

# THE FIFTH GOSPEL

## THE LAND

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*by Jim Pitts*

I am enthusiastic about the “fifth gospel.” Such a statement might cause people to wonder if I’ve embraced a newly discovered Gnostic text, but that’s not at all what I mean. Biblical scholar and archeologist, Bargil Pixner, described the fifth gospel this way: “Five gospels record the life of Jesus. Four you will find in books and one you will find in the land they call holy. Read the fifth gospel and the world of the four will open to you.”

My own introduction to the fifth gospel occurred in college. I understood the importance of the Bible, and I’d begun to understand how crucial it could be to know about the language and literature of God’s word if I really wanted to delve into Scripture. But it was only when a lecturer stood in front of a map and took me on a tour of the biblical world that I saw how the story of salvation has physical roots in geography and archeology. Archeologist Charles Page says, “Students of the Bible need to be introduced to the land of the Bible, on the assumption that such knowledge will enhance their understanding of biblical accounts.”

Throughout the centuries, believers have journeyed to the Holy Land. They want to physically experience the sacred places of their faith, to see with their own eyes the land where Jesus walked. For many, such journeys are often an early step into the fifth gospel, but pilgrimages like these aren’t the only way to increase our knowledge of the fifth gospel. Over the years, the story of the fifth gospel has been told and retold by gifted visual artists. Ancient mosaics, frescoes (paintings on walls and ceilings), canvas paintings, maps, and photographs can add a visual dimension to our understanding. In our image-driven culture, pictures often tell the story.

NextSunday Gallery has been developed by Smyth & Helwys to enhance the educational experience in both academic and congregational settings. Illustrating historical sites and presenting panoramic vistas, this ever-expanding collection of images covers mountaintops and valleys, cities and villages, deserts and rivers. The ability to visualize the places and artifacts of the people whose faith story we share offers us information and inspiration. Seeing the natural environment and human structures informs our understanding of the biblical narrative. As Pixner said, “Read the fifth gospel and the world of the four [gospels] will open to you.” ☉



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