

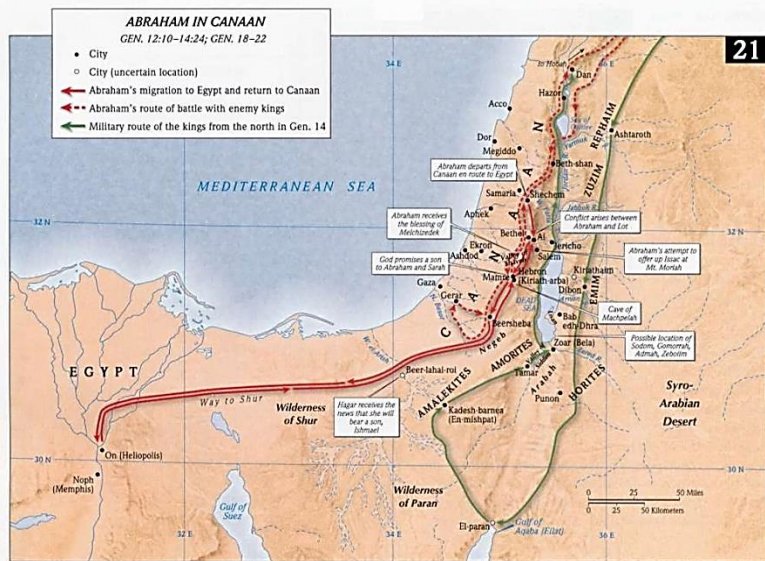
HEBREW EMPIRE: ANCIENT ISRAEL (UNITED AND DIVIDED KINGDOM)

Our knowledge of the ancient history of Israel is largely based on one source, *the Old Testament*. Written during the reign of King Solomon (961-922 BC), this massive work contains historical data, rules given by Hebrew prophets from their god Yahweh, as well as poetry and prayers. The challenge arises from the need to distinguish genuine historical information from matters of faith. It is necessary to analyze this record effectively to identify the history of the ancient Israelites in economic and socio-political terms. By recording the path of their experience and by subjecting it to the scrutiny of recalled tradition, they were able to articulate their historical experience as a process of gradual progression on several levels.

HISTORICAL OUTLINE

ERA OF THE PATRIARCHS, C. 1850-1000 BCE

Our record of the era of the Patriarchs is legendary but it presents the likely scenario that the Hebrews began as rural tribes migrating through Mesopotamia and existing along the margins of the emerging urban societies of Sumeria, Akkadia, and Babylonia. Around 1850 BCE, Abraham migrated from Ur in southern Mesopotamia to the northern Euphrates valley, and then to Canaan. Sometime between 1700 and 1580 BCE, Joseph led a migration into Egypt.

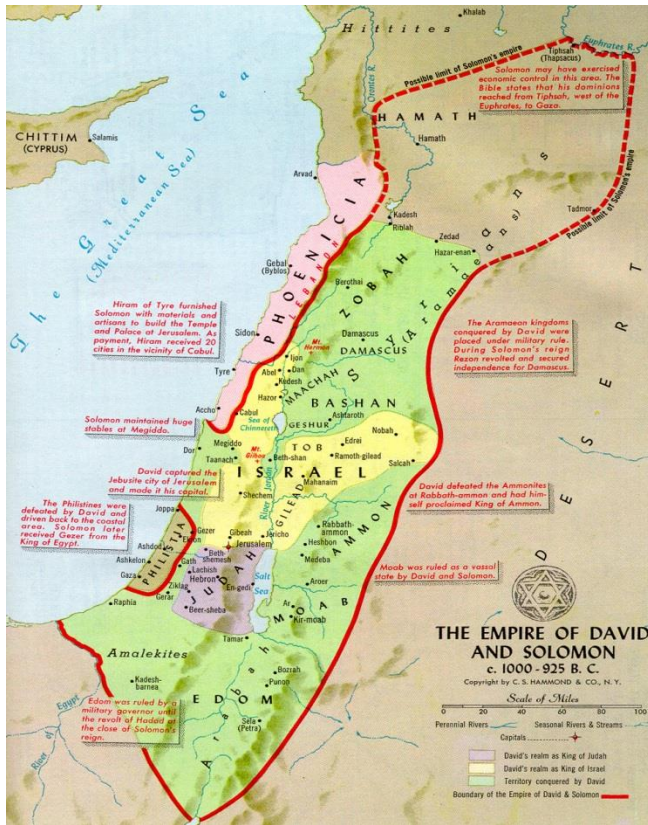


Joseph led a migration into Egypt. In the period 1290-1224 BCE, Moses led the flight from Egypt. Records confirm the *Old Testament* tradition that the Hebrews invaded Canaan. During the next two centuries their twelve tribal elements gradually adapted to settled agricultural existence. They lived side by side with the surviving native Canaanite population and in close proximity to competing peoples, such as the Philistines, the Armenians, and the Phoenicians.

1200-1000 BCE, PERIOD OF JUDGES; SETTLEMENT IN CANAAN

According to tradition Hebrew society at this point was organized according to twelve Tribes, 10 in the north, 2 (Judah, Benjamin) in south. Each tribe was ruled by councils of judges. Their population remained highly broken up and their judges arose from clan-based warlords. The Hebrew tribes were weakened by internal conflict and threat from their neighbors. Repeated losses to the Philistines forced Hebrew tribal leaders reluctantly to appoint a king named Saul (1020-1000 BCE). Saul made himself unpopular by

destroying the standing priesthood (the one unifying institution prior to the creation of the monarchy). Eventually the Israelites turned to a young charismatic person, who assumed the throne as **King David** (1000-960 BCE).



UNITED KINGDOM (1000-922 BCE)

David defeated the Philistines and established the **United Kingdom** (1000-922 BCE). He conquered the entire coastal region from Gaza to Phoenicia, including the Euphrates and the Red Sea. His reign represented the greatest extent of the Israelite Empire and was recalled as a "golden age." David established his capital of Jerusalem.

David was succeeded by **King Solomon** (961-922). Solomon was not as active militarily as David had been, but he was gifted in trade and diplomacy. He made alliances with Phoenician kings, Egyptian Pharaohs, and the Queen of Sheba (located possibly in Yemen or Somalia). Solomon also oversaw the construction of many temples and structures, making each tribe to send laborers to work in monthly

rotations. The forced labor and diverse atmosphere of Jerusalem caused opposition among Israelite citizens. At the death of Solomon, civil wars erupted and ultimately Israel fell apart.

DIVIDED KINGDOM 922-721 BCE

The **Divided Kingdom** was represented by Israel in the north, with a new capital at Samaria, and Judah (with its capital remaining at Jerusalem) in the south. Israel remained the more populous, more urban of the two kingdoms. Judah/Jerusalem was more rural and isolated. Both kingdoms became subject to Assyrian domination by 850 BCE, and were forced to pay tribute. The kingdom of Israel joined in the repeated rebellions of the Phoenicians, and was punished with increasing harshness. In 721 BCE, the Assyrian Kings Sargon II and Esarhaddon conquered Israel and deported their leaders. In 586 BCE King Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem and enslaved its nobility. Their deportation to Babylon marked the Babylonian Captivity, 586-539 BCE. Cyrus of Persia ultimately



released these captives and allowed them to return to Jerusalem to organize a religious society as a client state. Along with Palestine, Israel remained subjected to regional powers in the Hellenistic Era. The revolt of the Maccabees c. 120 BCE, brought them some measure of independence; however, Israel was ultimately crushed by Pompey the Great of Rome in 62 BCE. From then on the history of Israel's dealings with the Romans proved decidedly bumpy (friendly relations with Julius Caesar; yet they were hated and bullied by the Emperor Caligula). Ultimately the Jewish population in Palestine rebelled against Roman authority and was crushed violently by the Roman Emperors Vespasian (69-70 CE), and Hadrian (120s CE).