--You must prepare your pre-assigned *Regions on the Run* and *Regional Study Maps* map work and complete all assigned readings before class time. Bring all of your map materials and the *Historical Geography Notebook* to all class sessions, including field studies. The completed *Regional Study Maps* and *Syllabus Maps* must be turned in at the time of the final exam. Auditors must complete all map work.

**Exams**--There are three exams. These are noted on the calendar. You are responsible for the preview lectures and field study information for each exam.

**Impression Reports**--You must submit an impression report for *each* half-day and full day of field study (a four-day field study requires four impression reports). ~~These are personal reflections and read by the professor for interest but not content.~~ The impression reports will be due during the class period of the exam for the corresponding field study. The impression reports can be either typed or hand-written, but the length should be the equivalent of one single-spaced typed page for each. **Each impression report must end with the "so what" question. How did this particular day of field study impact your read of the biblical text and how might that effect interpretation?** Auditors must write all impression reports.

### Field Studies

- Bring your map materials and the *Historical Geography Notebook* with you on field studies (only the *Historical Geography Notebook* is necessary for the half-day walking field studies in Jerusalem).
- Please note the departure time for every field study on the calendar, and plan ahead so that you can be on time for the departures. We don't have very much time once in the field, and every minute counts.
- Each student must stay with the class and not wander off unless allowed to do so by the professor. Please be careful when "wandering!" Injuries have occurred in the past!
- You will be asked to help set up picnic lunches and take the empty containers back to the JUC kitchen on our return. Please take the initiative to help out in any way possible!
- A first-aid kit will be along for all field studies. Notify your instructor if you have any medical need while on the trip.
- Modesty kits are needed for certain sites on certain days, as indicated in the calendar.

**FINAL GRADE:** In consultation with Westmont faculty, JUC faculty will calculate your grade.

- 15%--Attendance and *pleasant* participation
- 15%--Impression Reports
- 30%--Completion of assigned *Syllabus Maps* and *Regional Study Maps*, including in-class personal markings
- 40%--Exams

**Commented [W11]:** TG: These lectures will focus on the patriarchal, tribal culture of ancient Israel and its ongoing representation in first century Judea. A central topic will be our own "ethnocentrism" in approaching the study of the biblical text, and the task of a cross-cultural approach in our study will be discussed. Students will be able to describe the differences between their own culture and that of rural and urban Israel and the impact of that knowledge in their interpretation of the Bible.

**Commented [W12]:** TH: The seven required maps for RS 155 require a detailed treatment of the topography, hydrology, travel routes, settlement, and international exchange of the Southern Levant. After identifying this primary data regarding the land of Syria-Palestine, students will be required to "map" the biblical narrative on top of the geographic (author, genre) and interpret texts to their ancient and current audiences.

**Commented [W13]:** TH: In addition to expanding geological knowledge, *Regions on the Run* will expose students to ancient historians and biblical passages (also ancient historians!) dependence on geographic features.

**Commented [W14]:** TH: Evaluate students' ability to draw conclusions from primary sources and evaluate the interpretation of secondary sources. Articulate how the past is relevant for the present.

**Commented [W15]:** These exams are attached.

**Formatted:** Strikethrough

**Commented [W16]:** Having spoken with Paul Wright of JUC, he has confirmed that the "not content" is an old and outdated portion of the syllabus. I have deleted it from my syllabus. Paul has assured me that our students will be assessed for interest *and* content.

**Commented [W17]:** TH/TG: Articulate how the past is relevant for the present; describe differences between at least two cultures and how those cultures influence formulations of knowledge.

**Commented [W18]:** TG: Identify ways in which cultures influence formulations of knowledge; identify ways in which they personally are affected.



## ITINERARY

MAY 16/17	TRAVEL TO TEL AVIV
MAY 18-JUNE 5	PROGRAM IN ISRAEL (3 WEEKS)
JUNE 6	TRAVEL TO THE STATES
JUNE 6-7	OPTIONAL JORDAN FIELD TRIP

### 1. Jerusalem Walks

- The Four Quarters of the Old City of Jerusalem
- Mount Zion
- City of David
- Western Wall
- Southern Steps of the Temple Mount
- Pool of Bethesda
- Church of the Holy Sepulchre

### 2. Jerusalem Approaches Field Study

- Mount of Olives and its churches
- Herodium
- Bethlehem

### 3. Benjamin Field Study

- Judean Wilderness / Wadi Qilt
- Jericho
- Nebi Samwil
- Gezer

### 4. Judah, Shephelah, Philistine Coast Field Study

- Beth Shemesh
- Valley of Elah
- Bet Guvrin
- Lachish
- Ashkelon

### 5. Negev and Great Wilderness Field Study

- Beersheba
- Arad
- Ein Avdat
- Avdat
- Makhtesh Ramon

**6. The Dead Sea Area Field Study**

- Masada
- Ein Gedi
- Qumran
- Dead Sea beach for swimming

**7. Sharon Plain and Jezreel Valley Field Study**

- Caesarea
- Mount Carmel
- Megiddo
- Nazareth

**8. Galilee Field Study**

- Sepphoris
- Arbel
- Hazor
- Dan
- Baniyas / Caesarea Philippi
- Golan Heights
- Capernaum
- Magdala
- Tabgha / Primacy of Peter
- Chorazim
- Mount of Beatitudes
- Kursi
- Boat ride on the Sea of Galilee
- Swimming in the Sea of Galilee

**OPTIONAL JORDAN FIELD STUDY, JUNE 6-7**

**9. Jordan Field Study**

- Jerash
- Jabbok River
- Moabite capital of Dibon
- Arnon gorge
- Petra
- Edomite capital of Bozrah
- Ammonite capital of Rabbah
- Amman
- Madaba
- Mount Nebo