for others, the ordeal of eking out a living in areas where nature itself pposed to survival. Nevertheless, their literature reflects their enthulife, their love for their land and their nations, their hopes and dreams ture. They were at home in the mountains, plains, river valleys, and deserts of the Near East and enjoyed life there.

The Fertile Crescent

raphic world of the Hebrew scriptures is the area along the Tigris and s rivers (Mesopotamia), the Palestinian coastal plain and hill country. [Jile River delfa and valley in Egypt. This area is commonly called the rescent, a name first used by the famous Egyptologist, James H. One who is familiar with the green forests and rich agricultural lands a or Europe might not think of Mesopotamia, Palestine, or Egypt as This is a false perspective for judging it, however. To the ancients there these lands watered by the rivers or by the rains blown in off terranean were good lands "flowing with milk and honey"—lands of and agricultural abundance.

pulation of the ancient Middle East was concentrated in this relatively a. Through it ran the most traveled roads or tracks. Great states were ere and they frequently waged war to control it. The major economic as agriculture, but trade and commerce were also common. Roads out in all directions, making some of the cities of the area hubs of ial activity.

mising terrain surrounded the Fertile Crescent. In Egypt the desert the river bed. Its advance was halted only by the annual overflow of Along the northern and eastern edges of the Asiatic segment of the , a series of mountain ranges and plateaus formed a semicircle. In the fertile areas were broken by low but rugged hills running from south through the center of the land.

formed the inner perimeter of the Asiatic portion of the Fertile Cresis vast interior was partially uninhabitable desert and partially semidicapable of supporting only sparse nomadic life. In the wasteland, ovided rain enough for pasture, and the nomad was free to roam with summer, however, life was restricted to areas close to oases. The sert area, not blessed by winter rains, virtually precluded human use

Egypt

e sixth century B.C.E., Egypt has been called "the gift of the Nile." bited area was basically an oasis formed by the river. The Blue Nile White Nile, with sources in the interior of the African continent;

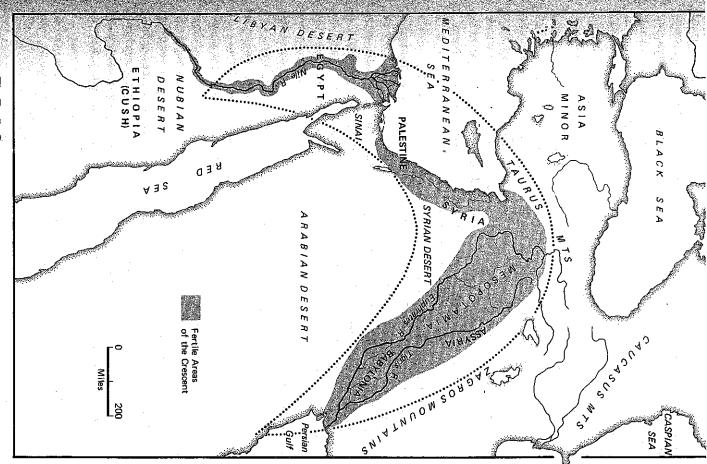


Figure 2.2. The Fertile Crescent

nt Near East? What was life like then in Haran? In Canaan? To answer possible, gives some historical substance to Abram, a character who would remain a shadowy figure in a story.

ound information about all three of these texts adds to our underof them. Their meaning is not dependent absolutely on such inforout the more one knows about the background of a text, the richer
occomes. Geography, archeology, and history expand our information
context and thereby enrich our understanding of the text. A geooverview of the Near East will provide a better appreciation of the
topographical setting of the Hebrew scriptures; archeology provides,
sociological, and cultural information. Knowledge of the overall hismtext is necessary if we are to understand Israel's experience to be
eal people in actual time and space. All help to bring the ancient
to life in a realistic setting.

GEOGRAPHY OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

istory and culture grew within a specific geography. Geography-large-interactions of nations, the location of cities, the layout of roads; of battle, the nature of the economy, sometimes even the character as of religious belief. Physical environment influences the circumsfeveryday life. Tools, houses, foodstuffs, the nature of agriculture, character and extent of industry and trade are affected by the place man beings live. To understand the Hebrew Bible, then, one must mething of the physical characteristics of the Near East. And because my of Israel was profoundly affected by the place Palestine occupied tal geographic picture of the Near East, our concern must encompass amia, Asia Minor, Armenia (today Iraq, Iran, and Turkey), Egypt; cially Palestine-Syria (modern Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and Israel) of us this is a strange and unfamiliar world, but it was the incubator al peoples and literature.

strange new world" of the Hebrew Bible is a little world of great concontains fertile river valleys and vast-reaches of elesert; nugged, barren n-slopes; and inviting upland-enclaves. It reaches to the heights in and plunges to the depths in the Dead Sea. This area was a matrix nkind, with its lower mountain slopes, oases, and river valleys forming of civilization. Within it some of the great states of the ancient world ed, and out of its deserts and down from its mountains periodically man floods that brought an end-to cultural epochs and a beginning to Life was not always easy in the ancient Near East. Inhabitants there are challenges hurled at them by the geographical conditions of their

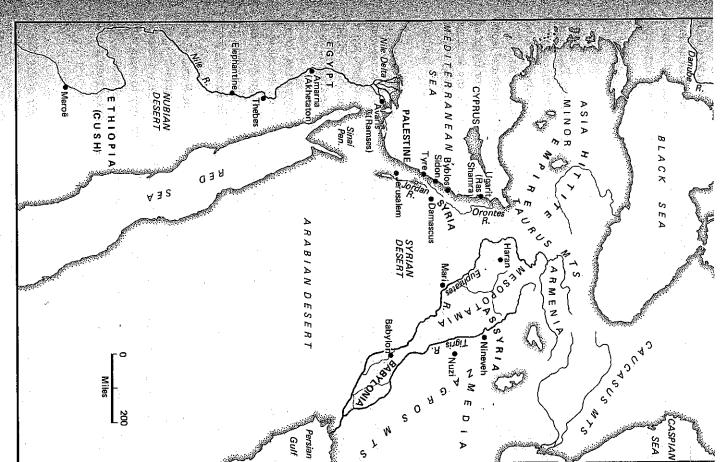


Figure 2.1. The ancient Near East

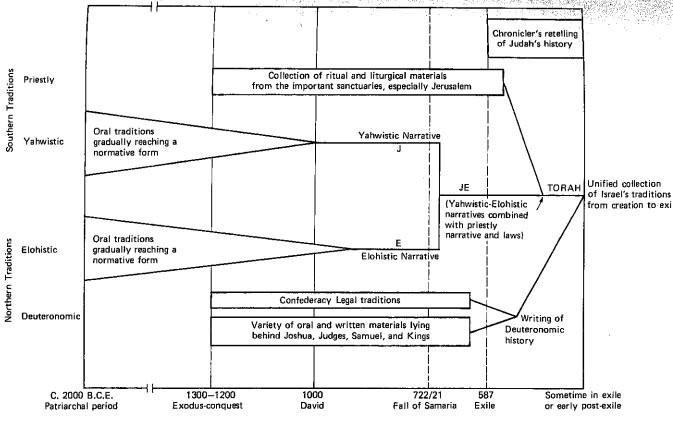
	J—Most of the book with the exceptions of the E & P materials listed here E—Abraham and Sarah in Egypt, the birth of Isaac, the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, and the sacrifice of Isaac (chapters 20-22) P—The creation liturgy (1:1-2:4a); the genealogies (chapters 5, 10, 11:10-30, 36, 46:8-27); the flood story (chapters 6-9, J & P combined); the covenant with Abraham (chapter 17) and Abraham's purchase of a burial cave (chapter 23)
EXODUS	J — Combined with some E materials (chapters 1–24 and 32–34) P — Cultic regulations of various kinds (chapters 25–31 and 35–40)
LEVITICUS	-P — The entire book
NUMBERS	JE — The unsuccessful attempt to enter Ganaan (chapters 11-14), victories east of the Jordan, the incident of the poisonous serpents, and the Balak/Balaam stories (chapters 21-24) P — The rest of the book
DUETERONOMY	D — The entire book with some JE materials in chapters 27–34

Figure 3.1. JEDP Sources in the Pentateuch

completion of the story occurs in Joshua-Kings when land is conquered and nationhood is established. Thus <u>Torah</u> is closely connected to the books that follow. The nature of the relationship is an item of continuous debate among students of the Hebrew Bible.

- 1. Some consider the basic units to be Genesis Deuteronomy (the traditional Jewish Torah designated as Pentateuch by modern scholarship) and Joshua-Kings (the traditional former prophets of Judaism).
- Some trace the Yahwistic and Elohistic strata through Joshua and beyond, and designate Genesis-Joshua as Hexateuch (six writings).
- Some accept the truncated form of the history of Israel's origins, Genesis-Numbers, and designate it as Tetrateuch (four writings) and consider Deuteronomy-Kings the deuteronomic history.

Deuteronomy belongs as much to the narrative that follows it, Joshua-Kings as it does to the Torah narrative preceding it. It brings the Moses story to its conclusion and anticipates Israel's life in Canaan. It may well be that the Deuteronomist depends on the conquest narratives from the Yahwist and the Elobist for his treatment of Israel's entry into Canaan. He probably reshaped there for his own theological purposes. But in the Hebrew canon Joshua-Kings separated from Torah, leaving Torah with a certain incompleteness. The priestly editor of Torah apparently intended that it end this way. Shaping Forah traditions for a community in exile, a community that had lost the land



The development of Israel's narrative and legal traditions.

Figure 3.2. The development of Israel's narrative and legal traditions.

