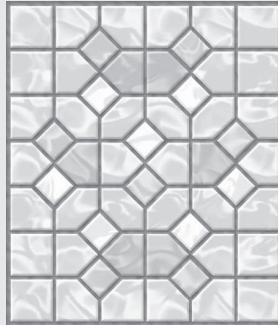


Second Edition

Exploring the BIBLE



STEPHEN L. HARRIS



Exploring the Bible

Second Edition

STEPHEN L. HARRIS

*Professor Emeritus
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Exploring the Bible, Second Edition

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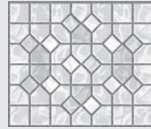
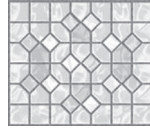


Table of Contents

	Preface	v	
	Part One	An Introduction to the Bible and the Biblical World	I
CHAPTER 1	The Bible: An Overview	3	
CHAPTER 2	How the Bible Was Created: Transmission, Canonization, and Translation	18	
CHAPTER 3	The Ancient Near East: The Environment That Produced the Bible	31	
	Part Two	The Torah (Divine Instruction)	49
CHAPTER 4	The Five Books of Torah (the Pentateuch): Themes and Theories	51	
CHAPTER 5	In the Beginning: The Book of Genesis	65	
CHAPTER 6	Freedom and Responsibility: The Book of Exodus	75	
CHAPTER 7	Law, Holiness, and Rebellion: The Books of Leviticus and Numbers	86	
CHAPTER 8	A New Vision of Moses' Teaching: The Book of Deuteronomy	93	
	Part Three	The Prophets I	101
CHAPTER 9	The Story of Ancient Israel: How the Promised Land Was Gained and Lost	103	
CHAPTER 10	Faith and War: The Book of Joshua	108	
CHAPTER 11	Yahweh's Warriors: The Book of Judges	116	
CHAPTER 12	The Rise of David and the Birth of a Kingdom: The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel	123	
CHAPTER 13	From the Glory of Solomon to Exile in Babylon: The Books of 1 and 2 Kings	131	
	Part Four	The Prophets II	147
CHAPTER 14	Israel's Spokespersons for God	149	
CHAPTER 15	Prophets to the Northern Kingdom: The Oracles of Amos and Hosea	157	
CHAPTER 16	Prophets of the Assyrian Threat: The Oracles of Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, and Nahum	162	
CHAPTER 17	Prophets of the Babylonian Crisis: The Oracles of Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Obadiah	172	
CHAPTER 18	Prophets in Exile: The Oracles of Ezekiel and Second Isaiah	180	

CHAPTER 19	After the Exile—Israel’s Last Prophets: The Oracles of Haggai, Zechariah, Third Isaiah, Joel, Malachi, and Jonah 188
Part Five	The Writings 197
CHAPTER 20	After the Exile: Israel’s Changing Life with God: Praise, Wisdom, and Reassessment 199
CHAPTER 21	The Postexilic Readjustment: The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah 203
CHAPTER 22	Worshiping at the Second Temple: Hebrew Poetry and the Book of Psalms 207
CHAPTER 23	Israel’s Wisdom Writers: The Books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes 214
CHAPTER 24	Festival Scrolls: The Books of Ruth, Song of Songs, Lamentations, and Esther 230
CHAPTER 25	Reinterpreting Israel’s History: The Books of 1 and 2 Chronicles 239
CHAPTER 26	Keeping God’s Law in a Hostile World: Revolt of the Maccabees and the Book of Daniel 244
CHAPTER 27	The Second Canon: Books of the Apocrypha 255
Part Six	The New Testament 267
CHAPTER 28	The World in Which Christianity Originated: Roman Power, Greek Culture, and the Cult of Deified Rulers 269
CHAPTER 29	First-Century Judaism: Diversity, Messianic Expectations, and the Birth of Christianity 286
CHAPTER 30	Telling Jesus’ Story: The Gospel of Mark 295
CHAPTER 31	The Synoptic Problem: The Gospel of Matthew and Its Relationship to the Gospels of Mark and Luke 311
CHAPTER 32	Jesus as a Savior for “All Nations”: The Gospel of Luke 329
CHAPTER 33	Another Way of Telling Jesus’ Story: The Gospel of John 340
CHAPTER 34	An Account of Early Christianity: The Book of Acts 354
CHAPTER 35	Paul and the Gentile Mission: Letters to Churches at Thessalonica, Corinth, Galatia, Rome, Philippi, and Colossae 367
CHAPTER 36	Continuing the Pauline Tradition: Second Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastoral Epistles 396
CHAPTER 37	General Letters on Faith and Behavior: Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles 406
CHAPTER 38	Continuing the Apocalyptic Hope: The Book of Revelation 417
CHAPTER 39	Our Biblical Legacy: Evolving Concepts of God 429
	Glossary 446
	Credits 473
	Index 474



Preface

Exploring the Bible is designed to help beginning students undertake their first systematic study of the Bible. Divided into six parts, this text opens with an overview of the Bible's contents, surveying the major themes of both the Old and the New Testament. Part One offers students a perspective from which to approach reading biblical literature, illustrating how the biblical books were transmitted to us and how biblical writers commonly adopted and transformed older traditions of the ancient Near East. Describing Israel's special relationship with God, this section also introduces readers to some of the methods scholars use to analyze and understand the biblical texts.

Surveying each of the Bible's major divisions, Parts Two through Six take students on a journey from the origins of ancient Israel and the teachings of Moses to the world of Jesus and the New Testament. Part Two examines the first section of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, the five books (Genesis through Deuteronomy) traditionally ascribed to Moses and known as the Torah (Divine Instruction). After describing scholarly theories of the Torah's composition, we place each Torah book in its literary, religious, and historical context. In Part Three, we discuss the historical narratives called the Former Prophets, which recount Israel's story from its settlement in Canaan (the Promised Land) to its conquest by Babylon in 587 BCE (the books of Joshua through Kings).

Part Four examines the individual books of Israelite prophecy, placing each in its historical environment, while Part Five surveys the Writings, the books of poetry, wisdom, and history produced mainly after Israel's exile in Babylon. In Part Six we first review the historical and cultural background of the New Testament, and then, beginning with the four Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, we investigate the major themes of each New Testament book. From the narratives about Jesus' life and teachings, to the letters of Paul, to the dazzling images of Revelation's promise of a "new heaven and a new earth," students learn of Christian origins and the birth and beliefs of a new global religion.



New Features

The second edition of *Exploring the Bible* contains several new features that make it even more useful in the classroom. A series of new boxes concisely highlights the Bible's "legacy," its continuing influence on contemporary thought, behavior, and ethical values. By underscoring the persistence and power of biblical ideas, these boxes heighten readers' awareness of the pervasiveness of biblical teachings in today's society. Discussions of numerous topics—from Gnosticism; to theories of biblical authorship; to the figure of Abraham in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; to Paul's conception of bodily transformation in the resurrection—have been clarified and updated to incorporate recent scholarship. Reorganization of the book into six sections also facilitates student learning, clearly showing the Bible's traditional divisions into the Torah ("Books of Moses"); the Former Prophets (historical narratives); the Latter Prophets (collections of prophetic sayings under the names of individual prophets); the Writings (diverse works of poetry and prose narrative); and the New Testament, the last a collection of Greek documents that Christian scribes added to a Greek edition of the Hebrew Bible (the Septuagint). Some sections of the book, such as the discussion of Israelite prophecy in Chapter 14, have been abridged for easier readability; new timelines have been added to illustrate the importance of crucial historical events; and virtually all of the "Recommended Reading" lists have been reworked to include both current scholarly references and the most accessible and helpful publications for beginning students.

This second edition concludes with an entirely rewritten chapter on the Bible's principal contribution to world religion, its multifaceted portrayal of God. In reading Chapter 39, "Our Biblical Legacy: Evolving Concepts of God," students can review virtually the entire historical course of biblical thought on the nature and character of the biblical God. By surveying the canonical authors' composite portrait of the Bible's leading figure, students will encounter the ethical complexity—and sometimes paradoxical quality—of the Jewish/Christian Deity.



Some Chapter-by-Chapter Highlights

Among the many changes incorporated into the new edition are the following:

Chapter 2

- An expanded coverage of the complexity of Gnostic Christianity, emphasizing the diversity and range of this early Christian movement

Chapter 5

- Two new legacy boxes highlighting the persistent controversy over the Genesis creation accounts and the strategic importance of Abraham in the Quran

Chapter 6

- A fresh discussion on the tension between absolute promises versus conditional agreements in biblical covenants. A new box on the Exodus legacy emphasizing its inspirational role in the global quest for freedom

Chapter 11

- A new feature on “The Women of Judges: A Challenge to Contemporary Ethics”

Chapter 13

- A new legacy box on the Deuteronomistic thesis: “The Ethical Meaning of History”

Chapter 19

- A new box on “The Prophets’ Legacy: Looking for God’s Will in the Present”

Chapter 23

- A new box on “Israel’s Wisdom Legacy: An Openness to the Universe”

Chapter 26

- A new box on “The Apocalyptic Legacy: Reorienting Prophecy toward the Future”

Chapter 30

- A new box on “A Markan Legacy: Awaiting the Second Coming.”

Chapter 32

- A new box “The Position of Women in the New Testament: A Mixed Legacy” surveys the roles of women in Jesus’ ministry and in the early church

Chapter 33

- A new box on “The Johannine Legacy: Jesus is Eternally Present”

Chapter 35

- A revised discussion of Paul’s opinions about same-sex love affairs and a new box on “Paul’s Legacy”

Chapter 36

- A new discussion on “The Problem of Pseudonymity” examines scholarly attitudes toward false authorship in the New Testament

Chapter 38

- A new box on “The Legacy of Revelation,” showing its continuing influence on contemporary apocalyptic movements

Chapter 39

- A completely revised survey of the multi-faceted biblical concepts of God, including a new box: “A Theological Scandal: God and Eternal Punishment”



Learning Aids

While adding features to make biblical studies more relevant and accessible, the new edition of *Exploring the Bible* also incorporates many pedagogical aids. Each chapter opens with a concise summary of key topics/themes. All important terms—persons, places, and concepts—are printed in **boldface**, listed alphabetically at the end of each chapter, and then defined in the extensive Glossary at the back of the book. To help students master the material, the presentation in every chapter is clear and direct, geared to the undergraduate with no previous exposure to the academic study of the Bible. At the end of every chapter are “Questions for Discussion and Review,” phrased to stimulate individual thought as well as class discussions. The updated “Recommended Reading” lists focus on standard references likely to be found in most college and university libraries, including one-volume Bible dictionaries, encyclopedia sets, and scholarly works calculated to enhance the learning experience and to provide resources for research papers.

Other learning tools include numerous charts, tables, boxes, and maps. From tables listing books of the Old Testament (also called the Tanakh) found in Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox Bibles, to summaries of major events in biblical history, to parallels among the four Gospels, students will find useful information at a glance. Boxes provide concise descriptions of topics that supplement the main text. These sidebars cover a wide range of subjects: the primal watery abyss in Genesis; Egyptian myths anticipating biblical concepts of creation; the gender of God; archaeology and the origins of Israel; Gospel concepts of the afterlife; Jesus’ final words; and milestones in the growth of Christianity.

Numerous maps show the topography of Palestine (the Promised Land); the ancient Near East; and the location of significant biblical cities and nations, as well as the vast geographical extent of the Roman Empire; the regions of Galilee and Judea where Jesus conducted his ministry; and the travel itineraries of Paul, the first great Christian missionary. The many illustrations depict important archaeological sites and artifacts, as well as later artists’ interpretations of biblical figures and events.

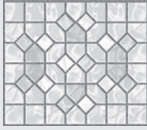


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PART ONE

An Introduction to the Bible and the Biblical World

CHAPTER 1

The Bible 3

CHAPTER 2

How the Bible Was Created 18

CHAPTER 3

The Ancient Near East 31

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CHAPTER I

The Bible

An Overview

Key Themes/Topics Divided into two main sections, the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Bible is a diverse anthology of documents composed over a span of about 1,100 years. Written in the Hebrew language (hence the name “Hebrew Bible”), the first section contains the story of ancient Israel, God’s chosen people. The Hebrew Bible is also known as the Tanakh, an acronym based on the first letter of each of its three major parts: *Torah* (Law or Instruction), *Nevi’im* (Prophets), and *Kethuvim* (Writings). The

Tanakh explores the partnership between God and Israel, with whom he concludes a series of covenants (pacts or agreements), including divine promises for a permanent homeland and other blessings. A collection of twenty-seven Greek books that the early Christian community added to a Greek edition of the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament focuses on the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth and the teachings of his followers, presented as the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel.



Why Read the Bible?

Translated into hundreds of languages, the Bible is the world’s most widely distributed book. In the United States, English-language editions top the best-seller lists every year. In an average year, Americans buy about 25 million copies of the Bible, more than twice as many as the year’s next most popular book. According to recent polls, about 91 percent of American families own at least one Bible (the average number of Bibles per household is four), and almost half the American population reads the Bible at least once a week.

Globally, about 2 billion people—approximately a third of the world’s population—are “people of the book,” Jews and Christians who worship the biblical concept of God. In the Western Hemisphere, biblical ideas and principles continue to exert an enormous influence on people’s thought and behavior. Even people who do not belong to a church or synagogue

typically express biblical attitudes in forming their personal views of life. Even when unaware that they are doing so, many Americans judge their own and others’ conduct according to biblical principles of social justice and ethical responsibility. From popular notions about angelic visitations to speculations about the time of Jesus’ return to earth or the fate of people after they die, most Americans typically echo biblical ideas.

While almost every American family owns one or more Bibles, polls indicate that few in the United States are familiar with its contents. When asked to name the four **Gospels**—the four accounts of Jesus’ life that form the first part of the New Testament—most Americans could not name even one. Only a small percentage could list more than two or three of the Ten Commandments, and fewer still knew where to find them in the Bible (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5). Some college students thought that Moses was one of Jesus’ twelve apostles. Even among people who regularly attend church,

pollsters found, the level of biblical knowledge is almost equally limited.

Religions claiming to base their teachings on the Bible are almost unbelievably diverse: There are three main branches of Judaism and, worldwide, 30,000 distinct Christian denominations, with more than 200 different denominations in North America alone. With so many different religious groups competing for people's allegiance, it is crucial to understand what the Bible is and how it acquired its present form.

This textbook has dual goals: to acquaint students with the Bible's principal themes and content and to familiarize readers with the work of contemporary biblical scholarship. For the past two centuries, since the scientific revolution, an international body of scholars—Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, and others—has labored to analyze the individual biblical books, trying to place them in their social and historical context and to understand each writer's individual message. As readers will discover, we are all the beneficiaries of this ongoing scholarly enterprise.



A Brief Survey of the Bible's Contents

In studying the Bible systematically, readers quickly discover that it is not a single volume but a library of many different books, written over approximately eleven centuries. In fact, the English word *bible* comes from the Greek *biblia* (meaning “little books”), a term that accurately expresses its nature as a collection of many individual writings. Christianity's two main divisions—Catholic and Protestant—have slightly different editions of the Bible. Whereas Protestant bibles typically contain sixty-six books, Catholic bibles include several additional books in the Old Testament, commonly known as the **Apocrypha**. Catholics and Protestants thus have a somewhat different **canon**—the official list of documents that a religious community accepts as authoritative and binding. The Greek Orthodox Church has a canon similar to the Catholic, but with the addition of three more books (see Table 1.1). (For a discussion of the Apocrypha or “second canon,” see Chapter 27.)

Viewed as a whole, the Bible is the story of God's complex relationship with humanity. The first book, Genesis, opens with an account of God's creation of the universe and of humans, whom he* fashions in his

“image” and “likeness.” The final book, Revelation, closes with a re-creation, a “new heaven and a new earth” in which God and humankind at last dwell together in peace. Between Genesis and Revelation, which provide a clear-cut beginning and ending to the biblical story, lies a dazzling array of literary genres—from narratives about Israel's rise and fall, to legal regulations and statutes, to prophesy, to speculations about God's rule of the world, to both devotional and erotic poetry, to Gospels, to letters, and to bewildering visions of End time (see Box 1.1).

Known to Christians as the Old Testament, the Bible's first part is essentially the drama of God's long-term relationship with **Israel**, the people he chooses to be his special possession (see Box 1.2). The first eleven books, Genesis through 2 Kings, are an extended narrative of the God-Israel partnership as it developed over a course of perhaps 1,000 years. Often called the “national epic of Israel,” this narrative begins with God's call to **Abraham**, regarded as Israel's chief ancestor; continues with God's rescue of Abraham's descendants, the Israelites, from slavery in Egypt; describes their occupation of **Canaan** (Palestine), the land God promised to Abraham's offspring; recounts Israel's growth as a monarchy under King David and his heirs; and concludes with a catastrophic event—the total destruction of the Davidic state and the deportation of its leading citizens to Babylon. (See the map of Israel and the ancient Near East in Figure 1.1.) This national disaster—which marked the destruction of the capital, **Jerusalem**, and the splendid Temple of Solomon, as well as the permanent overthrow of David's line of kings—marks a crucial turning point in biblical history. As we shall see, this historical event, which took place in 587 BCE,[†] preoccupied the minds of many biblical authors who, in different ways, struggled to understand God's purpose in allowing his human partner to suffer so severely. Before surveying some of these later biblical books, however, it is helpful to see how ancient editors arranged Israel's sacred writings.

*Although biblical writers consistently use the masculine pronoun (“he”) for God, many scholars urge us to remember that by definition God transcends all human dimensions, including gender distinctions.

[†]BCE is an abbreviation for “before the Common Era,” corresponding to BC (“before Christ”); CE refers to the “Common Era,” a religiously neutral term many scholars use instead of “AD” (*anno domini*, Latin for “in the year of our Lord”).

TABLE I. I Order of Books in the Old Testament (Tanakh)

HEBREW BIBLE (MASORETIC TEXT)	GREEK SEPTUAGINT BIBLE	ROMAN CATHOLIC AND GREEK ORTHODOX* OLD TESTAMENT	PROTESTANT OLD TESTAMENT
<i>I. Torah (Pentateuch)</i>	<i>Pentateuch</i>	<i>Pentateuch</i>	<i>Pentateuch</i>
Genesis	Genesis	Genesis	Genesis
Exodus	Exodus	Exodus	Exodus
Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus
Numbers	Numbers	Numbers	Numbers
Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy
<i>II. Nevi'im (Prophets)</i> <i>(Former Prophets)</i>	<i>Historical Books</i>	<i>Historical Books</i>	<i>Historical Books</i>
Joshua	Joshua	Josue (Joshua)	Joshua
Judges	Judges	Judges	Judges
	Ruth	Ruth	Ruth
1–2 Samuel	1–2 Regnorum (1–2 Samuel)	1–2 Kings (1–2 Samuel)	1–2 Samuel
1–2 Kings	3–4 Regnorum (1–2 Kings) 1–2 Paralipomenon (1–2 Chronicles) 1 Esdras 2 Esdras (Ezra–Nehemiah) Esther Judith Tobit 1–4 Maccabees	3–4 Kings (1–2 Kings) 1–2 Paralipomenon (1–2 Chronicles) 1 Esdras** Ezra–Nehemiah (2 Esdras in orthodox canon) Tobias (Tobit) [†] Judith [†] Esther (with additions) 1–2 Maccabees [†] 3 Maccabees**	1–2 Kings 1–2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah Esther
	<i>Poetry and Wisdom</i>	<i>Poetry and Wisdom</i>	<i>Poetry and Wisdom</i>
	Psalms	Job	Job
	Odes	Psalms (plus Ps. 151**) Prayer of Manasseh**	Psalms
	Proverbs	Proverbs	Proverbs
	Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes
	Song of Songs	Canticle of Canticles (Song of Songs)	Song of Songs
	Job	Wisdom of Solomon [†]	
	Wisdom of Solomon		
	Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)	Ecclesiasticus [†]	
	Psalms of Solomon	(Ben Sirach)	

(continued)

*The Greek Orthodox Bible contains all the books included in Catholic editions, plus three additional books—Prayer of Manasseh, 1 Esdras, and 3 Maccabees—and an additional psalm, Ps. 151. The books in the Orthodox canon are marked with a double asterisk (**).

[†]Not in Jewish or most Protestant Bibles; considered deuterocanonical in Catholic and Orthodox Old Testaments.

TABLE I. I (continued)

HEBREW BIBLE (MASORETIC TEXT)	GREEK SEPTUAGINT BIBLE	ROMAN CATHOLIC AND GREEK ORTHODOX OLD TESTAMENT	PROTESTANT OLD TESTAMENT
<i>(Latter Prophets)</i>	<i>Prophetic Books</i>	<i>Prophetic Books</i>	<i>Prophetic Books</i>
Isaiah		Isaias (Isaiah)	Isaiah
Jeremiah		Jeremias (Jeremiah)	Jeremiah
		Lamentations	Lamentations
		Baruch (including the epistle of Jeremias) [†]	
Ezekiel		Ezechiel (Ezekiel)	Ezekiel
		Daniel (with additions: Prayer of Azariah and Song of the Three Young Men, [†] Susanna, [†] Bel and the Dragon [†])	Daniel
Book of the Twelve			
Hosea	Hosea	Osee (Hosea)	Hosea
Amos	Amos	Joel	Joel
Micah	Micah	Amos	Amos
Joel	Joel	Abidas (Obadiah)	Obadiah
Obadiah	Obediah	Jonas (Jonah)	Jonah
Jonah	Jonah	Micheas (Micah)	Micah
Nahum	Nahum	Nahum	Nahum
Habakkuk	Habakkuk	Habucuc (Habakkuk)	Habakkuk
Zephaniah	Zephaniah	Sophonias (Zephaniah)	Zephaniah
Haggai	Hagai	Aggeus (Haggai)	Haggai
Zechariah	Zechariah	Zacharias (Zechariah)	Zechariah
Malachi	Malachi	Malachias (Malachi)	Malachi
<i>III. Kethuvim (Writings)</i>			
	Isaiah		
Psalms	Jeremiah		
Job	Baruch		
Proverbs	Lamentations		
Ruth	Epistle of Jeremiah		
Song of Songs	Ezekiel		
Ecclesiastes	Susanna		
Lamentations	Daniel		
Esther	Bel and the Dragon		
Daniel			
Ezra-Nehemiah			
1-2 Chronicles			

[†]Not in Jewish or most Protestant Bibles; considered deuterocanonical in Catholic and Orthodox Old Testaments.

BOX I.I What to Look for in the Bible and Where to Find It

As the West's single most influential literary work, the Bible shapes people's attitudes and beliefs in almost every sphere of life, even when many Westerners may not be aware that their thought processes are being influenced. From ideas about the

origins of life and the nature of God to the ultimate destiny of humankind, the biblical text informs the worldview of 2 billion people, particularly in North America. The Bible's teaching in several key areas is summarized below.

TOPIC**BIBLICAL SOURCE**

FROM THE HEBREW BIBLE (OLD TESTAMENT)

Creation of the world	Genesis 1:1–2:4a (first version); Genesis 2:4b–2:25 (second version)
Alienation of God and humanity	Genesis 3:1–3:24 (Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden)
The global flood	Genesis 6:5–8:2 (and origin of rainbow, Gen. 9:13–17)
God's promises to bless the world through Abraham	Genesis 12:1–3; 22:15–18
The ten plagues on Egypt	Exodus 6:28–12:42
Miraculous sea crossing	Exodus 14:1–15:21
The Ten Commandments	Exodus 20:1–17; Deuteronomy 5:6–21
Ratification of Mosaic Covenant between God and Israel	Exodus 24:1–18 (cf. Exod. 34:1–28)
Israel's conquest of Canaan (Palestine)	Joshua 1:1–24:33
God's promise to keep King David's descendants on Israel's throne "forever"	2 Samuel 7:8–17; also Psalms 89:19–37
Declaration that only Israel's God exists	Isaiah 40:10–28; 45:5–7; 46:8–11, etc.
What God requires	Micah 6:6–8
Moving beyond traditional concepts of God/the problem of evil	Job 1:1–19:29; 38:1–42:17
First promise of future life (resurrection)	Daniel 12:1–3
Human immortality	Wisdom of Solomon 3–9 (Apocrypha)

FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount	Matthew 5:1–7:28; cf. Luke 6:14–49
Accounts of Jesus' resurrection	1 Corinthians 15:3–7; Matthew 28:16–20; Luke 24:1–32; John 20:1–21; 24
Expectations of Jesus' imminent return	1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11 (earliest Christian document); Matthew 24:1–25: 46; Mark 13:1–36; Luke 21:5–36
Jesus as Word of God incarnated as man	John 1:1–14
Emphasis on love, human and divine	1 Corinthians 13:1–13; Mark 12:28–31; John 3:16; 15:12–15
God is love	1 John 4:8, 16



The Old Testament and the Hebrew Bible (the Tanakh)

Because it was composed mostly in Hebrew, the language spoken in ancient Israel, many scholars prefer to call the Old Testament (the Jewish Scriptures) the **Hebrew**

Bible. Today's biblical scholars also favor studying Israel's Scriptures in the three-part arrangement that ancient Jewish editors gave them: the Law (Hebrew, *Torah*), Prophets, and Writings. An acronym* derived

*Acronym: a word made up of the first letter or letters of a successive group of words.

BOX 1.2 Multiple Meanings of the Name “Israel”

In the Hebrew Bible, the name “Israel” has several meanings. In most cases it is used to denote collectively the ancient Near Eastern people with whom God entered into a special partnership. Historically, it also refers to two different but related political entities: (1) the twelve-tribe United Kingdom of Israel, which was briefly unified under its first three kings, Saul, David, and Solomon (c. 1020–922 BCE), and (2) following Solomon’s death (c. 922 BCE), the ten northern tribes that withdrew from the United Kingdom to form the separate

nation of Israel. The smaller southern kingdom, with its capital at Jerusalem, was then named after its leading tribe, Judah. The term “Israel,” however, continued to be used to describe collectively all of God’s people from both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.

During the last five centuries BCE, when first Persia and then Greece controlled Judah’s former territory (then called Judea), its inhabitants were commonly known as Jews (people of Judea).

from the initial consonants of the Hebrew Bible’s three main divisions, **TaNaKh** refers to **Torah** (Hebrew for “Instruction” or “Teaching”), **Nevi’im** (Prophets), and **Kethuvim** (Writings) (see Box 1.3). Because it contains five separate books—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—the Torah is also known as the **Pentateuch** (from the Greek for “five scrolls”). Because **Moses**, Israel’s first great leader and lawgiver, is the leading human figure in four Torah books (Exodus through Deuteronomy), this division is further known as the Mosaic Law or Books of Moses. (See Chapter 4 for a discussion of scholarly theories about the Torah’s origin and authorship.)

The Tanakh’s second part, the **Nevi’im**, is divided into two subsections. The first subunit, traditionally called the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings), opens with Israel’s conquest of Canaan and ends with the loss of that land to Babylon’s armies. According to biblical reckoning, this long narrative section covers a period of more than six centuries, from about 1200 BCE to 587 BCE, when Babylon demolished Jerusalem.

The second subunit of the **Nevi’im**, called the Latter Prophets, does not continue the narratives of Israel’s history during the exile in Babylon or of its eventual return to rebuild Jerusalem and its Temple. Instead, this subsection consists of the fifteen prophetic books, from the “Major Prophets”—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—to the twelve “Minor Prophets,” including Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Malachi. Although these books include some editorial commentary, they consist primarily of prophetic **oracles**, pronouncements believed to be divinely inspired and that prophets typically delivered as “the word of the LORD.” Rather than predictions of events in the distant future, most of the

prophets’ oracles address specific political or social crises in Israel’s national history. Biblical prophets were most active during two extremely critical periods. Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah prophesied during the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, when Assyria, an aggressive Near Eastern military power, threatened to destroy Israel. During the late seventh and early sixth centuries BCE, when the Babylonian menace loomed, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel warned of Jerusalem’s imminent destruction (see Chapter 16). As arranged in the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh), the prophetic works immediately follow the historical narratives about Israel’s rise and fall. The prophets’ warnings typically highlight ethical issues, such as the people’s breaking their pledge to worship Israel’s God alone, that, according to many biblical authors, led to Babylon’s overthrow of the Israelite nation.

The Tanakh’s third and final division, the **Kethuvim** (Writings), contains the most diverse material, ranging from volumes of poetry, such as Psalms, Song of Songs, and Lamentations; to short stories, such as Ruth and Esther; historical narratives, such as Ezra and Nehemiah; books of wisdom, such as Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes; and visionary speculations about God’s future intervention in world history in the Book of Daniel. Although Daniel appears among the prophets in the Christian canon, it is so different from most prophetic writings that Jewish editors did not include it with traditional books of prophecy (see Chapter 26).

Jewish scholars closed the **Kethuvim**—and hence the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) itself—with 1 and 2 Chronicles, a late retelling of Israel’s history from the time of its early kings to the end of the Babylonian exile. Although Ezra and Nehemiah relate events that occurred later than

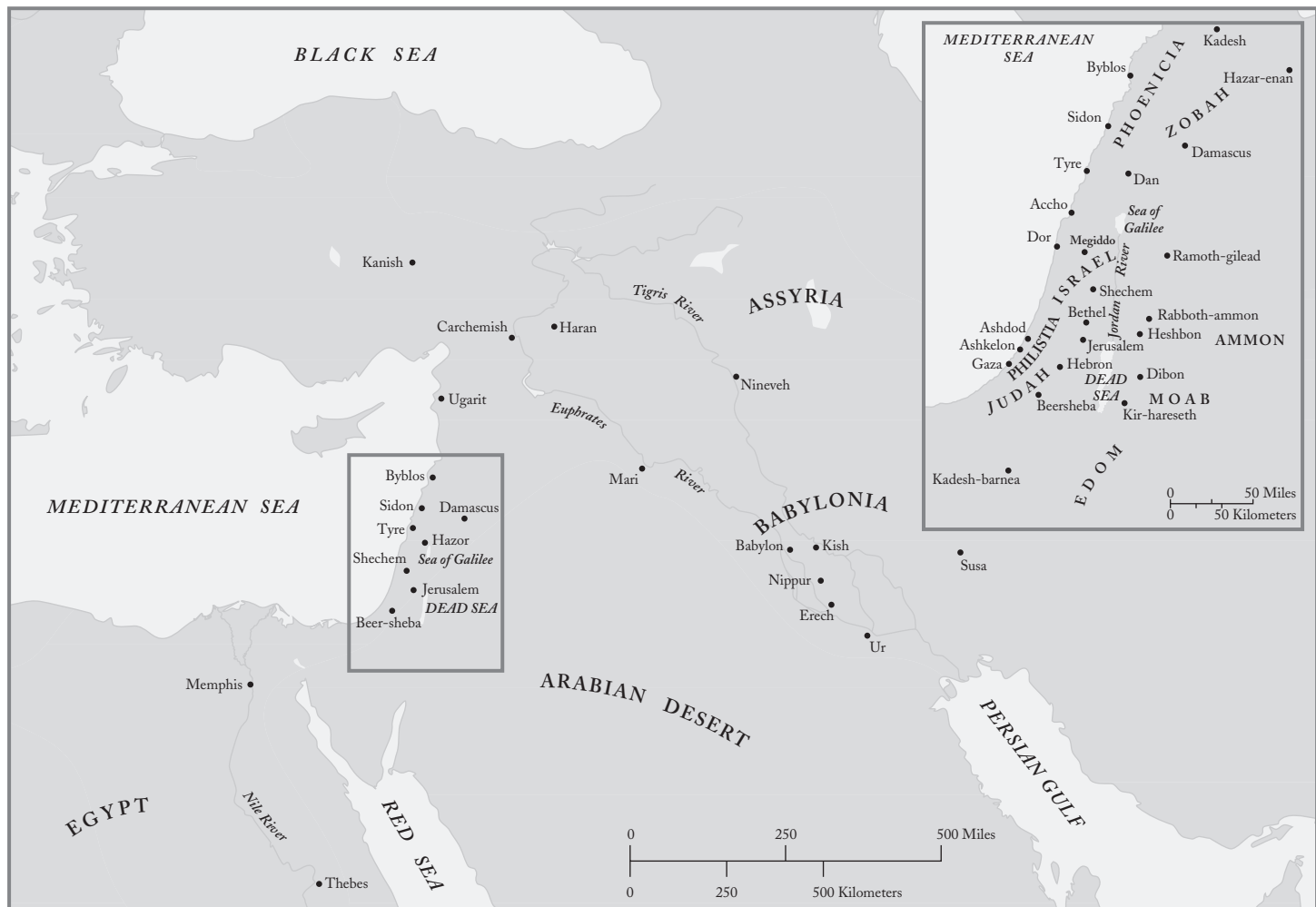


FIGURE 1.1 Map of Israel and the Ancient Near East. Located between the major powers of Mesopotamia (Assyria and Babylon) and Egypt, the kingdom of Israel was repeatedly devastated by the military invasions of its stronger neighbors, events that loom large in the biblical narratives. The inset shows Israel as it appeared between about 921 and 721 BCE, when it was divided into the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel. The northern state of Israel ceased to exist when the Assyrians destroyed it in 721 BCE. The smaller state of Judah, with its capital at Jerusalem, however, was partly restored about fifty years after the Babylonians destroyed it in 587 BCE.