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but they were also 'children of God'. What a relationship had become theirs! And what a blessed and honoured condition is ours when we remember with John, that 'we are children of God'.

But the writer goes on to use a further epithet, 'beloved'. What a wealth of meaning is conveyed by its use. They were very dear to his heart; for them he had toiled and laboured, for them he had endured persecution and privation. They were dear to him. But they were also dear to God, and as such were doubly beloved.

(c) *A Life to Love*. 'As imitators of God, and as dear children', they were to 'walk in love'. Every step in life, every act in life, every speech in life was to be 'in love'. Love was to be its motive, love was to stir to action, and love was to enfold the result. Christ loved, Christ gave Himself a sacrifice and so showed the ultimate extent to which love will go. That kind of love is to be the love manifested in the believer's life.

7. *Abiding in Love*. 1 John 4:16. Love is not to be spasmodic but the continuing element of the Christian's life. By his abiding in love is manifest that he is abiding in God. So is love perfected with us and enables us to have boldness in the day of judgement.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

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2. Palestine

The geographer, who is little concerned either by political boundaries or ethnic claims, sees the portion of the Fertile Crescent bounded to the north by the mountains of Anatolia and Armenia, to the east by the Euphrates and the Arabian desert, to the west by the Mediterranean and to the south by the Sinai desert, as a unity he calls Syria. There are natural divisions within it, but they are of less importance than the unity of the whole.

For the geographer the boundaries of Palestine are hard to define with exactitude, and his definition would hardly agree with the historic territories occupied by Israel at any given time in its history. The simple fact is that while the geographer's Palestine has certain peculiar features that may justify its consideration as an important sub-division of Syria, it is God's dealings with the land that have given it a real existence of its own. Except where God has over-ruled, its history has been merely part of that of the western Fertile Crescent generally.

Palestine's International Setting

In itself Palestine is the southern end of Syria, where the fertile land gradually disappears into the desert that cuts it off from Egypt. In Biblical times the Pelusiac arm of the Nile flowed further east, the Bitter Lakes were probably still linked with the Red Sea and much of the isthmus of Suez was marsh. As a result the land frontier of Egypt with Asia was easily defended. Weaker tribes gradually pushed southwards by enemies from the north or adventurous bands seeking pastures new were apt to find that Palestine was a dead end, the road south being barred by Egypt and the desert. This helps to explain the wide variety of tribes mentioned in Gen. 15:19-21.

Whenever Egypt wished to extend her power in Asia, or the Mesopotamian empires wished to penetrate into Egypt, their armies were bound to pass through Palestine. It should be noted, however, that this can easily be exaggerated. The main incursions of Egypt into Palestine seem to have taken place while Israel was in Egypt, and it was not until the closing days of the monarchy that the land became a battlefield between Assyria or Babylonia and Egypt. This position was to be revived in the Inter-Testamental period, when between approximately 300 and 100 B.C. Palestine was debatable land between the Ptolomaic kings of Egypt and the Seleucid kings of Syria.

The importance of Palestine as lying on the great trade route between Egypt and Mesopotamia is much less certain. The crossing of the Sinai desert was always considered hazardous (cf. Is. 30:6). In many cases fresh animals would be needed for

the long journey north. As a result from a very early date, even before the building of the Pyramids, a regular trade *by sea* sprang up between Egypt and the Phoenician cities, of which at first Byblos, now Jebeil, was the most important. How important Byblos was in this trade is seen in the fact that Bible, which means the book, is merely a corruption of the name. It came about from the fact that the Greeks obtained most of the Egyptian papyrus, which they used as paper, through Byblos, until its importance was gradually overshadowed by Tyre and Sidon.

We should do well, therefore, to see the bulk of the trade avoiding Palestine altogether, whenever Egypt and Phoenicia were at peace with each other, or in the hands of the same overlord. There will always have been trade going by land for one reason or another, but the only time its importance is stressed is during the reign of Solomon. In the north he controlled the fords over the Euphrates and he had guaranteed Egypt's favour by marrying the Pharaoh's daughter, so he was able to divert the caravans to his greatest profit.

With the passing centuries the importance of commerce for Palestine will probably have decreased steadily until it will have fallen to almost nothing in New Testament times. 'All roads lead to Rome' was a fact. The trade of Egypt was for the most part diverted from Mesopotamia, which was in Parthian hands, and found its way by sea direct to Rome.

So while Palestine was very sensitive to world movements and the flow of culture and trade, it was far less exposed to them than is often realized. God did not remove His people from the world around them, but He did in measure keep them away from its full influence.

The Geography of Palestine

Anyone looking at a map showing the physical features of Palestine, or still better at an infra-red aerial photograph taken at a great height, will see at once that Palestine is clearly divided into four differing bands of country running parallel from north to south. They are found in Syria as a whole, but in their prolongation in Palestine they take a form of their own and indeed even modify considerably as one passes from north to south.

The Coastal-Plain

As one approaches the Syrian-Lebanese coast from the sea, one normally gets the impression that the mountains rise direct from the water. In fact the coastal strip is always narrow, sometimes almost vanishing. But as we pass south over the headland of Ras en-Naqura, marked on many maps as the Ladder of Tyre, we find it widening out to the plain of Acre or Naphtali. To the south it is broken again by the seaward end of Carmel. At its narrowest there is room only for the road and railway to pass between the steep hillside and the beach, and in Biblical times it was probably even narrower.

Once Carmel lies behind us, the plain widens steadily until in the south it reaches twenty miles in places. To a great extent it is composed of silt from the Nile, which the current carries up the coast as far as Carmel. It is this silting that is responsible for the almost dead straight coast-line and the lack of harbours. Herod's famous port of Caesarea was almost entirely artificial. Until the building of modern all-weather roads, the coastal-plain was almost impassable after heavy rain.

It should be noted that the coastal plain was seldom firmly in the hands of Israel. The plain of Acre and the seaward end of Carmel were claimed by the Phoenicians. Though David made the Philistines tributary, the southern portion of the coastal plain did not become a real part of Israelite territory till the time of the Maccabean kings. The plain of Sharon, between the Philistine country and Carmel, seems to have been conquered by David.

The Central Hill-Country

The hills that flank the coastal-plain are the real land of Israel of the Old Testament, so much so that Ezekiel can refer to the land as a whole as 'the mountains of Israel' (6:2, 3; 36:1-15). They fall into three clearly marked sections.

The hills of Galilee are simply the continuation of the Lebanon range. It would be hard to draw a geographical or political frontier that would really reflect the fluctuations of history. Though the highest peaks of Palestine are here near Merom, they

are not as high as those of Lebanon, and the general average level is lower. In addition there are a number of easy routes across from the sea to the Jordan valley. We find therefore that it is 'Galilee of the Gentiles' (Is. 9:1) not merely because it was surrounded on all sides but the south by non-Israelites, but because it was so penetrated by them both on the frontiers and along the fertile cross valleys.

Galilee is divided from Samaria by the plain of Esdraelon which to the east descends steeply to the Jordan valley at Beth-shan through the valley of Jezreel. The great importance of the plain lies in the fact that the great military and trade route avoided the narrow land round Carmel and bore north-east, entering the plain by a number of passes, that at Megiddo being the most important. As a result many of the most important battles on Palestinian soil have been fought there.

The hills of Samaria are lower than those of Galilee, and though they are more compact, they are penetrated by a number of valleys relatively easy to follow. As a result this, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh was much more solid and united than Galilee, but it was still comparatively open to foreign influences. It is only when we come to Benjamin and Judah that the hills become a grim, unbroken mountain wall, fenced off from the coastal plain by the downs of the Shephelah or low lands. Water-cut ravines or *wadis* cut into the hills leaving as it were a back-bone with gaunt ribs running east and west. This was the land easiest to defend, where foreign ideas penetrated most slowly. Hence it is no chance that the true home of Israel's religion was in Judea.

From Hebron the hills gradually fall to a plateau about 1000 feet above the sea of which Beer-sheba is the centre. This region (the Negev) can be very fertile, but the rainfall is too uncertain to guarantee a harvest.

The Jordan Valley

Right from Antioch in the north of Syria the coastal mountains are flanked by a deep valley to the east. The water-shed between Syria and Palestine is fairly high, but on the south side the land falls rapidly. The whole of the Huleh basin is no more than

300 feet above sea level. In the approximately ten miles as the crow flies to the lake of Galilee the Jordan drops to 696 feet below sea level. In the sixty-five miles from Galilee to the Dead Sea—the actual course of the Jordan is some three times longer—it drops to 1274 feet below the Mediterranean in the forty-three mile long Dead Sea. The upper part of the Jordan valley is pleasant and fertile, but in the lower portion the ‘rain shadow’ caused by the steep drop from the hills in the west means that many parts cannot be cultivated without irrigation. The Jordan itself has here cut itself a trough some 150 feet below the valley bottom and sometimes up to a mile wide. This with its rank vegetation (the pride or jungle of Jordan) was a major obstacle to intercourse between west and east, for the traveller had to keep to the rare fords, and these might be impossible during the spring floods.

Transjordan

Transjordan consists of a high plateau, the continuation of Anti-Lebanon and Hermon—though this mountain is one of the most beautiful and remarkable features on the Galilee sky-line, it was never really part of Israel. The plateau is divided by the gorges of the Yarmuk and Arnon into three. The northernmost, Bashan, and the southernmost, Moab, are plains which were never incorporated into Israel. In between is Gilead, which more resembles the hill-country west of Jordan. All three parts gradually fall away to the Arabian desert, the limit of cultivation depending mainly on the rainfall and security against marauders from the desert.

God deliberately placed His people in a land with many natural divisions with inadequate natural wealth to become a world power in their own strength. In the most favoured parts of the land one could not be certain of adequate rainfall. In the Negev, the lower Jordan valley and the Wilderness of Judea, where the hills fall in a tangle of *wadis* and cliffs to the Dead Sea, as well in parts of Gilead rain was a matter for fervent prayer. His purpose was to force them to rely on Him instead of the normal skills of man. The bulk of the Old Testament is the story of how they reacted to the conditions in which He placed them.