

GOING DEEPER

ACTS Israel Tour 2018

DAY SIX: WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?

Today we explore northern Galilee, travelling right up to Israel's borders with Lebanon and Syria. Although much of Jesus's ministry was around the Sea of Galilee and to the south around Jerusalem, the gospels describe for us his travels to the north as well.

Then Jesus left Galilee and went north to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Matthew 15:21

Key Thought for Day Six

The most important issue in every human life is the choice of what to worship. Who is god? And what place does that god have in your life? Today we visit Dan where one thousand years before the time of Jesus King Jeroboam led the people of Israel away from the true God into worship of a golden calf. From Dan we go immediately to Caesarea Philippi where Jesus asked His followers the most important question in all human life, 'Who do you say that I am?' Visiting these two sites together reminds us of the choice each of us has about whom we will serve.



[Journey Map for Day Six](#)

Northern Galilee

Before we head north, some orientation to the geography of Israel may help. The map below, comparing Israel to Vancouver Island, will give you an idea of the size of Israel. Galilee is the region in the north of Israel, roughly equivalent to northern one-third of Vancouver Island.

Israel is also amazingly diverse in geography for such a small country. Vancouver Island is covered in forest from north to south. Not so with Israel.

- **In the south**, Israel is a Middle Eastern desert. The Dead Sea is the lowest spot on Earth, salty water and dry, parched ground.
- **Along the coast**, Israel is a fertile plain.
- **A mountainous spine** in the middle is divided into a southern part, called Judea in the Bible, and a northern part, Samaria.
- **The Jezreel Valley**, sometimes referred to as the Valley of Armageddon. At the top of those hills, the green plain pushes inland to the Sea of Galilee.
- **To the north** of the Sea of Galilee the land rises toward the snowy height of Mt. Hermon.
- **Mt. Carmel**, the site of Elijah's conflict with the prophets of Baal, extends eastward from Haifa.
- **The Golan Heights**, are indicated in grey to the west of the Sea of Galilee. This area extends into Syria. The road to Damascus where Paul met Jesus runs through that grey area on to the city of Damascus.
- **The Mountains of Jordan**, lie to the west of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea.

Some topography of Israel

The region we will visit today is runs north from Tiberias. The valley you see stretching north from the Sea of Galilee is the Hula Valley. In that valley there are swamps and wetlands that today are host to wonderful sanctuaries for migrating birds. You can see Sidon at the top of the map.

Relief map of northern Israel

Tel Dan

At the top of Israel, we will visit Tel Dan. from the top of Tel Dan, we can look across the border into Lebanon only a few meters distant.

Dan is a nature reserver area, and at Dan we will see one of the three major streams that feed the Jordan River as we cross a bridge over the rushing waters.

Stream feeding the Jordan River at Tel Dan

In the Bible, the extent of Israel was sometimes marked by Dan in the north and Beersheba in the south.

Then all the people of Israel came out, from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, and the congregation assembled as one man to the LORD at Mizpah.

The most significant mention of Dan in Scripture is in connection with the apostasy of Jeroboam. After the death of Solomon, the kingdom split between south and north. Solomon's son Rehoboam ruled in the south and the northern area of Israel was taken over by Jeroboam.

*Jeroboam thought to himself, 'Unless I am careful, the kingdom will return to the dynasty of David. When these people go to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices at the Temple of the LORD, they will again give their allegiance to King Rehoboam of Judah. They will kill me and make him their king instead. So on the advice of his counselors, **the king made two gold calves**. He said to the people, 'It is too much trouble for you to worship in Jerusalem. Look, Israel, these are the gods who brought you out of Egypt!' **He placed these calf idols in Bethel and in Dan**—at either end of his kingdom. But this became a great sin, for the people worshiped the idols, traveling as far north as Dan to worship the one there. (1 Kings 12:16-30).*

At the top of Dan, we will visit the “high place” where was found an Israelite horned altar. There seems little doubt that this is the place where Jeroboam erected one of his two golden calves.

The High Place altar at Tel Dan where Jeroboam erected his golden calf

The location of the altar is marked today by the metal frame you can see in the picture above.

The sin of Jeroboam was monstrous. For the sake of his personal political survival, Jeroboam was willing to lead an entire nation into idolatry. The “sin of Jeroboam son of Nebat” became a standard phrase for describing the evil done by the kings of Israel in the following years.

The Ancient Canaanite Gate

Before we leave, Dan, however, we will pass by a 3,000 year old mud wall and gate. This gate dates back to the time of Abraham. Dan is first mentioned in the Bible as the place where Abram rescued his nephew Lot from the army of Kedorlaomer.

When Abram heard that his nephew Lot had been captured, he mobilized the 318 trained men who had been born into his household. Then he pursued Kedorlaomer's army until he caught up with them at Dan. (Genesis 14:14)

The ancient Canaanite gate at Tel Dan

Did Abram himself pass through this gate? It's possible.

The City Gate at Dan

At Dan we also see a stone city gate from the Israelite period. City gates were opened during the day and through them flowed visitors to the city and goods of all kinds.

The city gate at Tel Dan

In the gate area, the great men of the city would sit to do business with one another and traders. It was also a place where legal contracts could be made and witnessed. A scene of exactly this kind is recorded in the Book of Ruth.

Now in those days it was the custom in Israel for anyone transferring a right of purchase to remove his sandal and hand it to the other party. This publicly validated the transaction. Boaz went to the town gate and took a seat there. Just then the family redeemer he had mentioned came by, so Boaz called out to him, ‘Come over here and sit down, friend. I want to talk to you.’ So they sat down together. . . . So the

other family redeemer drew off his sandal as he said to Boaz, ‘You buy the land.’ Then Boaz said to the elders and to the crowd standing around, ‘You are witnesses that today I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion, and Mahlon. And with the land I have acquired Ruth, the Moabite widow of Mahlon, to be my wife. This way she can have a son to carry on the family name of her dead husband and to inherit the family property here in his hometown. You are all witnesses today.’ (Ruth 4:1-10).



Tel Dan

Caesarea Philippi: Who Do You Say That I Am?

As we visit Caesarea Philippi (CP), it’s important to shift your thinking about the time this occurred in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus had spent about two years teaching and preaching through the Galilee region and selecting and training His disciples. Now His ministry in Galilee was coming to an end. He would turn his course south toward Jerusalem and the events of crucifixion and resurrection. But, just before he begins that final journey, two critical events have to happen. First, he must ensure that His disciples know and believe who He truly is. This critical moment of affirmation occurs in the region of Caesarea Philippi. Why here?

As the time grew short, Jesus came to this northern region to spend more time with His disciples. He needed to get them ready for the events to come which He knew would raise doubts and fears.

However, Caesarea Philippi was uniquely suited to Jesus’s purposes also because of its location, situated at a crucial junction on this trade route. Huge numbers of people from many backgrounds passed through this area. Remember the words of Isaiah 9:1 that refer to the “way of the sea?”

“In the latter time he has made glorious the **way of the sea**, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.”

The Way of the Sea, the “Via Maris” was the great trade route that flowed from the east through Damascus, down through Israel, and on to Egypt.

[Click to View Larger](#)

In keeping with this multi-cultural location, Caesarea Philippi was host to a variety of gods and temples. The area was famous as a place of worship to the nature god Pan, and the Cave of Pan was a major centre for the worship.

View looking up toward the cave of Pan at Caesarea Philippi

A second major spring originates here. Today it is below the cave, but in Jesus day the water flowed directly from the cave. It is said that worshippers could toss an offering, perhaps a goat, into the swirling waters of the cave. If the offering did not float back out, Pan had accepted the offering and would be pleased. If, however, the offering floated back out, which was likely given that the water was flowing out of the cave, Pan was displeased.

To the left of the cave, Herod Phillip, always alert to his political obligations, had erected a temple to Caesar. To the right of cave was a platform with altars to various Greek deities. In short, you could worship any god of your choice at Caesarea Philippi. The painting below provides a view of what the site may have looked like in the time of Jesus.

A painting of what the temples at Caesarea Philippi may have looked like



[Caesarea Philippi](#)

Therefore, it was in this area, perhaps in sight of this cave, that Jesus asked His profound question, “Who do you say that I am?”

And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, ‘Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the

things of man.”

*And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but **whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.** For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.’”*

It is critical to note that Jesus calls for loyalty to Himself and to the gospel. As part of putting Jesus in first place in their life, His disciples must also put the purpose for which He came in first place.

The Transfiguration of Jesus and His “Exodus”

Six days after the event at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus took Peter James and John up a mountain.

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus.

We don’t know with certainty whether Mount Hermon in the same region as Caesarea Philippi was the mountain, but it certainly fits the description of a “high mountain” (Mark 9:2).

Mount Hermon covered in snow

While they were on the mountain, Moses and Elijah came to speak with Jesus, and their conversation had a very specific topic.

Suddenly, two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared and began talking with Jesus. They

were glorious to see. And they were speaking about his exodus from this world, which was about to be fulfilled in Jerusalem. (Luke 9:30-31)

If there is any passage in the New Testament that invites us to look at an Old Testament text Christologically, it is this one. Let it sink in that Moses was talking with Jesus about an ‘exodus.’ Moses led the people of Israel across the Red Sea to freedom from slavery in Egypt. Jesus was about to lead his followers across the sea of God’s judgment to freedom in His kingdom. It must have been an amazing conversation!

Mount Bental, the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and the Valley of Tears

For our last stop of the day we move out of the biblical narrative to take in a piece of Israel’s modern history.

On October 6, 1973 on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish Year, Egypt and Syria launched a coordinated surprise attack on Israel. In the south 100,000 Egyptian troops, supported by 1,350 tanks and 2,000 artillery pieces crossed the Suez Canal on a strike into the south of Israel.

In the north, 28,000 Syrian troops, supported by 1,260 tanks and 600 artillery pieces swept down from the Golan heights into northern Galilee. On the Israeli side there were only 3,000 troops, 120 tanks and 60 artillery pieces. The situation was desperate.

Over the next days, furious combat with deep losses on all sides ensued. Israel forces were driven back in the early phase but regrouped and counter-attacked. Before the war ended three weeks later, Israeli troops had advanced to the outskirts of Damascus in the north and had cross the Suez Canal in the south where they were pressing toward the City of Suez. The Arab armies had been decisively defeated.

If security conditions allow we will visit the top of Mount Bental for an overlook into Syria. There is a popular coffee shop on the top and also what was formerly a United Nations observation post.

We will learn more about this war at Kibbutz Maron Golan where we see a film about the fighting in the north which was so brutal that the area is now referred to as the Valley of Tears. This will be, of course, an Israeli view of matters and not the Arab perspective.

Passages to Study for Today

Here are some passages to read as you prepare for Day Three.

- Caesarea Philippi and the confession of Peter. Mark 8: 27-38
- The Transfiguration. Mark 9:1-13; Luke 9:28-36.

Alternate Site for the Transfiguration

An alternate sight often suggested for the Transfiguration even is Mount Tabor in the Jezreel Valley, and on top of that mount there is a Church of the Transfiguration.

Mount Tabor in the Jezreel Valley

Our plan calls for us to drive by Mount Tabor on our way back to Jerusalem, so you may see it. We will not, however, go to the top. Mount Tabor is a beautiful spot and tall, but personally I believe Mount Hermon better fits the description of a “high mountain” that we have from the gospel of mark. If you like you can learn more about Mount Tabor [here](#).

Day Five

Day Seven