

# UNIT 4 Ancient Israel c. 2000-500 BCE

## CHAPTER 8

Correlates with 6.20  
Develops SSP.01, .02, .04, .05, .06

### GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF ANCIENT ISRAEL

#### Small Region, Big History!

**Ancient Israel** is a relatively small region, but it is home to some very important and complex history. This history is not only about a specific place or time. This history is also the history of a people and the development of a religion that would ultimately change the course of human civilization.

#### What Is Ancient Israel?

The modern-day nation of Israel is located in the same region as the Kingdom of Israel, an ancient nation that rose and fell during the Iron Age, starting around 1200 BCE. Although separated by time, the two nations are directly connected by both history and religious faith. The region of ancient Israel was once known as the land of **Canaan**. It included not only modern-day Israel but also all of Lebanon, most of western Jordan (along the fertile Jordan River Valley), and bits of modern-day Syria and Egypt.



The Tower of King David, located in the Old City of Jerusalem



Canaan was not a homogeneous society, but a collection of societies who shared some common traits, such as language or social structure.



## Geographical Features of Ancient Israel

The land of ancient Israel is small compared to other regions, but its geography is very diverse.

- ➔ The central and southern coastal plains are hot and dry in the summer and cool and wet in the winter, like most places along the Mediterranean Sea.
- ➔ The northern region is quite mountainous.
- ➔ The Jordan River Valley is the heart of the region. Over time, the **Jordan River** carved a deep, fertile valley surrounded by hills.
- ➔ Everything south and east of the Dead Sea is very hot and dry, like the vast **deserts** that extend for hundreds of miles in almost every direction.
- ➔ Bodies of water near Israel include the **Mediterranean Sea** to the west, the **Red Sea** to the south, and the **Dead Sea** at the southern end of the Jordan River.
- ➔ The city of **Jerusalem**, is located on a plateau in the Judean Mountains.



Part of Egypt, the **Sinai Peninsula** is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to the north and the Red Sea to the south. It played a key role in ancient Israel's history!

**The Dead Sea is a landlocked salt lake between Israel and Jordan. Because it has so much salt in it, people can easily float in the Dead Sea!**



Courtesy of Itamar Grinberg for the Israeli Ministry of Tourism (CC BY-ND 2.0)



## Map Skill-BUILDER

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Label the geographic features on the map. Then complete the steps that follow.

**Dead Sea**

**Jerusalem**

**Jordan River**

**Mediterranean Sea**

**Red Sea**

**Sinai Peninsula**

1. Add a mountain symbol to the map to show which part of Israel was mountainous.
2. Add a desert symbol to the map to show which part of Israel was desert.
3. Circle the area that was fertile.



## Rapid Recall

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Match each geographic feature of ancient Israel with the correct description.

- \_\_\_\_ 1. large body of water west of Israel
- \_\_\_\_ 2. salt lake east of Jerusalem
- \_\_\_\_ 3. capital of Israel
- \_\_\_\_ 4. body of water south of Sinai Peninsula
- \_\_\_\_ 5. triangular-shaped landform
- \_\_\_\_ 6. body of water that flows through fertile valley

- A. Dead Sea
- B. Jerusalem
- C. Jordan River
- D. Mediterranean Sea
- E. Red Sea
- F. Sinai Peninsula

# CHAPTER 9

## HISTORY OF ANCIENT ISRAEL

Correlates with 6.21, 6.22  
Develops SSP.01, .02, .03, .04, .05, .06

### How Do We Know about Ancient Israel?

Much of what we know about the history of ancient Israel comes from the **Hebrew Bible** or **Tanakh**, which is a collection of sacred Jewish texts. The first five books are known as the Torah. They were traditionally written on scrolls by a scribe. To Christians, the books of the Hebrew Bible are also the books of the Old Testament, including Genesis, Exodus, Psalms, and more than 30 others.

The Hebrew Bible provides primary-source history about ancient Israel. It is also the main source of information about the Jewish religion, including customs, rituals, laws, and traditions. Parts of the Hebrew Bible were passed down through generations for hundreds of years before they were first preserved in writing about 3,000 years ago.



Set of scrolls including the Torah and other parts of the Tanakh

The terms *Hebrew*, *Israelite*, and *Jew* are connected. Jews today are linked to the ancient Hebrews and Israelites through ancestral roots, and through the religion they developed, which became *Judaism*.

The Israelites spoke and wrote an ancient version of the Hebrew language, and they followed Israelite customs and beliefs. Today, many Jews speak a modern Hebrew, the main language of the State of Israel.



Cave where the Dead Sea scrolls were found

### Dead Sea Scrolls

The famous Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered during the 1940s. The scrolls were hidden in caves in the Judean Desert about 2,000 years earlier. For researchers, the scrolls are a treasure trove of knowledge about the ancient world. Most are religious manuscripts, including the earliest copies of parts of the Hebrew Bible, as well as descriptions of early Jewish customs, practices, and beliefs.



### Rapid Recall

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Answer the questions.

1. What book gave historians information about ancient Israel? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What religion did ancient Israel follow? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What language did the ancient Israelites speak? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What archaeological find included copies of stories found in the Hebrew Bible? \_\_\_\_\_

## The Story Starts with Abraham

The Israelites trace their origin to the biblical **patriarch Abraham**. Abraham lived about 3,500 years ago. He and his family were nomadic herders who lived in Ur in **Mesopotamia**. According to the Tanakh, or Hebrew Bible, unlike his neighbors, Abraham believed in only one God. God told Abraham to leave Ur and take his family to Canaan. God made a covenant, or contract, with Abraham, promising him that the land of Canaan would eventually belong to him and his descendants. The land of Canaan became known to the Hebrews as the "Promised Land." To those who follow Judaism, this covenant symbolizes the unique relationship between God and Jews.

The Hebrews in Canaan eventually became known as "Israelites." This new name came from Abraham's grandson named Jacob. The Hebrew Bible tells of Jacob getting into an intense wrestling match with an angel, which lasts all night. When the sun rises, God blesses Jacob and renames him "Israel." Jacob, or Israel, lived to have twelve sons. They become heads of the Twelve Tribes of Israel and were called Israelites.

So, who were the Israelites? They were the descendants of Abraham's grandson, Jacob, who was renamed Israel.

### Vocabulary

**patriarch:** male head of a family or tribe



Depiction of Abraham and family traveling from Ur to Canaan

The ancient Israelites had different religious beliefs than other groups at that time in history. They practiced **monotheism**, which is belief in only one God. The religion of **Judaism**, the first monotheistic religion, comes from the religion practiced by the Israelites.



### Quick Review

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Decide if each sentence describes Abraham or Jacob.  
Write the correct name at the end of each sentence.

1. He made a covenant with God. \_\_\_\_\_
2. His sons headed the Twelve Tribes of Israel. \_\_\_\_\_
3. The Israelites were named after him. \_\_\_\_\_
4. He brought his family to Canaan from Ur in Mesopotamia. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Israelites trace their origin to him. \_\_\_\_\_



## Israelites Move to Egypt

According to the Hebrew Bible, **famine** forced the Israelites to leave Canaan and move to Egypt. The Israelites prospered in Egypt and the Israelite population grew quickly. The Egyptian pharaoh worried that the Israelites would one day turn on the Egyptians so he forced them into slavery. In addition, he ordered that all the first-born male Israelite children be killed to reduce the Israelite population.



### Vocabulary

**famine:** extreme scarcity of food

## The Story of Moses

A Hebrew woman named Jochebed decided to save her infant son. She placed him in a basket and sent him down the Nile River. He was found by Egyptians and raised as part of the Egyptian royal family. The baby was named **Moses**. When he was a young adult, Moses killed a slavemaster and fled from Egypt.

The Ten Commandments became the foundation for the moral principles and many of the laws of Western civilization.

The Hebrew Bible says that God commanded Moses to return to Egypt and lead the Israelites out of captivity. But as punishment for their sins, God forced the Israelites to wander in the desert for 40 years after escaping Egypt. It was during this time that Moses is said to have received the **Ten Commandments**, God's laws written on stone and handed down on Mount Sinai.



Painting of Moses with the Ten Commandments

Moses eventually led the Israelites to the River Jordan but died before crossing into the Promised Land. Before he died, Moses placed Joshua in command of the Israelites and instructed them to take the land of Canaan by conquest. As a general, Joshua led the Israelites in capturing many cities, beginning with Jericho. By the time Joshua died, the Israelites had conquered much of Canaan, and the stage was set for the founding of the Kingdom of Israel.

## Basic Beliefs of Judaism

**Monotheism:** There is only one God.

**Ten Commandments:** These ten rules about how to worship and behave are to be revered and followed.

**Individual worth:** Each person has value and worth because each person was created in the image of God.

**Personal responsibility:** Individuals have the responsibility to act righteously, to be honest, and to help those in need.



## Gather Information ★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

Find a source listing the Ten Commandments. Pick two commandments that reflect laws in our society. On a separate sheet of paper, write those two commandments and give examples of laws they correspond with.



## Cause and Effect ★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

Explain the effect of each cause.

### Cause

### Effect

Israelite population  
in Egypt grows.



Pharaoh orders that  
all first-born male  
Israelite children  
be killed.



Moses hears  
God's command.



Moses receives the  
Ten Commandments.



Israelites conquer  
Canaan.





## Primary Source

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According to the Book of Exodus in the Bible, Moses led the Israelites across the desert toward Canaan after the Egyptian pharaoh agreed to free the Israelites. But the pharaoh suddenly changed his mind and headed out with his army to find the Israelites and bring them back. The Egyptians finally caught up with the Israelites at the Red Sea.

**Read the account from Exodus Chapter 14 and answer the questions.**

<sup>21</sup> Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, <sup>22</sup> and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

<sup>23</sup> The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. <sup>24</sup> During the last watch of the night the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. <sup>25</sup> He jammed the wheels of their chariots so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, "Let's get away from the Israelites! The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt."



<sup>26</sup> Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen." <sup>27</sup> Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it, and the Lord swept them into the sea. <sup>28</sup> The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.

<sup>29</sup> But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. <sup>30</sup> That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. <sup>31</sup> And when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.

1. Summarize each paragraph with one sentence.

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2. What conclusion can you draw about how the Israelites felt about Moses after this event?

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