

instruct them, and His ministry in Galilee comes to a close, John 6 : 60-70.

### LESSON XII

#### THE HOLY LAND (Continued)

**ESDRAELON**—Between Galilee and Samaria lies the great plain of Central Palestine, Esdraelon, the Greek form of the Hebrew Jezreel. The plain makes a complete break in the central range and affords a clear passage from the coast to the Jordan.

Its fertility is remarkable, the soil, deep, rich and loamy, yielding luxuriant fields of grain. Its importance in history is chiefly due to the great highways that lay across it, east and west, north and south. It was also the classic battlefield of scripture, where Sisera was overthrown, where Gideon conquered, where Saul and Jonathan were defeated and slain.

**SAMARIA**—From Esdraelon we climb the hills southward to Samaria and once more stand on high ground. The earliest name of Samaria was Mount Ephraim. When seen from across the Jordan or from the sea it presents the appearance of a single mount.

An open country, with roads suitable for chariot-driving, it offered few obstacles to the invader. And in times of peace it was responsive to influences that came from without. It was open to foreign trade and commerce, it tolerated heathen gods, yielded to luxury, and finally fell into decay.

The two outstanding features of Samaria are Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. Between these two heights there runs a pass right across Samaria, and at the watershed of the pass stands Shechem, near which was Jacob's well, the one place of surpassing interest in all this land.

**JUDEA**—Judaea was the sanctuary and fortress of the race, and Jerusalem the home to whose festivals the scattered members of the Jewish faith regularly returned. Yet Judaea was less favored physically than other parts of Palestine. Her position was more isolated, her appearance less attractive. Hence arose her selfishness, her bigotry, and her lack of initiative. On the other hand, her seclusion helped to make her courageous when occasion demanded, and passionately patriotic.

Judaea's history was largely made by her situation, in particular the borders of the

land. These therefore must be surveyed.

On the east, lie the lower Jordan and the Dead Sea. To a great depth, far below the level of the ocean, the land sinks rapidly. Across this gulf, whose bottom one cannot see from Judaea, rise the hills of Moab, their summits forming the eastern horizon. Of this barrier the Jew was always conscious. The desert was brought to his very door, and the fact exerted a marked influence over his manner of life and thought.

Towards the south, the hills of Judaea descend gently to the level desert. But there are some sixty miles of mountainous country between the heights of Judaea and the plain. No great highway was ever constructed through this region, no army ever invaded Judaea from this side. Travel and commerce followed the easier paths to the east and west.

Again, on the west, between Judaea and the Philistine plain, there is a lower range of hills, called the Shephelah, and between the Shephelah and the central range, a series of valleys, the whole creating an important means of defence on the western side.

There remains the border land, to the north. From this side Judaea is more open than from any other, so fortresses in large number were erected as a protection against the enemy.

It is this situation of seclusion that forms the key to much of her history. She had all the advantages of an island and was as difficult to conquer as England. Even when her invaders did succeed, they found the hill-country of Judaea barren, waterless, and therefore difficult to hold.

Judaea itself is but little larger than Galilee. It is a lofty plateau of stony moorland, with a few dwarf trees, where water is scarce and crops are meagre. Such features fitted it to be a land of sheep and shepherds, and so we understand why this image comes so much to the front in the history of God's people, and why Christ took the shepherd as the type of Himself.

Bethlehem and Jerusalem are the two places of greatest interest to the Christian—the scenes of the Saviour's birth and passion. But neither of them had in itself the promise of prosperity and greatness.