

OXFORD BIBLE ATLAS
Fourth Edition

A serious Biblical student is concerned about the details of the Scriptures. One such detail is understanding names and locations of places in the Bible. The Scriptures often refer to events that occurred at specific places, and many times a series of places are named in the course of a narrative. In order to fully understand the context and meaning of the record, it is essential to be aware of where the places were and how they stood in relation to other locations. A Bible atlas is an invaluable reference for understanding geography in the study of the Scriptures.

The *Oxford Bible Atlas* contains maps that show cities, trade routes, Paul's journeys, and the political boundaries of different regions referred to in the Bible at important points in the history of the Biblical narrative. There are also maps that give information about the terrain: geology, vegetation, and mean annual rainfall. The text that accompanies the maps in the atlas provides some useful insights into the culture, contemporary historical events, and archaeological finds. The use of colorful photography adds to the reader's appreciation of the beauty of the lands of the Bible. The atlas has an Index of Place Names that lists cities and other geographic features with the grid coordinates and page numbers of the maps where each item can be found.

An example of the usefulness of an atlas comes up in reading the Book of Acts. For instance, let us look at two verses in Acts 17.

Acts 17:10 and 11:

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming *thither* went into the synagogue of the Jews [Judeans].

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

Where is Berea? Where is Thessalonica? How close were they to each other? Were they in the same area or hundreds of miles apart? A Bible atlas can answer these questions.

To find Berea on a map, first look in the Index of Place Names which begins on page 205 of the *Oxford Bible Atlas*. You will find three listings for Berea on page 207. The first listing for Berea has an alternate spelling and other locations listed in parentheses: (Beroea/*Ḥaleb/Ḥalab*). When you locate this alternate spelling, "Beroea," in the alphabetical list, you will find two additional listings for this area: Beroea (in Greece/Macedonia, Verria) and Beroea (in Syria). Which one of these listings is referred to in Acts 17?

By going to the Book of Acts and reading the context around verse 11 we learn that Paul was in Macedonia. When we check the index again, we note that one of the entries for Beroea indicates it is located in Greece/Macedonia. It is included on the map on page 168 at the grid coordinates C2 and on maps on pages 158 and 172 at the grid coordinates D2.

You can also use a Bible dictionary as a cross reference to determine which entry for Berea applies to the record in the Book of Acts. Then you can pinpoint which map and the proper grid coordinates to examine. When you look up Beroea/Berea in the *New Bible Dictionary*, point number one refers to Paul and Silas leaving Thessalonica because of the opposition they experienced there and includes

scripture references for Acts 17:5-11 and Acts 20:4. Because this dictionary reference includes Acts 17:11, we can determine that this is the Berea we are studying. From this entry, we learn that Berea is a city in south Macedonia. Now we can use the atlas index to locate the maps that contain Macedonia, “(in Greece/Macedonia, Verria).”

The grid coordinates refer to “squares” that are labeled with numbers and letters on the edges of the maps. To locate Berea on the map on page 168, look along the bottom of the map to find the “C” and along the left side of the page to find the number “2.” In the square formed by the grid lines where C and 2 intersect you will find Berea (also spelled Beroea). This Berea is located in Macedonia. Just a little to the right of Berea is Thessalonica (which could have been located by using the index the same way we found Berea).

Since Thessalonica and Berea are mentioned together in Acts 17, it might be helpful to know the distance between the two cities. The map on page 168 does not include a scale for determining distance. Let’s look at another reference to Berea or Beroea from the index. Page 158 has a map with Beroea located at coordinates D2. This map includes a scale that indicates both miles and kilometers. Using the scale on the map, you can see that Beroea is about forty miles or sixty-four kilometers from Thessalonica. (Other sources might measure this distance differently.)

Travelers couldn’t always follow a direct path to their destination. We can only approximate the distances people traveled because using a map scale doesn’t factor in the distance added when hills must be traversed or when the traveler had to divert his path due to the geographic features of the area.

As you will note from the topographical shading on the maps included in the atlas, the elevations of the Bible lands varied significantly. For example, on page 159, in coordinates G4, you will see that Jerusalem is located in a mountainous area and Caesarea is not. Jerusalem has a much higher elevation than Caesarea, which is located on the coast at sea level. In the Scriptures, you’ll read about people traveling or going “up to Jerusalem,” which means “up” in elevation. When studying with a Bible atlas, it’s helpful to understand that in the Scriptures, the word “up” in the context of traveling was commonly used to refer to elevation rather than direction. Acts 11:2 notes that when traveling from Caesarea to Jerusalem (north to south), Peter “was come up to Jerusalem....” Peter traveled uphill to Jerusalem.

Now let us return to the map on page 158. Thessalonica is shown on this map to be the closest city to Beroea. It is easy to see how the people in these two cities were in close contact with each other. A further step in research would be to look up both of these cities in a Bible dictionary to gain some cultural insights about the area, which may lead you back to the atlas for more cross-referencing.

Use the Bible atlas as you read and study the Bible to see where the places referred to were located and to increase your understanding and appreciation for God’s wonderful Word.