



Story of Scripture

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PRE-LESSON INFORMATION

SESSION DESCRIPTION

God's story in scripture is the story of crossing borders and breaking through boundaries in order to bring new life.

Background information for the leader:

The slideshow and video will give an overview of the stories of God crossing borders and boundaries to accompany God's people in Scripture. This lesson focuses on one specific story. Matthew 2 narrates the flight of Jesus' family away from King Herod's violent reign. They flee to Egypt (crossing national, ethnic and religious borders) as they seek safety from political violence. The experience of this family is that of any refugee family today who flees across national borders in response to political, religious, economic or ethnic violence out of fear for the life and future of their children.

With some groups, it will make sense to draw these connections between the holy family in ancient times fleeing as refugees across borders, and refugee families today who are seeking safety by fleeing across borders.

For other groups, the main focus may be how God in Jesus accompanies us at difficult border crossings in our lives. It is significant that in his early life, according to Matthew, Jesus negotiated multiple languages and accents in unfamiliar Egypt and then again in Galilee. He learned to move between multiple cultures and maybe even translated these cultures and languages for his parents.

ELCA FAITH PRACTICES

Study

LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- identify and describe different kinds of borders and boundaries that structure our lives
- explore Jesus' ministry as a practice of crossing borders to meet people
- connect Jesus' border crossing ministry with the ways God comes to us and meets us in scripture and in our lives
- name three specific "borders" they can cross to extend God's service and love of neighbor

BIBLICAL FOCUS

Matthew 2:13-23

Mark 7:24-37

MATERIALS NEEDED

Computer, projector, and screen for PowerPoint that accompanies this session
Ability to access and project video/sound that accompanies this session (if utilized). It is highly recommended that you download online videos prior to the presentation.

Bible, or an excerpt of Matthew 2

Map of Jesus' itinerary in Matthew 2

Blank sheet of paper

Optional: magazines, tape/glue, markers for map making activity

Pens, markers, or crayons

Materials to create a dividing line (see Opening Activity for ideas/suggestions)

LESSON PLAN

OPENING ACTIVITY: CROSSING THE LINE

We'll begin with a short activity on "crossing the line." Have the group stand shoulder to shoulder in a line on one side of the room (or out of doors) leaving about 3-4 feet in front of them. Mark a line on the ground (with chalk on pavement, a string/tape stretched across the floor, a line drawn in the sand, etc.), or indicate a dividing line (with orange cones, two chairs, or two Frisbees [one at each end], or provide a string or rope stretched across about shoulder height so the group has to duck to go under it.

For example, the group should look like this:

CHAIR _____ CHAIR
person.person.person.person.person.person.person

The group leader or a member of the group may stand aside (or in line if you want everyone to participate) and read the following:

"During this activity, please be sensitive and respectful of the others in the group. I am going to read a bunch of different statements. If your experience matches the statement I read, you step forward and cross the line (or go under the line). After some people have stepped forward, turn around and look back at who is on the other side of the line. Pause. Then I'll tell you to cross back to your original spot and I'll read the next statement. You are the only person who decides if you fit the statement or not—there is no right or wrong, it's just how you understand the statement. If you are uncomfortable with the question, you can take a step back."

(Once you get the hang of this activity, there may be additional statements you want to add to fit your group's context.)

Warm-up:

1. Cross the line if you have long hair. OK, turn and look back at the others. Now go back to your spot.
2. Cross the line if you are wearing sneakers. Turn and look back at the others. Now go back.
3. Cross the line if you are not an athlete. Now go back.

Everyone understand? Let's start. NOTE: Leaders should feel free to rearrange, add, or eliminate items below. Activity can be done in complete silence as we observe our similarities with others and our differences from them.

Cross the line if you identify as a boy. (Boys cross the line, turn and look back at girls, then go back.)

Cross the line if you've ever been teased or called a bad name or made fun of.

Cross the line if you've ever teased or made fun of someone else.

Cross the line if you have ever broken a rule.

Cross the line if you have ever broken a rule and gotten in trouble.

Cross the line if you've ever been picked last in games or sports or left out of an activity altogether.

Cross the line if you've ever been treated differently because of the color of your skin.

Cross the line if you've ever been singled out because of your religious background.

Cross the line if you've ever been made fun of because of your accent or your voice.

Cross the line if you or anyone in your family or a friend has a disability that you cannot see.

Cross the line if you know someone who uses a wheelchair.

Cross the line if you have a friend whose religion is different than yours.

Cross the line if you were born in another country.

Cross the line if one of your parents was born in another country.

Cross the line if you have a passport.

Cross the line if you have ever been the only person of your race/ethnicity in a classroom.

Cross the line if it is hard for you to make new friends.

Cross the line if your family is working class or poor.

Cross the line if your family is middle class.

Cross the line if your family is upper class or wealthy.

Cross the line if you are a Republican.

Cross the line if you are a Democrat.

Cross the line if you don't have a political affiliation.

Cross the line if you have friends who belong to a different group at school than you do.

Cross the line if you speak another language at home.

Debrief the activity by asking participants the following questions:

What are some feelings that came up for you during this activity?

What was the hardest part for you?

What did you learn about yourself? About others?

What kinds of borders or boundaries did that line indicate? (ex: social, physical, inherited, biological, acquired, shameful, honored, shared, unique, geographical, economic)

Were you surprised to see others on the other side of the line from you?

What does "the line" represent?

VIDEO: GOD CROSSES THE LINE

This segment utilizes the video that accompanies the session. A script with the video's content is provided in the appendix for leader use in preparing the lesson and for those who do not have access to or do not wish to utilize the video during the session.

Play the video that accompanies this session.

BIBLICAL FOCI: JESUS CROSSES THE LINE

Matthew 2:13-23 and Mark 7:24-37

Jesus often crossed lots of lines in his ministry. Even as a child, he was carried across borders. Look at the story of the Holy Family in Matthew 2:13-23--Matthew's story of Jesus as a child refugee and immigrant. To set up the context, remind the group of the Christmas story: The wise men came from far away and crossed many borders to see Jesus after he was born. Jesus was predicted to be "king of the Jews" and this threatened the local King, Herod. When Herod heard he had a rival, he began killing the children in his kingdom. Because Jesus' life is at risk his father and mother flee their home in Bethlehem. They make the long journey to Egypt—out of the reach of Herod's political power—and they take shelter as refugees.

- What was this time like for Jesus?
- How do refugees live and what resources do they have?

Jesus was uprooted from Bethlehem at an early age, and left his extended family, cousins, aunts, uncles, neighbors.

- Did he make friends easily?
- Did he learn the local language, or speak his first words in the local accent?
- Did Mary enroll him in Hebrew school so he wouldn't fall behind if they ever got to return home?
- Or did Joseph insist Jesus accompany him to work each morning to learn a trade?

Eventually, the family decides to leave Egypt and return home to Bethlehem—which Jesus probably has little memory of. But the political threat is still present, and Joseph fears for his family's safety. So they avoid Bethlehem—not even stopping to see their relatives there—and they head north into Galilee. This is a sketchy part of the Roman Empire, more "wild west" than tranquil suburb. But the family settles there and they begin their lives again.

- Did the other children make fun of Jesus, with his different "Egyptian" clothes and accent?
- Did they tease him because he didn't know how to play their games, or where to find the closest well for water, or how to avoid the gangs and thieves who also lived among the hills of Galilee?

Look at the Map of the Ancient Near East (see Appendix). Trace the holy family's journey from Bethlehem (south of Jerusalem) down into Egypt, along the Nile River Valley. Then trace the journey from Egypt back north, up and around Jerusalem, and then finally into the Galilee region. This is the journey across multiple borders that the holy family makes in Matthew 2:13-23. (Note that their journey is similar to the Exodus journey led by Moses, Miriam and Aaron out of Egypt to the promised land.)

- Name the borders that the holy family has crossed (national, social, ethnic, political, urban and countryside).
- By the time he was a grown man, Jesus may have been very comfortable with differences among people--different colors and races, accents, ways of dressing, social classes and religions. Let's look at one story from Jesus' ministry where he crosses borders to escape Jewish crowds in the Galilee, and discovers that his mission and vocation to heal goes beyond ethnic, religious and geographical borders.

Now read Mark [6:53-56]; 7:24-37 (Jesus crosses borders and heals a Gentile girl he's never met)

Setting the context:

In the Gospel of Mark, particularly in the first half (chapters 1-8), Jesus moves around an enormous geographical region very quickly. This gospel is not preoccupied with logical routes of travel, but shows that Jesus meets many, many different people in many, many different contexts and ministers to them where they are. That said, his ministry does seem to focus on Jews living around the Sea of Galilee, where he and his disciples continually return to, and often sails across, with large crowds following him. Finally, he does venture into Gentile territory (Mark 5); and then he goes even further (Mark 7:24).

Mark chapter 7 opens after Jesus has "crossed" the water to a town at the edge of the Sea of Galilee called "Gennesaret." Have the group find the Sea of Galilee on the Map, and then locate Gennesaret along the North West edge of the Sea. When Jesus has ministered to many crowds of people (Mark 6:53-56), he then converses with Scribes and Pharisees, who have crossed other boundaries to talk with Jesus. They left their urban comfort zone in the Jerusalem and entered a different world--the countryside and small towns of Galilee (7:1). In Gennesaret and around Galilee Jesus teaches and argues with the powerful men from Jerusalem. In the end, his teaching cannot penetrate their arguments and he cannot bridge the social boundaries of their different classes, accents, education, doctrine and religious training.

Have the group pick up the Bible study here. Jesus leaves and goes on a long journey to Tyre. Read Mark 7:24. Find Tyre on the map--what kinds of terrain is Jesus crossing to get there? What territories is he crossing? What is his goal?

Read verses 25-26. A new character is introduced. Who is she and where has she come from? What differences or barriers are there between the woman and Jesus? (ex: Jew/Gentile; man/woman; single man/mother; Galilean immigrant/Syrophoenician; divine/human; resting at home with friends/intruding on a home as a stranger, etc.)

Read verse 27 and stop. What is Jesus saying? How would this sound if you said the same thing at the dinner table? In Jesus' time, "dog" was a derogatory way to speak about another person - Jesus was calling her a name. "Children" is an honorary name for the Jewish people - Jesus' own people - who are children of God. When do we use derogatory words or call people names today? How do people respond when they are called these names?

Some people read this story and make the interpretation that Jesus is just testing the woman. Another interpretation is that in this moment, Jesus experiences his full humanity: he is tired from his long journey, the past months of healing and teaching have been exhausting and he just wants to relax with his friends. He is caught off guard and responds as we often do - putting up a defensive barrier: my work is for the children of God, not for you. We are different. Don't ask me to minister to your people, too.

But now read verse 28. How does she respond to Jesus' name-calling? Does she take offense? Does she get angry, or argue and call him names? (Help the group to notice how the Syro-phenician woman acknowledges the social and religious barrier between herself and Jesus: Yes, you are a Jew at the table of God, and yes, I am but a "dog" in God's house. But God will provide for me and my daughter, too.) The woman remains calm. AND, she insists that Jesus cross the socio-religious (and gender) boundaries to minister to her family. Sometimes border crossing means insisting that others meet us half way.

Read verses 29-30. What changes between Jesus and the woman? How did she find common ground with Jesus? Who crossed a boundary - Jesus, or the woman - in order to heal the little girl? Why might God in Jesus give us this story of being fully human and also being willing to cross the line?

Now, let's come back to our context.

Make your own map - a big map that shows your neighborhood/city or a smaller scale map that shows your church, home, and/or school.

- What are the physical boundaries on this map?
- What are (invisible) social boundaries on this map?
- Cut images from magazines to illustrate the kinds of spaces and activities taking place in your neighborhood/on the map.
- Which borders and boundaries do people regularly cross, why? Which ones do people never cross, why?

Sometimes differences divide people and create barriers. But other kinds of differences are just part of our everyday lives and we don't even notice them. When we become aware of the borders and barriers that keep us from people, it often just takes a little bit of work to cross those boundaries. Working to discover what we have in common with others can help us respect and negotiate those differences. It can also help us to learn more about ourselves by learning about each other.

ACTIVITY: FINDING WHAT'S IN COMMON

Stand up, choose a side of the line to stand on. Facing the person in front of you, see if you can find three things you have in common that you didn't know about before. Shake hands when you are done. Move to your right. Face a new person and see if you can find three things you have in common that you didn't know before. Shake hands when you are done. Move to your right one more time. Face a new person and see if you can find three things you have in common that you didn't know before. Shake hands when you are done.

Debrief the activity by asking participants the following questions:

Some lines and borders are difficult or impossible to cross. How did you cross the line?

What kinds of lines or borders are easy to cross? Why are they easier to cross?

Which kinds of borders are harder to cross? Are there some borders or boundaries that should not be crossed? What are these and why? What borders and lines have you seen God cross in your life, or in your friends' lives?

CLOSING THE CONVERSATION

Thank the group for their participation and make any final remarks or announcements. Then offer this closing prayer (or one of your own):

God of all creation, you have created the borders and boundaries of our natural world so that all of your creatures could live together in peace. We have crossed and blurred many of these boundaries, and we have created other political, social and religious boundaries that do not promote peace, but antagonize, divide and even set people against each other. Sometimes we put up borders and draw lines to keep ourselves safe. But there must be a better way. You are the God who came to live among us in Jesus. You crossed borders and boundaries to comfort, heal, encounter and simply to meet people in need. Give us the courage to willingly cross the social boundaries and borders that divide us from each other. Give us the strength to stand on the unpopular side of the line when you call us to take a stand with others for justice. Give us the compassion to reach across the lines that separate us to give and receive healing in your name. Amen.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

The following are suggested as resources for further exploration of this session's topic.

Seminarium Blog: "Prepping Class with Newspaper in Hand" by Julia L Fogg
<http://seminariumblog.org/general/semclass/prepping-class-newspaper-hand/>

Inocente, a documentary, <http://inocentedoc.com/>

Whale Rider--on a young person called to cross tribal gender boundaries and cross her grandfather in order to save her people, and the whales.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

The Rev. Dr. Julia Lambert Fogg chairs the religion department and teaches New Testament at California Lutheran University. Over the last 5 years she has been asking how today's experience of immigration and the undocumented can help us understand the God who continually crosses borders and boundaries in Scripture—and calls us to do the same in service to our neighbors.



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Video Script – Story of Scripture

The following script is, generally speaking, the content contained in the video segment of this lesson, provided as information for those who cannot access or do not wish to utilize the video.

God's story in scripture is the story of crossing borders and breaking through boundaries in order to bring new life.

TITLE: Genesis 1... In the beginning God created and set the boundaries of nature

VOICE: AT Creation, God broke open the universe, crossing boundaries by calling order out of chaos—form out of void—structure and rhythm out of amorphous matter. God crossed the voids of space, breaking into voice and with words, calling new life into being.

TITLE: Exodus...God leads people across the borders of Egypt, the Red Sea, and into a bounded wilderness

VOICE: IN Egypt, God again broke through to manifest the eternal in time and the unbounded in specific geography, in order to call to Moses in a burning bush. In this story, God breaks the hold of slavery—the power of the master, the enslaved's humility, self-deprecation and lack of trust, in order to lead people across deserts to wander in a wilderness and to break through to become a people.

TITLE: John 1...The line that divides divine from human

THROUGH the incarnation, God crossed the boundaries of divine and human divide to walk side by side with us in creation.

TITLE: Phil 2:5-11...all the lines that divide us

BY becoming human, God accepted the limits of a gendered body, of time, and intellect. And in that limited, bounded lifetime, Jesus demonstrated humility by sharing human servitude, suffering, pain and death. Now when we reach our limits, or hit a border we cannot cross, we can draw on Christ's humility in solidarity with us. And we can draw on God's grace that dissolves the borders between divine and human, slave and free, male and female, Jew and Gentile (Gal 3:28).

TITLE: Matthew 2...Refugees crossing borders to reach safety

VOICE: AS a child, Jesus and his family fled to Egypt to escape the violence of King Herod in Bethlehem. The wisemen came from far away and crossed many borders to see Jesus after he was born. Jesus was predicted to be "king of the Jews" and this threatened the local King, Herod.

When Herod heard he had a rival, he began killing the children in his kingdom. Because Jesus' life is at risk his father and mother flee their home in Bethlehem. Jesus was uprooted from Bethlehem at an early age, and left his extended family, cousins, aunts, uncles, neighbors.

They make the long journey to Egypt—out of the reach of Herod’s political power—and they take shelter as refugees. They make a home there for a number of years until the political threat fades.

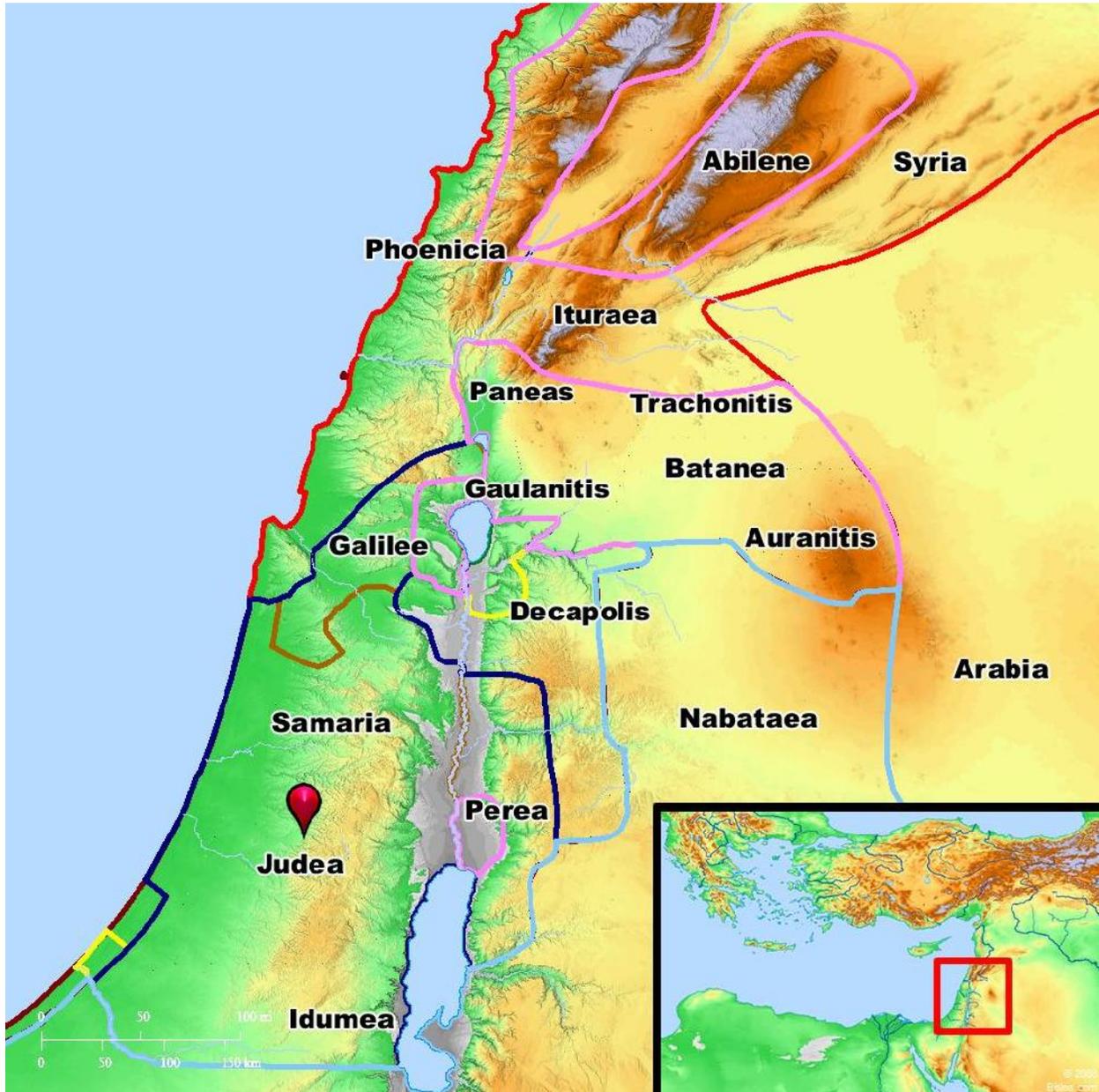
Eventually, the family decides to leave Egypt and return home to Bethlehem—which Jesus probably has little memory of. But the political threat is still present, and Joseph fears for his family’s safety. So they avoid Bethlehem—not even stopping to see their relatives there—and they head north into Galilee. This is a sketchy part of the Roman Empire, more “wild west” than tranquil suburb. But the family settles there and they begin their lives again.

As a child Jesus made difficult journeys across uncertain geography, and then continued to make these journeys in his adult ministry, crossing lakes, ethnic territories, and social taboos to heal and call people. We may imagine that as Jesus grew up, like many teens today, he had to develop a social identity in a mixture of social, religious and political influences that were often in tension. That God in Jesus experienced this difficult journey of negotiating geographical and political borders, social and cultural borders, in order to be with God’s people means that as we are negotiating the same kinds of journeys and borders, the one on whom we rely intimately knows our path, and is a sympathetic guide.

VOICE: IN Galilee, Jesus regularly crossed social, ethnic and regional borders to practice his ministry of meeting, healing, and eating with others. Jesus’ experience in crossing borders, migrating, and even living as a refugee early in his life (according to Matthew) shape his adult ministry as well. He is comfortable in many different contexts and situations—with scribes and teachers, Roman soldiers, government workers, women, beggars, the disabled and the mentally challenged. He doesn’t distinguish between rich Temple officials or humble workers. Because he is willing to cross social, ethnic and political borders to encounter and serve people, he embodies God in the scriptures—crossing borders and boundaries to meet us where we are.

Just as God in Jesus willingly experienced this upheaval and displacement, so we, too, might reach out to our neighbors who experience similar upheaval and displacement. To do so may require that we cross a border or social boundary and put ourselves at risk to walk with our neighbor. In other words, when we reach out to strangers and neighbors who have been refugees, we are also reaching out to know God in them.

Appendix: Map of the Near East
Map the flight to Egypt and return to Galilee



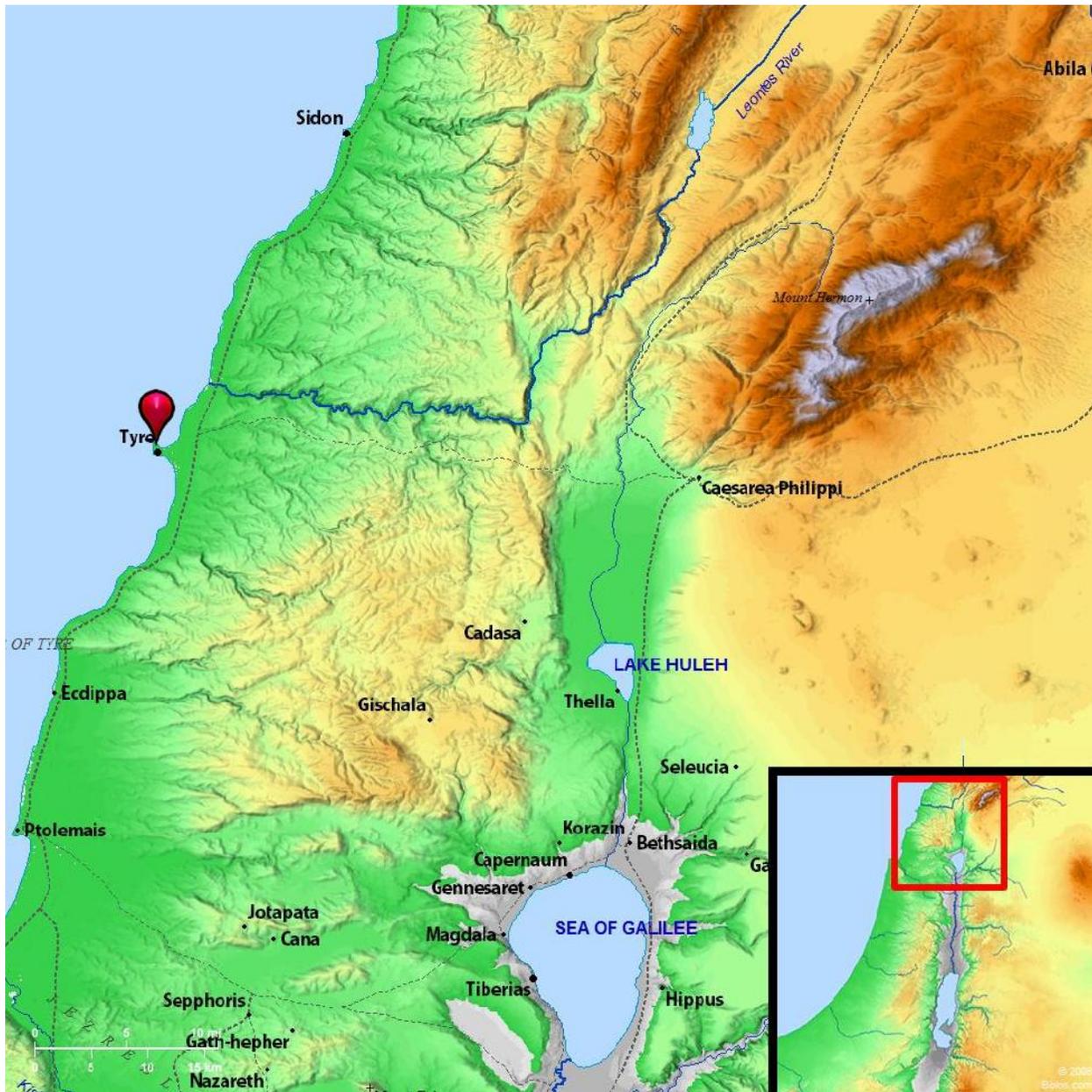
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**Appendix: PRINTABLE Map of the Near East
Map the flight to Egypt and return to Galilee**



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Appendix: Map Jesus' border crossing from Galilee into Syria and Phoenicia



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Appendix: PRINTABLE Map
Jesus' border crossing from Galilee into Syria and Phoenicia

MAP OF THE GALILEE REGION IN NORTHERN ISRAEL



<http://www.bible-history.com/maps/Map-Galilee-Northern-Palestine.jpg>

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