

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

The Fertile Crescent

The Fertile Crescent is the area along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Mesopotamia), the Palestinian coastal plain and hill country, the Nile River delta and valley in Egypt. This area is commonly called the Fertile Crescent, a name first used by the famous Egyptologist, James H. Breasted. One who is familiar with the green forests and rich agricultural lands of Mesopotamia or Europe might not think of Mesopotamia, Palestine, or Egypt as fertile. This is a false perspective for judging it, however. To the ancients, these lands watered by the rivers or by the rains blown in from the Mediterranean were good lands "flowing with milk and honey"—lands of great agricultural abundance.

The population of the ancient Middle East was concentrated in this relatively small area. Through it ran the most traveled roads or tracks. Great states were born here and they frequently waged war to control it. The major economic activities were agriculture, but trade and commerce were also common. Roads were built in all directions, making some of the cities of the area hubs of international activity.

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Egypt

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

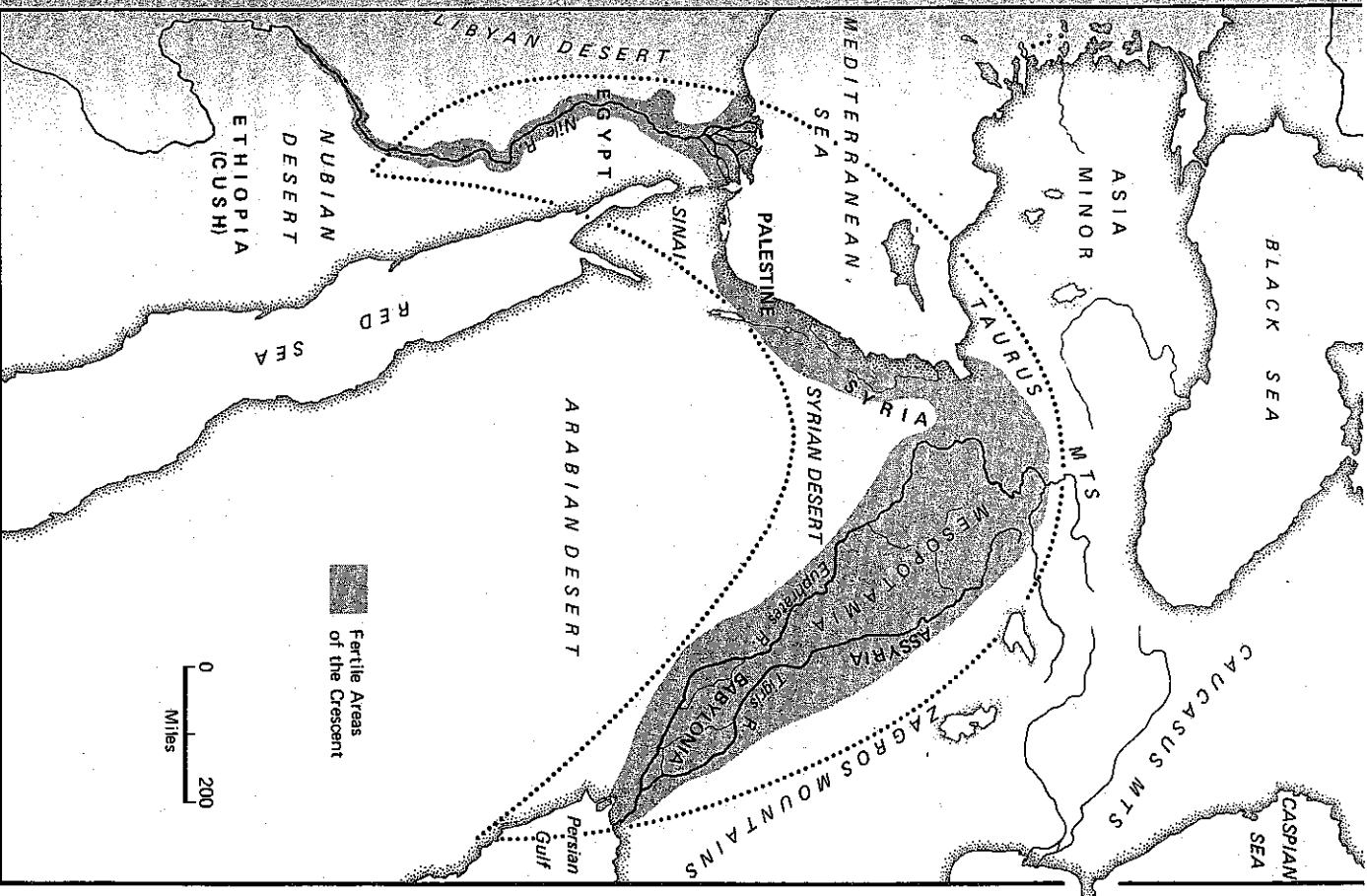


Figure 2.2. The Fertile Crescent

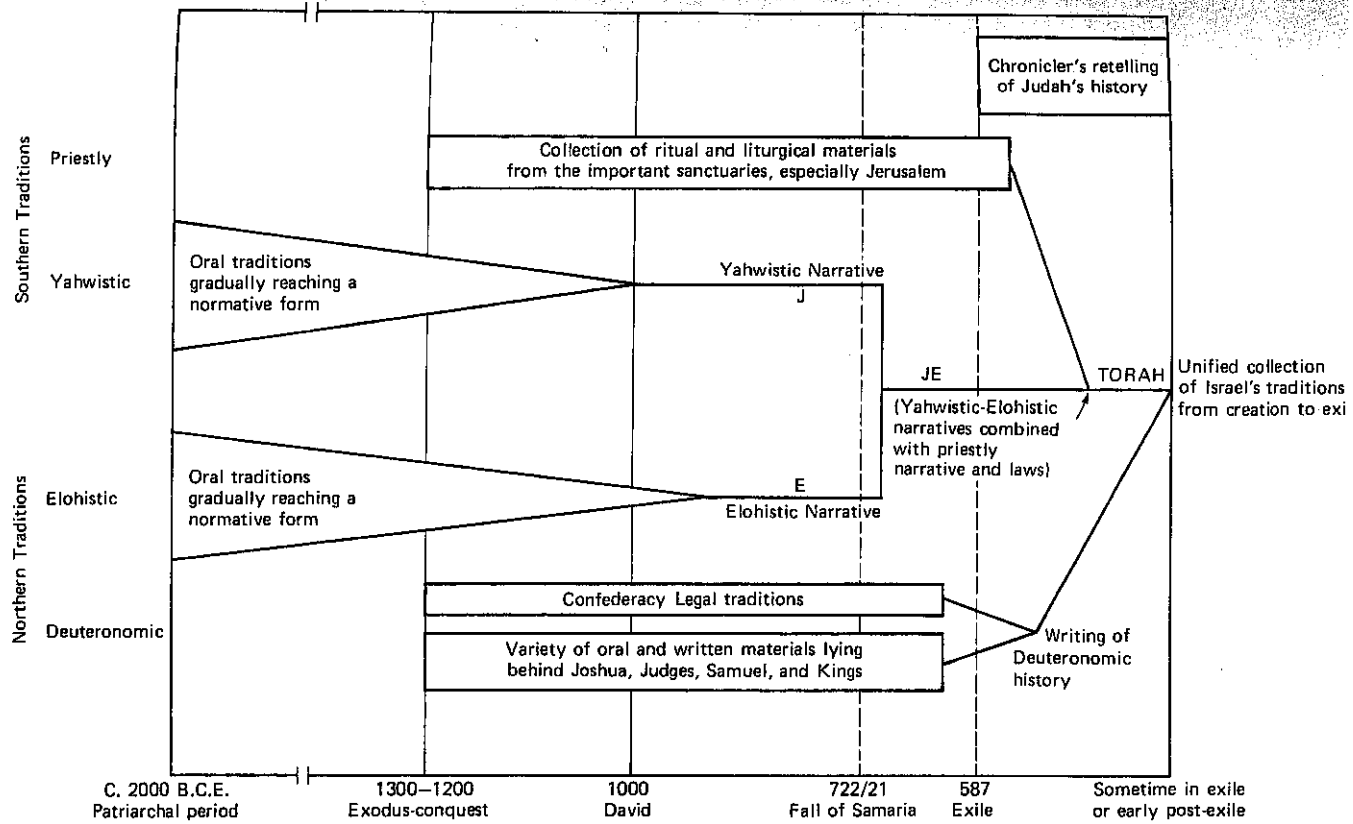
GENESIS	J — Most of the book with the exceptions of the E & P materials listed here E — Abraham and Sarah in Egypt, the birth of Isaac, the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, and the sacrifice of Isaac (chapters 20–22) P — The creation liturgy (1:1–2:4a); the genealogies (chapters 5, 10, 11:10–30, 36, 46:8–27); 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 Canaan (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
DEUTERONOMY	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 Torah 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).
2. Some trace the Yahwistic and Elohist strata through Joshua and beyond, and designate Genesis–Joshua as Hexateuch (six writings).
3. 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 Elohist for his treatment of Israel's entry into Canaan. He probably reshaped them for his own theological purposes. But in the Hebrew canon Joshua–Kings is separated from Torah, leaving Torah with a certain incompleteness. The priestly editor of Torah apparently intended that it end this way. Shaping Torah 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.