

of the ancient Philistine city of Ashdod (Josh 13: 3). While we have no evidence of Roman roads linking the Elah Valley and Azotus, Dorsey documents a local route by way of Gath (Dorsey 1991:194; *Ant.* 5:87; *Eus. Onom.* 68:4-7; Tsafir, Di Segni and Green 1994:134) and Saphir (*Eus. Onom.* 156:23; Tsafir, Di Segni and Green 1994:222), where one would join the international coastal route to Azotus.

Peter on the Coastal Plain. As part of Luke's account of the spread of the Gospel, he records Peter's ministry in the coastal regions (Acts 9:32-10:48). Peter is first mentioned at Lydda (Tsafir, Di Segni and Green 1994:152), because Tabitha, a woman "full of good works and acts of charity" (Acts 9:36), had died. The Apostle prayed for her, and she came back to life. "And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner" (Acts 9: 41-42). It is at Simon's house in Joppa that Peter saw his vision of the sheet descending from heaven with clean and unclean animals on it. His experience was intended to prepare him for his meeting with the Gentile Cornelius in Caesarea, and the realization that "what God has cleansed, you must not call common" (Acts 10:15).

During this time, Cornelius, a Roman centurion, had a vision in which he was instructed to send for Peter. The Gentile is described as "a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms liberally to the people, prayed constantly to God" (Acts 10: 2). Luke's description of the Roman suggests that he was a semi-proselyte, a God-fearer, who had elected to refrain from certain aspects of pagan life (e.g. idolatry, sexual immorality) and identified himself with the faith of the Jewish people (Stern 1980: 2:103-107). When Peter arrived and heard of Cornelius' experience, he remarked, "Truly, I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him" (Acts 10: 34-35). Peter's experience in Joppa and Caesarea is paradigmatic for the early church's dawning recognition that Gentiles would now be drawn to faith.

PAUL'S ENCOUNTER ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

The Apostle Paul is introduced for the first time in the New Testament in Jerusalem during the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58). Paul's role in the execution of the first Christian martyr is unclear (cf. Acts 22:20; Fitzmyer 1998:394). All we are told is that those who acted against Stephen, "laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul." Concerning the Apostle's name, Paul never calls himself in his epistles by his Hebrew name (Saul: שָׁאוּל or Σαούλ). Instead, he always uses his Greco-Roman cognomen, Paul (Παῦλος; Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1, etc.).

In the chronicle of Paul's embrace of the Christian faith and subsequent missionary efforts, Luke refers to the Apostle as Σαούλ until the beginning of his missionary activities to the Gentiles (Acts 13:9). Thereafter, the only occasions when Paul is referred to as Saul are in the repeated accounts of his experience on the road to Damascus, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 22:7, 22:13, 26:14).

Insufficient geographical details are provided to know which route Paul chose to travel from Jerusalem to Damascus. Presumably he would



Saul of Tarsus (Paul) on the road to Damascus.

have traveled by way of the Galilee and ascended to the Transjordanian highlands somewhere east of the Sea of Galilee (Talbert 2000:69). We also do not know precisely where he had his vision of Jesus. Two of the three accounts (Acts 9:1-19, 22:4-11, 26:12-18) of Paul's encounter in Acts relate that he was *nearing Damascus* (Acts 9:3, 22:6). Meinardus notes that, already in the eighteenth century, explorer Richard Pococke recognized that some traditional sites were not even remotely close to the ancient Roman road from Damascus to Jerusalem. Meinardus favors a location on the ancient route near,

... Mar Boulos (St. Paul) and the village of Kaukab. ... Mar Boulos is merely a small volcanic crater where a few archeological remains of a pre-Christian temple were discovered. Tradition has placed the site of Paul's conversion in the immediate neighborhood of the village of Kaukab. ... (Meinardus 1981:59)

Blinded from his vision, Paul stayed a few days at a private home "on the street called Straight" (Acts 9:11) in Damascus (McRay 1992a: 2: 7-8), until a disciple named Ananias arrived and laid hands on him "so that he might regain his sight" (Acts 9:12). It is to Ananias that the Lord first reveals the purpose of Paul's calling: "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel ..." (Acts 9:15). Paul's sight is restored, and he then is baptized and takes a meal. Soon, Paul publicly declares his new faith in Jesus to the skepticism of some of his fellow believers who have heard of his reputation and the consternation of the Jewish authorities.

Discovering a plot to kill him, Paul escaped by night and returned to Jerusalem where he once again engages in disputations, this time with Greek-speaking Jews (Ἑλληνιστάς; Hengel 1974: 1:2-3; Simon 1956:1-19). After renewed threats, he was taken to Caesarea, where he traveled by ship to Tarsus, the place of his birth (Acts 9:30, 21:39, 22:3).

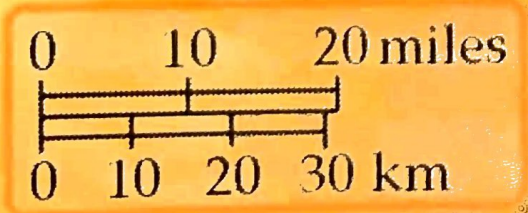
We next hear about Paul when he is sought by Barnabas in Tarsus and brought to the church in Antioch (Norris 1992: 1:265-269). Here the two ministered for a year (Acts 11:25-26). At the time of a great famine during the reign of Claudius,



Saul baptized

Saul's Heavenly Vision

Saul (Paul) sets out for Damascus





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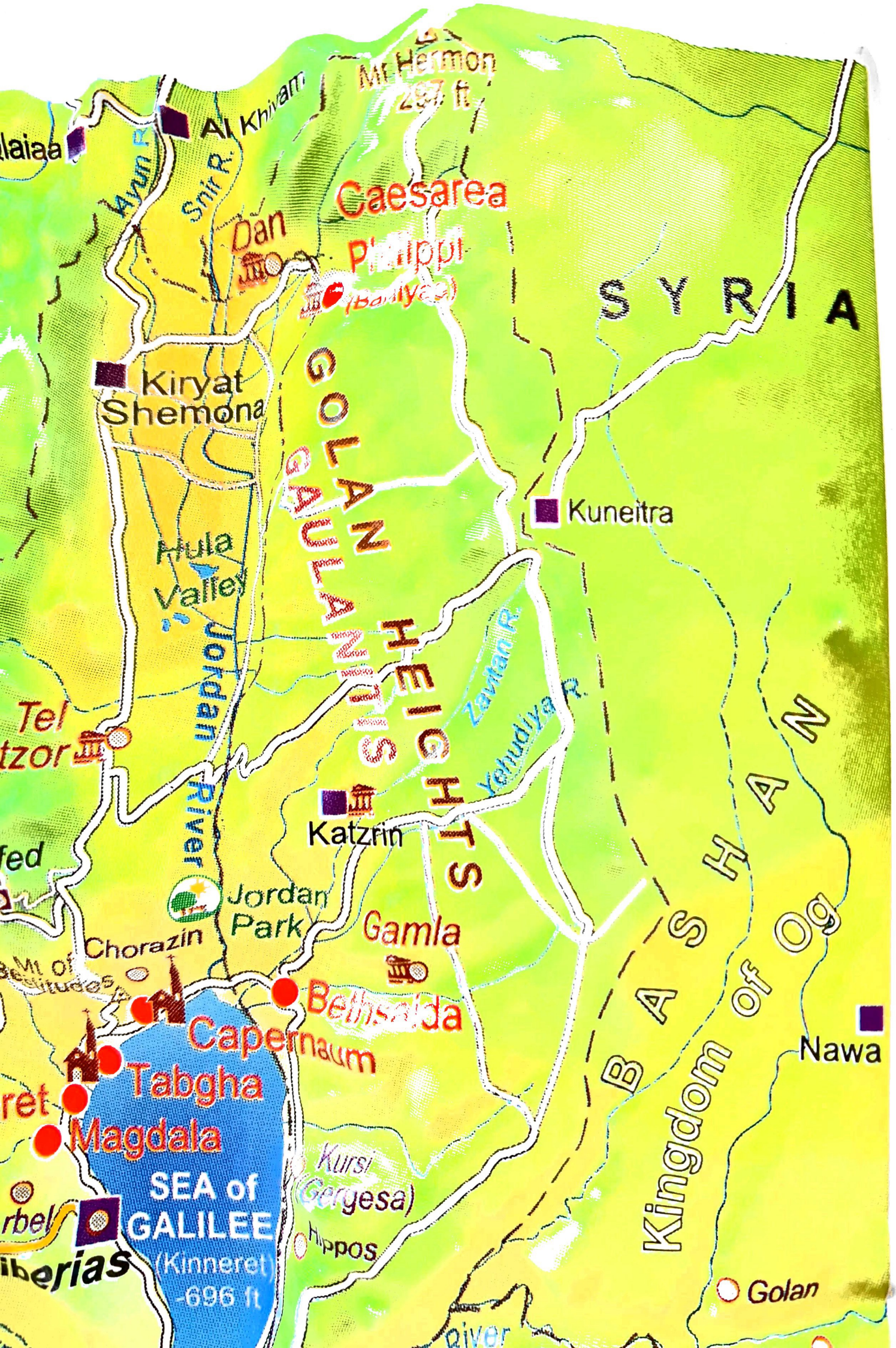
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