

# The History of Ancient Israel

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# Preliminary questions to ask

Who am I?

What is the purpose of the Bible?

How is the OT organized? (Law/History/Literature/Prophecy)

How does the OT differ from the NT

- Is the OT about the wealthy and elite of Ancient Israel or the poor?
- Was it written for a 21st Century Western audience?
- Play word game

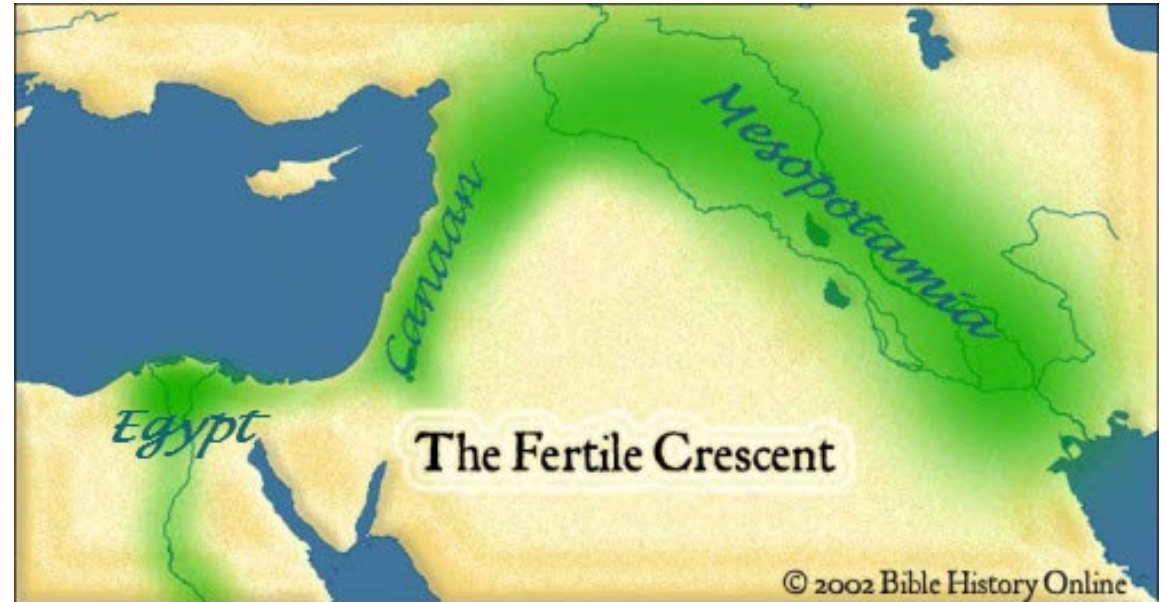
# Various approaches to the study of Ancient Israel

- Maximalist vs. Minimalist approach
- Maximalists: us, Walter Kaiser, John Bright, James Moyer (MSU, although the faculty today is comprised of mostly minimalists)
- Minimalists: Miller and Hayes, too many "Christian" churches and people today. The minimalist approach is by far the most popular approach to the OT, even by people professing to be Christian today and by many "Christian" churches. Why? Is the OT "out of touch" with Western society/America today? Is it just easier to "write it off" as old stories, fables or myths? Is it a synthesis of various ancient happenings and/or beliefs?
- It is, just as much so as the NT, an inerrant conveyance of God's word. It is true, accurate and reliable. However, it is not as approachable or understandable for the most part as the NT is, why?

# The World of the Ancient Israelites

- Was Israel a strong or weak nation compared to its neighbors in the ANE?
- Neighbors over time included the Babylonians, Assyrians, Chaldeans (Neo-Babylonians), Persians and Romans.
- When Abram (Abraham) moves people to the region that is eventually entered by Joshua (across the Jordan River), what was the region they were entering like? Did the just take over and dominate? Were they a minority or majority? What impression does the OT give us? Why?
- Was Abram sent to create a nation? Was he instructed to "fit in" and be like other nations?
- Concept of being "set apart" is established in the OT.

# What was Canaan?



- Sometimes hard to describe but we have an advantage living where we do in understanding the concept.
- Canaan is a "region" like the Ozarks is a region. It is not a nation, or cohesive people but rather a collections of people who share common lands, customs, culture and sometimes...religious beliefs and practices.
- How is Canaan often described? Why study them? (Illumination/reconstruction/differences)

# "A Land Flowing with Milk and Honey"

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The word "Canaan" should not be identified as modern Israel, it really refers to the whole Mediterranean coast from Turkey down to the border of Egypt. The Southern part of Canaan would eventually be referred to as Palestine and the Northern portion would be known as Phoenicia.

The word "Canaan" means "trader" in ancient Semitic languages (Hebrew is one of many Semitic languages, oddly enough along with Arabic and many others).

Canaan was "good" land from an agricultural standpoint. Part of the "Fertile Crescent" and as such was very valuable.

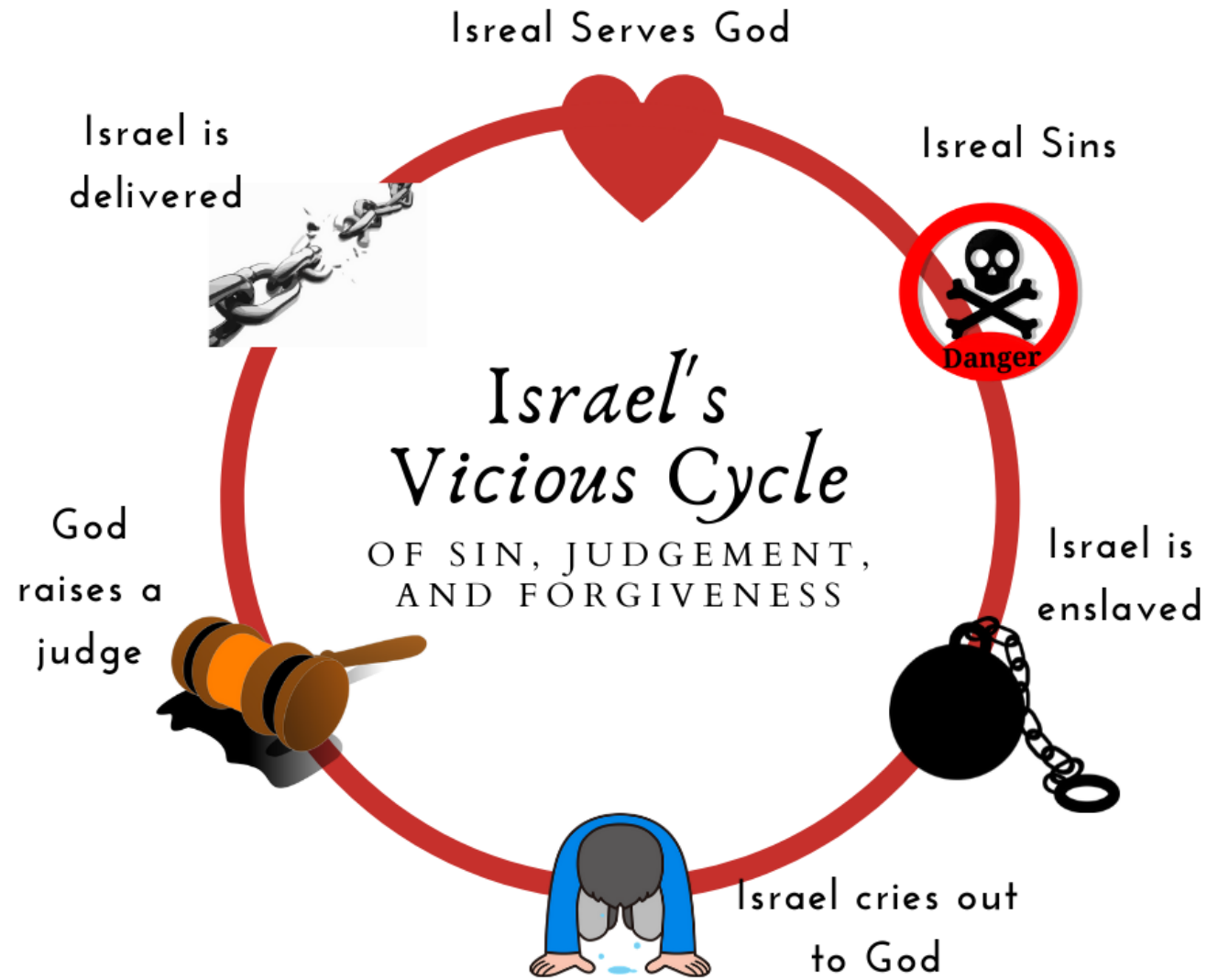
In ancient agrarian societies, the ability to grow food, raise crops and livestock, was crucial to everyday life.

As such, in polytheistic cultures, one of the top "deities" of "gods" was almost always the god of rain, or storms, or the sky in some fashion. Why? Fertility was crucial to survival.

Poor tribes of Israel were shocked by the amount of wealth they found that the Canaanites accumulated. Along with the wealth disparity, the religious beliefs would clash with the Israelite belief of one God who rules all. This would be a constant struggle for the Israelites (kid of like being a Bible believing Christian in the secular world of Western society and America today). This reality sets the stage for a constant struggle in the OT of the Israelites with God vs. the Canaan influences of their world.

The cycle of sin is perpetuated in Israel

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# Canaanite Religion (tempting...)

- Each Canaanite culture had basically three common features
  - They worshipped gods that affected climate: rain, drought, storm.
  - The most important gods were involved with the cycle of nature.
  - The Canaanite god "Ba'al" could be identified with the Babylonian god "Marduk" or the Assyrian god "Ashura" as storm gods or sky gods. They were basically the gods of rain. Why? What is the significance?
  - These gods were so similar in characteristics that it was easy for one conquered nation to take the new gods, because there was really no change other than name.
  - This also made it very hard for the Israelites to believe in only one God who could do all; it was much easier to add pagan practices to their supposed devotion to Yahweh than to go against the grain. The appeal of "fitting in" is as old as mankind itself.
  - Ba'al is often portrayed as a bull, why?
  - The task of the human worshipper was to win the favor of the gods and hope that they would act in a way to help the community prosper. "Religion is about what the follow must do in order to be accepted by the god(s)." This notion including Judaism, which was very much a "quid pro quo" belief system.





# The discovery of Ugarit

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- Discovered by accident in 1928
- Ugaritic text, also called the Ras Shamra, gave us insights into the Canaanite culture that the Israelites became a part of by moving into Canaan.
- The most important religious text for understanding Canaanite beliefs is *The Epic of Ba'al*, a series of texts about Ba'al's role in the Canaanite belief system.
- They are on clay tablets which have been broken into pieces.
- They include stories about Ba'al (they day to day king of the gods), El (the father of the gods and creator), Asherah (wife of El, goddess of the sea), Anat (sister/wife of Ba'al) etc.



*Israelite  
religion  
condemns  
many aspects  
of the  
Canaanite  
religion...which  
caused  
difficulties*

- The fertility rituals used to honor Ba'al and Anat were not accepted by Israelites
- The prophets were horrified of the Canaan gods and their practices
- Israelites has a very strict idea of the sacredness of sex (reserved for marriage)
- Israelites condemned child sacrifice (and in fact places an extremely high value on children which, at times causes problems for women who have difficulty conceiving)
- Israelites condemn making any image or idol of Yahweh
- All these practices make Israelites (Hebrews) stand out, and they are labeled as "different" or "Habiru"
- Israel is "SETTING ITSELF APART" from its neighbors.

# Influences of Canaan

- They many influences of Canaan on the Hebrews are clear, and they are pure human and NOT the desires of God:
  - Temple for worship is desired by the Israelites
  - A King for leadership is desired by the Israelites
  - A nation to follow, or be a part of is desired by the Israelites
  - The wealth and power of the Canaanites is desired by the Israelites
  - An "assimilation" more than a conquering

This sets the stage for the United and Divided Kingdom periods of Israel

# The periods of Ancient Israel History

The period of the Israelites encompasses some distinct time periods

The Patriarch/Ancestor period (c. 2000–1400 B.C.) Abraham–Joshua

The Judges Period (c. 1400–1050 B.C.) to the anointment of Saul

Kingdom/Monarchy period (c. 1050 –586 B.C) to the fall of Judah

- United Monarchy (c. 1050–900 B.C.) Saul, David and Solomon reigns
- Divided Monarchy (c. 900–586 B.C.)

Exile period (beginning c. 586 B.C.)

My choice to use B.C./A.D. explained



Maps of Israel at different times

# The term "Israel"

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- It means the "struggle" that ones has with God
- It is an internal struggle that each believer has (and can be argued every non-believer as well).
- There is a similar term in another Semitic language – Arabic. The term for the internal struggle with god in Arabic is called "jihad". Of course, a modern interpretation of the word is very different and takes on an external or militant aspect.

**Characteristics  
of a  
"Nation" ...why  
have one?  
Primary factors  
of state  
formation.**

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Desire to unify the tribes (common identity)

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For mutual defense

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For food production and supply

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For political leadership (king)

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For a common religious identity

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For diplomacy

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# Characteristics of Ancient Kingship

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- Strong leader militarily (warrior)
- Virile leader (good looking)
- Harem (significance of marriages for alliance purposes)
- Crush and often destroy his enemies



# Overview of coming weeks

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- 10-week study
- Need to have the History of Israel: From the Bronze Age Through the Jewish Wars by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.
- Go over the syllabus (see handout)
- Week 2 The Patriarchs and the Exodus (Read chapters 1-5, skim chapters 6-10)
- Week 3 The Judges Period (Read chapters 12-13)
- Week 4 The United Monarchy (Read chapters 14-16, 2 Samuel)
- Week 5 The United Monarchy Continued (Read chapters 17-19, 1 Kings)
- Week 6 The Divided Kingdom (Read chapters 20-22, 2 Kings)
- Week 7 The Divided Kingdom Continued (Read chapters 23-26, 1 Chronicles)
- Week 8 The Babylonian Exile (Read chapter 27, 2 Chronicles)
- Week 9 The Rise of Persia (Read chapter 28, Esther)
- Week 10 The Intertestamental Period and wrap up (Read Chapters 29-31)