

A Journey through historic mountains

# Maamalakkappuram

MOUNT EPHRAIM or MOUNTAINS OF EPHRAIM



**M**ount Ephraim or Mount of Ephraim, was the historical name for the central mountainous district of Israel once occupied by the Tribe of Ephraim, extending from Bethel to the plains of Jezreel (Joshua 17:15; 19:50; 20:7). Mount Ephraim is not a single mountain but its rather a mountainous or a hilly region.

In the present day, Mount Ephraim lies in the wild, uncultivated hill-country to the northeast of Jerusalem, between the central towns and the Jordan valley.

Ephraim means '*being fruitful*'. In Joshua's time (Joshua 17:18), approximately sometime between the 18th century BCE and the 13th century BCE, these hills were densely wooded. They were intersected by well-watered, fertile valleys as referred to in Jeremiah 50:19.

Joshua was buried at Timnath-heres among the mountains of Ephraim (Judges 2:9). This region is also called the "Mountains of Israel" and the "Mountains of Samaria". Israel's fourth judge and prophetess Deborah lived in this region. Her home was called "the palm tree of Deborah", and was between Bethel and Ramah in Benjamin (Judges 4:5).

About half the territory occupied by the tribe of Ephraim was hilly or mountainous, and the other half was flatter, approaching the coastal plains. In Joshua 19:50, Joshua, who was of the tribe of Ephraim, received a city in the hill country of Ephraim as his inheritance. Later, he was buried there (Joshua 24:33), as was Eleazer the high priest, son of Aaron (Joshua 24:33). Shechem, a city of refuge, was also located in the hill country of Ephraim or “Mount Ephraim” (Joshua 21:21).

In the book of Judges, much of the action takes place in the hill country of Ephraim. Ehud (a Benjamite) rallied the people for battle in the hill country of Ephraim, which bordered the territory of Benjamin (Judges 3:27). Gideon later rallied troops from the mountains of Ephraim (Judges 7:24). Abimelech, a lesser-known judge, lived there, too (Judges 10:1). The sad tale of Judges 18-19 is set in the same area of Mount Ephraim.

Saul searched for his missing donkeys in the hill country of Ephraim (1 Samuel 9:4), and some men of Israel hid from the Philistines there (1 Samuel 14:22). Sheba, one of the men who sided with Absalom against King David, is also listed as being from the hill country (2 Samuel 20:21).

Although not specifically referred to in the New Testament, most of the hill country of Ephraim would have been in Samaritan territory. This was a town to which our Lord retired with his disciples after he had raised Lazarus, and when the priests were conspiring against him (John 11:54).

Jeremiah promises that the Lord will redeem His people: “But I will bring Israel back to their own pasture, and they will graze on Carmel and Bashan; their appetite will be satisfied on the hills of Ephraim and Gilead” (Jeremiah 50:19).

As we reflect on the Mount of Ephraim, let us pray to the Lord to remove the barrenness in our lives and make us more fruitful as the name Ephraim stands for. Amen

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Tony Melba

