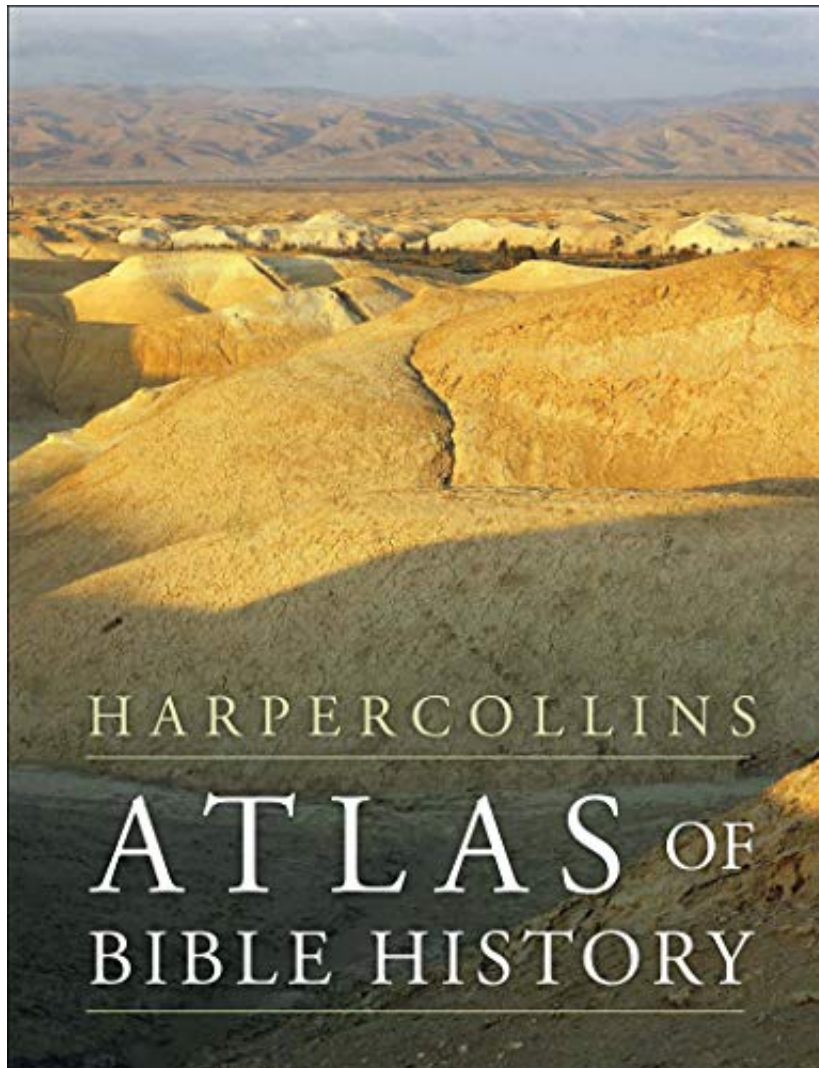


HarperCollins Atlas of Bible History

by

Nancy Andrews-Goebel



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Synopsis

From the earliest evidence of humankind in Palestine to the establishment of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, the ministry of Jesus, and the rise of the Christian Church, the richly illustrated HarperCollins Atlas of Bible History brings the Bible to life in all its geographical context. Detailed biblical references, timelines, and suggestions for further reading accompany each period of biblical history, conveying a tangible sense of the land, events, and people portrayed in the world's most famous book. With more than 100 full-color maps, timelines, and expert explanations, this superlative reference work will enable readers to more fully appreciate and understand the Bible and its stories. The HarperCollins Atlas of Bible History features: Over 100 full-color geographical and topographical maps The latest archaeological information, floor plans, city plans, illustrations, and artistic recreations of ancient life Charts, graphs, statistics, informative sidebars, and more Detailed biblical references Timelines that place each section of the Bible in its historical context Web site recommendations for further interactive study

Sort review

About the Author William Shakespeare lived between 1552-1616, but his work endures and is enjoyed the world over.

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Look inside the book

HARPER COLLINS ATLAS OF BIBLE HISTORY

Foreword

The aim of this book is to provide a general overview of the events of Bible times; the wars, journeys, migrations, rebellions, and invasions which, both recorded in the text of the Bible and beyond, throw light on the people, lands, and culture of the biblical world. The foreword to the original edition of this Atlas, written in 1990, emphasized the extent to which archaeology was having an impact on the field of biblical studies. Since then, its impact has only gained momentum, with scholars drawing on data from a wide range of archaeological disciplines. Whereas, in its early days, apologetics supplied one of the main motivations behind archaeology, in recent years the driving force has been a desire to explore the wider context of the world in which the characters from the Bible lived. Discoveries relating to travel, commerce, living conditions, and social and religious activities have given new life to the accounts in both the Old and New Testaments. Recent archaeological finds are continuing to redefine the relationship between the Bible and history. For example, the publication of the Cave 4 fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the 1990s gave a new angle to early Judaism and the origins of Christianity. Even during the preparation of this edition, there came claims of the discovery of Herod the Great's tomb at the Herodion, a possible mention of a Babylonian official mentioned in Jeremiah on a clay tablet in the British Museum, and the discovery of an ancient village just to the north of Jerusalem. Of course, archaeology is a matter of interpretation and opinion as well as investigation; and such opinions become particularly acute when the Bible is involved. For example, the issue of ancient chronology - especially Egyptian - excites much debate and discussion. Ancient dating was by means of regnal years of different rulers, rather than the kind of dating we are used to today. So, absolute dates are hard to determine, and have to be established through other means. Some dates can be checked by cross-referencing the same event as dated by two different cultures; others by means of astronomy. However, there remain huge areas of uncertainty, especially beyond the seventh century BC. For the most part the dating preferences of the original edition have been kept. However, for the dates of the Egyptian rulers, this new edition follows the preferred chronology of the Department of Egyptian Antiquities in the British Museum.

One of the most important factors for understanding the Bible, whether as an historian, a theologian, or a general reader, is an understanding of the historical context. The aim of the HarperCollins Atlas of Bible History is to provide the reader with all the information they need to acquire this understanding, in a way that is accessible, informed, and visually stimulating.

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SETTING THE SCENE
The land
Palestine has always been something of a "gateway." Geographically, it serves as a land-bridge between Asia and Africa; historically, it was an important route between the two centers of ancient civilization: Mesopotamia and Egypt. The land has a basic relief of rounded mountains and incised valleys, which have determined the pattern of major roads. Seen from the west, Palestine consists of a coastal plain, a lowland, and two lines of mountains, divided by the great rift that runs southward from Syria to the source of the African river Zambezi. The river Jordan runs through the Palestinian section of this rift. Indeed, the Jordan depression is a unique feature of the physical geography of Palestine. The point where the river enters the Dead Sea is the lowest point on the land surface of the Earth, some 393m (1280 ft) below sea level. Appropriately, the name Jordan means "the descender." Palestine lies in a subtropical zone, with a long dry summer and a short rainy season in winter. Precipitation varies greatly. The northern mountains of Carmel, Upper Galilee and northern Samaria were once covered with dense woodland sustained by the fair amount of rain. Now, however, only a narrow strip along the Mediterranean enjoys a relatively large amount of rainfall. Desert surrounds Palestine on the south and east. The geography of the country is directly related to the quality of the soil (map right). Palestine's most fertile soil derives from the Cenomanian limestone, which, with adequate rainfall, breaks down into the rich terra rossa. The Senonian chalk is easily eroded and is infertile. Numbers indicate elevations in

feet. The geology of the land has had a huge impact on human activities. The hard limestone in the hills of Palestine weathers into a rich red-brown soil called terra rossa, ideal for farming. However, the soft limestone (the intermediate Senonian rock) tends to erode into a gray infertile soil. Building stone was quarried from the limestone rocks of Cenomanian, Turonian, and Eocene formations. Quarries have been found at Megiddo, Samaria, and Ramat Rahel in Iron Age contexts. Basalt exists in eastern Galilee and in the Golan; since prehistoric times, it has been the basic material for making querns and mortars. Palestine is not very rich in mineral resources. A thick layer of red Nubian sandstone, containing deposits of copper, is known from southern Transjordan and around the river Jabbok; iron is mined in the mountains of Transjordan. Salt is obtained from the Mediterranean or from the Dead Sea.

Agriculture

The economy of Palestine has generally been pastoral-agrarian in character. Some plant species have migrated from as far away as Western Europe, Central Asia, and Central Africa. Agriculture has traditionally been based on grain, wine, and olive oil. Barley was usually grown in areas of poor soil and limited precipitation. Supplementing these were figs, pomegranates, dates, and almonds. Terraces were frequently built in serried fashion on the slopes of hills for farming. Easy access between fields and the marketplaces was vital, and in many areas of Palestine a complex network of regional and rural roads was established.

Major climatic and floral zones in Palestine (map right).

Lines show average yearly rainfall in inches. The great variety of soil and rainfall makes for a diversity of flora. In the narrow belt of land known as the Mediterranean zone, the climate is characterized by a short, wet winter with an annual total rainfall of between 15.5 and 47.25 in. The zone originally supported evergreen woodlands and high maquis vegetation, but this has now been destroyed. The typical trees are the Aleppo pine, the common oak, the Palestine terebinth, the laurel, the carob, and the mastic terebinth.

Loess or thin calcareous soils exist in the Irano-Turanian zone. The climate is characterized by a low rainfall with an annual total ranging between 7.5 and 11.5 in. Since this is the absolute limit for dry-farming, only sparse trees and shrubs are to be found, notably the lotus jujube and the Atlantic terebinth.

The Saharo-Arabian zone has the poorest flora in the Levant. The rainfall does not exceed 7.5 in and can be much less. The soils are not conducive to plant growth, but thorny acacias of African-savannah origin grow in the wadi beds and survive on the water of the occasional flash flood.

Fauna

The region supports a great variety of animals including over 100 species of mammals and almost 500 species of birds. The Bible refers to many different wild animals, including the lion, tiger, bear, antelope, wild ox, Mesopotamian fallow deer, ostrich, crocodile, and hippopotamus. Some of these - such as the lion, ostrich, and bear - are no longer found in the region, mainly due to intensive hunting. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the crocodile, which originally inhabited the river Jordan, could still be seen in Nahal Tanninim ("the crocodile river") in the coastal plain of Palestine. The ibex and hyrax, mentioned in the Bible as living in the high hills (Ps 104.18), are common today in a number of rocky locations in Sinai and Negeb and at En-gedi near the Dead Sea. In nearby Nahal Mishmar, objects decorated with ibex horns were found in the bronze hoard dating back to the Chalcolithic period. The Sinai leopard referred to in a number of biblical

passages is critically endangered, if not already extinct. Ancient representations of the leopard have come to light on a Neolithic wall painting in Anatolia, in stone constructions in the desert floor next to a structure of the late 6th millennium BC at Biqat Uvda in southern Palestine, and in ancient wall carvings in Sinai (Wadi Abu-Jada). Palestine not only forms a bridge between Egypt and Arabia to the south and Anatolia and Mesopotamia to the north and east, but is also at the end of sea routes across the Mediterranean and up the Gulf of Suez (map right). Domesticated animals are also frequently mentioned in the Bible. Among them are horses, donkeys, goats, sheep, and cattle. Insects too, such as fleas, mosquitoes, and locusts, feature in biblical passages. Agriculture and the Bible The importance of agriculture is reflected throughout the Bible. Two out of the three major Israelite festivals were connected with agriculture: the Feast of Weeks, with the end of the grain harvest and the arrival of the first fruits, and the Feast of Booths, which celebrated the completion of the fruit harvest. (The date of Passover may also have been linked with the start of the grain harvest.) Similarly, the Bible abounds in agricultural imagery. In the later chapters of Isaiah, the renewal of the land is couched in agricultural terms; Jesus' teaching often featured farms, vineyards, and agricultural laborers, while poems such as the Song of Solomon are rich in agricultural metaphors. Most significantly, God's blessing could be measured by the success of the harvest, while events such as droughts or plagues of locusts (Joel 1:2-4) were seen as signs of his displeasure. The contours of the land obviously had their effect on travel (map below). The map shows major lines of communication in biblical times, the biblical names for the major highways, and the position of the passes through high ground. These roads were important both for troop movements and for trade and commerce. Mapping Biblical narratives At first sight, the account of the travels of the ark (1 Sam 4.1-7.2) is the ideal subject for a map. Yet the complexities of the account and the difficulty of identifying the site illustrate some of the problems inherent in mapping Biblical narratives. It begins with the ark at Shiloh in the charge of Eli and his two ill-behaved sons (1 Sam 8.1-3). Then the ark is taken to Aphek and Ebenezer, where the Philistines rout the Israelites, capture the ark, and take it to Ashdod, one of their chief cities. At Ashdod the ark brings trouble upon the Philistines - the statue of their god Dagon collapses before it and the people of Ashdod are struck by a plague. So they transfer it to Ekron, another Philistine city, with similar results. Finally, in desperation, the Philistines place the ark on a cart yoked to two cows who pull it to Beth-shemesh, where it is taken into custody by Levites. They take it to the house of Abinadab at Gibeah (or "the hill") near Kiriath-jearim. There it remains until David transfers it to Jerusalem. It seems pretty clear. But there are difficulties. For a start, it's not certain where Ebenezer is, let alone "the hill" near Kiriath-jearim. Secondly, although the narrative implies the ark stayed at Kiriath-jearim for 20 years (1 Sam 7.2), it must have been there for longer, if we are to fit it in to the accepted chronology. Was it housed elsewhere during that time? The most fundamental problem in mapping Bible narratives is simply identifying the locations. The books of the Bible refer to numerous places that, although well known to the ancient Israelites, have become lost to us. The locations of the major cities of ancient Palestine can be established with a reasonable degree of certainty, but,

when it comes to less-prominent villages and landmarks, there is far less certainty. The story of Saul's search for his father's asses, for example, describes how he passes through the hill country of Ephraim, the lands of Shalishah, Shaalim, and Benjamin and eventually reaches the land of Zuph (1 Sam 9.4). Except for the references to Benjamin and Ephraim, none of the other "lands" can be located with any confidence. This lack of certainty can strike even sites of major significance: in modern scholarship, at least a dozen different sites have been proposed for Mount Sinai. Nor is it restricted to Old Testament sites: the village of Emmaus (Luke 24.13-35) has also never been definitely identified. The route of the ark of the covenant from Shiloh, where it was in possession of the old priest Eli, to the Philistine cities and its return to the house of Adinadad at Gibeah near Kiriath-jearim (map left). The account in 1 Samuel 4-7 though seemingly straightforward, presents both geographical and chronological difficulties. The problems are further exacerbated by difficulties with translating the manuscripts, or where there are variant route of the ark readings. For example, 2 Samuel 24.5-7 describes the area covered by officials during the census conducted by David. Yet these verses are difficult to untangle, and it is unclear whether some of the words should be translated as proper names, such as Tahtim Hodshi and Dan Jaan (NIV). Finally, there is the issue of dealing with stories where there are conflicts of opinion over the historicity. In the ark narrative, different scholars would argue over what is history and what is legend. The net result of all this is that almost all Bible maps are hypothetical to some degree, reflecting not only the best guesses as to location, but also a degree of textual interpretation, and even the mapmaker's view on the historicity of the narrative.

The journey of Edward Robinson In 1838, and again in 1852, Edward Robinson, an American Bible scholar, traveled through Palestine and the Sinai recording the names of towns and villages. Robinson believed that the ancient Hebrew names could still be heard in the modern names by which villagers identified their homes. For example, in the name of Anata he could hear Anathoth, the home of Jeremiah; er-Ram was Ramah; Jeba was probably the site of Geba; Mukhmas was Michmash, the place of Jonathan's victory over the Philistines; Beitin, the site of Bethel. Robinson's studies, and the development of rules for comparing ancient Hebrew geographical terminology with modern Arabic, helped to establish biblical geography as a serious, academic pursuit. The description of Saul's search for his father's asses found in 1 Samuel 9.10 located the area around Ephraim and Benjamin and mentions several familiar cities (map right). However, the three lands of the Shalishah, Shaalim, and Zuph cannot be located on the map, since they are not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. The route taken on May 4-5 1838, by Edward Robinson and Eli Smith over the area immediately north of Jerusalem (map above right).

Historical geography and archaeology Numerous pilgrims, travelers, and explorers have sought to unearth the past of the lands of the Bible, beginning, perhaps, with Helena, mother of the emperor Constantine, and her claim to have discovered remnants of the cross in the 4th century. However, true archaeological research in Palestine and the near East really dates back only to the nineteenth century. Surveys The earliest surveys were made by Edward Robinson and Eli Smith in 1838 and 1852 to identify places mentioned in the Bible. During the years

1872-1877, a team of Royal Engineers of the British Army, sponsored by the Palestinian Exploration Fund, compiled the Survey of Western Palestine, a 26-sheet set of maps covering the entire country. In more recent times, surveys have widened their focus to look also at the advantages offered by a particular location. Was the spot favorable for defense, subsistence, trade, and transport? Did it have a good water supply? Was it close to other settlements connected by bonds of kinship or religion? Answers to these and other questions have prompted many careful surveys of large areas. Excavation

Scientific excavations began in 1890 with Sir Flinders Petrie's stratigraphic excavations at Tell el-Hesi. He demonstrated that the ancient mound, or tell, was composed of layers of debris deposited by successive occupations, often over long periods of time. In general, it could be assumed that, unless the deposits had been disturbed (for example, by earthquakes), the upper layer was later in time than the lower. Layers containing burnt debris and broken artifacts may be the result of warfare or disaster in the region, and might therefore be datable according to other historical records. The principle of stratigraphy established in 1890 is still the basic practice of modern archaeology. The horizontal bird's-eye view of the superimposed architectural remains uncovered by archaeologists at T. Arad in the Negeb desert. The architectural remains shown in this plan represent different stages of the Iron Age fortress (c. 120-600 BC) with a square tower of the Hellenistic date built above earlier remains (plan below). The change in settlement patterns has been charted for the sites of the coastal plain for the three periods of occupation: Early Bronze II-III (c. 2850-2350 BC), Middle Bronze IIA (c. 2000-1750 BC), and Middle Bronze IIB (c. 1750-1550 BC) (map right). The bar charts show comparisons of settlements for each of these periods for three different areas - the Central Mountains, the Middle and Lower Jordan Valley, and the coastal plain. Excavation reveals, in general, four distinct elements: architecture (buildings, walls, etc.), artifacts (tools, pots, and other objects), various kinds of deposit (ashes, building debris, etc.), and floors (beaten earth, paving stones, street surfaces, etc.). Architecture and artifacts are normally straightforward to identify, but distinguishing layers of deposits from the floor level requires careful judgment.

Pottery and dating The most common artifact found in excavations is the ceramic vessel, or potsherds from it. Because pots were fragile, they would often break; therefore, they had to be replaced. Styles were often changed as potters sought to attract buyers, and these stylistic shifts, with such wide differences in form and decoration, provide various kinds of information about ancient life. One is the dating of the stratum in which they were found. Since changes in styles were gradual and some survived longer than others, a quantitative record of the number of sherds of a type provides an accurate picture of change from one period to another. Such changes can be observed in other objects as well. Tools, weapons, jewelry, and ivory and bone carvings are useful in charting changes through time and serve to strengthen chronological conclusions based on pottery types. More precise means for dating are provided by coins of a known mint, scarabs, inscriptions, and datable imported goods from neighboring civilizations. Destructions wrought by invaders such as Shishak, Sennacherib, or Nebuchadnezzar, or others for whom written records are available, are useful in pinpointing

dates for artifacts found in the ruins, yet even here there is debate among scholars over identification of a particular destruction with a specific event mentioned in the Bible or other texts. Use of science in archaeology Science has provided new means for surveying sites and dating objects. Techniques such as aerial surveys and archaeological geophysics can be used to reveal hidden structures below the ground. Indeed, archaeological field work is no longer restricted to the land. Wrecks of ancient ships, filled with valuable cargo, have documented ancient trade and revealed the construction methods. Underwater surveys can use geophysical or other remote-sensing devices. A vertical view of the layers of Tel Mikhal, revealing a system of superimposed earthen ramparts dating from the Middle Bronze Age IIB (c. 1750-1200 BC) (chart left). Each deposit uncovered in the excavation was designated separately according to its color and composition. The thick black lines represent the upper surfaces of the various archaeological features of a period. The broken lines represent the hypothetical continuation of these archaeological features. Radiocarbon and tree-ring dating (dendrochronology) are now commonplace in dating sites and objects (although the lack of an established continuous sequence in Palestinian archaeology limits the use of the latter). Thermoluminescence can determine how much time has elapsed since the original firing of the pottery. Metal analysis can identify trace elements within alloys, revealing information about ore deposits and even trading activity. Professionals with specific expertise are increasingly used in archaeology. Osteoarchaeologists study animal bones and can tell us much about the development of domestic animals and the fauna of a region. Archaeobotanists and palynologists study plant life and pollen from the soil, throwing valuable light on the vegetation of a region or of a particular period of occupation at a site. Excavations have become smaller in terms of the size of the site being excavated, but more intensive in terms of the information being gleaned from the sites. Such attention to detail requires longer excavation projects and more time before findings are published. This, combined with the need for technologically advanced specialist equipment, can make archaeological digs extremely expensive. New objectives While archaeology continues to result in spectacular finds (such as the recent discovery of the tomb of Herod the Great), there has been a shift towards smaller sites and a concern to explore the lives of ordinary people. Was there a stratification of society? What evidence is there about the accumulation of wealth, power, and position? How has society adapted to its environment at various periods of its history? The increased use of ethnographic and environmental data reveals a great deal about ancient societies, while the distribution of the mundane objects of daily living - those used for cooking, weaving, and metalworking - enables a more precise study of households and the relationships between those who work at various activities within a city or settlement. Knowledge of human society and its organization in ancient Palestine has become an important objective of archaeological research, and one that draws on an increasing range of disciplines, such as zoology, botany, hydrology, and geology. This new approach, which has been termed "socio-archaeology" or "contextual archaeology," is an activity that draws on many specialists from a wide range of disciplines. "Excavation is both art and science," wrote W. F. Allbright, one of the

pioneers of biblical archaeology; in modern times, it is also, above all, teamwork. Writing, archives, and libraries in the ancient Near East - the lands of Egypt and Mesopotamia - formed the cradle of civilization. And key to any civilization is, of course, writing. Some of these ancient writing systems were kept alive - Hebrew and Greek, for example - but many more were forgotten, and it is only relatively recently that scholars have been able to translate the ancient texts. Deciphering these "dead" languages only really began in the 1750s, when Phoenician was first read. In the 1820s, the Rosetta stone provided Champollion with the key to Egyptian hieroglyphs; Assyrian cuneiform was fairly well understood by 1857, and Ugaritic was read in 1930, just a year and a half after the first tablet was found. Whether written records survive depends on what they were written on. Most literate societies of the ancient Near East left inscriptions on stone, or sometimes on metal. These texts, however, are limited in their subject matter, usually proclaiming the greatness of a king, recording his victories, entreating the favor of a god, or displaying the laws of the land. The clay tablet, which originated in Mesopotamia, is also extremely durable. (Fire, for example, which destroys papyrus and wood, simply bakes clay hard). Cheap and easily produced, such tablets filled the great libraries and archives of the ancient Near East, mainly written in Sumerian and Akkadian. Although 15 libraries can be listed, some important archives have simply never been discovered (for example, Carchemish and Aleppo). Archives were essentially practical collections of law, diplomacy, and economics, relating to their own generation. Libraries were more permanent collections, containing literary texts, epics, poetry and "wisdom" (including texts on religion, mythology, rituals, festivals, and incantations), as well as scientific and scholastic texts dealing with medicine, mathematics, and astrology. Other documents were written on less-permanent material. In Egypt, and in places under its influence, writing was normally on papyrus or wood, neither of which survive well enough to preserve a full library or archive, though fragmentary hoards sometimes imply the existence of a larger collection. The alphabet¹⁴ N. and S. Arabian scripts appear at an uncertain date (c. 500 BC), the latter giving rise to Ethiopic. These scripts may have split off the developing alphabetic tradition as early as the Proto-Canaanite stage (i.e. before 1000 BC).¹⁵ Scattered graffiti in a linear pictographic script on various objects (c. 1500-1100 BC) come from Canaan. Termed Proto-Canaanite, the signs are found arranged in alphabetic order c. 1150 BC. The cursive letters imply a system of writing for papyrus or skin.¹⁶ In Ugarit a "cuneiform alphabet" was used c. 1400-1200 BC to write the local language - also found in Canaan. Signs were arranged in alphabetic order, linking the script to the Proto-Canaanite linear alphabet.¹⁷ An undeciphered "Pseudo-Hieroglyphic" script on stone and metal comes from Byblos. The earliest readable inscriptions in the true alphabet are found here, in a group of Phoenician inscriptions on scripture.¹⁸ The Hebrews adopted the alphabet (c. 1150-1050 BC). Preserved contemporary documents from the Hebrew kingdoms (c. 620-595 BC) are sparse: ostraca, seals, and very few stone inscriptions.¹⁹ The Aramaeans adopted the Phoenician-Hebrew alphabet after 900 BC and established their script and language in Mesopotamia. Aramaic became the administrative language of the Persian Empire (c. 500-330

BC) disseminating their alphabet from Anatolia to India.²⁰ Phoenician colonization (c. 1000-700 BC) took their language and script west, to Carthage, Malta, Sardinia, and Spain. Surviving examples are mostly stone inscriptions.²¹ By c. 800 BC, the Greeks had adopted the Phoenician alphabet and remodeled it for their language. By 400 BC, the Ionic alphabet had become the common script.²² In Anatolia, several peoples adopted a variant of the alphabet and left stone inscriptions, etc. Phrygian (from c. 750 BC), Lydian, Carian (from c. 600), and Lycian (from c. 500). These Anatolian writings continued until they were superseded by Greek.²³ Greek colonization of the west, Sicily, southern Italy, and southern France in the period c. 800-500 BC effectively Hellenized the coastal areas and established the Greek language and script. Each colony used its own variant of the alphabet.²⁴ The Etruscans began writing after 700 BC. The earliest inscriptions are from c. 650 BC. They maintained their script and language until the 1st century AD. Only a few hundred words of Etruscan have been translated with any certainty.²⁵ Early Rome was under strong Etruscan influence, and borrowed much, including the alphabet. Most of the letters of the alphabet passed directly from Greek through Etruscan, though some in variant forms. Three were later additions (G, Y, and Z), as were the medieval J, V, and W.

The alphabet¹⁴ N. and S. Arabian scripts appear at an uncertain date (c. 500 BC), the latter giving rise to Ethiopic. These scripts may have split off the developing alphabetic tradition as early as the Proto-Canaanite stage (i.e. before 1000 BC).¹⁵ Scattered graffiti in a linear pictographic script on various objects (c. 1500-1100 BC) come from Canaan. Termed Proto-Canaanite, the signs are found arranged in alphabetic order c.1150 BC. The cursive letters imply a system of writing for papyrus or skin.¹⁶ In Ugarit a "cuneiform alphabet" was used c. 1400-1200 BC to write the local language - also found in Canaan. Signs were arranged in alphabetic order, linking the script to the Proto-Canaanite linear alphabet.¹⁷ An undeciphered "Pseudo-Hieroglyphic" script on stone and metal comes from Byblos. The earliest readable inscriptions in the true alphabet are found here, in a group of Phoenician inscriptions on scripture.¹⁸ The Hebrews adopted the alphabet (c.1150-1050 BC). Preserved contemporary documents from the Hebrew kingdoms (c. 620-595 BC) are sparse: ostraca, seals, and very few stone inscriptions.¹⁹ The Aramaeans adopted the Phoenician-Hebrew alphabet after 900 BC and established their script and language in Mesopotamia. Aramaic became the administrative language of the Persian Empire (c. 500-330 BC) disseminating their alphabet from Anatolia to India.²⁰ Phoenician colonization (c. 1000-700 BC) took their language and script west, to Carthage, Malta, Sardinia, and Spain. Surviving examples are mostly stone inscriptions.²¹ By c. 800 BC, the Greeks had adopted the Phoenician alphabet and remodeled it for their language. By 400 BC, the Ionic alphabet had become the common script.²² In Anatolia, several peoples adopted a variant of the alphabet and left stone inscriptions, etc. Phrygian (from c. 750 BC), Lydian, Carian (from c. 600), and Lycian (from c. 500). These Anatolian writings continued until they were superseded by Greek.²³ Greek colonization of the west, Sicily, southern Italy, and southern France in the period c. 800-500 BC effectively Hellenized the coastal areas and established the Greek language and script. Each colony used its own variant of the alphabet.²⁴

The Etruscans began writing after 700 BC. The earliest inscriptions are from c. 650 BC. They maintained their script and language until the 1st century AD. Only a few hundred words of Etruscan have been translated with any certainty.²⁵ Early Rome was under strong Etruscan influence, and borrowed much, including the alphabet. Most of the letters of the alphabet passed directly from Greek through Etruscan, though some in variant forms. Three were later additions (G, Y, and Z), as were the medieval J, V, and W.

Hieroglyphic⁹ The earliest writing in Egypt is on stone monuments of c. 3100 BC, where the signs already show the characteristic “hieroglyphic” forms. The use of hieroglyphic expanded in the Early Dynastic period (c. 3100-2900 BC), surviving largely as tomb inscriptions.¹⁰ In Crete, c. 2000 BC, a native “hieroglyphic” script appeared on seals and clay docketts. This developed into two linear scripts, A and B. Linear B (c. 1400-1200 BC) has been deciphered and shown to write Mycenaean Greek.¹¹ Cyprus has two indigenous scripts, the undeciphered Cypro-Minoan, written on clay (c. 1500-1200 BC), and the Cypriot syllabary (c. 750-300 BC), descended from the earlier script and used for writing monumental inscriptions in Greek and an unknown language.¹² The Hittites employed a hieroglyphic script for seals and monumental inscriptions (c. 1500-700 BC), but the language written was Luvian not Hittite.¹³ Many Egyptian hieroglyphic inscriptions (dated c. 2700-1000 BC) were discovered at Egyptian mines in Sinai. There is also a small group of linear pictographic inscription, “Proto-Sinaitic,” connected both with hieroglyphic and with the Proto-Canaanite alphabet.

Mesopotamian cuneiform¹ The earliest writing - pictographic signs on clay tablets from Uruk - dates from the “Protoliterate” period (c. 3200-2800 BC).² In the Early Dynastic period (c. 2800-2400 BC), inscriptions in Sumerian are found on many sites, including Ur and Lagash. The script developed from pictographic to “cuneiform,” i.e., signs made of wedge (Latin *cuneus*)-shaped strokes.³ The Ebla archive (c. 2500-2300 BC) contains some 15,000 tablets, written in Sumerian cuneiform but also Eblaite, a Semitic language.⁴ The Semitic Dynasty of Akkad (c. 2400-2250 BC), borrowed cuneiform for its inscriptions. Akkadian replaced Sumerian as the spoken language of Mesopotamia.⁵ At Susa, a large group of tablets was found, inscribed in a pictographic script. The script has only partially been deciphered.⁶ After 2000 BC, cuneiform Akkadian on clay tablets was widely used as an international means of communication. Other peoples used the script and the tablet for writing their own languages, including the Elamites (c. 2250-350 BC), Hurrians (c. 2200-1300 BC), Hittites (c. 1650-1200 BC) and Urartians (c. 8500-600 BC).⁷ The Indus Valley cities have produced many short, undeciphered inscriptions (c. 2500-1800 BC). Links with Mesopotamia may have spread the idea of writing and led to the local invention of the script.⁸ In the Persian empire (c. 550-330 BC) a “cuneiform” script was used on monumental stone inscriptions. The script was modeled on the Aramaic alphabet with influence from Akkadian.

The Bible and ancient history
In the surviving literature of the great empires that surrounded ancient Israel, there is hardly any mention of the characters and events of the Bible. Famous characters such as Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Saul, David, and Solomon are known only from the pages of the Bible. This is not surprising, for, compared to powers like Assyria and Egypt, Israel played a minor role in the military and

commercial affairs of the time. However, the discovery of the ancient palaces of the Assyrian kings at Khorsabad, Nineveh, and Nimrud revealed, for the first time, details about ancient Israel from sources outside the Bible. The Assyrian kings' boastful accounts of their military triumphs include the names of some monarchs of Israel and Judah. Carved in stone or written on clay, these documents are contemporaneous with the campaigns, battles, and conquests to which they bear witness. The boxed sections contain accounts of these events, written shortly after they occurred and discovered in the mounds of Assyria and Babylonia, on a stela found in Transjordan, and on a temple wall at Karnak. There are agreements and disagreements between the accounts. Some sources, such as the inscription of Shalmaneser III mentioning Ahab; list events not referred to in the Bible; others contain information supplementary to the biblical account. For example, Sheshonq I's (Shishak of the Bible) long list of cities conquered in Palestine, not only confirms the biblical account of the invasion but also provides a valuable source for the geography of the 10th century BC. The details on the sources naturally reflect the bias of those who caused the inscriptions to be made. A stela erected by King Mesha of Moab proclaims to his subjects that "Israel hath perished forever!" But even the wishful thinking of Israel's enemies serves to integrate events and kings - otherwise known only in the religious history of ancient Israel - with the history of the larger world. Perhaps the most important aspect of these discoveries is that they make possible a chronology for the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The Assyrian kings kept records of the years of their reigns, covering the period from the beginnings of the 9th through to the end of the 6th century BC. Among the important events recorded is a solar eclipse in a certain year of the reign of Ashur-Dan. With a high degree of certainty, astronomical calculations fix the year this eclipse (as observed from Nineveh) at 763 BC. This date makes possible the assignment of dates to the biblical kings whose history was interwoven with that of the kings of Assyria. Comparison of biblical and non biblical texts c. 924 BC (Victories of Seshonq I over the) Asiatics of distant foreign countries [with list of cities in Palestine and Syria]. Amon Temple, Karnak. In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, King Shishak of Egypt came up against Jerusalem... (1 Kings 14.25) 853 BC He brought along to help him... 200 chariots, 10,000 foot soldiers of Ahab the Israelite... I fought with them... I did inflict a defeat upon them... With their corpses I spanned the Orentes before there was a bridge. Shalmaneser III, on monolith from Kurkh. No mention of this battle in the Bible. c. 830 BC As for Omri, king of Israel, he humbled Moab many years... And his son followed him, but I have triumphed over him, while Israel hath perished forever! Mesha, king of Moab, on stela found at Dibon. Now King Mesha of Moab was a sheep breeder, who used to deliver to the king of Israel one hundred thousand lambs, and the wool of one hundred thousand rams. But when Ahab died, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel. (2 Kings 3.4-5) 732 BC They overthrew their king Pekah and I placed Hoshea as king over them. Tiglath-pileser III, inscription at Nimrud. In the days of King Pekah of Israel, King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria came... and he carried the people captive to Assyria. Then Hoshea son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah son of Remaliah, attacked him, and killed him; he reigned in place of him... (2 Kings 15.29-30) 722 BC I besieged and

conquered Samaria, led away as booty 27,290 inhabitants of it. Sargon II, inscription at Khorsabad. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria captured Samaria; he carried the Israelites away to Assyria... (2 Kings 17.6) 712 BC Azuri, king of Ashdod, had schemed not to deliver tribute (any more) ... I besieged and conquered the cities of Ashdod, Gath (and) Asdudimmu. Sargon II, inscription at Khorsabad. In the year that the commander-in-chief, who was sent by King Sargon of Assyria, came to Ashdod and fought against it and took it... (Isa 20.1) 701 BC Asa to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities... I drove out (of them) 200,150 people... Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem... like a bird in a cage... Hezekiah himself... did send me, later... 30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver... Sennacherib, text from Nineveh. King Hezekiah of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, "I have done wrong; withdraw from me; whatever you impose on me I will bear." The king of Assyria demanded of King Hezekiah of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. (2 Kings 18.14) 597 BC The king of Akkad... laid siege to the city of Judah... and the king took the city... He appointed in it a [new] king of his liking, took heavy booty from it and brought it into Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar II, on tablet from Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to the city, while his servants were besieging it; King Jehoiachin of Judah gave himself up to the king of Babylon... The king of Babylon took him prisoner in the eighth year of his reign. He carried off all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house... The king of Babylon made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah. (2 Kings 24.11-17)

Comparison of biblical and non-biblical texts

Pagan cults and religious practice

The monotheistic Hebrew religion faced a constant challenge from Canaanite polytheism and its practices. The diversity of religious allegiances is evident from discoveries at Kuntillet Ajrud to the south of Kadesh-barnea, where inscriptions record the names of Baal, Asherah, and El, as well as Yahweh "and his consort." Clearly, the popular cults did not die easily. The practices and imagery of the religions of the time were characterized by naturalistic symbols such as standing stones, trees, the bull, the cow, and serpents. A basalt upright stone found at Jericho shows that the custom of setting up a stone for religious purposes reaches back to Neolithic times. Biblical accounts of memorial stones are many: a stone marks Jacob's covenant with Laban (Gen 31.45); another is used as a cult object at Bethel (Gen 28.18-19). Altars were for slaughtering animals and burning offerings. They were made of mud brick or unquarried stone (Exod 20.24-26; Deut 27.5), and examples have been found at Megiddo and Lachish. Altars from the Iron Age have also been found, one from Beersheba having "horns" at the four corners and a snake engraved on one side. "You shall have no other gods before me," declared the god of Israel. The countries and culture surrounding Israel, however, worshipped a huge number of different gods. The map shows the distribution of religious cults throughout Palestine, Phoenicia, Syria, and Mesopotamia. Trees were also important. Late Bronze Age cylinder seals often show a worshipper standing in front of a tree; other seals dating from the 10th to the 8th centuries BC depicting a tree flanked by worshippers have been found at Tel Halif, Lachish, Beth-shemesh, Gibeon, Samaria, and elsewhere. Gold

pendants from Tel el-Ajjul and Ugarit even display trees growing out of the navel or the genitals of some kind of goddess. Sexual intercourse took place under holy trees and was considered a part of the sacrifice to the goddess (Hosea 4.13-14). Numerous Canaanite bronzes of a young man with his right hand raised in a gesture of victory are thought to represent Baal. Bronze bulls, also possibly representing Baal, are known from Hazor, Ugarit, and Samaria. Jeroboam is said to have violated the law by setting up images of golden calves in the temples at Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12.28-30). The female deity is referred to as the consort of Baal (Judg 3.7; 2 Kings 23.4), and Ashtoreth (Astarte) is often described as a fertility goddess. Maternal traits were usually expressed in animal, rather than human, form. The cow suckling her calf, familiar from Phoenician ivories, can be regarded as the counterpart of the god in the form of a bull. "You shall not make gods of silver alongside me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold." (Exod 20.23) Small bronze snakes found in Late Bronze Age temples at Hazor, Megiddo, Tel Mevorah, Gezer, and in the Early Iron Age shrine at Timnah, may have been votive offerings to a goddess, since a figurine of a female has been found holding a serpent in her hands. This same image, or one like it, may be the "Nehushtan" worshipped by the Israelites (2 Kings 18.4). The pantheon was as large and varied as the natural world, with deities for the sky, sun, moon, storm, and sea, as well as for more abstract concepts such as war, love, healing, wisdom, and writing.

Routes and distances Most people walked. Wheeled vehicles need roads; walkers need only tracks. There were ancient roads, such as the road between Babylon and Larsa in the days of Hammurabi, but they would not have been paved. Bridges, too, were rare; rivers had to be forded or travelers carried across on ferries. Only the rich few had horses, and even then, the ancient world used neither horseshoes nor stirrups, which made traveling on horseback far less convenient. Animals were used mainly for transporting goods or equipment. The most common pack animals were donkeys or asses. Camels were used by desert tribes and traders making long journeys. Traveling to Jerusalem after the exile, the returning exiles used 435 camels (Neh 7.6g) and David appointed an expert - Ofiel the Ishmaelite - to look after his (1 Chron 27.30). By Roman times, a traveler might make fifteen to twenty miles a day on foot, perhaps twenty-five to thirty in a carriage. In emergencies, forty to fifty might be possible. For long distances, sailing, where possible, was the best. With a good wind, a ship could make up to one hundred miles a day. Sea travel was risky, however. Unless absolutely vital, no sailor would travel between November and March. The account of Paul's shipwreck shows just how dangerous such travel could be (Acts 27). The following list gives the distances in miles between places mentioned in biblical accounts of journeys, marches, and other movements of people. A selection of distances outside Palestine has also been added to the list to set journeys mentioned in the New Testament in a wider context. Since the routes taken from one point to another are not generally known, distances are those of a straight line. This approximation serves for comparative purposes and to provide an idea of the length of a journey. Only those ancient places that can be identified with reasonable certainty are included.

Index of Distances

Place	Distance (miles)
Antioch	235
Caesarea	55
Ephesus	575
Damascus	195
Dura-Europas	310
Jerusa	

lem330AshkelonAzotus10Gaza12Joppa30Timnah23AthensCorinth62Ephesus (by sea)230Phili
 ppi310Thessalonica230BabylonAsshur210Damascus471Jerusalem540Megiddo536Nineveh27
 3BeershebaBethel53Dan146Gerar17Hebron25BethelBeersheba53Bethlehem
 (Judah)16Gibeah5Haran410Hebron29Ramah
 (Benjamin)5Shechem19Shiloh9Tekoa20BethlehemAdullam13Bethel16Jerusalem4Beth-
 shemesh Ekron7Jerusalem16Kiriath-jearim9Caesarea Philippi Damascus40Capernaum37Tyre2
 5Philadelphia90Petra260CapernaumBethsaida3Cana17Jericho71Jerusalem79Nazareth20Sam
 aria48CorinthAlexandria (by sea)600Caesarea (by sea)750DamascusAntioch195Dura-
 Europas295Hamath110Jerusalem140Palmyra135Tyre65Dan (a/c Laish) Beersheba146Hebron1
 23Shechem75Sidon28EphesusAntioch508Athens194Corinth236Miletus31Philippi264Rome808
 Tarsus424Thessalonica295GathAdullam10Ashdod12Ekron5Jerusalem23GazaAlexandria270H
 ebron38Hormah36Jerusalem48Joppa38Petra100Zorah36milesGezerEglon24Geba
 (Benjamin)20Gibeon15Jerusalem19Lachish21GibeahBethel5Bezek36Jabesh-
 gilead45Jerusalem6Mizpah (Benjamin)3Ramah (Benjamin)1Rimmon2Ziph28Gibeon Abel-beth-
 maacah103Gezer15Jerusalem6Kiriath-jearim6Mahanaim38HebronBeersheba25Bethel29Beth-
 shean72Dan123Eglon23Gaza38Jerusalem19Marisa13Shechem48Jabesh-gilead Beth-
 shean13Bezek17Gibeah45Rabbath-ammon35Shiloh33Jericho Abel-
 shittim14Ai11Gazara32Jerusalem14Samaria31Jerusalem Abel-beth-
 maacah105Alexandria320Anathoth3Antioch330Ashdod34Ashkelon42Baalah8Baal-
 hazor14Beth-horon (lower)12Bethlehem (Judah)4Beth-shemesh (Judah)16Bethzur16Bezek42C
 aesarea54Damascus140Dora60Elephantine740Gath23Gazara19Geba (Benjamin)6Gezer19Gib
 eah6Gibeon6Hebron19Jamnia30Jericho14Jezreel54Joppa34Lachish27Mahanaim39Mareshah
 23Masada33Megiddo57Michmash8Mizpah
 (Benjamin)8Modein18Panion102Persepolis1020Rabbath-ammon43Ramoath-gilead67Samaria35
 Shechem30Succoth37milesTekoa10Tyre104Jezreellbleam8Jerusalem54Ramoath-
 gilead40Samaria21Kiriath-jearimBeth-shemesh9Eshtaol6Gibeon6Laish103Zorah7MizpahBethe
 l3Gibeah3Jerusalem8Ramah3Samaria27Shechem23Shiloh13NazarethBethlehem69Cana8Cap
 ernaum20Jerusalem64Sepphoris4PhilippiAthens212Beroea114Corinth224Thessalonica74Troa
 s128RamahBethel5Geba (Benjamin)2Gibeah1Jerusalem6Kedesh-naphtali88Mizpah
 (Benjamin)3Shiloh14Tirzah30SamariaDothan10Jericho31Jerusalem35Jezreel21Mizpah
 (Benjamin)27Ramoath-gilead50Tirzah9SepphorisAcco19Caesarea24Capernaum20Gischala22N
 azareth4Tiberias15ShechemArumah5Bethel19Dan75Dothan14HARPER COLLINSATLAS
 OFBIBLE HISTORYHARPER COLLINSATLAS OFBIBLE HISTORYForewordThe aim of this
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feature of the physical geography of Palestine. The point where the river enters the Dead Sea is the lowest point on the land surface of the Earth, some 393m (1280 ft) below sea level. Appropriately, the name Jordan means "the descender." Palestine lies in a subtropical zone, with a long dry summer and a short rainy season in winter. Precipitation varies greatly. The northern mountains of Carmel, Upper Galilee and northern Samaria were once covered with dense woodland sustained by the fair amount of rain. Now, however, only a narrow strip along the Mediterranean enjoys a relatively large amount of rainfall. Desert surrounds Palestine on the south and east. The geography of the country is directly related to the quality of the soil (map right). Palestine's most fertile soil derives from the Cenomanian limestone, which, with adequate rainfall, breaks down into the rich terra rossa. The Senonian chalk is easily eroded and is infertile. Numbers indicate elevations in feet. The geology of the land has had a huge impact on human activities. The hard limestone in the hills of Palestine weathers into a rich red-brown soil called terra rossa, ideal for farming. However, the soft limestone (the intermediate Senonian rock) tends to erode into a gray infertile soil. Building stone was quarried from the limestone rocks of Cenomanian, Turonian, and Eocene formations. Quarries have been found at Megiddo, Samaria, and Ramat Rahel in Iron Age contexts. Basalt exists in eastern Galilee and in the Golan; since prehistoric times, it has been the basic material for making querns and mortars. Palestine is not very rich in mineral resources. A thick layer of red Nubian sandstone, containing deposits of copper, is known from southern Transjordan and around the river Jabbok; iron is mined in the mountains of Transjordan. Salt is obtained from the Mediterranean or from the Dead Sea. Agriculture The economy of Palestine has generally been pastoral-agrarian in character. Some plant species have migrated from as far away as Western Europe, Central Asia, and Central Africa. Agriculture has traditionally been based on grain, wine, and olive oil. Barley was usually grown in areas of poor soil and limited precipitation. Supplementing these were figs, pomegranates, dates, and almonds. Terraces were frequently built in serried fashion on the slopes of hills for farming. Easy access between fields and the marketplaces was vital, and in many areas of Palestine a complex network of regional and rural roads was established. Major climatic and floral zones in Palestine (map right). Lines show average yearly rainfall in inches. The great variety of soil and rainfall makes for a diversity of flora. In the narrow belt of land known as the Mediterranean zone, the climate is characterized by a short, wet winter with an annual total rainfall of between 15.5 and 47.25 in. The zone originally supported evergreen woodlands and high maquis vegetation, but this has now been destroyed. The typical trees are the Aleppo pine, the common oak, the Palestine terebinth, the laurel, the carob, and the mastic terebinth. Loess or thin calcareous soils exist in the Irano-Turanian zone. The climate is characterized by a low rainfall with an annual total ranging between 7.5 and 11.5 in. Since this is the absolute limit for dry-farming, only sparse trees and shrubs are to be found, notably the lotus jujube and the Atlantic terebinth. The Saharo-Arabian zone has the poorest flora in the Levant. The rainfall does not exceed 7.5 in and can be much less. The soils are not conducive to plant growth, but thorny acacias of African-savannah origin grow in the wadi beds and survive on the

water of the occasional flash flood. Fauna The region supports a great variety of animals including over 100 species of mammals and almost 500 species of birds. The Bible refers to many different wild animals, including the lion, tiger, bear, antelope, wild ox, Mesopotamian fallow deer, ostrich, crocodile, and hippopotamus. Some of these - such as the lion, ostrich, and bear - are no longer found in the region, mainly due to intensive hunting. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the crocodile, which originally inhabited the river Jordan, could still be seen in Nahal Tanninim ("the crocodile river") in the coastal plain of Palestine. The ibex and hyrax, mentioned in the Bible as living in the high hills (Ps 104.18), are common today in a number of rocky locations in Sinai and Negeb and at En-gedi near the Dead Sea. In nearby Nahal Mishmar, objects decorated with ibex horns were found in the bronze hoard dating back to the Chalcolithic period. The Sinai leopard referred to in a number of biblical passages is critically endangered, if not already extinct. Ancient representations of the leopard have come to light on a Neolithic wall painting in Anatolia, in stone constructions in the desert floor next to a structure of the late 6th millennium BC at Biqat Uvda in southern Palestine, and in ancient wall carvings in Sinai (Wadi Abu-Jada). Palestine not only forms a bridge between Egypt and Arabia to the south and Anatolia and Mesopotamia to the north and east, but is also at the end of sea routes across the Mediterranean and up the Gulf of Suez (map right). Domesticated animals are also frequently mentioned in the Bible. Among them are horses, donkeys, goats, sheep, and cattle. Insects too, such as fleas, mosquitoes, and locusts, feature in biblical passages. Agriculture and the Bible The importance of agriculture is reflected throughout the Bible. Two out of the three major Israelite festivals were connected with agriculture: the Feast of Weeks, with the end of the grain harvest and the arrival of the first fruits, and the Feast of Booths, which celebrated the completion of the fruit harvest. (The date of Passover may also have been linked with the start of the grain harvest.) Similarly, the Bible abounds in agricultural imagery. In the later chapters of Isaiah, the renewal of the land is couched in agricultural terms; Jesus' teaching often featured farms, vineyards, and agricultural laborers, while poems such as the Song of Solomon are rich in agricultural metaphors. Most significantly, God's blessing could be measured by the success of the harvest, while events such as droughts or plagues of locusts (Joel 1:2-4) were seen as signs of his displeasure. The contours of the land obviously had their effect on travel (map below). The map shows major lines of communication in biblical times, the biblical names for the major highways, and the position of the passes through high ground. These roads were important both for troop movements and for trade and commerce. The land Palestine has always been something of a "gateway." Geographically, it serves as a land-bridge between Asia and Africa; historically, it was an important route between the two centers of ancient civilization: Mesopotamia and Egypt. The land has a basic relief of rounded mountains and incised valleys, which have determined the pattern of major roads. Seen from the west, Palestine consists of a coastal plain, a lowland, and two lines of mountains, divided by the great rift that runs southward from Syria to the source of the African river Zambezi. The river Jordan runs through the Palestinian section of this rift. Indeed, the Jordan depression is a unique feature of the physical

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the passes through high ground. These roads were important both for troop movements and for trade and commerce. Mapping Biblical narratives

At first sight, the account of the travels of the ark (1 Sam 4.1-7.2) is the ideal subject for a map. Yet the complexities of the account and the difficulty of identifying the site illustrate some of the problems inherent in mapping Biblical narratives. It begins with the ark at Shiloh in the charge of Eli and his two ill-behaved sons (1 Sam 8.1-3). Then the ark is taken to Aphek and Ebenezer, where the Philistines rout the Israelites, capture the ark, and take it to Ashdod, one of their chief cities. At Ashdod the ark brings trouble upon the Philistines - the statue of their god Dagon collapses before it and the people of Ashdod are struck by a plague. So they transfer it to Ekron, another Philistine city, with similar results. Finally, in desperation, the Philistines place the ark on a cart yoked to two cows who pull it to Beth-shemesh, where it is taken into custody by Levites. They take it to the house of Abinadab at Gibeah (or "the hill") near Kiriath-jearim. There it remains until David transfers it to Jerusalem. It seems pretty clear. But there are difficulties. For a start, it's not certain where Ebenezer is, let alone "the hill" near Kiriath-jearim. Secondly, although the narrative implies the ark stayed at Kiriath-jearim for 20 years (1 Sam 7.2), it must have been there for longer, if we are to fit it in to the accepted chronology. Was it housed elsewhere during that time?

The most fundamental problem in mapping Bible narratives is simply identifying the locations. The books of the Bible refer to numerous places that, although well known to the ancient Israelites, have become lost to us. The locations of the major cities of ancient Palestine can be established with a reasonable degree of certainty, but, when it comes to less-prominent villages and landmarks, there is far less certainty. The story of Saul's search for his father's asses, for example, describes how he passes through the hill country of Ephraim, the lands of Shalishah, Shaalim, and Benjamin and eventually reaches the land of Zuph (1 Sam 9.4). Except for the references to Benjamin and Ephraim, none of the other "lands" can be located with any confidence. This lack of certainty can strike even sites of major significance: in modern scholarship, at least a dozen different sites have been proposed for Mount Sinai. Nor is it restricted to Old Testament sites: the village of Emmaus (Luke 24.13-35) has also never been definitely identified.

The route of the ark of the covenant from Shiloh, where it was in possession of the old priest Eli, to the Philistine cities and its return to the house of Adinadad at Gibeah near Kiriath-jearim (map left). The account in 1 Samuel 4-7 though seemingly straightforward, presents both geographical and chronological difficulties. The problems are further exacerbated by difficulties with translating the manuscripts, or where there are variant route of the ark readings. For example, 2 Samuel 24.5-7 describes the area covered by officials during the census conducted by David. Yet these verses are difficult to untangle, and it is unclear whether some of the words should be translated as proper names, such as Tahtim Hodshi and Dan Jaan (NIV). Finally, there is the issue of dealing with stories where there are conflicts of opinion over the historicity. In the ark narrative, different scholars would argue over what is history and what is legend. The net result of all this is that almost all Bible maps are hypothetical to some degree, reflecting not only the best guesses as to location, but also a degree of textual interpretation, and even the mapmaker's view on the

historicity of the narrative. The journey of Edward Robinson In 1838, and again in 1852, Edward Robinson, an American Bible scholar, traveled through Palestine and the Sinai recording the names of towns and villages. Robinson believed that the ancient Hebrew names could still be heard in the modern names by which villagers identified their homes. For example, in the name of Anata he could hear Anathoth, the home of Jeremiah; er-Ram was Ramah; Jeba was probably the site of Geba; Mukhmas was Michmash, the place of Jonathan's victory over the Philistines; Beitin, the site of Bethel. Robinson's studies, and the development of rules for comparing ancient Hebrew geographical terminology with modern Arabic, helped to establish biblical geography as a serious, academic pursuit. The description of Saul's search for his father's asses found in 1 Samuel 9.10 located the area around Ephraim and Benjamin and mentions several familiar cities (map right). However, the three lands of the Shalishah, Shaalim, and Zuph cannot be located on the map, since they are not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. The route taken on May 4-5 1838, by Edward Robinson and Eli Smith over the area immediately north of Jerusalem (map above right).

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The route taken on May 4-5 1838, by Edward Robinson and Eli Smith over the area immediately north of Jerusalem (map above right).

Historical geography and archaeology

Numerous pilgrims, travelers, and explorers have sought to unearth the past of the lands of the Bible, beginning, perhaps, with Helena, mother of the emperor Constantine, and her claim to have discovered remnants of the cross in the 4th century. However, true archaeological research in Palestine and the near East really dates back only to the nineteenth century.

Surveys

The earliest surveys were made by Edward Robinson and Eli Smith in 1838 and 1852 to identify places mentioned in the Bible. During the years 1872-1877, a team of Royal Engineers of the British Army, sponsored by the Palestinian Exploration Fund, compiled the Survey of Western Palestine, a 26-sheet set of maps covering the entire country.

In more recent times, surveys have widened their focus to look also at the advantages offered by a particular location. Was the spot favorable for defense, subsistence, trade, and transport? Did it have a good water supply? Was it close to other settlements connected by bonds of kinship or religion? Answers to these and other questions have prompted many careful surveys of large areas.

Excavation

Scientific excavations began in 1890 with Sir Flinders Petrie's stratigraphic

excavations at Tell el-Hesi. He demonstrated that the ancient mound, or tell, was composed of layers of debris deposited by successive occupations, often over long periods of time. In general, it could be assumed that, unless the deposits had been disturbed (for example, by earthquakes), the upper layer was later in time than the lower. Layers containing burnt debris and broken artifacts may be the result of warfare or disaster in the region, and might therefore be datable according to other historical records. The principle of stratigraphy established in 1890 is still the basic practice of modern archaeology. The horizontal bird's-eye view of the superimposed architectural remains uncovered by archaeologists at T. Arad in the Negeb desert. The architectural remains shown in this plan represent different stages of the Iron Age fortress (c. 120-600 BC) with a square tower of the Hellenistic date built above earlier remains (plan below). The change in settlement patterns has been charted for the sites of the coastal plain for the three periods of occupation: Early Bronze II-III (c. 2850-2350 BC), Middle Bronze IIA (c. 2000-1750 BC), and Middle Bronze IIB (c. 1750-1550 BC) (map right). The bar charts show comparisons of settlements for each of these periods for three different areas - the Central Mountains, the Middle and Lower Jordan Valley, and the coastal plain. Excavation reveals, in general, four distinct elements: architecture (buildings, walls, etc.), artifacts (tools, pots, and other objects), various kinds of deposit (ashes, building debris, etc.), and floors (beaten earth, paving stones, street surfaces, etc.). Architecture and artifacts are normally straightforward to identify, but distinguishing layers of deposits from the floor level requires careful judgment. Pottery and dating The most common artifact found in excavations is the ceramic vessel, or potsherds from it. Because pots were fragile, they would often break; therefore, they had to be replaced. Styles were often changed as potters sought to attract buyers, and these stylistic shifts, with such wide differences in form and decoration, provide various kinds of information about ancient life. One is the dating of the stratum in which they were found. Since changes in styles were gradual and some survived longer than others, a quantitative record of the number of sherds of a type provides an accurate picture of change from one period to another. Such changes can be observed in other objects as well. Tools, weapons, jewelry, and ivory and bone carvings are useful in charting changes through time and serve to strengthen chronological conclusions based on pottery types. More precise means for dating are provided by coins of a known mint, scarabs, inscriptions, and datable imported goods from neighboring civilizations. Destructions wrought by invaders such as Shishak, Sennacherib, or Nebuchadnezzar, or others for whom written records are available, are useful in pinpointing dates for artifacts found in the ruins, yet even here there is debate among scholars over identification of a particular destruction with a specific event mentioned in the Bible or other texts. Use of science in archaeology Science has provided new means for surveying sites and dating objects. Techniques such as aerial surveys and archaeological geophysics can be used to reveal hidden structures below the ground. Indeed, archaeological field work is no longer restricted to the land. Wrecks of ancient ships, filled with valuable cargo, have documented ancient trade and revealed the construction methods. Underwater surveys can use geophysical

or other remote-sensing devices. A vertical view of the layers of Tel Mikhal, revealing a system of superimposed earthen ramparts dating from the Middle Bronze Age IIB (c. 1750-1200 BC) (chart left). Each deposit uncovered in the excavation was designated separately according to its color and composition. The thick black lines represent the upper surfaces of the various archaeological features of a period. The broken lines represent the hypothetical continuation of these archaeological features. Radiocarbon and tree-ring dating (dendrochronology) are now commonplace in dating sites and objects (although the lack of an established continuous sequence in Palestinian archaeology limits the use of the latter). Thermoluminescence can determine how much time has elapsed since the original firing of the pottery. Metal analysis can identify trace elements within alloys, revealing information about ore deposits and even trading activity. Professionals with specific expertise are increasingly used in archaeology. Osteoarchaeologists study animal bones and can tell us much about the development of domestic animals and the fauna of a region. Archaeobotanists and palynologists study plant life and pollen from the soil, throwing valuable light on the vegetation of a region or of a particular period of occupation at a site. Excavations have become smaller in terms of the size of the site being excavated, but more intensive in terms of the information being gleaned from the sites. Such attention to detail requires longer excavation projects and more time before findings are published. This, combined with the need for technologically advanced specialist equipment, can make archaeological digs extremely expensive. New objectives

While archaeology continues to result in spectacular finds (such as the recent discovery of the tomb of Herod the Great), there has been a shift towards smaller sites and a concern to explore the lives of ordinary people. Was there a stratification of society? What evidence is there about the accumulation of wealth, power, and position? How has society adapted to its environment at various periods of its history? The increased use of ethnographic and environmental data reveals a great deal about ancient societies, while the distribution of the mundane objects of daily living - those used for cooking, weaving, and metalworking - enables a more precise study of households and the relationships between those who work at various activities within a city or settlement. Knowledge of human society and its organization in ancient Palestine has become an important objective of archaeological research, and one that draws on an increasing range of disciplines, such as zoology, botany, hydrology, and geology. This new approach, which has been termed "socio-archaeology" or "contextual archaeology," is an activity that draws on many specialists from a wide range of disciplines. "Excavation is both art and science," wrote W. F. Albright, one of the pioneers of biblical archaeology; in modern times, it is also, above all, teamwork. Historical geography and archaeology

Numerous pilgrims, travelers, and explorers have sought to unearth the past of the lands of the Bible, beginning, perhaps, with Helena, mother of the emperor Constantine, and her claim to have discovered remnants of the cross in the 4th century. However, true archaeological research in Palestine and the near East really dates back only to the nineteenth century. Surveys

The earliest surveys were made by Edward Robinson and Eli Smith in 1838 and 1852 to identify places mentioned in the Bible. During the years 1872-1877, a

team of Royal Engineers of the British Army, sponsored by the Palestinian Exploration Fund, compiled the Survey of Western Palestine, a 26-sheet set of maps covering the entire country. In more recent times, surveys have widened their focus to look also at the advantages offered by a particular location. Was the spot favorable for defense, subsistence, trade, and transport? Did it have a good water supply? Was it close to other settlements connected by bonds of kinship or religion? Answers to these and other questions have prompted many careful surveys of large areas.

Excavation

Scientific excavations began in 1890 with Sir Flinders Petrie's stratigraphic excavations at Tell el-Hesi. He demonstrated that the ancient mound, or tell, was composed of layers of debris deposited by successive occupations, often over long periods of time. In general, it could be assumed that, unless the deposits had been disturbed (for example, by earthquakes), the upper layer was later in time than the lower. Layers containing burnt debris and broken artifacts may be the result of warfare or disaster in the region, and might therefore be datable according to other historical records. The principle of stratigraphy established in 1890 is still the basic practice of modern archaeology.

The horizontal bird's-eye view of the superimposed architectural remains uncovered by archaeologists at T. Arad in the Negeb desert. The architectural remains shown in this plan represent different stages of the Iron Age fortress (c. 120-600 BC) with a square tower of the Hellenistic date built above earlier remains (plan below).

The change in settlement patterns has been charted for the sites of the coastal plain for the three periods of occupation: Early Bronze II-III (c. 2850-2350 BC), Middle Bronze IIA (c. 2000-1750 BC), and Middle Bronze IIB (c. 1750-1550 BC) (map right). The bar charts show comparisons of settlements for each of these periods for three different areas - the Central Mountains, the Middle and Lower Jordan Valley, and the coastal plain.

Excavation reveals, in general, four distinct elements: architecture (buildings, walls, etc.), artifacts (tools, pots, and other objects), various kinds of deposit (ashes, building debris, etc.), and floors (beaten earth, paving stones, street surfaces, etc.). Architecture and artifacts are normally straightforward to identify, but distinguishing layers of deposits from the floor level requires careful judgment.

Pottery and dating

The most common artifact found in excavations is the ceramic vessel, or potsherds from it. Because pots were fragile, they would often break; therefore, they had to be replaced. Styles were often changed as potters sought to attract buyers, and these stylistic shifts, with such wide differences in form and decoration, provide various kinds of information about ancient life. One is the dating of the stratum in which they were found. Since changes in styles were gradual and some survived longer than others, a quantitative record of the number of sherds of a type provides an accurate picture of change from one period to another. Such changes can be observed in other objects as well. Tools, weapons, jewelry, and ivory and bone carvings are useful in charting changes through time and serve to strengthen chronological conclusions based on pottery types. More precise means for dating are provided by coins of a known mint, scarabs, inscriptions, and datable imported goods from neighboring civilizations. Destructions wrought by invaders such as Shishak, Sennacherib, or Nebuchadnezzar, or others for whom written records are available, are useful in pinpointing

dates for artifacts found in the ruins, yet even here there is debate among scholars over identification of a particular destruction with a specific event mentioned in the Bible or other texts. Use of science in archaeology Science has provided new means for surveying sites and dating objects. Techniques such as aerial surveys and archaeological geophysics can be used to reveal hidden structures below the ground. Indeed, archaeological field work is no longer restricted to the land. Wrecks of ancient ships, filled with valuable cargo, have documented ancient trade and revealed the construction methods. Underwater surveys can use geophysical or other remote-sensing devices. A vertical view of the layers of Tel Mikhal, revealing a system of superimposed earthen ramparts dating from the Middle Bronze Age IIB (c. 1750-1200 BC) (chart left). Each deposit uncovered in the excavation was designated separately according to its color and composition. The thick black lines represent the upper surfaces of the various archaeological features of a period. The broken lines represent the hypothetical continuation of these archaeological features. Radiocarbon and tree-ring dating (dendrochronology) are now commonplace in dating sites and objects (although the lack of an established continuous sequence in Palestinian archaeology limits the use of the latter). Thermoluminescence can determine how much time has elapsed since the original firing of the pottery. Metal analysis can identify trace elements within alloys, revealing information about ore deposits and even trading activity. Professionals with specific expertise are increasingly used in archaeology. Osteoarchaeologists study animal bones and can tell us much about the development of domestic animals and the fauna of a region. Archaeobotanists and palynologists study plant life and pollen from the soil, throwing valuable light on the vegetation of a region or of a particular period of occupation at a site. Excavations have become smaller in terms of the size of the site being excavated, but more intensive in terms of the information being gleaned from the sites. Such attention to detail requires longer excavation projects and more time before findings are published. This, combined with the need for technologically advanced specialist equipment, can make archaeological digs extremely expensive. New objectives While archaeology continues to result in spectacular finds (such as the recent discovery of the tomb of Herod the Great), there has been a shift towards smaller sites and a concern to explore the lives of ordinary people. Was there a stratification of society? What evidence is there about the accumulation of wealth, power, and position? How has society adapted to its environment at various periods of its history? The increased use of ethnographic and environmental data reveals a great deal about ancient societies, while the distribution of the mundane objects of daily living - those used for cooking, weaving, and metalworking - enables a more precise study of households and the relationships between those who work at various activities within a city or settlement. Knowledge of human society and its organization in ancient Palestine has become an important objective of archaeological research, and one that draws on an increasing range of disciplines, such as zoology, botany, hydrology, and geology. This new approach, which has been termed "socio-archaeology" or "contextual archaeology," is an activity that draws on many specialists from a wide range of disciplines. "Excavation is both art and science," wrote W. F. Albright, one of the

pioneers of biblical archaeology; in modern times, it is also, above all, teamwork. Writing, archives, and libraries in the ancient Near East - the lands of Egypt and Mesopotamia - formed the cradle of civilization. And key to any civilization is, of course, writing. Some of these ancient writing systems were kept alive - Hebrew and Greek, for example - but many more were forgotten, and it is only relatively recently that scholars have been able to translate the ancient texts. Deciphering these "dead" languages only really began in the 1750s, when Phoenician was first read. In the 1820s, the Rosetta stone provided Champollion with the key to Egyptian hieroglyphs; Assyrian cuneiform was fairly well understood by 1857, and Ugaritic was read in 1930, just a year and a half after the first tablet was found. Whether written records survive depends on what they were written on. Most literate societies of the ancient Near East left inscriptions on stone, or sometimes on metal. These texts, however, are limited in their subject matter, usually proclaiming the greatness of a king, recording his victories, entreating the favor of a god, or displaying the laws of the land. The clay tablet, which originated in Mesopotamia, is also extremely durable. (Fire, for example, which destroys papyrus and wood, simply bakes clay hard). Cheap and easily produced, such tablets filled the great libraries and archives of the ancient Near East, mainly written in Sumerian and Akkadian. Although 15 libraries can be listed, some important archives have simply never been discovered (for example, Carchemish and Aleppo). Archives were essentially practical collections of law, diplomacy, and economics, relating to their own generation. Libraries were more permanent collections, containing literary texts, epics, poetry and "wisdom" (including texts on religion, mythology, rituals, festivals, and incantations), as well as scientific and scholastic texts dealing with medicine, mathematics, and astrology. Other documents were written on less-permanent material. In Egypt, and in places under its influence, writing was normally on papyrus or wood, neither of which survive well enough to preserve a full library or archive, though fragmentary hoards sometimes imply the existence of a larger collection. The alphabet¹⁴ N. and S. Arabian scripts appear at an uncertain date (c. 500 BC), the latter giving rise to Ethiopic. These scripts may have split off the developing alphabetic tradition as early as the Proto-Canaanite stage (i.e. before 1000 BC).¹⁵ Scattered graffiti in a linear pictographic script on various objects (c. 1500-1100 BC) come from Canaan. Termed Proto-Canaanite, the signs are found arranged in alphabetic order c. 1150 BC. The cursive letters imply a system of writing for papyrus or skin.¹⁶ In Ugarit a "cuneiform alphabet" was used c. 1400-1200 BC to write the local language - also found in Canaan. Signs were arranged in alphabetic order, linking the script to the Proto-Canaanite linear alphabet.¹⁷ An undeciphered "Pseudo-Hieroglyphic" script on stone and metal comes from Byblos. The earliest readable inscriptions in the true alphabet are found here, in a group of Phoenician inscriptions on scripture.¹⁸ The Hebrews adopted the alphabet (c. 1150-1050 BC). Preserved contemporary documents from the Hebrew kingdoms (c. 620-595 BC) are sparse: ostraca, seals, and very few stone inscriptions.¹⁹ The Aramaeans adopted the Phoenician-Hebrew alphabet after 900 BC and established their script and language in Mesopotamia. Aramaic became the administrative language of the Persian Empire (c. 500-330

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Mesopotamian cuneiform¹ The earliest writing - pictographic signs on clay tablets from Uruk - dates from the “Protoliterate” period (c. 3200-2800 BC).² In the Early Dynastic period (c. 2800-2400 BC), inscriptions in Sumerian are found on many sites, including Ur and Lagash. The script developed from pictographic to “cuneiform,” i.e., signs made of wedge (Latin *cuneus*)-shaped strokes.³ The Ebla archive (c. 2500-2300 BC) contains some 15,000 tablets, written in Sumerian cuneiform but also Eblaite, a Semitic language.⁴ The Semitic Dynasty of Akkad (c. 2400-2250 BC), borrowed cuneiform for its inscriptions. Akkadian replaced Sumerian as the spoken language of Mesopotamia.⁵ At Susa, a large group of tablets was found, inscribed in a pictographic script. The script has only partially been deciphered.⁶ After 2000 BC, cuneiform Akkadian on clay tablets was widely used as an international means of communication. Other peoples used the script and the tablet for writing their own languages, including the Elamites (c. 2250-350 BC), Hurrians (c. 2200-1300 BC), Hittites (c. 1650-1200 BC) and Urartians (c. 8500-600 BC).⁷ The Indus Valley cities have produced many short, undeciphered inscriptions (c. 2500-1800 BC). Links with Mesopotamia may have spread the idea of writing and led to the local invention of the script.⁸ In the Persian empire (c. 550-330 BC) a “cuneiform” script was used on monumental stone inscriptions. The script was modeled on the Aramaic alphabet with influence from Akkadian.

Writing, archives, and libraries in the ancient Near East
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Mesopotamian cuneiform¹ The earliest writing - pictographic signs on clay tablets from Uruk - dates from the "Protoliterate" period (c. 3200-2800 BC).² In the Early Dynastic period (c. 2800-2400 BC), inscriptions in Sumerian are found on many sites, including Ur and Lagash. The script developed from pictographic to "cuneiform," i.e., signs made of wedge (Latin *cuneus*)-shaped strokes.³ The Ebla archive (c. 2500-2300 BC) contains some 15,000 tablets, written in Sumerian cuneiform but also Eblaite, a Semitic language.⁴ The Semitic Dynasty of Akkad (c. 2400-2250 BC), borrowed cuneiform for its inscriptions. Akkadian replaced Sumerian as the spoken language of Mesopotamia.⁵ At Susa, a large group of tablets was found, inscribed in a pictographic script. The script has only partially been deciphered.⁶ After 2000 BC, cuneiform Akkadian on clay tablets was widely used as an international means of communication. Other peoples used the script and the tablet for writing their own languages, including the Elamites (c. 2250-350 BC), Hurrians (c. 2200-1300 BC), Hittites (c. 1650-1200 BC) and Urartians (c. 8500-600 BC).⁷ The Indus Valley cities have produced many short, undeciphered inscriptions (c. 2500-1800 BC). Links with Mesopotamia may have spread the idea of writing and led to the local invention of the script.⁸ In the Persian empire (c. 550-330 BC) a "cuneiform" script was used on monumental stone inscriptions. The script was modeled on the Aramaic alphabet with influence from Akkadian.

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influence from Akkadian. The Bible and ancient history
In the surviving literature of the great empires that surrounded ancient Israel, there is hardly any mention of the characters and events of the Bible. Famous characters such as Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Saul, David, and Solomon are known only from the pages of the Bible. This is not surprising, for, compared to powers like Assyria and Egypt, Israel played a minor role in the military and commercial affairs of the time. However, the discovery of the ancient palaces of the Assyrian kings at Khorsabad, Nineveh, and Nimrud revealed, for the first time, details about ancient Israel from sources outside the Bible. The Assyrian kings' boastful accounts of their military triumphs include the names of some monarchs of Israel and Judah. Carved in stone or written on clay, these documents are contemporaneous with the campaigns, battles, and conquests to which they bear witness. The boxed sections contain accounts of these events, written shortly after they occurred and discovered in the mounds of Assyria and Babylonia, on a stela found in Transjordan, and on a temple wall at Karnak. There are agreements and disagreements between the accounts. Some sources, such as the inscription of Shalmaneser III mentioning Ahab; list events not referred to in the Bible; others contain information supplementary to the biblical account. For example, Sheshonq I's (Shishak of the Bible) long list of cities conquered in Palestine, not only confirms the biblical account of the invasion but also provides a valuable source for the geography of the 10th century BC. The details on the sources naturally reflect the bias of those who caused the inscriptions to be made. A stela erected by King Mesha of Moab proclaims to his subjects that "Israel hath perished forever!" But even the wishful thinking of Israel's enemies serves to integrate events and kings - otherwise known only in the religious history of ancient Israel - with the history of the larger world. Perhaps the most important aspect of these discoveries is that they make possible a chronology for the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The Assyrian kings kept records of the years of their reigns, covering the period from the beginnings of the 9th through to the end of the 6th century BC. Among the important events recorded is a solar eclipse in a certain year of the reign of Ashur-Dan. With a high degree of certainty, astronomical calculations fix the year this eclipse (as observed from Nineveh) at 763 BC. This date makes possible the assignment of dates to the biblical kings whose history was interwoven with that of the kings of Assyria. Comparison of biblical and non biblical texts c. 924 BC (Victories of Seshonq I over the) Asiatics of distant foreign countries [with list of cities in Palestine and Syria]. Amon Temple, Karnak. In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, King Shishak of Egypt came up against Jerusalem... (1 Kings 14.25) 853 BC He brought along to help him... 200 chariots, 10,000 foot soldiers of Ahab the Israelite... I fought with them... I did inflict a defeat upon them... With their corpses I spanned the Orentes before there was a bridge. Shalmaneser III, on monolith from Kurkh. No mention of this battle in the Bible. c. 830 BC As for Omri, king of Israel, he humbled Moab many years... And his son followed him, but I have triumphed over him, while Israel hath perished forever! Mesha, king of Moab, on stela found at Dibon. Now King Mesha of Moab was a sheep breeder, who used to deliver to the king of Israel one hundred thousand lambs, and the wool of one hundred thousand rams. But when Ahab died, the king of

Moab rebelled against the king of Israel. (2 Kings 3.4-5)732 BCThey overthrew their king Pekah and I placed Hoshea as king over them.Tiglath-pileser III, inscription at Nimrud.In the days of King Pekah of Israel, King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria came... and he carried the people captive to Assyria. Then Hoshea son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah son of Remaliah, attacked him, and killed him; he reigned in place of him... (2 Kings 15.29-30)722 BC I besieged and conquered Samaria, led away as booty 27,290 inhabitants of it.Sargon II, inscription at Khorsabad.In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria captured Samaria; he carried the Israelites away to Assyria...(2 Kings 17.6)712 BCAzuri, king of Ashdod, had schemed not to deliver tribute (any more) ... I besieged and conquered the cities of Ashdod, Gath (and) Asdudimmu.Sargon II, inscription at Khorsabad.In the year that the commander-in-chief, who was sent by King Sargon of Assyria, came to Ashdod and fought against it and took it... (Isa 20.1)701 BCAs to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities... I drove out (of them) 200,150 people... Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem... like a bird in a cage... Hezekiah himself... did send me, later... 30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver...Sennacherib, text from Nineveh.King Hezekiah of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, "I have done wrong; withdraw from me; whatever you impose on me I will bear." The king of Assyria demanded of King Hezekiah of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. (2 Kings 18.14)597 BCThe king of Akkad... laid siege to the city of Judah... and the king took the city... He appointed in it a [new] king of his liking, took heavy booty from it and brought it into Babylon.Nebuchadnezzar II, on tablet from Babylon.King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to the city, while his servants were besieging it; King Jehoiachin of Judah gave himself up to the king of Babylon... The king of Babylon took him prisoner in the eighth year of his reign. He carried off all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house... The king of Babylon made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah. (2 Kings 24.11-17)Comparison of biblical and non-biblical textsThe Bible and ancient historyIn the surviving literature of the great empires that surrounded ancient Israel, there is hardly any mention of the characters and events of the Bible. Famous characters such as Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Saul, David, and Solomon are known only from the pages of the Bible. This is not surprising, for, compared to powers like Assyria and Egypt, Israel played a minor role in the military and commercial affairs of the time.However, the discovery of the ancient palaces of the Assyrian kings at Khorsabad, Nineveh, and Nimrud revealed, for the first time, details about ancient Israel from sources outside the Bible. The Assyrian kings' boastful accounts of their military triumphs include the names of some monarchs of Israel and Judah.Carved in stone or written on clay, these documents are contemporaneous with the campaigns, battles, and conquests to which they bear witness. The boxed sections contain accounts of these events, written shortly after they occurred and discovered in the mounds of Assyria and Babylonia, on a stela found in Transjordan, and on a temple wall at Karnak. There are agreements and disagreements between the accounts. Some sources, such as the inscription of Shalmaneser III mentioning Ahab; list events not referred to in the Bible; others

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Pagan cults and religious practice

The monotheistic Hebrew religion faced a constant challenge from Canaanite polytheism and its practices. The diversity of religious allegiances is evident from discoveries at Kuntilet Ajrud to the south of Kadesh-barnea, where inscriptions record the names of Baal, Asherah, and El, as well as Yahweh "and his consort." Clearly, the popular cults did not die easily. The practices and imagery of the religions of the time were characterized by naturalistic symbols such as standing stones, trees, the bull, the cow, and serpents. A basalt upright stone found at Jericho shows that the custom of setting up a stone for religious purposes reaches back to Neolithic times. Biblical accounts of memorial stones are many: a stone marks Jacob's covenant with Laban (Gen 31.45); another is used as a cult object at Bethel (Gen 28.18-19). Altars were for slaughtering animals and burning offerings. They were made of mud brick or unquarried stone (Exod 20.24-26; Deut 27.5), and examples have been found at Megiddo and Lachish. Altars from the Iron Age have also been found, one from Beersheba having "horns" at the four corners and a snake engraved on one side. "You shall have no other gods before me," declared the god of Israel. The countries and culture surrounding Israel, however, worshipped a huge number of different gods. The map shows the distribution of religious cults throughout Palestine, Phoenicia, Syria, and Mesopotamia. Trees were also important. Late Bronze Age cylinder seals often show a worshipper standing in front of a tree; other seals dating from the 10th to the 8th centuries BC depicting a tree flanked by worshippers have been found at Tel Halif, Lachish, Beth-shemesh, Gibeon, Samaria, and elsewhere. Gold pendants from Tel el-Ajjul and Ugarit even display trees growing out of the navel or the genitals of some kind of goddess. Sexual intercourse took place under holy trees and was considered a part of the sacrifice to the goddess (Hosea 4.13-14). Numerous Canaanite bronzes of a young man with his right hand raised in a gesture of victory are thought to represent Baal. Bronze bulls, also possibly representing Baal, are known from Hazor, Ugarit, and Samaria. Jeroboam is said to have violated the law by setting up images of golden calves in the temples at Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12.28-30). The female deity is referred to as the consort of Baal (Judg 3.7; 2 Kings 23.4), and Ashtoreth (Astarte) is often described as a fertility goddess. Maternal traits were usually expressed in animal, rather than human, form. The cow suckling her calf, familiar from Phoenician ivories, can be regarded as the counterpart of the god in the form of a bull. "You shall not make gods of silver alongside me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold." (Exod 20.23) Small bronze snakes found in Late Bronze Age temples at Hazor, Megiddo, Tel Mevorah, Gezer, and in the Early Iron Age shrine at Timnah, may have been votive offerings to a goddess,

since a figurine of a female has been found holding a serpent in her hands. This same image, or one like it, may be the “Nehushtan” worshipped by the Israelites (2 Kings 18.4). The pantheon was as large and varied as the natural world, with deities for the sky, sun, moon, storm, and sea, as well as for more abstract concepts such as war, love, healing, wisdom, and writing. Pagan cults and religious practice

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18.4).The pantheon was as large and varied as the natural world, with deities for the sky, sun, moon, storm, and sea, as well as for more abstract concepts such as war, love, healing, wisdom, and writing.Routes and distancesMost people walked. Wheeled vehicles need roads; walkers need only tracks. There were ancient roads, such as the road between Babylon and Larsa in the days of Hammurabi, but they would not have been paved. Bridges, too, were rare; rivers had to be forded or travelers carried across on ferries. Only the rich few had horses, and even then, the ancient world used neither horseshoes nor stirrups, which made traveling on horseback far less convenient. Animals were used mainly for transporting goods or equipment. The most common pack animals were donkeys or asses. Camels were used by desert tribes and traders making long journeys. Traveling to Jerusalem after the exile, the returning exiles used 435 camels (Neh 7.6g) and David appointed an expert - Ofil the Ishmaelite - to look after his (1 Chron 27.30).By Roman times, a traveler might make fifteen to twenty miles a day on foot, perhaps twenty-five to thirty in a carriage. In emergencies, forty to fifty might be possible.For long distances, sailing, where possible, was the best. With a good wind, a ship could make up to one hundred miles a day. Sea travel was risky, however. Unless absolutely vital, no sailor would travel between November and March. The account of Paul's shipwreck shows just how dangerous such travel could be (Acts 27).The following list gives the distances in miles between places mentioned in biblical accounts of journeys, marches, and other movements of people. A selection of distances outside Palestine has also been added to the list to set journeys mentioned in the New Testament in a wider context. Since the routes taken from one point to another are not generally known, distances are those of a straight line. This approximation serves for comparative purposes and to provide an idea of the length of a journey. Only those ancient places that can be identified with reasonable certainty are included.

Index of Distances

miles	Antioch	Acco	235	Caesarea	55	Ephesus	575	Damascus	195	Dura-Europas	310	Jerusalem	330	Ashkelon	Azotus	10	Gaza	12	Joppa	30	Timnah	23	Athens	Corinth	62	Ephesus (by sea)	230	Philippi	310	Thessalonica	230	Babylon	Asshur	210	Damascus	471	Jerusalem	540	Megiddo	536	Nineveh	273	Beersheba	Bethel	53	Dan	146	Gerar	17	Hebron	25	Bethel	Beersheba	53	Bethlehem (Judah)	16	Gibeah	5	Haran	410	Hebron	29	Ramah (Benjamin)	5	Shechem	19	Shiloh	9	Tekoa	20	Bethlehem	Adullam	13	Bethel	16	Jerusalem	4	Bethshemesh	Ekron	7	Jerusalem	16	Kiriath-jearim	9	Caesarea	Philippi	Damascus	40	Capernaum	37	Tyre	25	Philadelphia	90	Petra	260	Capernaum	Bethsaida	3	Cana	17	Jericho	71	Jerusalem	79	Nazareth	20	Samaria	48	Corinth	Alexandria (by sea)	600	Caesarea (by sea)	750	Damascus	Antioch	195	Dura-Europas	295	Hamath	110	Jerusalem	140	Palmyra	135	Tyre	65	Dan (a/c Laish)	Beersheba	146	Hebron	123	Shechem	75	Sidon	28	Ephesus	Antioch	508	Athens	194	Corinth	236	Miletus	31	Philippi	264	Rome	808	Tarsus	424	Thessalonica	295	Gath	Adullam	10	Ashdod	12	Ekron	5	Jerusalem	23	Gaza	Alexandria	270	Hebron	38	Hormah	36	Jerusalem	48	Joppa	38	Petra	100	Zorah	36	miles	Gezer	Eglon	24	Geba (Benjamin)	20	Gibeon	15	Jerusalem	19	Lachish	21	Gibeah	Bethel	5	Bezek	36	Jabesh-gilead	45	Jerusalem	6	Mizpah (Benjamin)	3	Ramah (Benjamin)	1	Rimmon	2	Ziph	28	Gibeon	Abel-bethmaacah	103	Gezer	15	Jerusalem	6	Kiriath-jearim	6	Mahanaim	38	Hebron	Beersheba	25	Bethel	29	Beth-
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 azareth4Tiberias15ShechemArumah5Bethel19Dan75Dothan14Routes and distancesMost
 people walked. Wheeled vehicles need roads; walkers need only tracks. There were ancient
 roads, such as the road between Babylon and Larsa in the days of Hammurabi, but they would
 not have been paved. Bridges, too, were rare; rivers had to be forded or travelers carried across
 on ferries. Only the rich few had horses, and even then, the ancient world used neither
 horseshoes nor stirrups, which made traveling on horseback far less convenient. Animals were
 used mainly for transporting goods or equipment. The most common pack animals were
 donkeys or asses. Camels were used by desert tribes and traders making long journeys.
 Traveling to Jerusalem after the exile, the returning exiles used 435 camels (Neh 7.6g) and
 David appointed an expert - Ofil the Ishmaelite - to look after his (1 Chron 27.30).By Roman
 times, a traveler might make fifteen to twenty miles a day on foot, perhaps twenty-five to thirty in
 a carriage. In emergencies, forty to fifty might be possible.For long distances, sailing, where
 possible, was the best. With a good wind, a ship could make up to one hundred miles a day. Sea
 travel was risky, however. Unless absolutely vital, no sailor would travel between November and
 March. The account of Paul's shipwreck shows just how dangerous such travel could be (Acts
 27).The following list gives the distances in miles between places mentioned in biblical accounts
 of journeys, marches, and other movements of people. A selection of distances outside
 Palestine has also been added to the list to set journeys mentioned in the New Testament in a
 wider context. Since the routes taken from one point to another are not generally known,
 distances are those of a straight line. This approximation serves for comparative purposes and
 to provide an idea of the length of a journey. Only those ancient places that can be identified with
 reasonable certainty are included.Index of
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