

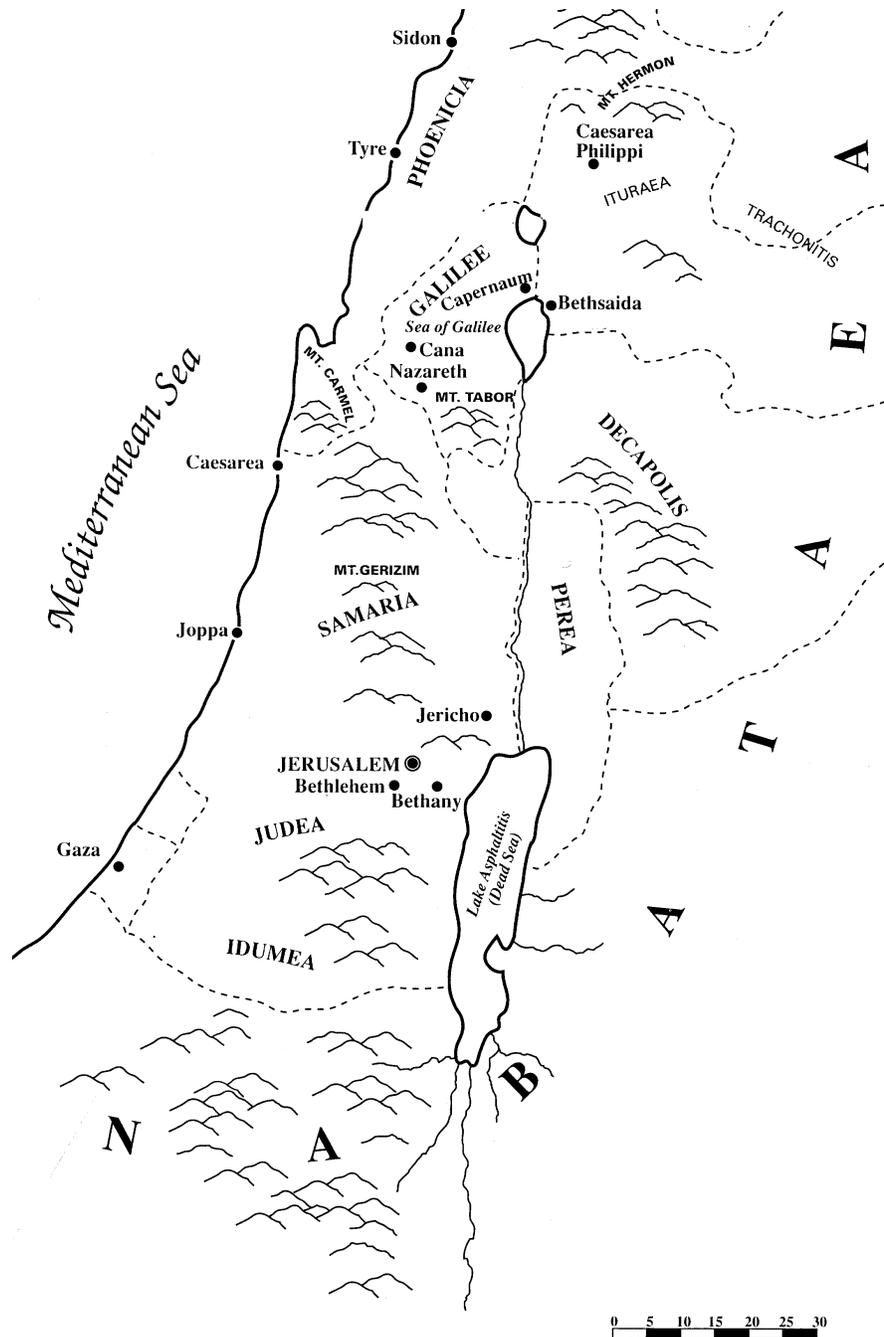
# Palestine –a Snapshot

Five centuries before Christ, a Greek historian dubbed it Palestine. It's a little strip of land between the desert and the sea. It could fit quite easily into the south of England. It has mountains, hills, fertile valleys, desert and the lowest point on earth. It has water full of fish and water in which no fish can live. In the millennium before Christ it had been fought over and occupied at least four times by major powers. It is still a land of strife. Three world religions attach significance to it, hence the name 'the Holy Land'. Today, most of it is the modern state of Israel.

In the time of Christ, Palestine was a Roman province of Syria in the south-eastern corner of the great Empire. This River Jordan marked many boundaries in the time of Jesus. The Jewish provinces of Galilee and Judea – home to about a million Jews - were west of it. The mainly pagan Greek-speaking areas were east of the Jordan, for example, Decapolis (Ten Towns).

The Jordan River rises on the slopes of Hermon, an impressive snow-capped mountain to the north of Galilee, and it empties into the Dead Sea. This 'Sea' is a concentrated solution of different salts, so dense that people can literally sit and read on the water without sinking too far in. Not far away is the lowest spot on the dry earth - almost 400 meters below sea level.

In Jesus' day, Galilee was the northern Jewish region. It's quite mountainous and yet has plenty of fertile land. The Lake itself, 12 miles long and 8 miles across, is surrounded most sides by hills.



Jerusalem lies in the southern region of Judea. It sits atop a hill – the fabled Mount Zion. It was the main city and religious centre of the Jewish people. Every Passover many Jewish pilgrims would take the pilgrim route to Jerusalem through Jericho - perhaps the oldest city on earth. The pilgrims would sing the joyful Songs of Ascent on the final stretch from Jericho, a 14-mile journey and a climb of nearly 1000 metres.



*City Scene in First Century Palestine*

Galilee and Judea are divided by a large flatland that included much of Samaria – the land of the Samaritans. Samaritans stuck to Jewish beliefs even though the Jews considered them to be half-breeds. There wasn't much love lost between Jews and Samaritans.

### **The History of the ancient Israel – Tragedy and Hope**

Picture this: almost all the lands of Israel lost and most of her 12 tribes crushed and vanished. What hope remained was in Judah and her great city, Jerusalem. Surely, God's city and God's holy Temple would be safe? Then, in 587 BC, the hammer blow: the armies of Babylon. Jerusalem and the dazzling Temple of Solomon were destroyed and most of Judah carried off across the desert to exile in Babylon.

What a shock to the national psyche! The poignant Psalm beside hints at the longing, loss and horror of this catastrophe. Would Judah perish and Yahweh God be forgotten among all the gods of the foreigners? To crush a nation was to crush its culture, its religion and its identity. Would the great story of the Hebrews come finally to an end?

No. In the fifty-year exile, a fierce new identity was forged. The Judahites - the Jews - developed a way to worship Yahweh in exile. They collected and edited their sacred writings. Inspired with new reverence and respect, scribes endlessly debated on them and derived new meanings for a changing world. Didn't they point to a Messiah who would come to liberate them from all oppression?

When, after fifty years, the Jews returned to rebuild their city and Temple, they could not know that more conquerors would arise - the armies of Alexander the Great, the Legions of Rome. But what the Jews had was something unique: a religion that could survive the loss of land, liberty and Temple. It has survived to this day.

*Beside the streams of Babylon  
we sat and wept  
at the memory of Zion  
leaving our harps  
hanging on the poplars there.*

*For we had been asked  
to sing to our captors,  
to entertain those who had carried us off:  
'Sing' they said  
'some hymns of Zion'.*

*How could we sing  
one of Yahweh's hymns  
in a pagan country?  
Jerusalem, if I forget you,  
may my right hand wither!*  
(From Psalm 137)

## Core Reinforcement

- 1 You will need to use the Timeline and any previous knowledge to answer the questions at the bottom of the page.

A 'By God's power I parted the Red Sea and brought the Israelites safely through.'

B 'We conquered the northern Kingdom and allowed others to settle there.'

C 'We conquered Jerusalem and carried the people off into exile.'

D 'A shepherd of flocks, a singer and musician, I became Israel's second king, and I established Jerusalem as my capital.'

E 'God asked me to sacrifice my dearly beloved son. His angel stopped me just in time. God promised that I would be a father of a great nation.'

F 'Rome appointed me 'King of the Jews'; I enlarged their modest Temple into something magnificent.'

G 'We survived the Assyrian onslaught and clung on to Jewish beliefs, but the Jews considered us half-breeds.'

H 'The third King of all Israel's tribes, I was noted for my wisdom and lavish style.'

- a) Name **and** put in order the people A to H.
- b) Which of them was considered:
- the Father of the Hebrews?
  - the founder of Israel as a nation?
  - the greatest king?
- c) For how long
- had there been a Temple in Jerusalem?
  - were the Judahites (Jews) in exile?
- d) In the millennium before Jesus, how many times had Jewish lands been conquered or occupied in a major way?

### BC (Before Christ)

3000	Palestine inhabited by Canaanites.
1800?	Immigration of nomadic shepherds. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel). Some Israelites emigrate to Egypt.
1300?	Moses and the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt.
1200?	Israelites conquer Palestine under Joshua.
1050	Israelites adopt monarchy - Saul first king.
1000	King David establishes Jerusalem as his capital.
950	King Solomon builds the First Temple.
930	The kingdom splits into two, Judah (south) and Israel (north).
780 -	Great age of prophecy - Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, ...
721	Northern kingdom (Israel) overrun by Assyrians. Permanent exile. Origin of Samaritans.
586	Southern kingdom overrun by Babylonians. Solomon's Temple destroyed. Exile for 50 years
538	Jewish (Judah) exiles return and build Second Temple. Israelites survive as the Jews (of Judah's tribe)
332	Alexander the Great's Greek Empire. Jewish lands subjugated.
63	Greek Empire taken over by Rome.
37	Rome appoints Herod the Great as king of the Jews, Second Temple enlarged into magnificent Temple..
5?	Jesus born.

### AD (Anno Domini - In the Year of the Lord)

25?	Public ministry of Jesus.
28?	Jesus crucified and risen..
65?	St Mark's Gospel.
66	Jews rise in revolt against Rome.
70	Jerusalem is destroyed by the Roman army. Temple is never rebuilt.