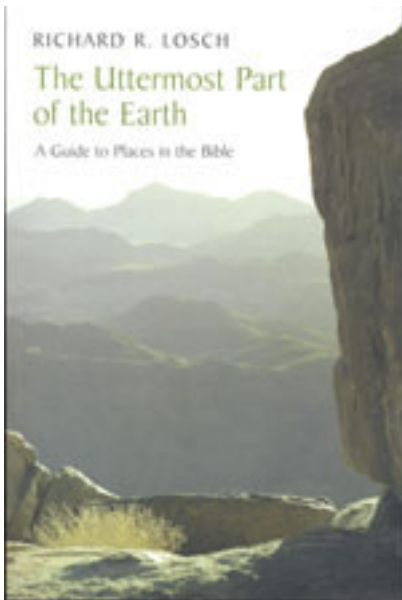


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Losch, Richard R.

The Uttermost Part of the Earth: A Guide to Places in the Bible

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005. Pp. 272 + 15 black and white maps. Paper. \$16.00. ISBN 0802828051.

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The telling title of this handy paperback volume may have a twofold effect: on the one hand, it attracts readers by employing a reference to the unknown, dangerous, and mystic that might await them in these places (although those familiar with the Bible immediately recognize that the main title is citing Acts 1:8, where Jesus gave his disciples the Great Commission); on the other hand, it contains a promise as well, literally to “guide” its readers to places mentioned in the Bible. The attentive reader may wonder how such a concept could work at all. Place names in the Bible are almost legion, especially if one includes those that scholars today cannot identify with actual geographical places or those that have become symbolic, such as Babylon for evil, which was consequently applied to other places, such as Rome (see 40 with reference to Rev 17:5). The problem itself can be illustrated by pointing to a recent monograph of some 680 pages about the place names in Judges alone (Erasmus Gass, *Die Ortsnamen des Richterbuchs in historischer und redaktioneller Perspektive* [ADPV 35; Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2005]; see the reviews by Uwe Becker [http://bookreviews.org/pdf/4732_4878.pdf] and Ernst A. Knauf [http://bookreviews.org/pdf/4732_4883.pdf]).

Of course, comprehensiveness cannot be an aim of a book of some 260 pages, and Richard R. Losch, retired rector of St. James’ Episcopal Church in Livingston, Alabama, is fully aware of the fact that such expectations may lead readers astray. Thus in his introduction he correctly limits the scope when he states: “It [this book] is not intended to

be an in-depth study or encyclopedia of biblical sites” (ix). Consequently, places having played “a minor role” are excluded to keep the volume manageable. Additionally, Losch wants to introduce “the stories of the many fascinating places that are mentioned in the Bible, as well as some nonbiblical places that played a significant role in Bible times.” That is definitely reasonable and adequately fulfills the purpose of such a book. As far I am concerned, Losch is successful in making at least one reader “curious” about what fascinating pieces of information lie behind such extravagant place names such as Ai or Bethphage, to mention only two. Furthermore, information becomes even more attractive if it is presented in such a pleasant narrative style, as is the case here.

The inclusion of some nonbiblical places demonstrates that Losch knows of the difficulties an exclusive concentration on biblical place names might cause. Often knowledge about these nonbiblical places is the key to an in-depth understanding of a certain geographical name mentioned in the Bible. Such a place name is Sepphoris, which “is never mentioned in the Bible” but “very probably played a major role in the culture of Nazareth and in Jesus’ early education.” Of course, such a criterion might cause some trouble, because the category of nonbiblical places to be integrated either could increase to such a number that becomes unmanageable or the former clear-cut criterion (“which place name is talked about why”) becomes “fuzzy” and incomprehensible for a reader. Be that as it may, the intended readership—according to the text on the back cover, “Bible classes, church education,” and those who personally study the Bible—are supplied with a good deal of information that might occasionally surprise the professional scholar as well.

The book offers a short introduction (ix–xi); “A Brief History of the Holy Land” (1–11); the presentation of the places, starting with Ai and ending with Ur of the Chaldeans (12–245); six maps (246–51; basically the usual thematic maps: “The Twelve Tribes of Israel,” “Ancient Asia Minor,” “The Mediterranean World of the New Testament,” “Palestine in Old Testament Times,” “The Kingdoms and Empires of Old Testament Times,” and “Palestine in New Testament Times”); “A Guide to Pronunciation” (252–54); and an cumulative index of names and places (255–60). The book lacks a bibliography, although Losch indicates where he has derived his information by citing some sources in his introduction (x). Here and there black and white photographs visualize the places or at least some striking parts of them. Of course, the individual entries are of varied length according to their significance but also depending on what we know about them (see, e.g., Cana of Galilee on 66 and Rome on 169–201).

The informed reader will wonder why an entry on Caesarea Philippi occupies just three pages (to be more precise, only two, if the photographs are omitted [61–63]), which is less than Dan does (83–85). Moreover, some scholars or those interested in Qumran will not agree with Losch’s depiction of the archaeological site and the place, its history, and

its purpose (165–68). Further, one would hope for more on the Decapolis than just a single page of text and a brief footnote (86). Some may even challenge the necessity of including the history of the “Holy Land” in such a volume, if not to speak of its contents (1–11). Additionally, there is a certain focus on the Roman empire (correctly expressed on the back cover) that might be problematic, because such a concentration could lead to the exclusion of other places.

Be that as it may, Losch seeks to present each of the seventy-six places in a neutral and informative way. He never loses sight of his readers and their needs and thus singles out the relevant facts and references for them. Of course, scholars may find this and that somewhat superficial. However, the audience Losch is writing for will enjoy his vivid style and the lively depictions so that “[s]ome readers may read this volume cover-to-cover, while others may simply dip in to find out more about a particular town or city.” Belonging to the latter type of readers, I am sure I will reach for this book over and over again, since it is a handy reference resource and a good read.