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**SECOND EDITION**



# The IVP ATLAS of BIBLE HISTORY



InterVarsity Press  
ivpress.com

Taken from *The IVP Atlas of Bible History* by Paul Lawrence.

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Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL. [www.ivpress.com](http://www.ivpress.com)

# Introduction

## **The scope of this book**

This Atlas spans over two millennia of history from Abraham, placed approximately at 2000 BC, through to the Revelation seen by the apostle John, which closes the New Testament at the end of the first century AD. These limits are expanded by consideration of the biblical book of Genesis before Abraham, by surveys of Mesopotamia and Egypt, and by a look at the spread of Christianity in the first three centuries after the last book of the New Testament had been written.

Geographically this Atlas is not confined to the modern state of Israel and the West Bank, for about 40 per cent of the Bible is set outside this area or addresses people living outside it. In its widest sense the Bible world stretches from Spain to Iran, from Yemen (the Sheba/Saba of the Old Testament) to Philippi in northern Greece. Trade widens these horizons even further to encompass India and possibly China and the east coast of Africa.

The Bible is linked to all of these disparate historical periods and areas. In this Atlas the unfolding story of Bible history is presented as chronologically as is practically possible, supplemented by nine special features.

## **The Bible as history**

The main purpose of this Atlas is to present the broad sweep of Bible history. To enter into academic controversies, unless they effect our understanding of the flow of Bible history, is beyond its scope. It is our contention that history should primarily be based on written sources and, although the writer is aware of a large body of critical scholarship connected with the Bible, theoretical reconstructions of the past based on minimal or no evidence have no place here. Ancient writers lived much closer to the events they described than we do, so it is our basic policy to show them healthy respect. This applies to the writers of the Bible just as much as to other ancient historians, whose work we sometimes also cite.

Since between two to four millennia separate us from the people and civilizations that produced the Bible, it should not surprise us that some of its details are obscure or difficult to understand; but it is our belief that such details do not obscure the much larger picture of the Bible that we are attempting to paint.

## **The Bible as geography**

Bible history is played out on a large geographical stage. The locations of political powers such as Israel, Moab and Rome are known, though the extent of territory they ruled varied historically. Many of the important locations of the biblical world are still significant today, such as Jerusalem, Damascus and Athens. Often, unless there is inscriptional evidence, the identity of a site remains uncertain. The exact locations of such sites as Libnah and Ziklag in the Old Testament and Emmaus and Arimathea in the New are unknown.

## **The Bible as theology**

The broad flow of Bible history provides the setting for the main message of the Bible: how God provided in Jesus a saviour for rebellious humankind. The God of the Bible is the Bible's greatest unifying theme. For the Hebrew prophet Isaiah (c. 700 BC), there is a graphic contrast between God and his creation. The people of the world are like grasshoppers, but the living God of the Bible 'sits enthroned above the circle of the earth' (Isaiah 40:22). To the biblical writers he alone, it would seem, has the true perspective on Bible history. It would seem arrogance on our part to suppose otherwise.

# Chronology of the Events of the Bible and the Ancient Near East



BIBLE EVENTS

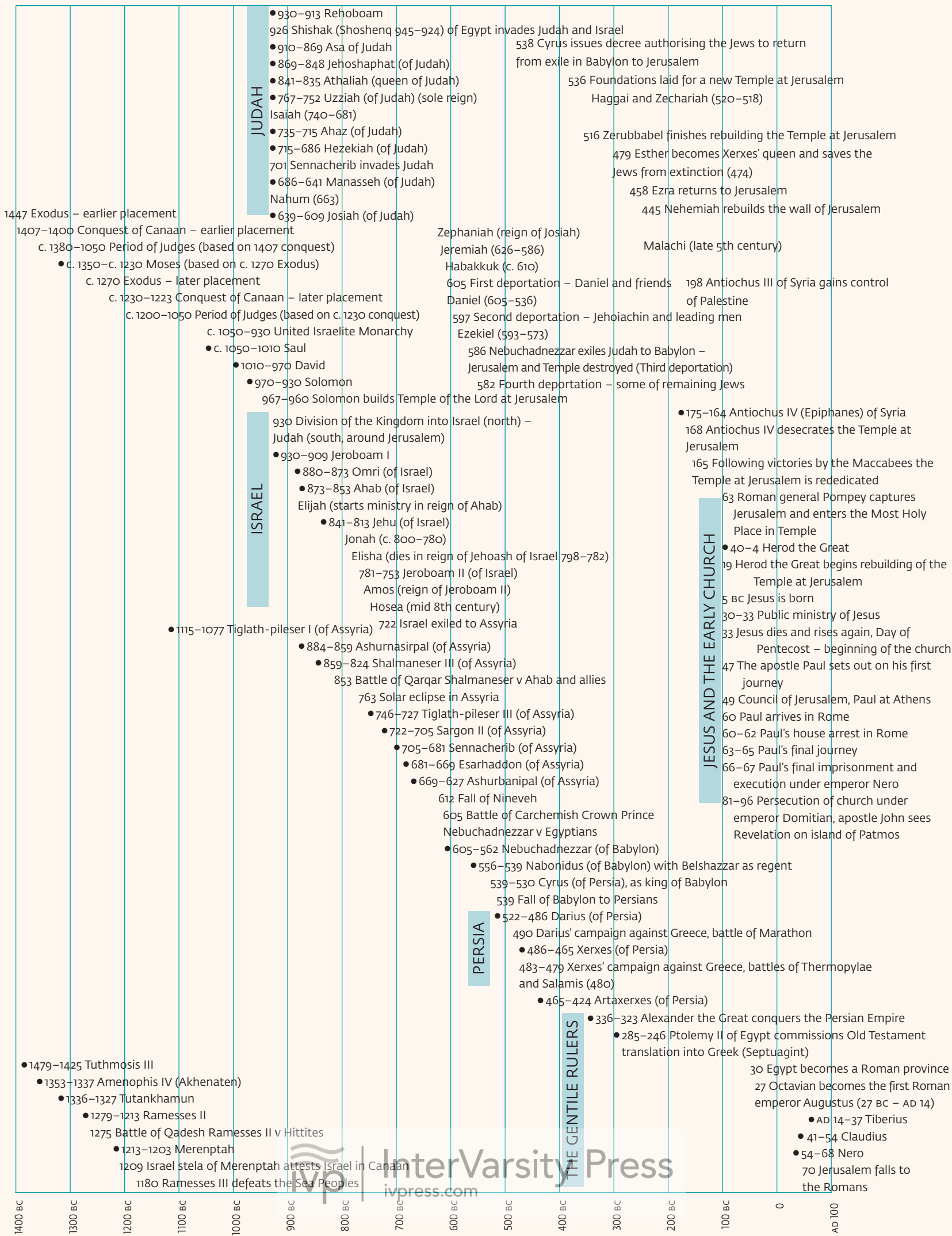
- 2167–1992 Abraham (based on 1447 Exodus)
- c. 1990–c. 1815 Abraham (based on c. 1270 Exodus)
- c. 1910–c. 1800 Joseph (based on 1447 Exodus)
- c. 1730–c. 1620 Joseph (based on c. 1270 Exodus)
- 1527–1407 Moses (based on 1447 Exodus)

MESOPOTAMIA

- 3100 Beginnings of writing in Mesopotamia and Egypt
- 2750–2371 Early Dynastic Period in Mesopotamia
  - 2700 Gilgamesh
- 2600–2400 Royal Cemetery of Ur
- 2371–2230 Dynasty of Akkad
  - 2371–2316 Sargon
- 2113–2006 Third Dynasty of Ur
  - 2113–2096 Ur-Nammu
- 1894–1595 First Dynasty of Babylon
  - 1792–1750 Hammurabi
- 1595–1171 Kassite Dynasty of Babylon
- 2700–2136 Old Kingdom
  - 2691–2672 Djoser (Step pyramid)
  - 2593–2570 Kheops (Khufu) (Great pyramid)
- c. 2136–2023 First Intermediate Period
- 2116–1795 Middle Kingdom
- 1900–1800 First examples of alphabetic writing in Egypt
- 1795–1630 Second Intermediate Period
- 1540–1070 New Kingdom

EGYPT





# Israel in Old and New Testament Times

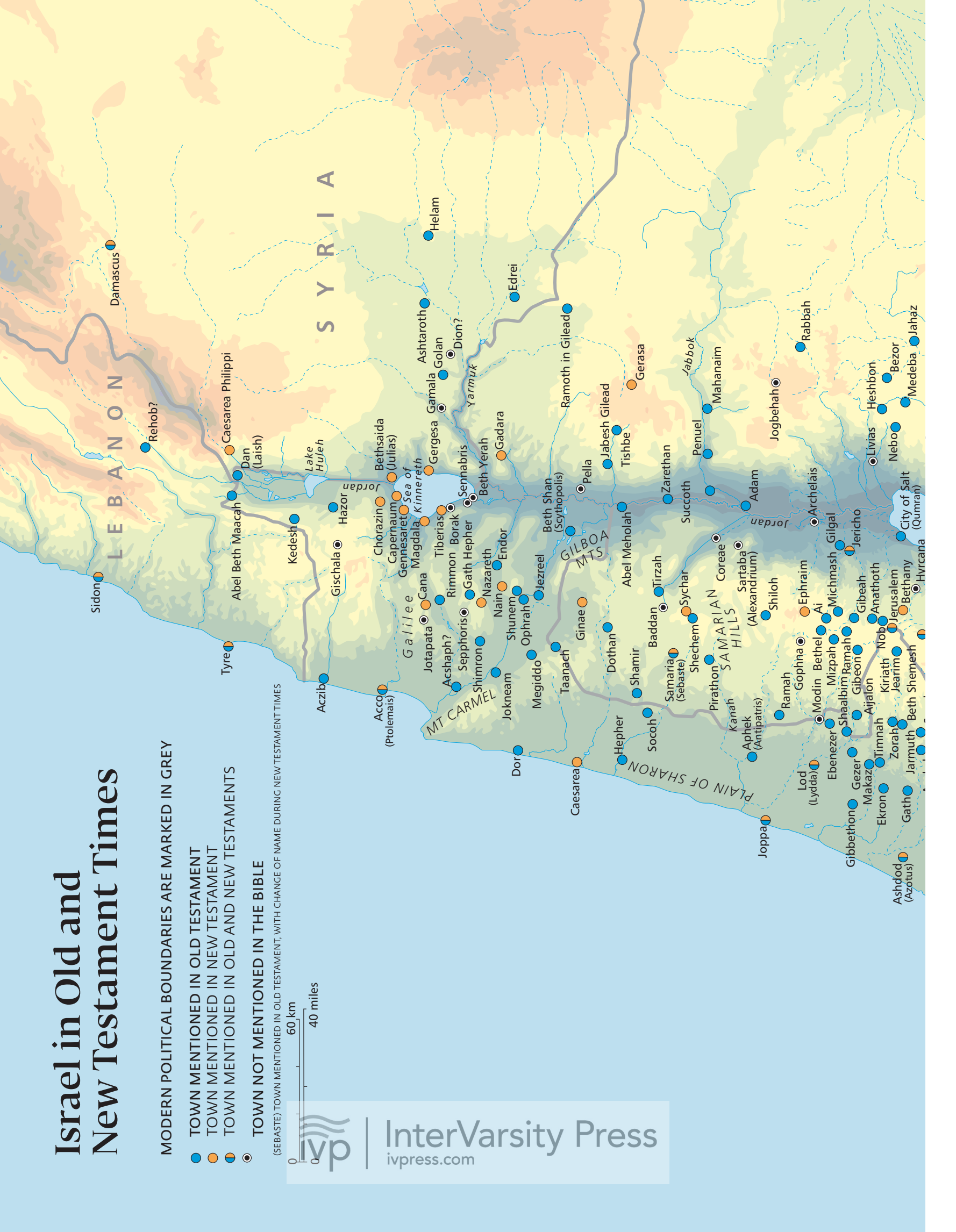
MODERN POLITICAL BOUNDARIES ARE MARKED IN GREY

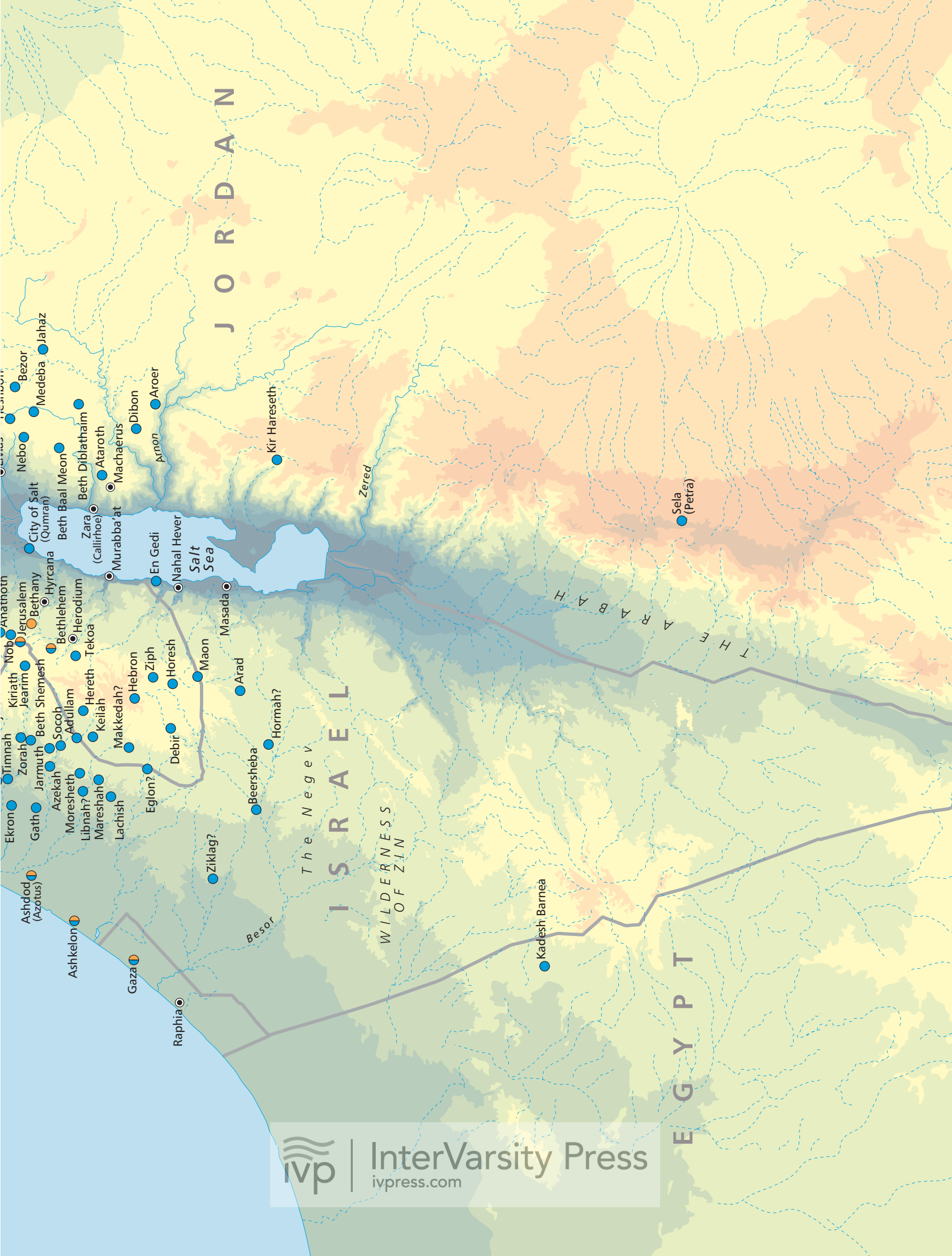
- TOWN MENTIONED IN OLD TESTAMENT
- TOWN MENTIONED IN NEW TESTAMENT
- TOWN MENTIONED IN OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS
- TOWN NOT MENTIONED IN THE BIBLE

(SEBASTE) TOWN MENTIONED IN OLD TESTAMENT, WITH CHANGE OF NAME DURING NEW TESTAMENT TIMES



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JORDAN

ISRAEL

EGYPT

The Negev

WILDERNESS OF ZIN

ARABAH



# What Is the Bible?

## One Bible, two testaments

The word 'Bible' is derived from a Greek word 'biblia' meaning 'books'. Essentially the Bible is a collection of sixty-six books, divided into two sections of unequal length, which Christians call the Old and New Testaments. 'Testament' in biblical terminology means 'covenant', an agreement made between God and his people.

The Old Testament claims to be a record of God's revelation to his people, Israel. It was written by some thirty different writers over a period of approximately a thousand years. Its primary language was Hebrew, the language of the Israelites, although a few short portions were written in Aramaic, a Semitic language related to Hebrew that the Jews learned during their exile in Babylon.<sup>1</sup>

The New Testament purports to be a record of Jesus' life and ministry and the establishment of the church. It was written in Greek by some nine different writers in the second half of the first century AD. Whereas the Old Testament was God's message to Israel communicated 'at many times and in various ways',<sup>2</sup> the New Testament records God's word made flesh in the person of his son Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

The term 'Bible' is used differently by Jews and Christians. Jews use the term 'Bible' for what Christians call the 'Old Testament'. Christians use the term 'Bible' for both Old and New Testaments. The latter is the use in this book.

## A sacred book in a historical setting

The Old Testament owes its preservation to the fact that it was perceived by Jewish scribes and priests to be a sacred book. Similarly, the New Testament was viewed by the fathers of the early Christian church as sacred – sacred because in the pages of the Bible the living God claims to reveal himself to humankind. Most of the Bible is not however written in the form of a theological treatise. It is an account of how God revealed himself to many different men and women over many centuries, real men and real women each living in a particular place at a particular time. The events described in

the Bible are rooted in history – the history of the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world, to be precise. This Atlas sets the main events of Bible history in their wider historical setting.

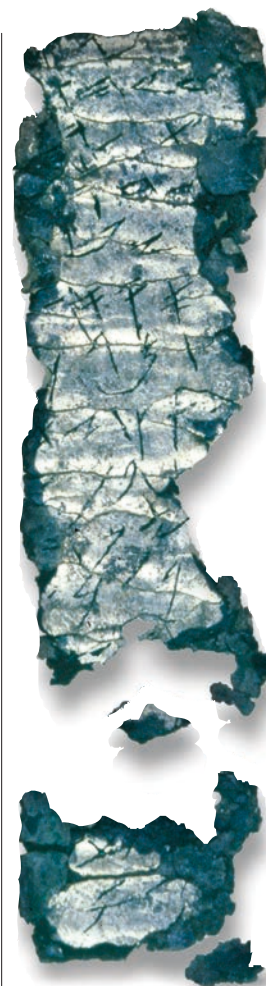
## The geographical setting

We should not forget that nearly two thousand years have elapsed since the last events described in the Bible. Many of the cities mentioned in the Bible have been destroyed, much of the countryside has been subject to the ravages of war and general neglect. As a result the geographical settings given by scholars to many of the incidents described in the Bible are general rather than specific.

## Archaeological and historical evidence

Archaeological discoveries over the past two hundred years have enabled a number of places mentioned in the Bible to be pinpointed; King Hezekiah's water tunnel at Jerusalem and the theatre at Ephesus in Turkey are good examples.<sup>4</sup> However, archaeology has done more than identify sites. We can see buildings and artefacts used by people from Bible times: city walls, weapons, cooking utensils and pottery, to name but four examples. Since precise dates cannot always be given, such evidence may be difficult to interpret. Archaeology has also revealed many written documents. Many of these are simply lists of commodities or receipts, but some record historical events. Historical texts from the peoples of the ancient Near East and the literature of Greece and Rome are regularly used in this work to shed further light on Bible history.

Some of the incidents that occur in the Bible can be illuminated to some extent by material evidence, but the vast majority cannot. So, when all is said and done, the role of archaeology is limited; it cannot bring to life people's personal experiences of the God of the Bible. If we want to know what happened when God gave the Law to Moses at Sinai or what happened at the empty tomb of Jesus (to cite examples that



ABOVE: Silver amulet from Ketef Hinnom on the western edge of Jerusalem. When unrolled this text was only about 9 cm (3½ in) long. It contained many of the words of the priestly blessing from the Old Testament book of Numbers 6:24–26 as well as other words not found in the Bible. The writing suggests a date in the seventh or sixth century BC.

## The books of the Old Testament

Genesis	Nehemiah	Obadiah
Exodus	Esther	Jonah
Leviticus	Job	Micah
Numbers	Psalms	Nahum
Deuteronomy	Proverbs	Habakkuk
Joshua	Ecclesiastes	Zephaniah
Judges	Song of Songs	Haggai
Ruth	Isaiah	Zechariah
1 Samuel	Jeremiah	Malachi
2 Samuel	Lamentations	<i>The following books from the Apocrypha are also cited</i>
1 Kings	Ezekiel	1 Maccabees
2 Kings	Daniel	2 Maccabees
1 Chronicles	Hosea	
2 Chronicles	Joel	
Ezra	Amos	



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RIGHT: The Elizabeth Hay Bechtel Psalms scroll from cave 11 at Qumran. Apart from a few minor variations this scroll agrees with the later Masoretic or traditional Hebrew text of the Old Testament. However, it has some additional psalms not found in the Bible. It is dated c. AD 30–50.



RIGHT: The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) from one of the earliest examples of a complete Old Testament in Hebrew. The so-called St Petersburg Codex of the Old Testament dates from AD 1008.



are fundamental to Judaism and Christianity respectively) we have to trust the biblical record; there is nothing else beside.

### The Old Testament

The Old Testament itself consists of three main parts, called the Law, the Prophets and the Writings in Jewish terminology. The 'Law' is the first five books attributed to Moses. The 'Prophets' consists of all the prophets except Daniel, but includes the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. The 'Writings' is everything else. This is further reduced to 'the Law and the Prophets' in the New Testament.<sup>5</sup> In the Christian Bible the order of the historical books is somewhat more chronological. The wisdom literature is placed after the histories, with the prophets at the end.

### The New Testament

The New Testament consists of two main parts: the four Gospels and the letters of Paul and other leaders of the early church. Between the Gospels and the letters is Luke's account of the growth of the early church called 'The Acts of the Apostles'. The New Testament concludes with the 'Revelation', a glimpse into heaven and the future as seen by the apostle John.

### The Apocrypha

The books of the Apocrypha (a Greek term meaning 'hidden') were written by Jewish religious writers in the period between the Old and New Testaments. Some Apocryphal books, such as Ecclesiasticus and Tobit, turned up among the 'Dead Sea Scrolls' at Qumran. Later Jewish and Protestant Christian opinion did not regard the Apocrypha as authoritative or 'canonical'. The Catholic and Orthodox Churches accord the Apocrypha 'canonical' status, but there is not complete agreement as to which writings should be included. Of the Apocryphal books we quote only 1 and 2 Maccabees; they are valuable historical sources.

#### REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Ezra 4:8 – 6:18; 7:12–26; Jeremiah 10:11; Daniel 2:4–7:28
- <sup>2</sup> Hebrews 1:1–2
- <sup>3</sup> John 1:14
- <sup>4</sup> 2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:30; Acts 19:29
- <sup>5</sup> Matthew 7:12; 22:40

#### The books of the New Testament

Matthew	1 Timothy
Mark	2 Timothy
Luke	Titus
John	Philemon
Acts	Hebrews
Romans	James
1 Corinthians	1 Peter
2 Corinthians	2 Peter
Galatians	1 John
Ephesians	2 John
Philippians	3 John
Colossians	Jude
1 Thessalonians	Revelation
2 Thessalonians	

# Creation

## In the beginning

'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.' So begins the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. The Bible nowhere attempts to prove the existence of God; it simply states that he was there 'In the beginning'. Incidentally, the title of the Bible's first book, Genesis, comes from its title in Greek meaning 'origin'. The words 'the heavens and the earth' mean the universe. For the Bible writers nothing (except God) existed before, so everything in the universe was created out of nothing by God.

Although the Bible tells us that God made the heavens and the earth it does not give precise details of how he did it. The Lord's question to Job 'Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me if you understand' applies just as much to modern people with all their scientific knowledge as it did to Job perhaps 3,500 years ago. We have to face the fact that no human being was a witness to creation. Whether we accept it or not, Genesis claims to be God's own account. It is this account that gave birth to the biblical world-view, a view we must attempt to understand if we are to understand the Bible.

The account of creation in Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 enables us to make the following observations:

1. The Genesis 1 account is structured in terms of six days, which are further defined by the oft repeated phrase 'and there was evening, and there was morning'. The pattern of six days of work followed by a day of rest was to provide a model for the sabbath principle later to be taught in Exodus 20:8–11.

2. The account was not written by someone with modern scientific understanding. Light is called into being on the first day,<sup>2</sup> yet the sun, moon and stars which give light to our planet are not made until the fourth day. The moon is called the 'lesser light'. That it simply reflects the sun's light was almost certainly unknown to the author.

3. The Bible's account of creation is earth-centred; the emphasis is not on space. Indeed the creation of the stars is dismissed with less than half a verse in Genesis 1:16 ('and also the stars'). Some six thousand stars are visible to the naked eye, yet within the observable universe, according to modern estimates, there are some 100 billion stars in our galaxy alone, and a 100 billion galaxies.

4. The writer avoids mentioning the sun and moon by name, maybe because of the widespread worship of celestial bodies in the nations around.

5. God was pleased with his creation. Six times we read 'God saw that it was good.' Genesis 1 concludes: 'God saw all that he had made and it was very good.'

6. God is the creator. He is separate from his creation, not part of it.

7. Human beings are viewed as the climax of God's creation. Of all God's creatures human beings alone are made in God's

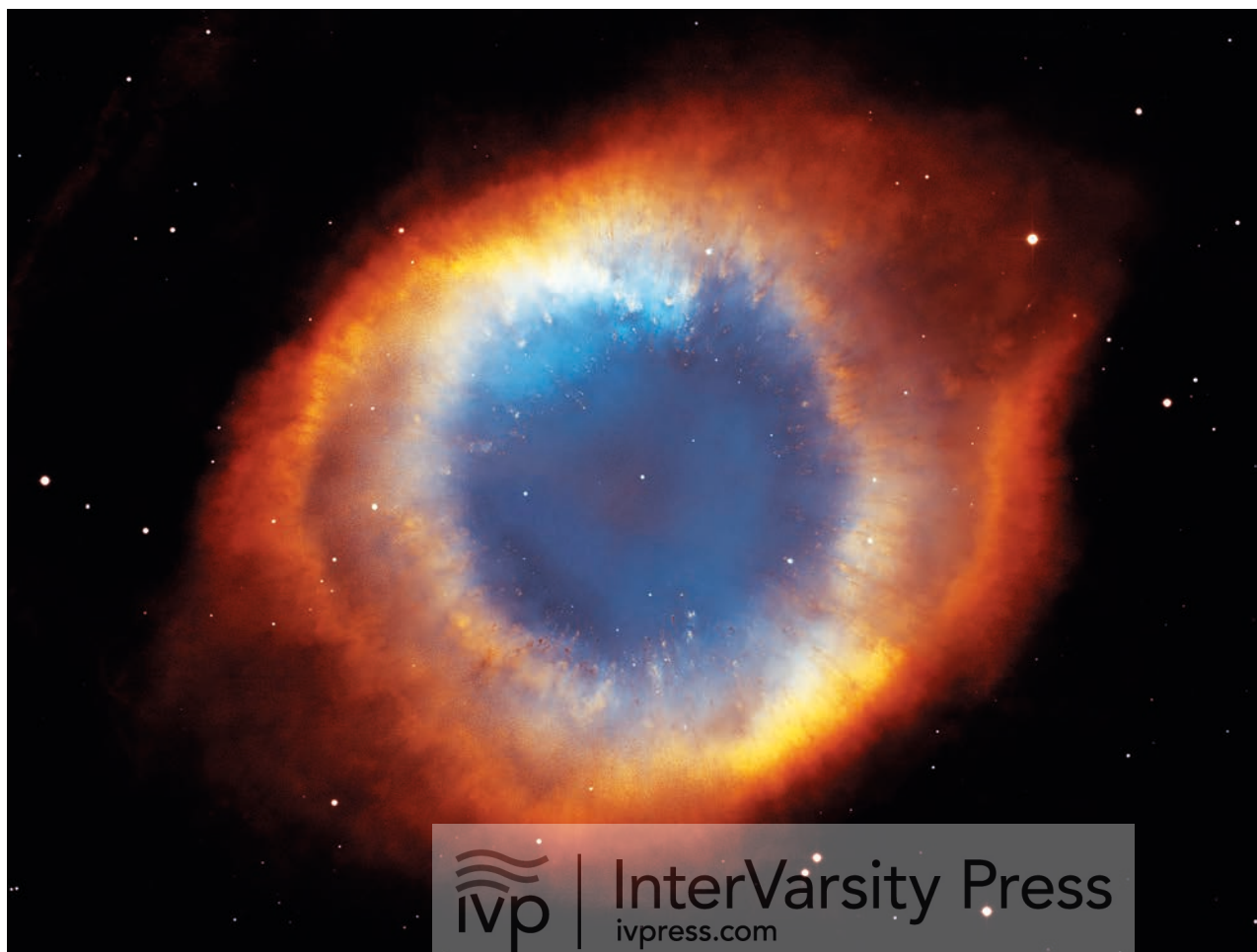
## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Job 38:4
- <sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:3
- <sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:26–27
- <sup>4</sup> Genesis 2:16–17, 3:17; Romans 5:12
- <sup>5</sup> Matthew 1:1–17
- <sup>6</sup> 1 Chronicles 3:11–12
- <sup>7</sup> *Atrahasis Epic* 1.223–26
- <sup>8</sup> *Enuma elish* 6.32–36

## RIGHT: The location of the rivers mentioned in Genesis 2

This is a possible solution based on the identification of the river and place names that are known from antiquity. Some consider that the geography was later sufficiently changed by Noah's flood to invalidate direct comparison with modern geographical features.

LEFT: One of the nearest nebulae to Earth, the coil shaped Helix Nebula, as viewed through the NASA Hubble Space Telescope. NASA has nicknamed it 'the eye of God'.



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image, in his likeness.<sup>3</sup> In Genesis 2:4–25 more details of the direct, special and personal creation of the first humans are given. The man is made ‘from the dust of the ground’ and the woman from man.

Chapter 3 of Genesis states that it was the sin of the first humans that brought death into the world.<sup>4</sup>

### Chronological considerations

The question of when God created the world is not directly stated by the biblical writers (contrast the date given to the exodus in 1 Kings 6:1). Throughout the centuries scholars have added up the figures given in the genealogical lists in the book of Genesis and advanced their own dates. Most famous was that of 4004 BC, published by James Ussher (1581–1656), the Archbishop of Armagh, in his *Annales Veteris et Novi Testamenti* (1650–54). Such a method can be criticized on a number of counts, three of which are worthy of note here:

1. The writer of Genesis has two lists showing the line of descent from Adam to Noah (Genesis 5) and from Noah to Terah, the father of Abraham (Genesis 11). Both lists give ten generations, with the final patriarch in each list producing three sons (Shem, Ham and Japheth in the case of Noah in Genesis 5:32 and Abram, Nahor and Haran in the case of Terah in Genesis 11:26). The writer seems to have schematic as well as chronological considerations in mind, as is clearly the case with Matthew’s division of the genealogy of Jesus into three sets of fourteen generations at the beginning of his Gospel.<sup>5</sup>

2. A strict chronological approach to the data would mean that all the patriarchs of the Genesis 11 list would still have been living when Abram was fifty years old, and Eber would have been a contemporary of Jacob.

3. We know that the term ‘was the father of’ is sometimes used for ancestral relationships.

A classic case in point is Matthew 1:8 where Jehoram, ‘father’ of Uzziah, was actually his great-great grandfather.<sup>6</sup>

### The Garden of Eden

Genesis 2:8 states that the original home of Adam and Eve was ‘a garden in the east, in Eden’. Genesis 2:10–14 locates it where four rivers rose. From elsewhere in the Bible we know that the third and fourth rivers are the Tigris and Euphrates, which rise in eastern Turkey and flow through Iraq into the Persian Gulf. Cush, in the Old Testament, normally denotes Egypt south of Aswan and Sudan as far south as Khartoum, which would make the Gihon River, which winds through Cush, the Nile. The Pishon River, which ran through Havilah, could be a prehistoric river of Arabia flowing into the Persian Gulf. Havilah was famous for its gold. Hawlan, a gold-bearing region in western Arabia, may be Havilah. It is strange how the river that flowed through Eden could separate into four headwaters comprising such diverse rivers as suggested above. Perhaps the geography was later sufficiently changed by Noah’s flood to invalidate direct comparison with modern geographical features.

### Mesopotamian creation stories

The account of creation in Genesis is sometimes compared to creation stories from ancient Mesopotamia (modern Iraq). In the *Atrahasis Epic* of c. 1635 BC the mother goddess Mami (or Nintu), with the help of the wise god Ea, created humans out of clay mixed with the blood of a slain god named Aw-ilu.<sup>7</sup>

*Enuma elish* (‘When on high’), a Babylonian epic composed c. 1200 BC from older sources, narrates how the god Marduk used the blood of Qingu, the evil leader of the enemy gods whom he had slain, to create humankind with the help of Ea.<sup>8</sup> The only similarities between the *Enuma elish* and Genesis are the mention of ‘the deep’, the separation of heaven and earth, the divine element in humans, divine rest after creation and the task given to humans of working the soil. Much closer parallels exist between Genesis and various flood stories from Mesopotamia.



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