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"John Collins's introduction is a timely and welcome contribution, one based on his own extensive research and on his many years of teaching the subject. The reader will find not only a careful presentation of the biblical material but also a judicious assessment of scholarship on it. This book will be a valuable tool for classroom use, and the bibliographies appended to each chapter will help the student who wishes to pursue a topic in greater detail."

James C. VanderKam | emeritus, University of Notre Dame

"Drawing on years of teaching in seminary and university, and of addressing Christian and Jewish popular audiences, Collins has produced a clear, concise, and up-to-date introduction to the Old Testament, including the deuterocanonical books. Wisely following the canonical order of books (slightly adapted), he describes each book's contents, critical issues, and religious meaning. Collins situates each biblical book squarely in its historical setting and deals honestly with the problems as well as the bounty of the Bible."

Richard J. Clifford, SJ | emeritus, Boston College School of Theology and Ministry

John J. Collins is Holmes Professor of Old Testament Criticism and Interpretation at Yale Divinity School and author of many works, including, from Fortress Press, *Encounters with Biblical Theology* (2005), *Does the Bible Justify Violence?* (2004), and *Daniel* (Hermeneia, 1994).

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A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO THE HEBREW BIBLE

THIRD EDITION

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JOHN J. COLLINS

A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible

A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible

AND DEUTERO-CANONICAL BOOKS

THIRD EDITION

JOHN J. COLLINS

Fortress Press
Minneapolis

A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO THE HEBREW BIBLE, THIRD EDITION

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Preface

This book is an abridgment of *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible with CD-ROM*, published by Fortress Press in 2004. The abridgment was achieved mainly by omitting elaborations and details. I have also omitted several minor prophets: Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Obadiah, and Habakkuk, and some of the deutero-canonical books (Tobit, Judith, Baruch). Some additional illustrations have been included, and also some short vignettes on topics of interest, scattered through the book. A companion website, available at collinstext.com, includes chapter summaries, study and research guides, materials for PowerPoint presentations, and other resources for teachers and students.

This book is written out of the experience of teaching introductory courses on the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible at several different institutions over thirty years. The students in these courses have included Catholic seminarians (at Mundelein Seminary and the University of Notre Dame), undergraduates (at DePaul, Notre Dame, and the University of Chicago), Master of Divinity students of all denominations (at Chicago and Yale), and Master of Arts students who, like the undergraduates, might have a religious commitment or might not. They have been predominantly Christians but have also included good numbers of Jews and Unitarians (especially at Chicago). Most of these students came to the courses with some knowledge of the Bible, but some were unencumbered by any previous knowledge of the subject. This introductory textbook is written to meet the needs of any or all such students. It presupposes a certain level of literacy, and some previous acquaintance with the Bible would definitely be helpful. It is intended, however, as a book for those who are beginning serious study rather than for experts. It is meant to be ecumenical, in the sense that it does not seek to impose any particular theological perspective, but to provide information and raise questions that should be relevant to any student, regardless of faith commitment. The information is largely drawn from the history, archaeology, and literature of the ancient Near East. The questions are primarily ethical and reflect the fact that people of different faith commitments continue to read these texts as scripture in the modern world.

The introduction is historical-critical in the sense that it emphasizes that the biblical text is the product of a particular time and place and is rooted in the culture of the ancient Near East. Since much of the Old Testament tells an ostensibly historical story, questions of historical accuracy must be addressed. In part, this is a matter of correlating the biblical account with evidence derived from archaeology and other historical sources. But it also leads to a discussion of the genre of the biblical text. The historylike appearance of biblical narrative should not be confused with historiography in the modern sense. Our best guide to the genre of biblical narrative is the corpus of literature from the ancient Near East that has been recovered over the last two hundred years.

This introduction, however, is not only historical in orientation. The primary importance of the Old Testament as scripture lies in its ethical implications. In some cases biblical material is ethically inspiring—the story of liberation from slavery in Egypt, the Ten

Commandments, the preaching of the prophets on social justice. In other cases, however, it is repellent to modern sensibilities. The command to slaughter the Canaanites is the showcase example, but there are numerous issues relating to slaves, women, homosexuality, and the death penalty that are, at the very least, controversial in a modern context. In any of these cases, whether congenial to modern sensibilities or not, this introduction tries to use the biblical text as a springboard for raising issues of enduring importance. The text is not a source of answers to these issues, but rather a source of questions. Most students initially see the text through a filter of traditional interpretations. It is important to appreciate how these traditional interpretations arose, but also to ask how far they are grounded in the biblical text and whether other interpretations are possible.

Since this book is intended for students, I have tried to avoid entanglement in scholarly controversies. For this reason, there are no footnotes. Instead, each chapter is followed by suggestions for further reading. These suggestions point the student especially to commentaries and reference works that they can use as resources. Inevitably, the bibliographies are highly selective and consist primarily of books that I have found useful. Many other items could be listed with equal validity, but I hope that these suggestions will provide students with a reliable place to start. Since they are intended primarily for English-speaking students, they are limited to items that are available in English.

I would like to thank the staff at Fortress Press, particularly Neil Elliott and Josh Messner, James Pfeiffer, who suggested the abridgment, and anyone else who worked on the book. The chapter summaries were prepared in large part by Matthew Neujahr. The book is dedicated to the students of Yale Divinity School.

Preface to the Second Edition

This revised second edition has updated bibliographies and is presented in a different format from the original.

I have made only minor changes to the text. I have moved the discussion of the Book of Jonah from chapter 26 (Hebrew short stories) to chapter 20 (Minor Prophets). I have separated out introductory comments on the Deuteronomistic History, the Prophets, and the Writings. I have revised my analysis of the Flood in chapter 2. Numerous smaller changes are scattered throughout the book.

I would like to thank Joel Baden and Ron Hendel for their comments and suggestions.

I am especially grateful to Neil Elliott, Marissa Wold, Lisa Gruenisen, and others on the staff at Fortress for shepherding this revision through the publication process.

Preface to the Third Edition

The changes to this new third edition are largely visual, since the content is virtually unchanged from the second edition. In this edition, the format is now presented in a one-column design, which allows for more flexibility in the placement and size of the images in the volume. A number of new images have been introduced, while some of the images in the second edition have been replaced.

This third edition also features a new map design emphasizing greater readability, and a number of new maps have been added. A significant new feature of this edition is the addition of a full index.

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary.* Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament.* Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BAR	*Biblical Archaeology Review*
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
Bib Int	Biblical Interpretation
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CC	Continental Commentaries
CEJL	Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica (Old Testament series)
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
ITC	International Theological Commentary
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement Series

JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
LXX	Septuagint (Greek version)
MT	Masoretic text
NCB	New Century Bible
NIB	*New Interpreter's Bible*
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OEANE	*Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East.* Edited by E. M. Meyers. 5 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997
OTL	Old Testament Library
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	SBL Dissertation Series
SBLEJL	SBL Early Jewish Literature Series
SBLMS	SBL Monograph Series
SBLWAW	SBL Writings from the Ancient World
VTE	Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wisssenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament

Previous page: Remains of the community settlement at Qumran.

Introduction

The following pages will introduce the different canons of the Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament; considerations regarding the text of the Bible; questions about the Bible and history; and methods of biblical scholarship.

WHAT ARE THE HEBREW BIBLE AND OLD TESTAMENT?

The writings that make up the Hebrew Bible or the Christian Old Testament are on any reckoning among the most influential writings in Western history. In part, their influence may be ascribed to their literary quality, but mainly it derives from the fact that they are regarded as Sacred Scripture by Jews and Christians and are viewed as authoritative in a way that other literary classics are not. The idea of Sacred Scripture, however, is by no means a clear one, and it means very different things to different people. Some conservative Christians regard the Bible as the inspired word of God, verbally inerrant in all its details. At the liberal end of the spectrum, others regard it only as a witness to the foundational stages of Western religion.

THE DIFFERENT CANONS OF SCRIPTURE

The Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament are not quite the same thing. The *Hebrew Bible* is a collection of twenty-four books in three divisions: the Law (*Torah*), the Prophets (*Nebi'im*), and the Writings (*K*^{e}*tubim*), sometimes referred to by the acronym Tanak.

The Torah consists of five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy (traditionally, the books of Moses).

The Prophets are divided into the four books of the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings; 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings are each counted as one book) and the four of the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve; the Twelve Minor Prophets [Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi] are counted as one book).

The Writings consist of eleven books: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs (or Canticles), Ruth, Lamentations, Qoheleth (or Ecclesiastes), Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah (as one book), and Chronicles (1 and 2 Chronicles as one book).

The *Christian Old Testament* is so called in contrast to the New Testament, with the implication that the Old Testament is in some sense superseded by the New. There are significant differences, however, within the Christian churches as to the books that make up the Old Testament.

The *Protestant Old Testament* has the same content as the Hebrew Bible, but arranges the books differently. The first five books are the same, but are called the Pentateuch rather than the Torah. Samuel, Kings, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles are each counted as two books, and the Minor Prophets as Twelve, yielding a total of thirty-nine books. The Former Prophets are regarded as historical books and grouped with Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. Daniel is counted as a prophetic book. The (Latter) Prophets are moved to the end of the collection, so as to point forward to the New Testament.

The *Roman Catholic canon* contains several books that are not in the Hebrew Bible or the Protestant Old Testament: Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus (or the Wisdom of Jesus Sirach = Ben Sira), Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah (= Baruch 6), 1 and 2 Maccabees. Furthermore, the books of Daniel and Esther contain passages that are not found in the Hebrew Bible. In the case of Daniel, these are the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men, which are inserted in Daniel 3, and the stories of Susanna and Bel and the Dragon.

The additional books are called Apocrypha (literally, "hidden away") in Protestant terminology. Catholics often refer to them as "deuterocanonical" or "secondarily canonical" books, in recognition of the fact that they are not found in the Hebrew Bible.

Why Are There Different Canons of Scripture?

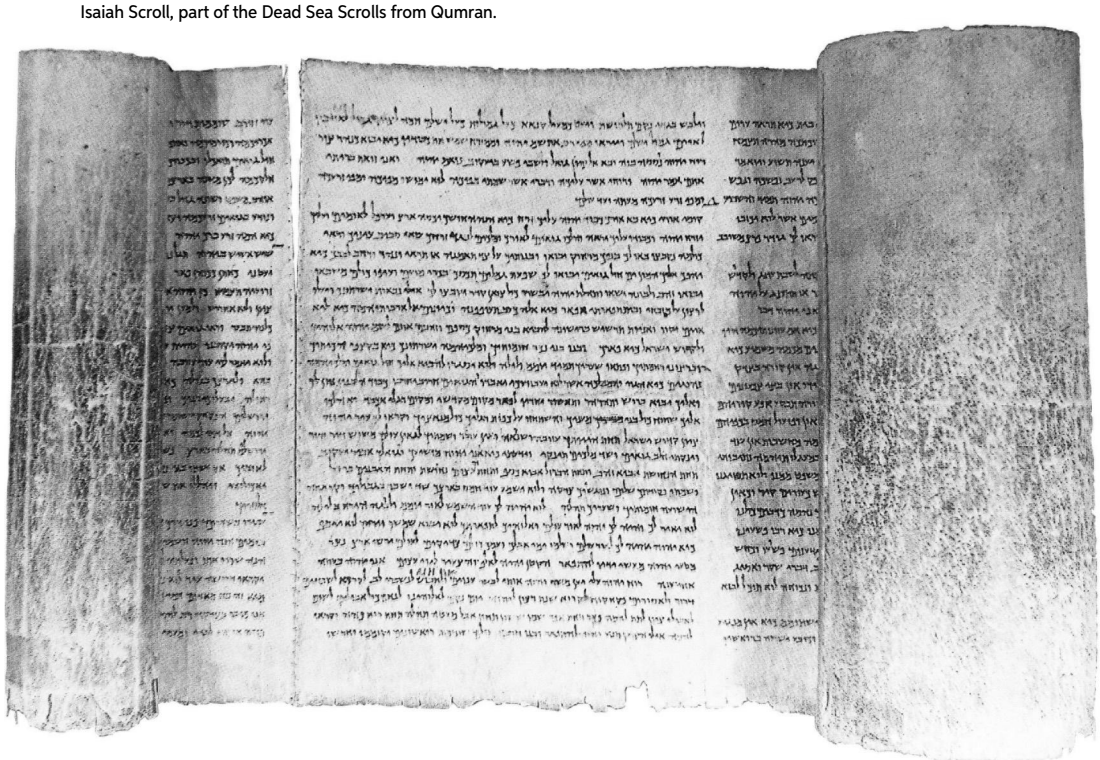
The *Hebrew Bible* took shape over several hundred years, and attained its final form only in the first century C.E. The *Torah* may have been substantially complete in the fifth century B.C.E., but there were still some additions or modifications later than that. The *Prophets* formed a recognized category in the second century B.C.E. We find references to the Torah and the Prophets in the second century B.C.E. in the book of Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus) and again in the Dead Sea Scrolls (in a document known as 4QMMT). The book of Daniel, which was composed about 164 B.C.E., is not included in the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, and this may indicate that the collection of the Prophets was already fixed. The *Writings*: The preface to the book of Ben Sira also mentions other writings that were regarded as authoritative, but there was no definitive list of these before the first century C.E. Most references to the Jewish Scriptures in the writings of this period (including references in the New Testament) speak only of "the Law and the Prophets." The Psalms are sometimes added as a third category. The first references to a fixed number of authoritative Hebrew writings are found toward the end of the first century C.E. The Jewish historian Josephus gives the number as twenty-two, while the Jewish apocalypse of *4 Ezra* (= 2 Esdras 3–14) speaks of twenty-four. It is possible that

both had the same books in mind but that Josephus combined some books (Judges-Ruth and Jeremiah-Lamentations) that were counted separately in *4 Ezra.*

The fixing of the Hebrew canon is often associated with the so-called Council of Jamnia, the discussions of an authoritative group of rabbis after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. It is misleading, however, to speak of a "Council" of Jamnia, since it suggests a meeting like the ecumenical councils of the Christian church. The rabbis debated the status of some books (Qoheleth and Song of Songs), but there is no evidence that they proclaimed a formal list of Scriptures. Nonetheless, it is at this time (70–100 C.E.) that we first find references to a fixed number of authoritative books.

The books that were included in the Hebrew Bible were only a small selection from the religious writings that were current in Judaism. A larger selection was preserved in the Greek Scriptures that were taken over by the early Christians but had been current in Jewish communities outside Israel, especially in Alexandria in Egypt. According to legend, the Torah had been translated into Greek at the request of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, king of Egypt, in the first half of the third century B.C.E., by seventy-two elders. The translation became known as the Septuagint or LXX ("Septuagint" means "seventy"). The name was eventually extended to cover the whole collection of Greek Scriptures. This larger collection included translations of some books that were written in Hebrew (e.g., the book of Ben Sira, I Maccabees) and also some books that were composed in Greek (2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon). The Jews of Alexandria

Isaiah Scroll, part of the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran.



CANONS OF THE HEBREW BIBLE/OLD TESTAMENT

The Hebrew Bible	Protestant Old Testament	
Torah:	**Pentateuch:**	**Prophets**
Genesis	Genesis	Isaiah
Exodus	Exodus	Jeremiah
Leviticus	Leviticus	Lamentations
Numbers	Numbers	Ezekiel
Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Daniel
		Hosea / Nahum
Prophets (Former):	**Historical Books**	Joel / Habakkuk
Joshua	Joshua	Amos / Zephaniah
Judges	Judges	Obadiah / Haggai
Samuel (1 and 2)	Ruth	Jonah / Zechariah
Kings (1 and 2)	1 Samuel	Micah / Malachi
	2 Samuel	
Prophets (Latter):	1 Kings	**Apocrypha**
Isaiah	2 Kings	1 Esdras
Jeremiah	1 Chronicles	2 Esdras
Ezekiel	2 Chronicles	Tobit
Minor Prophets ("The Twelve"): Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi	Ezra	Judith
	Nehemiah	Additions to Esther
	Esther	Wisdom of Solomon
Writings:	**Poetry/Wisdom**	Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom of Sirach)
Psalms	Job	Baruch
Proverbs	Psalms	Letter of Jeremiah
Job	Proverbs	Prayer of Azariah and Song of the Three Young Men
Song of Songs	Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth)	Susanna
Ruth	Song of Solomon (Songs)	Bel and the Dragon
Lamentations		Prayer of Manasseh
Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes)		1 Maccabees
Esther		2 Maccabees
Daniel		
Ezra-Nehemiah		
Chronicles (1 and 2)		

CANONS OF THE HEBREW BIBLE/OLD TESTAMENT

Roman Catholic Old Testament

Pentateuch

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

Historical Books

Joshua
Judges
Ruth
1 Samuel
2 Samuel
1 Kings
2 Kings
1 Chronicles
2 Chronicles
Ezra (Greek and Russian Orthodox Bibles also include 1 Esdras, and Russian Orthodox includes 2 Esdras)
Nehemiah
Tobit
Judith
Esther (with additions)
1 Maccabees
2 Maccabees
(Greek and Russian Orthodox Bibles include 3 Maccabees)

Poetry/Wisdom

Job
Psalms (Greek and Russian Orthodox Bibles include Psalm 151 and Prayer of Manasseh)
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth)
Song of Solomon (Songs)
Wisdom of Solomon
Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom of Sirach)

Prophets

Isaiah
Jeremiah
Lamentations
Baruch (includes Letter of Jeremiah)
Ezekiel
Daniel (with additions)
Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

did not set a limit to the number of the sacred writings. The Jewish community in Alexandria was virtually wiped out in the early second century C.E. Christians who took over the Greek Scriptures of the Jews inherited a larger and more fluid collection than the Hebrew Bible. There is still considerable variation among the lists of Old Testament books cited by the church fathers, centuries later.

When Jerome translated the Bible into Latin about 400 C.E., he based his translation on the Hebrew. He also translated the books that were not found in the Hebrew, but accorded them lesser status. His translation, known as the Vulgate, was very influential, but nonetheless the Christian church continued to accept the larger Greek canon down through the Middle Ages. At the time of the Reformation, Martin Luther advocated a return to the Hebrew canon, although he also translated the Apocrypha. In reaction to Luther, the Roman Catholic Church defined its larger canon at the Council of Trent in the mid-sixteenth century.

It should be apparent from this discussion that the list of books that make up the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament emerged gradually over time. The various canons were eventually determined by the decisions of religious communities. Christian theology has often drawn a sharp line between Scripture and tradition, but in fact Scripture itself is a product of tradition. Its content and shape are subject to the decisions of religious authorities.

THE TEXT OF THE BIBLE

Modern English translations of the Bible are based on the printed editions of the Hebrew Bible and the principal ancient translations (especially Greek and Latin). These printed editions are themselves based on ancient manuscripts. In the case of the Hebrew Bible, the most important manuscripts date from the tenth and eleventh centuries C.E., almost a thousand years after the canon of the Hebrew Bible was fixed. The text found in these manuscripts is called the Masoretic text, or MT. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in caves near Qumran south of Jericho, beginning in 1947, brought to light manuscripts of all biblical books, except Esther, that are more than a thousand years older than these manuscripts. The oldest of these scrolls date from the third century B.C.E. Many of these texts agree with the MT, but some differ and are closer to the Greek.

There are fragments of Greek biblical manuscripts from the second century B.C.E. on. The oldest complete manuscripts date from the fourth century C.E. The Greek translations were generally very literal and reflected the Hebrew text closely. Nonetheless, in many cases they differed significantly from the MT. The books of Jeremiah and Job are much shorter in the Greek than in the Hebrew. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain Hebrew texts of Jeremiah that are very close to the Greek, although other copies agree with the MT. It now seems likely that the differences between the Greek and the Hebrew texts were not due to the translators but reflect the fact that the Greek was based on a shorter Hebrew text. This is also true in I Samuel 16–18 and in

a number of other cases. There were different forms of the Hebrew text in circulation in the third, second, and first centuries B.C.E. In some cases, the Greek may preserve an older form of the text than the Hebrew. For example, the shorter form of Jeremiah is likely to be older than the form preserved in the Hebrew Bible.

In light of this, it makes little sense to speak of verbal inerrancy in connection with the biblical text. In many cases we cannot be sure what the exact words of the Bible should be. This is not to say that the wording of the Bible is unreliable. The Dead Sea Scrolls have shown that there is, on the whole, an amazing degree of continuity in the way the text has been copied over thousands of years. But even a casual comparison of a few current English Bibles should make clear that there are many areas of uncertainty in the biblical text. We do not have a perfect copy of the original text. We only have copies made centuries after the books were originally composed, and these copies often differ among themselves.

THE BIBLE AND HISTORY

The Bible is a product of history. It took shape over time, and its content and even its wording changed in the process.

The Bible is also immersed in history in another way. Much of it tells the story about the people of Israel that has at least the appearance of a historical narrative. For most of Jewish and Christian history there has been an uncritical assumption that this story is historically true. In the last 200 years, however, other information about the ancient world has come to light, through archaeological exploration and through the recovery of ancient literature. This information is often at variance with the account given in the Bible.

Biblical Chronology

The following outline of history emerges from the biblical text:

Adam to the flood: 1,656 years, 10 generations (Genesis 5)
The flood to Abraham, 290 years, 10 generations (Genesis 11)
Abraham to the descent of Jacob and his family to Egypt: 290 years, 3 generations (Genesis 12–50)
The sojourn in Egypt: 430 years, 3 generations (Exod 12:40)
The conquest of Canaan: 5 years
The Judges: 470 years
Transition period under Saul and David
According to 1 Kgs 6:1, Solomon began to build the temple in Jerusalem 480 years after the exodus. This figure is incompatible with the number of years assigned to the Judges.
In the generation after Solomon, the kingdom was divided in two:
Israel (the northern kingdom) survived 200 years.
Judah (the southern kingdom) survived 335 years.

CHRONOLOGY

Approximate dates implied in Bible for early history:		Modern chronology:	
4000 B.C.E.	Creation	(Scientists estimate the age of the earth is 4.5 billion years.)	
2400	Flood		
2401			
2100	Abraham	The historical value of the stories of the patriarchs is uncertain. Modern scholars have often proposed a date of 1800 B.C.E. for Abraham.	
1875	Descent into Egypt		
1445	Exodus	1250 B.C.E. (approx.) Exodus from Egypt (disputed).	
		1250–1000 Emergence of Israel in the highlands of Canaan.	
1000	David	1000–960 (approx.)	King David. Beginning of monarchy in Jerusalem (disputed).
		960–922 (approx.)	King Solomon. Building of Jerusalem temple (disputed).
(From 922 on, the implied biblical dates are generally compatible with those of modern scholarship.)		922	Division of kingdom: Israel in the north, Judah in the south.
		722/721	Destruction of Samaria, capital of Israel, by the Assyrians. End of kingdom of Israel.
		621	Reform of Jerusalem cult by King Josiah. Promulgation of "the book of the law" (some form of Deuteronomy).
		597	Capture of Jerusalem by Babylonians. Deportation of king and nobles to Babylon.
		586	Destruction of Jerusalem by Babylonians. More extensive deportations. Beginning of Babylonian exile.
		539	Conquest of Babylon by Cyrus of Persia. Jewish exiles allowed to return to Jerusalem. End of exile. Judah becomes a province of Persia
		520–515	Rebuilding of Jerusalem temple.
		458	Ezra is sent from Babylon to Jerusalem with a copy of the Law.
		336–323	Alexander the Great conquers the Persian Empire.
		312–198	Judea controlled by the Ptolemies of Egypt (a Greek dynasty, founded by one of Alexander's generals).

CHRONOLOGY

Approximate dates implied in Bible for early history:	Modern chronology:	
	198	Jerusalem conquered by the Seleucids of Syria (also a Greek dynasty).
	168/167	Persecution of Jews in Jerusalem by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, king of Syria. Maccabean revolt.
	66–70 C.E.	First Jewish revolt against Rome. Destruction of Jerusalem temple.
	132–135 C.E.	Second Jewish revolt under Bar Kochba. Jerusalem rebuilt as Aelia Capitolina, with a temple to Jupiter Capitolinus.

Then came the Babylonian exile, followed by
The postexilic or Second Temple period.

The destructions of northern Israel and its capital, Samaria, and of Judah and its capital, Jerusalem, allow us to correlate the history of Israel with the general history of the Near East, since these events are also recorded in Assyrian and Babylonian records. From these records we get the following dates:

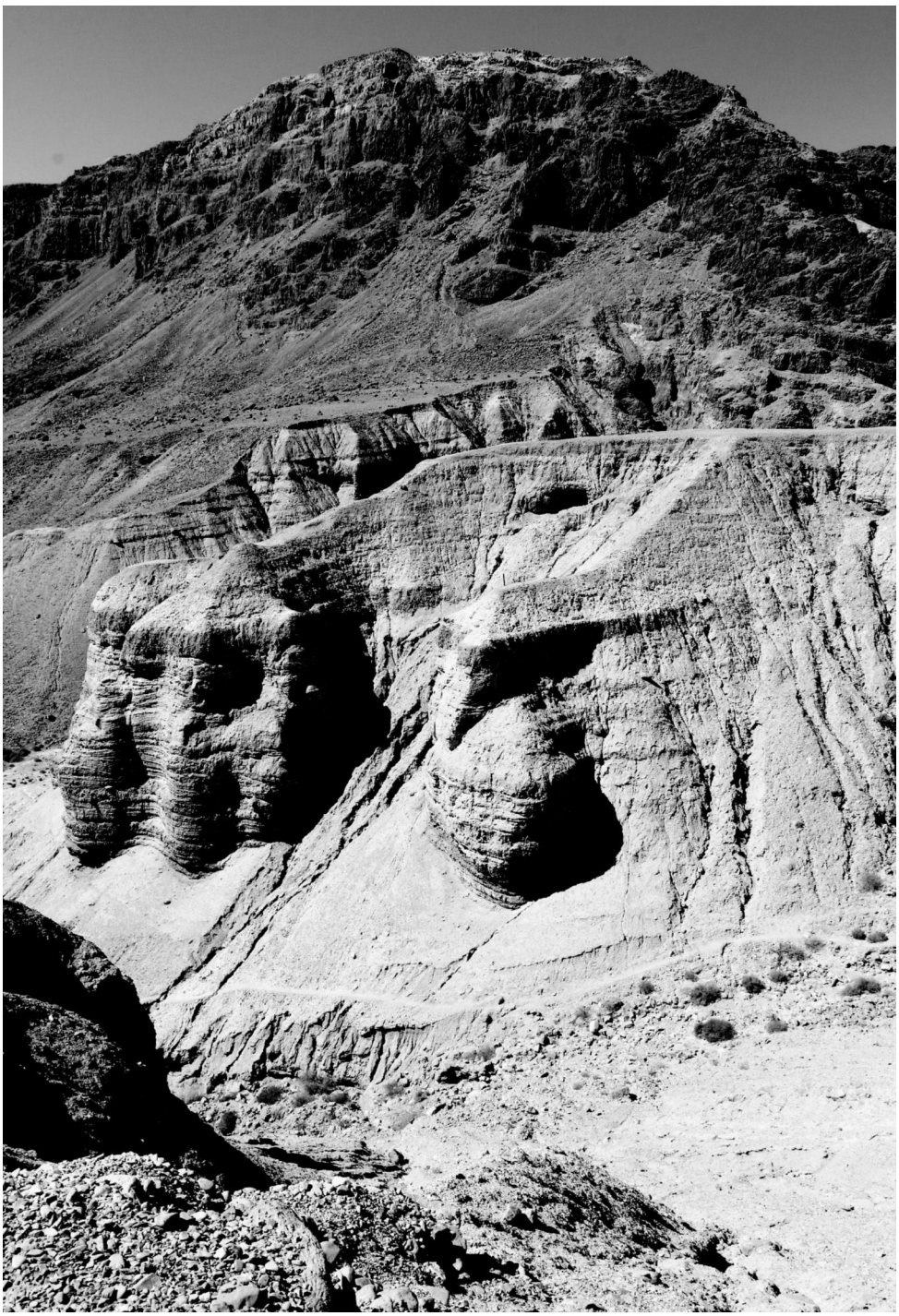
722 B.C.E.: The fall of Samaria
597 B.C.E.: First capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians
586 B.C.E.: Second capture of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the beginning of the Babylonian exile.

If we work back from the dates of the destructions and add up the years of the kings of Israel and Judah, we arrive at the following dates:

About 950 B.C.E.: Solomon
About 1450 B.C.E.: The exodus
About 1876 B.C.E.: The descent of Jacob and his family into Egypt
About 2100 B.C.E.: Abraham

The seventeenth-century Irish Anglican bishop James Ussher famously calculated the date of creation as 4004 B.C.E.

Modern scholarship has generally accepted the biblical chronology of the period of the monarchy, since it can be correlated with nonbiblical sources at several points. The dates for the exodus and the patriarchs, however, are viewed with great skepticism. The life spans of the patriarchs are unrealistic, ranging from 110 to 175 years. The 430 years in Egypt is supposed to cover only three generations. Most scholars place the exodus about



The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in caves in these cliffs and in other nearby sites in Israel.

1250 B.C.E., but many now question whether we can claim any historical knowledge about the patriarchs or even the exodus.

Both the biblical record and modern scholarship place the emergence of Israel as a people in the second half of the second millennium B.C.E. Modern reconstructions favor the last quarter of that millennium, roughly 1250–1000 B.C.E. The biblical dates put it about two centuries earlier.

One implication of this chronological survey is that Israel was a late arrival on the stage of Near Eastern history. The great civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia had already flourished for a millennium and a half before the tribes of Israel appeared on the scene.

A second implication is that there is a gap of several centuries between the date when the biblical books were written and the events that they claim to describe. Traditionally, the books of the Torah were supposed to be works of Moses, but it has long been clear that Moses could not have been their author. It now seems clear that the entire Hebrew Bible received its final shape in the postexilic, or Second Temple, period, long after the events it describes.

METHODS IN BIBLICAL STUDY

Most of the books that make up the Hebrew Bible were composed in several stages over many centuries. Consequently there are many gaps and inconsistencies in the biblical text, and it seems to reflect several different historical settings.

The history of biblical scholarship is in large part a sequence of attempts to come to grips with the composite character of the biblical text:

1. Source Criticism. In the nineteenth century "literary criticism" of the Bible was understood primarily as the separation of sources (source criticism), especially in the case of the Pentateuch. This phase of biblical scholarship found its classic expression in the work of the German scholar Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) in the 1870s and 1880s, and it remains important yet today.
2. Form Criticism. A reaction against this kind of source criticism appeared in the work of another German scholar, Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932). Form criticism focuses on the smaller units that make up the biblical text, such as the individual stories in Genesis. Gunkel drew attention to the importance of literary form or genre, and to the importance of social location (the *Sitz im Leben*) for the meaning of a text. Gunkel also made extensive use of newly available Babylonian literature for comparison with the biblical material.
3. Redaction Criticism. One disadvantage of form criticism was that it tended to break up the biblical text into small fragments. In the mid-twentieth century, a reaction against this fragmentation arose in the form of redaction criticism. Here the focus was on the way in which the smaller units were combined by an editor, who imposed his own theological agenda on the material. The classic works of redaction criticism were again by German scholars, Gerhard von Rad (1901–1971)

CHRONOLOGY OF MODERN BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

1735	Jean Astruc observes multiple names for the divinity in the Pentateuch.
1805	W. M. L. de Wette dates Deuteronomy later than the rest of the Pentateuch.
1822	Jean-Francois Champollion deciphers Egyptian hieroglyphics for the first time.
1860s	K. H. Graf and A. Kuenen establish a chronological order for the various "sources" in the Pentateuch: (J, E, P, D).
1870s	Discovery of great works of Akkadian literature, such as the creation story Enuma Elish and the Gilgamesh epic.
1878	Julius Wellhausen, in *Prolegmonena to the History of Israel*, presents his classic study of the Documentary Hypothesis and a new source chronology: J, E, D, P.
1890–1920	Hermann Gunkel pioneers Form Criticism, which examines the literary genre of shorter biblical passages and their *Sitz im Leben* (social location).
1920s–30s	Discovery of Ugarit (1929) and the efforts of W. F. Albright to confirm the historical accuracy of the Bible through archaeology.
Mid-20th century	Gerhard von Rad and Martin Noth examine the editorial history of biblical texts through redaction criticism. American scholarship dominated by Albright and his students: John Bright's *History of Israel* (1959) provides synthesis of biblical data and ancient Near Eastern history. Biblical theology movement, emphasizing the "acts of God in history," typified by archaeologist G. E. Wright.
1947–54	Discovery of Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran
1960s–present	Biblical scholarship characterized by a multiplicity of approaches, including: the study of religion and literature of Israel in light of Near Eastern, especially Ugaritic traditions, typified by F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Ethic* (1973) sociological approaches, typified by N. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh* (1979) literary approaches, typified by R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981) and *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (1985) feminist/literary approaches, typified by P. Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (1978) and *Texts of Terror* (1984) canonical approach to biblical theology, typified by B. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (1979) revisionist Pentateuchal studies, questioning traditional sources: see overview by E. Nicholson, *The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century* (1998) revisionist approaches to Israelite history: see I. Finkelstein and N. A. Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed* (2001)

and Martin Noth (1902–1968). Redaction criticism showed the beginnings of a shift of interest that has continued in more recent scholarship, placing the main emphasis on the later rather than on the earlier forms of the text.

4. Archaeology. The scholarship mentioned thus far all developed in Germany, where the most influential biblical criticism developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A different tradition of scholarship developed in North America, which attached great importance to archaeology as a source of independent confirmation of the biblical text. Archaeological discoveries could also help to fill out the context of the biblical material. The dominant figure in North American scholarship through the first half of the twentieth century was W. F. Albright (1891–1971). Albright also made extensive use of the literature of the ancient Near East as the context within which the Bible should be understood. Albright's view of the history of Israel found classic expression in the work of his student John Bright (1908–1995).

   In Albright's lifetime, archaeology was believed to support the historicity of the biblical account (not necessarily in all its details), although there were some troubling discrepancies (for example, archaeologists found no evidence of the destruction of a walled city at Jericho in the time of Joshua). In the last quarter of the century, however, the tide has turned on this subject. Discrepancies between the archaeological record and the biblical narrative are now seen to outweigh the points of convergence.

5. Current Methods. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, biblical scholarship is characterized by a diversity of methods. Here I will comment only on two broad trends, the rise of literary criticism and the influence of sociological methods.

   a. Literary Criticism. The Bible is literature, whatever else it may be, and any serious biblical study must have a literary component. Literary scholarship, however, is of many kinds. Beginning in the 1960s, literary criticism of the Bible was heavily influenced by a movement called "New Criticism" in the study of English literature. New Criticism was a formalistic movement that held that the meaning of a text can be found through close examination of the text itself, without extensive research into questions of social, historical, and literary context. The attraction of this method was that it directed attention to the text itself. Nonetheless, it has obvious limitations insofar as it leaves out of account factors that may help to clarify and explain the text. In general literary studies, a reaction against the formalism of New Criticism has arisen in a movement called "New Historicism," which appreciates the importance of contextual information, while still maintaining its focus on the literary text.

      Another consequence of the rise of literary criticism has been increased attention to the final form of biblical books. On the whole, this has been a positive development. We should bear in mind, however, that the books of the Bible are not governed by the same literary conventions as a modern novel or treatise. In many cases they are loose compilations and

the conventional book divisions are not always reliable guides to literary coherence. There is more than one way to read such literature. If we are to appreciate the "composite artistry" of biblical literature, then the final form of the text cannot be the only focus. Questions of genre and literary conventions are fundamental, but we are dealing with ancient genres and conventions, not those of modern literature.

b. Sociological Approaches. The second major trend in recent biblical studies is the increased use of sociological methods. These methods also vary. They may be viewed as an extension of traditional historical criticism insofar as they view the text as a reflection of historical situations. Perhaps the most fundamental contribution of sociological theory to biblical studies, however, is the realization that interpretation is not objective and neutral but serves human interests and is shaped by them. On the one hand, the biblical texts themselves reflect the ideological interests of their authors. This insight follows naturally enough from the form-critical insistence on the importance of the *Sitz im Leben*. On the other hand, the modern interpreter also has a social location. Feminist scholarship has repeatedly pointed out male patriarchal assumptions in biblical scholarship, and has made little secret of its own agenda and commitments. Jewish scholars have pointed out that Christian interpretations are often colored by theological assumptions. But no one is exempt from presuppositions and special interests. One of the clearest gains of recent "postmodern" scholarship has been the increased attention to figures and interests that are either marginal in the biblical text or have been marginalized in previous scholarship. Feminist scholarship has led the way in this regard. More recently, postcolonial criticism has brought a new emphasis on the perspective of subject peoples.

The Approach of This Introduction

This introduction builds on the tradition of historical-critical scholarship. I view the text in its historical context, relating it where possible to the history of the time and respecting the ancient literary conventions.

Placing the Bible in its historical context is not, however, an end in itself. For most readers of the Bible, this is not only a document of ancient history but also in some way a guide for modern living. The responsible use of the Bible must begin by acknowledging that these books were not written with our modern situations in mind, and are informed by the assumptions of an ancient culture remote from our own. To understand the Bible in its historical context is first of all to appreciate what an alien book it is. But no great literature is completely alien. There are always analogies between the ancient world and our own. Biblical laws and the prophetic preaching repeatedly raise issues that still confront us in modern society. The Bible does not provide ready answers to these problems, but it provides occasions and examples to enable us to think about them and grapple with them.

FOR FURTHER READING

Formation of the Canon

T. H. Lim, *The Formation of the Jewish Canon* (Yale Anchor Reference Library; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

Biblical Chronology

Israel Finkelstein, and Neil Asher Silberman. *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001).

Methods in Biblical Scholarship

John Barton, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

J. J. Collins, *The Bible After Babel. Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes. *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application.* (Louisville: Westminster, 1993).

PART ONE
THE TORAH/PENTATEUCH

Previous page: Amulet.

CHAPTER 1

The Near Eastern Context

This chapter provides an overview of the history of the ancient Near East, the context in which any historical understanding of the Hebrew Bible must be based. We will review aspects of the modern rediscovery of the ancient Near East and aspects of Mesopotamian, Canaanite, and Egyptian mythology especially.

EARLY HISTORY OF THE NEAR EAST

Life in the ancient Near East can be traced back thousands of years. There was a settlement at Jericho as early as the eighth millennium B.C.E., and village life developed throughout the Near East in the Neolithic period (8000–4000). With the coming of the Early Bronze Age (3200–2200) the first great civilizations emerged in proximity to the great rivers of the region, the Nile in Egypt, and the Tigris and Euphrates that define Mesopotamia (literally, the land "between the rivers") in modern Iraq.

The Sumerians developed the earliest known writing system around 3200 B.C.E., a system of wedge-shaped signs, called cuneiform, inscribed on clay tablets. About 2300 B.C.E. the Sumerians were conquered by Sargon of Akkad. His successors ruled for almost 200 years, but the Akkadian language remained the main one for Mesopotamian literature for 2,000 years.

Babylon rose to power under Hammurabi (18th century B.C.E.), who was famous for a code of laws. Babylon only became dominant again a thousand years later, under Nebuchadnezzar, the conqueror of Jerusalem in the early 6th century B.C.E.

Assyria attained its greatest power first in the Middle Assyrian period in the thirteenth and twelfth centuries and then especially in the Neo-Assyrian period in the ninth and eighth centuries B.C.E.

Egyptian civilization is almost as old as that of Sumer. A form of writing known as hieroglyphics first appears around 3100 B.C.E. Many of the great pyramids were constructed during the Old Kingdom (2700–2160). The Middle Kingdom extended from 2033 to

CHRONOLOGY OF ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN HISTORY

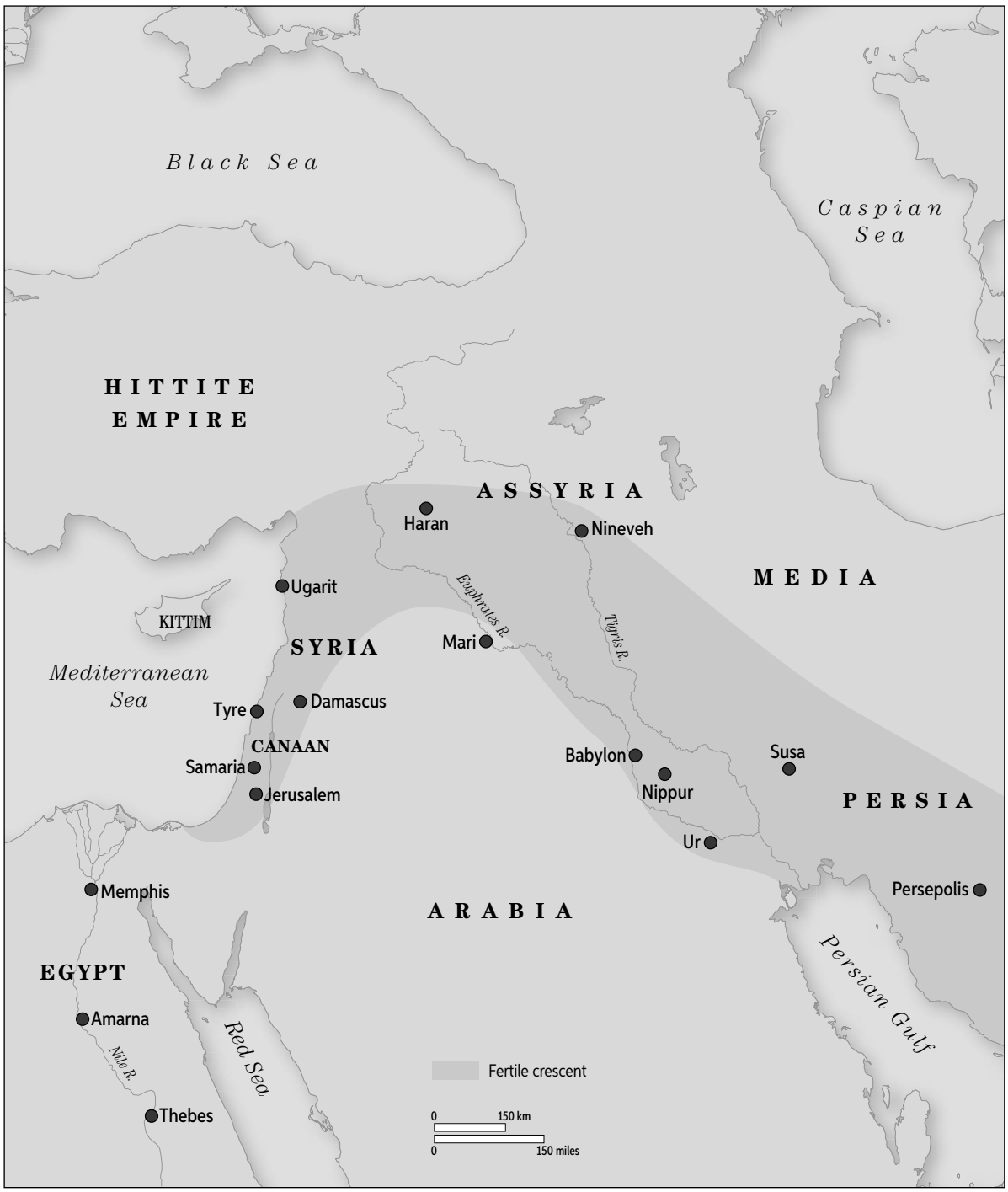
Period	Mesopotamia	Egypt
Early Bronze Age (3200–2200 B.C.E.)	3200 B.C.E. Sumerians develop first known writing system 2300 B.C.E. Sumerian city-states (Uruk, Lagash, Umma) Sargon of Akkad conquers the Sumerians	From 3100 B.C.E. Hieroglyphic writing 2700–2160 B.C.E. Old Kingdom Age of the Pyramids
Middle Bronze Age (2200–1550 B.C.E.)	18th century B.C.E. Rise of Babylon under Hammurabi Assyrian kingdom becomes an established power	2160–2106 B.C.E. First Intermediate Period 2033–1648 B.C.E. Middle Kingdom 1648–1540 B.C.E. Second Intermediate Period Hyksos rule in Egypt
Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 B.C.E.)	14th century B.C.E. (Canaan: Kingdom at Ugarit) 1124 B.C.E. Elevation of Marduk under Nebuchadnezzar	1540–1069 B.C.E. New Kingdom Ca. 1350 B.C.E. Amarna Period Akhenaten 1279–1213 B.C.E. Reign of Ramesses II

1648. For about a century in the middle of the second millennium (1648–1540) Egypt was ruled by foreigners from Asia, known as the Hyksos, who were eventually driven out. The New Kingdom followed. Egypt ruled over Canaan, the region where Israel would emerge, for much of this period.

In the mid-fourteenth century, Pharaoh Amenhotep IV abandoned the traditional worship of the god Amun and devoted himself to the worship of the sun and the solar disk (Aten). He changed his name to Akhenaten and moved his capital to Amarna. This is therefore known as the Amarna period. It is important because of the monotheistic character of Akhenaten's devotion, but also because of a hoard of tablets from this period (the Amarna letters) that give information about the state of affairs in Canaan. After Akhenaten's death, his successor, Tutankhamun, departed from Amarna and reverted to the cult of Amun.

In this period, the main challenge to Egyptian power in Asia came from the Hittites, a people who lived in Anatolia or modern Turkey.

Canaan lay between Egypt and Mesopotamia; it comprised modern Palestine/Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and part of Syria. It was a loose configuration of city-states. Later, in the first millennium, the Canaanites in the coastal cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos were known as Phoenicians. The biblical texts sometimes use the designation "Amorite" as a variant for "Canaanite."



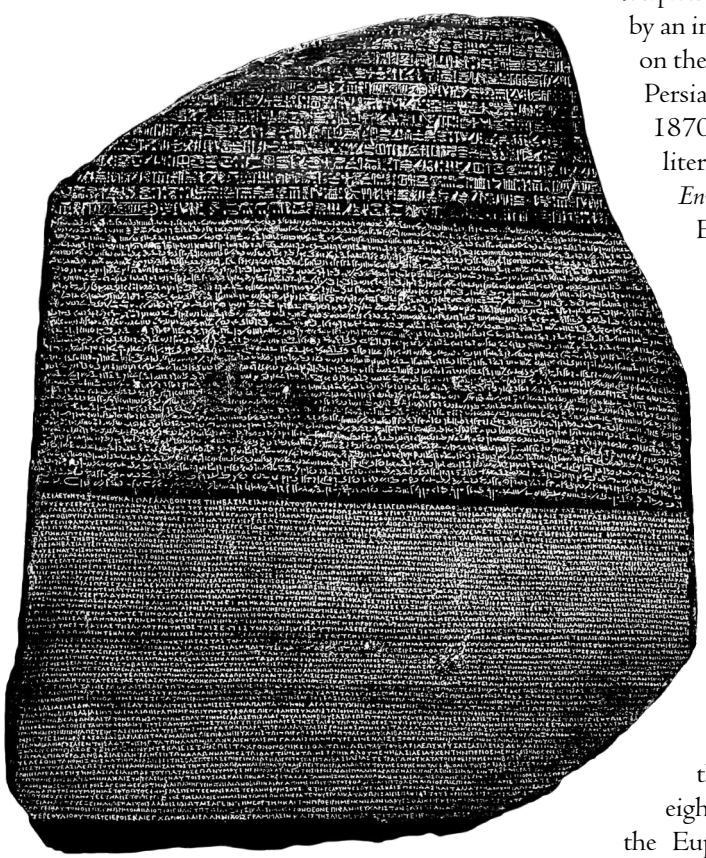
The Fertile Crescent

From the twelfth century on, the people of northern Syria were called Arameans. These were not a unified people but included several small kingdoms.

The Philistines were sea people who came to Canaan from the Aegean. Their origin remains obscure. They were defeated by Egypt about 1190 B.C.E., but they then settled in the coastal towns of Palestine, including Ashkelon, Gaza, and Ashdod. The history of the Philistines parallels that of Israel to a great degree.

THE MODERN REDISCOVERY OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

The modern recovery of the ancient Near East began with Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798–1802, and the discovery of the Rosetta Stone. Since the same text was written in both Greek and Egyptian, it became possible in 1822 to decipher hieroglyphics for the first time.



The Rosetta Stone, written in hieroglyphic, Demotic, and Greek.

The first explorations of Assyrian sites (Nineveh, Khorsabad) were carried out in the 1840s. The key to the decipherment of Akkadian was provided by an inscription by a Persian king Darius on the rock of Behistun in Persia, in Old Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian. In the 1870s the great works of Akkadian literature, such as the creation story *Enuma Elish* and the Gilgamesh Epic, were discovered and first translated. The Babylonian flood story, which was contained in the Epic of Gilgamesh, caused a sensation because of its similarity to the story of Noah and the ark.

Other major discoveries followed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, among them: the Amarna letters, noted above, discovered in 1887; the Ugaritic tablets (fourteenth century B.C.E.), found on the Mediterranean coast in northern Syria in 1929; the Mari tablets (mostly from the eighteenth century B.C.E.), at Mari on the Euphrates, beginning in 1933; the

Ebla tablets (third millennium B.C.E.), from Tell Mardikh, near Aleppo in northwestern Syria, discovered beginning in 1964; and tablets from Emar (modern Meskene, in Syria), uncovered in the mid-1970s.

ASPECTS OF NEAR EASTERN RELIGION

The worship of gods and goddesses was a significant part of life in the ancient Near East. Religion was not standardized and systematized. Each city-state had its own cult of its chief god or goddess.

There was, however, a corpus of literature that circulated widely in the ancient Near East. As part of their training in Akkadian, scribes had to copy out a prescribed body of standard texts. Consequently some works (e.g., the Epic of Gilgamesh) could be found at widely different locations at diverse dates. Modern scholars often refer to such texts as "canonical," but it is important to bear in mind that the "canon" or standard that they established was literary and that it did not involve orthodoxy in religious belief.

We may get an impression of the Mesopotamian view of the world by considering some of the myths or stories about the origin of the world and of humanity. The word "myth" is derived from the Greek *mythos*, or story, but is used especially for sacred stories or traditional stories deemed to have religious import. In modern English usage, "myth" is often opposed to factual truth, but this is unfortunate, as it makes it difficult to take myths seriously. The ancient myths are serious but imaginative attempts to explain life in this world. Two Akkadian creation myths stand out, because of their length and wide distribution. These are the myth of Atrahasis and *Enuma Elish.*

Atrahasis

Atrahasis is most fully preserved in an Old Babylonian version from about 1700 B.C.E. It was copied for at least a thousand years.

The story begins at a point before the creation of humankind, "when the gods instead of man did the work, bore the loads." When the gods cast lots and divided the world, Anu took the sky, Enlil the earth, and Enki the waters below the earth. The labor of agriculture was imposed on a class of gods called the Igigu. The first section of the myth deals with the rebellion of these worker gods, which led to the creation of humanity by Enki and the mother goddess, "to bear the load of the gods." They slaughtered "a god who had intelligence" and mixed clay with his flesh and blood. After six hundred years the people became too numerous, and a plague was sent to reduce humanity. At this point, Atrahasis ("the very wise") emerged, and averted the plague by the advice of Enki. Enlil made a number of similar attempts to reduce humanity at six-hundred-year intervals, but each time Enki instructed Atrahasis and the danger was averted. Finally, the gods sent a flood to wipe humanity off the face of the earth. Enki instructed Atrahasis to build a boat that was big enough to ride out the deluge. Atrahasis took his family and livestock on board. The flood lasted seven days and seven nights and wiped out the rest of humanity. The gods, other than Enlil, were horrified at the destruction, but they were mainly affected by

the fact that they were deprived of their offerings. When the flood subsided, Atrahasis made an offering in thanksgiving. When the gods smelled the odor, "they gathered like flies over the offering." In the end, the gods devised a new scheme for population control. Some women would be barren, some children would die at birth, and some categories of priestesses would not bear children at all.

The gods are anthropomorphic, conceived and portrayed in the likeness of human beings. There is a whole society of gods, analogous to a human society. Especially important is the role of the council of the gods, where the gods deliberate and arrive at decisions. These gods are not fully in control of events. Rather, they react to crises as they develop. Moreover, they are not the guardians of a moral order. The crises develop for various reasons: overwork in the case of the Igigu, overpopulation in the case of humanity. The actions that lead to the crises are not necessarily wrong or sinful. The gods react differently to these crises, and the eventual solutions are reached by compromise. While Enki frustrates the designs of Enlil, in the end they arrive at a balance of forces rather than the dominance of any one god.

Enuma Elish

The *Enuma Elish* was composed some centuries later than Atrahasis, probably in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I of Babylon (1125–1104 B.C.E.), when Marduk became the chief god of Babylon. It was widely copied. It was recited on the fourth day of the New Year's festival, the Akitu. It was still copied in the Hellenistic period in the third century B.C.E.

> *When skies above were not yet named*
> *Nor earth below pronounced by name,*
> *Apsu, the first one, their begetter*
> *And maker Tiamat, who bore them all,*
> *Had mixed their waters together*
> *But had not formed pastures, nor discovered reed-beds;*
> *When yet no gods were manifest,*
> *Nor names pronounced nor destinies decreed,*
> *Then gods were born within them.*
>
> (*Enuma Elish*, trans. S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 233)

The *Enuma Elish* begins at an earlier point in primordial time than does the Atrahasis story. In the beginning, there was only the primordial pair, Apsu and Tiamat. The *theogony* (begetting of the gods) comes before the creation of humanity. Here it is the young gods who create a tumult. Finally, Apsu, with his counselor Mummu, goes to Tiamat and proposes that the young gods be eliminated. The young gods, however, learn of the plot because of the wisdom of Ea. Ea then devises a spell, puts Apsu to sleep, and slays him. He sets up his dwelling on top of Apsu. There he begets new gods, Bel and Marduk. Tiamat then prepares for battle. Ea urges Marduk to come forward. Marduk agrees to fight Tiamat on condition that his word should be law. The gods accept and proclaim him king.

Marduk then defeats Tiamat in battle. He cuts the corpse of Tiamat in two, puts up half of it to make the sky and arranges her waters so that they can not escape. He then proceeds to establish the constellations of the stars as stations for the gods. He has Ea create humankind, from the blood of Qingu, an ally of Tiamat, to do the work of the gods. Finally he gives the command to create Babylon. The gods labor for a year to construct Babylon and the temple Esagila. On its completion, Marduk invites them to a banquet in the temple. The myth ends with a lengthy litany of the names and praises of Marduk.

The *Enuma Elish* celebrates the exaltation of Marduk, god of Babylon, to kingship among the gods. Tiamat is a complex and fascinating figure. She is Mother Nature, at one point concerned for the survival of her offspring, at another ready to devour them. She is not evil; indeed she is only slowly provoked to rage. But since she is a threat to the lives of the young gods, she must be destroyed. If life is to flourish on earth, nature must be subdued.

The story has a clear formula for establishing a successful society. Faced with the threat of Tiamat, the gods realize that they need to unite behind the strong leadership of a king. The kingship of Marduk among the gods carries a strong implication that kingship is also necessary in human society. There is a clear symmetry between the king and his palace and the god and his temple. The myth can easily be read as a story composed to legitimate the rise of monarchy. But a story like this has many meanings, and we should not try to reduce it to a simple political message.

The Epic of Gilgamesh

The Epic of Gilgamesh is one of the most remarkable works that have come down to us from antiquity. This work is called an epic rather than a myth, because the main characters are human, although gods and goddesses also intervene in the action. Gilgamesh was regarded in antiquity as a historical character. He may have lived in the third millennium.

According to the epic, Gilgamesh, king of Uruk, was two-thirds divine and one-third mortal. He would not leave young women alone, and the gods often heard their complaints. Eventually the gods created someone to be a match for him, a primitive man named Enkidu, who lived with the beasts on the steppe, but was tamed by a harlot. She tells him, after sex, that he is wise and has become like a god. Enkidu goes to Uruk, where he becomes a well-matched companion for Gilgamesh. He puts on clothes and learns to eat and drink in the human fashion.

Together, Gilgamesh and Enkidu undertake great adventures. They kill Humbaba, the giant of the forest. When they return to Uruk, Gilgamesh is so resplendent that the goddess Ishtar becomes enamored of him and proposes marriage. Gilgamesh, however, insults her by recalling the misfortunes that have befallen her former lovers. Ishtar persuades Anu, the god of heaven, to give her the Bull of Heaven to punish Gilgamesh and Uruk. But Enkidu subdues the bull and Gilgamesh kills it.

By killing Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven, Gilgamesh and Enkidu win fame in Uruk, but they incur the displeasure of the gods. It is decreed that one of them must die, and the sentence falls on Enkidu, who learns of his fate in a dream. When Enkidu dies,

Gilgamesh mourns bitterly: "Shall I die too? Am I not like Enkidu?" He decides to visit Utnapishtim, the flood hero (the counterpart of Atrahasis in the Atrahasis story), who was granted eternal life and now lives far away at the ends of the earth. The journey takes Gilgamesh into the mountain in the west where the sun sets, through a dark tunnel to the sunrise at the other side. He comes to the shore of the sea that circles the earth, where he finds an inn kept by an alewife, Siduri. He tells her his story and asks for directions. She sees that his quest is hopeless:

Tablet XI of the Babylonian version of the Epic of Gilgamesh. This tablet contains the flood account.

Gilgamesh, where do you roam?
You will not find the eternal life you seek.
When the gods created mankind
They appointed death for mankind,
Kept eternal life in their own hands.
So, Gilgamesh, let your stomach be full,
Day and night enjoy yourself in every way . . .
This is the work [of the living].

(Old Babylonian Version; Dalley, *Myths*, 150).

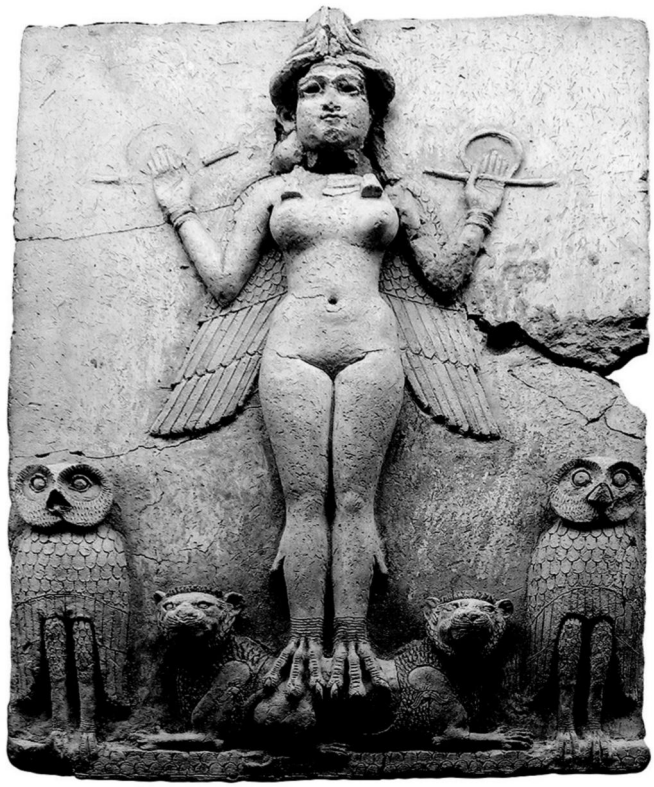
She directs him to Urshanabi, boatman of Utnapishtim. Gilgamesh prevails on the boatman to ferry him over to Utnapishtim, who tells him the story of the flood. Before Gilgamesh sets out on his return journey, Utnapishtim tells him about a plant that has the power to rejuvenate or make the old young again. Gilgamesh dives and brings up the plant. On the way back, however, he stops to bathe in a pool, and while he is doing so a snake carries off the plant. At this point Gilgamesh becomes resigned. When they return to Uruk, he displays the walls of Uruk to Urshanabi, with the implication that the city walls have a permanence that is denied to human beings, even to heroes.

The story of Gilgamesh needs little commentary. It is a poignant reflection on human mortality that belongs to the classics of world literature. In contrast to what we

find in the Bible, morality is not a consideration in this story. The exploits of Gilgamesh and Enkidu are neither good nor bad. They win fame for the heroes, but they also bring about their fall. There is a nice appreciation of both the curses and the blessings that attend the harlot. The gods are sometimes capricious (especially Ishtar), sometimes reasonable (Shamash). In the end, however, death is the great leveler of humanity. As Utnapishtim remarks, death is inevitable for Gilgamesh as for the fool.

The Role of Goddesses

The role of Ishtar draws attention to an aspect of Near Eastern religion that contrasts with the Hebrew Bible. Goddesses figure in the stories beside the gods. In general, goddesses declined in importance in the second millennium. One goddess who did not decline was Ishtar, who was associated with fertility in all its aspects. She is the goddess of thunderstorms and rain; she is also the goddess of battle. Above all, she was the goddess of sexual attraction. She was also associated with the morning star. She is most probably the goddess venerated as the "queen of heaven" (Jer 44:17, 19).



Babylonian relief, nineteenth or eighteenth century B.C.E., of a winged and eagle-footed goddess, possibly Ishtar. Known as the "Queen of the Night", this relief is now in the British Museum, London.

CANAANITE MYTHOLOGY

Our sources for Canaanite mythology are much less extensive than those for Mesopotamia. Until the discovery of the tablets at Ugarit in 1929, we were dependent on the polemical accounts of Canaanite religion in the Bible and some information in Greek sources. The gods that appear in the Ugaritic tablets (El, Baal, Anat, etc.) are the same deities that figure in the Hebrew Bible. The Ugaritic texts are the best representatives we have of Canaanite religion in the second half of the first millennium. Different myths, or different forms of these myths, may have circulated in other locations.

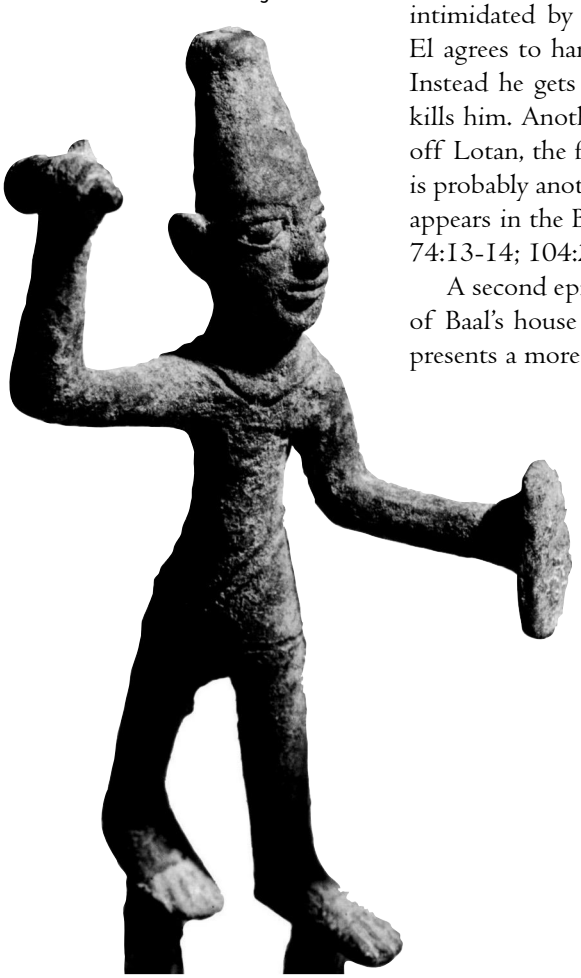
In the Ugaritic pantheon, El was king and father of the gods. His decree is wise and his wisdom eternal. The word *El* is familiar from Hebrew, where it is both the common

noun for "god" and a designation for the God of Israel (YHWH). El is said to live in a tent on a mountain that is the source of two rivers. He presides over assemblies of "the sons of El," the council of the gods.

By the time the Ugaritic myths were composed, however, El's position among the gods was largely ceremonial. In the Baal cycle of myths, Baal emerges as the dominant figure, although his claim to rule is still challenged by Yamm (Sea) and Mot (Death). Three goddesses figure prominently in the stories: Asherah, wife of El; Anat, sister and wife of Baal; and Astarte, who is the least prominent of the three.

The Baal Cycle from Ugarit resembles *Enuma Elish* insofar as it describes a conflict among the gods that ends in the establishment of a king (in this case, Baal). The Ugaritic text does not discuss the creation of the world, but it can be read as an account of how things came to be the way they are. The first episode of the myth begins when Yamm (Sea) demands that the assembly of the gods surrender Baal into his power. The gods are intimidated by the violent approach of the messengers, and El agrees to hand Baal over. Baal, however, refuses to submit. Instead he gets two clubs, and smashes Sea on the skull and kills him. Another passage in the myth says that Baal finished off Lotan, the fleeing serpent, the seven-headed monster. This is probably another way of referring to the same victory. Lotan appears in the Bible as Leviathan (Isa 27:1; Job 3:8; 41:1; Pss 74:13-14; 104:26).

Bronze figurine of Baal, the Canaanite warrior god.



A second episode of the myth begins with the construction of Baal's house and a celebratory banquet. The third episode presents a more serious challenge to Baal, on the part of Mot, or Death. Baal is terrified, and declares that he is Mot's servant forever. The story vividly describes how Death swallows Baal. Eventually, Baal is rescued by his sister Anat, who splits Death with a sword. Baal then returns to life, and the heavens rain down oil, and the wadis (or gullies) run with honey. Finally there is a tussle between Baal and Mot.

One lip to the earth, one lip to the heavens;
he stretches his tongue to the stars.
Baal must enter inside him;
He must go down into his mouth,
Like an olive cake, the earth's produce, the fruit of the trees.

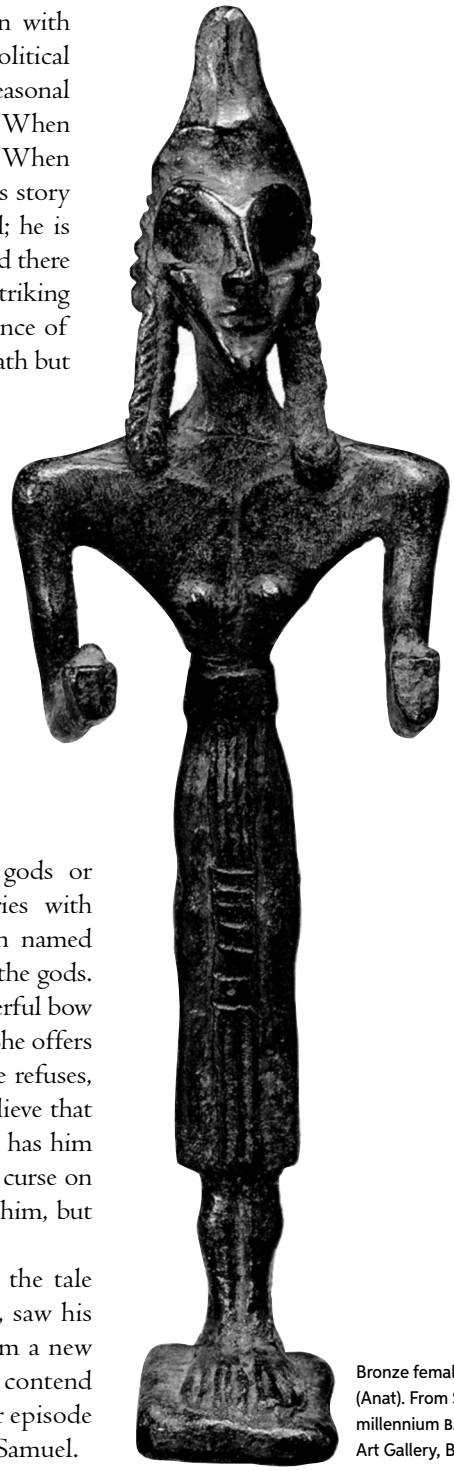
(Coogan and Smith, *Stories*, 141)

While the Baal cycle has much in common with *Enuma Elish,* it does not seem to have the same political implications. Rather, it seems to reflect the seasonal changes, at least in the struggle of Baal and Mot. When Baal dies, there is no rain, and the fields are dry. When he comes back to life, the rain comes again. This story is not concerned with morality. Mot is not evil; he is just a power that must be given his due. In the end there is some equilibrium between Baal and Mot. A striking feature of the Canaanite mythology is the violence of the goddess Anat, who not only dismembers Death but also berates the high god El on occasion and threatens to smash his skull if he does not comply with her wishes.

Baal's victory over the Sea is more decisive. We may imagine that the image of a monster with seven heads was suggested by the waves of the sea, beating against the Mediterranean coast. Both Sea and Death may be considered chaos monsters: they are forces that threaten the survival of life. In this they resemble Tiamat in the Babylonian myth. Baal, like Marduk, is a god who protects life, but Baal has much stronger overtones of fertility.

All the characters in the Baal myth are gods or goddesses. But the Canaanites also had stories with human heroes. One such story tells of a man named Danel, who had no son and besought one from the gods. He is given a son named Aqhat, who has a wonderful bow that attracts the attention of the goddess Anat. She offers Aqhat gold and silver for the bow and, when he refuses, she offers him immortality. Aqhat refuses to believe that this is possible and goes on to insult Anat, who has him killed in revenge by a vulture. Danel then puts a curse on nature. Aqhat's sister Paqhat sets out to avenge him, but the end of the story is lost.

Another cycle of stories from Ugarit tells the tale of a king named Keret or Kirta, who, like Job, saw his numerous family destroyed. The gods grant him a new family, but he is afflicted by illness and has to contend with a challenge to his rule by his son. The latter episode recalls the revolt of David's son Absalom in 2 Samuel.



Bronze female figurine (Anat). From Syria, second millennium B.C.E. Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.

EGYPTIAN RELIGION

As in Mesopotamia and Canaan, religion in ancient Egypt was subject to local variations. The Old Kingdom, in the second half of the third millennium B.C.E., had its capital at Memphis. The preeminent god was the creator-god Ptah. The priests of Heliopolis, however, exalted the god Atum as creator. The New Kingdom, in the second half of the second millennium, had its capital at Thebes in Middle Egypt, and here the god Amun came to prominence, and was linked with the sun-god Re. Several different gods appear as creators in Egyptian myths: Ptah, Re, Atum, Amun, Khnum, but there is only one creator in any given myth. The sun-god Re was universally worshiped and appears in almost every creation myth, although his role varies. The process of creation also varied. In the theology of Heliopolis, the sun-god emerged from the abyss on a primal mound, and created the first pair of deities by masturbation or spittle. The god Ptah was said to conceive in his heart the things he wanted to create and bring them into existence by uttering a word. The god Khnum was a potter-god, who fashioned human beings as a potter fashions clay. The models of creation by a word and of fashioning like a potter appear in the Bible, but on the whole the Bible is much closer to the idiom of the Canaanite and Mesopotamian myths than to the Egyptian.

Gold mask of Tutankhamun. He is wearing the royal nemes headdress and ceremonial false beard.

The Egyptian creation stories place less emphasis on conflict than *Enuma Elish* or the Baal myth. The main mythical conflict in Egyptian tradition was the conflict of Horus and Seth. Seth is the symbol of chaos and evil (the Greeks identified him with Typhon). He murders his brother and rival, Osiris. Isis, widow and sister of Osiris, recovers his body, and conceives his son Horus. Horus engages in many struggles with Seth and eventually defeats him. The pharaoh was regarded as the living Horus and after death was identified with Osiris. Osiris became the king of the dead, and symbolized the hope for eternal life.

One of the most striking features of ancient Egyptian culture was the pervasive belief in life after death. It is to this belief that we owe the pyramids. Many of the artifacts that stock the Egyptian section of modern museums were discovered in tombs, where they had been buried as provisions for the deceased in the afterlife.

There is a considerable corpus of Egyptian literature that deals in some way with death and the afterlife. The most ancient corpus of Egyptian religious texts is the Pyramid texts, spells for the protection of the deceased inscribed on the inside walls of the pyramids. In the Middle Kingdom, such spells were inscribed on the panels of wooden coffins, and are called the Coffin texts. In the New Kingdom many of these spells appear on papyrus scrolls in Books of the Dead.

One episode in the history of Egyptian religion may be relevant to the development of monotheism in Israel. This was the religious reform of Pharaoh Amenophis IV, also known as Akhenaten (ca. 1350 B.C.E.). This pharaoh broke with the traditional cult of Amun at Thebes. He moved his capital to Amarna or Akhetaten, farther north on the Nile, and concentrated worship on one god alone, Aten, the solar disk. (This period is known as the Amarna period. It is also famous for the Amarna letters, sent to the pharaoh by his vassals in Canaan, describing conditions there.) Akhenaten focused all worship on Aten, identified with Re, the sun-god, who had given birth to himself and was beyond compare. He was supreme and all-powerful, the creator and sustainer of the universe. Scholars dispute whether this cult is properly described as monotheistic. It is not clear that Akhenaten denied the existence of other gods. But it certainly came closer to monotheism than any other cult in the Near East before the rise of Israel. Akhenaten died in the seventeenth year of his rule. After his death, his successor Tutankhaten changed his name to Tutankhamun, and moved the royal residence from Amarna to the ancient site of Memphis, south of modern Cairo. Akhenaten's monuments were destroyed or concealed, and the royal cult returned to the old ways.

CONCLUSION

The material reviewed in this chapter is meant to give an impression of the world of the second millennium B.C.E. and the ways in which people imagined gods and goddesses. The Bible claims that Moses received a new revelation, but even a new revelation was of necessity expressed in language and imagery that were already current. The Hebrew language was a Canaanite dialect, and Canaanite was a Semitic language, like Akkadian. Israelite religion, too, did not emerge in a vacuum. Its novel aspects came into being as modifications of beliefs and practices that had been current for centuries. The Hebrew language uses the word *El* for God, and the term inevitably carried with it associations of the Canaanite high god. The biblical creation stories draw motifs from the myths of Atrahasis and *Enuma Elish* and from the epic of Gilgamesh. In short, much of the language and imagery of the Bible was culture specific, and was deeply imbedded in the traditions of the Near East.

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CHAPTER 2

The Nature of the Pentateuchal Narrative

The Pentateuch appears in our Bible as a single continuous narrative but clearly includes very diverse materials. In this chapter we discuss problems with the traditional attribution of the Pentateuch to Moses and indications of multiple authorship. We will also consider what has been the dominant explanation of the Pentateuch's composition among modern scholars, the Documentary Hypothesis, and criticisms that have been raised against it.

MOSAIC AUTHORSHIP

The first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy; collectively known as the Pentateuch) tell the story from creation to the death of Moses. These books are traditionally known as the Torah, and as the books of Moses. The Torah is commonly, but not quite accurately, translated as "Law." Much of the Pentateuch is a presentation of laws, but Genesis and the first half of Exodus consist of narratives.

The problematic nature of Mosaic authorship was noticed at least as early as the Middle Ages. The medieval Jewish scholar Ibn Ezra (twelfth century) noted that Gen 12:6, "the Canaanites were then in the land," must have been written at a later time, when this was no longer the case. Similarly, Gen 36:31, which refers to "the kings who reigned in the land of Edom, before any king reigned over the Israelites," must have been written after the establishment of the monarchy. Others noted that Moses could not have written the account of his own death, at the end of Deuteronomy. Attention was gradually drawn to various repetitions and contradictions that suggested that the Torah was not the work of any one author but was rather a compilation long after the time of Moses. Such observations proliferated in the wake of the Reformation, when the Bible was subjected to a new level of scrutiny.

A major advance in the study of the Pentateuch is credited to Jean Astruc, a convert to Catholicism who became private physician to King Louis XV. In 1735, Astruc observed

Sculpture of Moses by Michelangelo Buonarroti, in the church of San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome, Italy.

that in some passages God is called by the general Hebrew word for God, *Elohim,* while in others he is called by the proper name Yahweh. (It is often written without vowels, YHWH, so as not to profane the name by pronouncing it. Jewish tradition substitutes the word *Adonai,* "the LORD." The mongrel form "Jehovah" is a combination of the consonants of YHWH, or JHVH, with the vowels of *Adonai*.) Astruc supposed that different source documents had been woven together in the composition of Genesis.

Astruc's observation was gradually developed into a theory of the composition of the entire Pentateuch. The book of Deuteronomy was recognized as a distinct source. A distinction was made between passages that refer to God as Elohim. Some of these (e.g., Gen 1:1—2:4a, and various passages dealing with genealogies) were recognized as part of a Priestly source (P) that is represented extensively in Leviticus. The remaining narrative material was seen as a combination of Yahwistic source (J, following the German spelling Jahweh) and an Elohistic one (E). From the 1860s, P was viewed as the latest (or next to latest) document, and the order was established as J, E, D, P (or J, E, P, D). The theory received its classic formulation from Julius Wellhausen in the 1870s and 1880s.

The "Documentary Hypothesis," the view that the Pentateuch is a combination of (at least) four different documents, enjoyed the status of scholarly orthodoxy for about a century. Many variations of the theory were proposed, but the four-source theory was by far the dominant view. Only in the last quarter of the twentieth century did it come to be widely questioned. Before we can evaluate these objections, however, we need to appreciate the observations on which the hypothesis was based.

INDICATIONS OF MULTIPLE AUTHORSHIP

In Exod 6:2-3: "God also spoke to Moses and said to him: 'I am YHWH. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but by my name YHWH I did not make myself known to them.' " Yet in Gen 4:26 people began to call upon the name of YHWH in the time of Enosh, grandson of Adam. God is often called YHWH in his dealings with the patriarchs, especially with Abraham. It is apparent, then, that Exod 6:2 comes from a different source than these passages in Genesis.

The variation in divine names is by no means the only criterion. In numerous cases we have doublets, or variant forms of the same story. The account of creation in Gen 1:1—2:3 is quite different from the story of Adam and Eve. Two versions of the flood story are intertwined in Genesis 6–9. Abraham identifies his wife Sarah as his sister to a foreign king in two separate stories (in chaps. 12 and 20). In a third story, Isaac identifies his wife Rebekah as his sister (chap. 26). There are two accounts of God's covenant with Abraham (chaps. 15 and 17), two accounts of Abraham's dealings with Hagar and Ishmael (chaps. 16 and 21), two accounts of the naming of Beersheba (chaps. 21 and 26). There are variant accounts of the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus 14–15, and different accounts of the revelation of the commandments in Exodus 19–20 and in Deuteronomy. The mountain of the revelation is variously named Sinai or Horeb. The

Decalogue (Ten Commandments) is given three times, with some variations (Exod 20:1-17; 34:10-28; Deut 5:6-18). The list of forbidden animals is given twice (Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14). Many further examples could be given.

The argument that these duplications result from the combination of different documents can be well illustrated from the story of the flood, where J and P versions of the story can be separated. The two versions have not been preserved in full. Noah is never instructed to build the ark in J. But the outline of the two stories is clear. In one account Noah takes only one pair of animals into the ark. In the other he takes seven pairs. In one account the flood lasts 150 days; in the other, 40 days and 40 nights. Moreover, these two accounts can be aligned with strands or sources elsewhere in Genesis. There are clear links between the Priestly version and the Priestly account of creation in Gen 1:1—2:3, typified by the command to be fruitful and multiply. The anthropomorphic character of God in the J account (he regrets that he made humankind, and is pleased by the odor of sacrifice) is typical of the J source.

The example of the flood should suffice to show that sources are combined in the Pentateuch at least in some cases. It also shows that it is possible to line up consistent features of these sources in different passages. Proponents of the Documentary Hypothesis insist that consistent profiles can be established for each of the four sources, with strands that run through several biblical books.

Profiles of the Sources

The Priestly document is the easiest source to recognize. The dry, formulaic style is familiar from the account of creation in Genesis 1. God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. It is marked by a strong interest in genealogies, in dates, and in ritual observance (the Creator observes the Sabbath by resting on the seventh day). The book of Leviticus is quintessential Priestly material, as is the description of the tabernacle in Exodus 25–31 and 35–40. In P, history is punctuated by a series of covenants, with Noah, Abraham, and finally Moses. P has no angels, dreams, or talking animals. There is little dispute about the identification of P, although its date remains very controversial. I shall examine this strand of the Pentateuch in more detail in chapter 7.

THE FLOOD STORY IN GENESIS 6–9

J, the Yahwist	P, the Priestly source
6:5-8, 9b	6:9a, 10-22
7:1-5, 8a, 10, 12	7:6-7, 8b-9, 11, 13-16a
7:16b-17a, 23; 8:2b-3a	7: 17b-22, 24—8:2a; 8:3b-5
8:6, 8-12, 13b	8:7, 13a, 14-19
8:20-22	9:1-19