

Moses, The Prophets, and Me!

Coming to Grips with the Older Testament

Focus #1: The Geography of the Land of the Bible

I. Introduction to the Land of the Bible

A. The importance of the study of Bible Geography

It is not too much to say that the geographical position of this little land has always dominated its history. In the land of the Bible, geography and history are so deeply interwoven that neither can be really understood without the help of the other.

Yohanon Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible*, ix

The Biblical drama was acted out on the stage of geography. Just as stage props help to put one in the right mood for watching a play or promote understanding of it or become an integral part of the presentation of the drama, a knowledge of biblical geography is essential to an appreciation of the biblical story.

Howard Vos, *Beginnings in Bible Geography*, 7

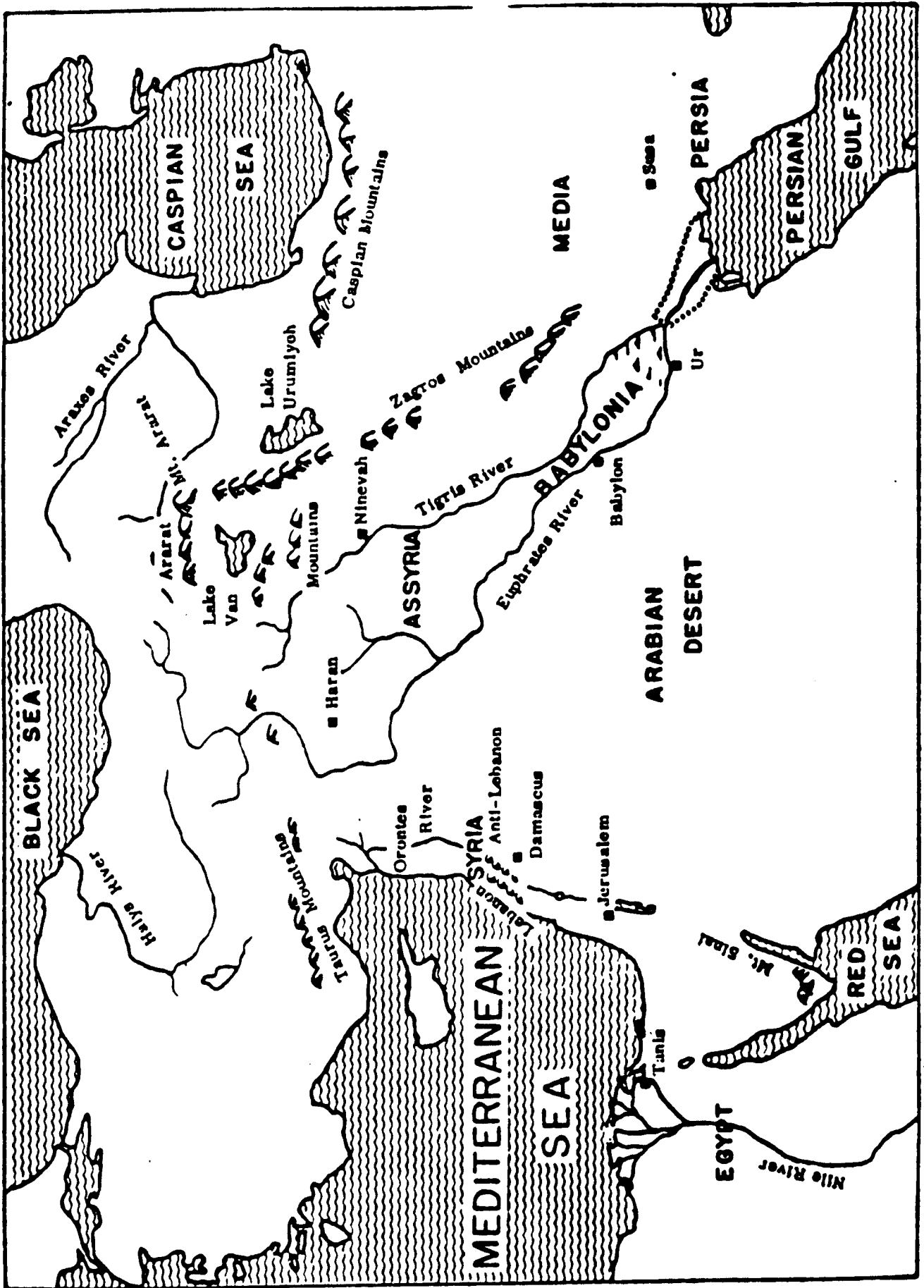
B. Three primary characteristics of Israel's geography *and* history

1. Israel is a land of *prominence*.
2. Israel is a land of *pressure*.
3. Israel is a land of *privacy*.

C. Illustrations of the importance of geographical considerations to the history of the Scriptures

1. Why is it that Eretz Israel has been so sought after by foreign nations throughout history?
2. Why did Moses first plan to attack Canaan from Kadesh-Barnea, and then later reposition the nation so that they could attack from the east?
3. What was the "battle plan" given to Joshua in his campaign against the Canaanites, and what was the rationale for the order of the attacks?
4. Why was it significant that Jesus was reared in Nazareth, and why did He abandon that city and make a home for Him and His family in Capernaum when He commenced His public ministry?
5. Why did Jesus retire to the land beyond the Jordan, Perea, at times of danger during His earthly ministry?

D. A word concerning the title given this land.



Note the following concerning this part of the world

a. The eastern Mediterranean world is roughly bounded by four bodies of water:

- ✓ The Mediterranean (Great) Sea (to the west)
- ✓ The Black Sea (to the northwest)
- ✓ The Caspian Sea (to the northeast)
- ✓ The Persian Gulf (to the south east)

b. Taken as a geographical unit, the eastern Mediterranean world is...

- ✓ about 1400 miles from east to west;
- ✓ about 900 miles from north to south;
- ✓ dominated by the Arabian Desert
- ✓ a total of approximately 1,100,000 square miles, which is about 1/3 the land-area of the continental United States.

c. Notice especially the following very important features of the eastern Mediterranean world

(1) The Red Sea

- ✓ about 1500 miles long, forms the natural border between Africa and the Arabian peninsula; lies to the south of the Eretz Israel
- ✓ averages ca. 180 miles wide (narrower at its extremities)
- ✓ empties into the Indian Ocean; thus provides access by sea to the east
- ✓ two northern arms (Gulf of Suez to the west, Gulf of Aqaba to the east) very important in defining the boundaries of Eretz Israel

(2) The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers

- ✓ flow out of rugged mountains in the north, all the way to the Persian Gulf
- ✓ very long (Euphrates: 1675 mis; Tigris: 1150 mis), largely navigable by small craft
- ✓ together form the delta which allowed civilization, thus define *Mesopotamia*
- ✓ Euphrates once defined the northern boundary of the land of Israel (2 Sam 8:3; 10:16)

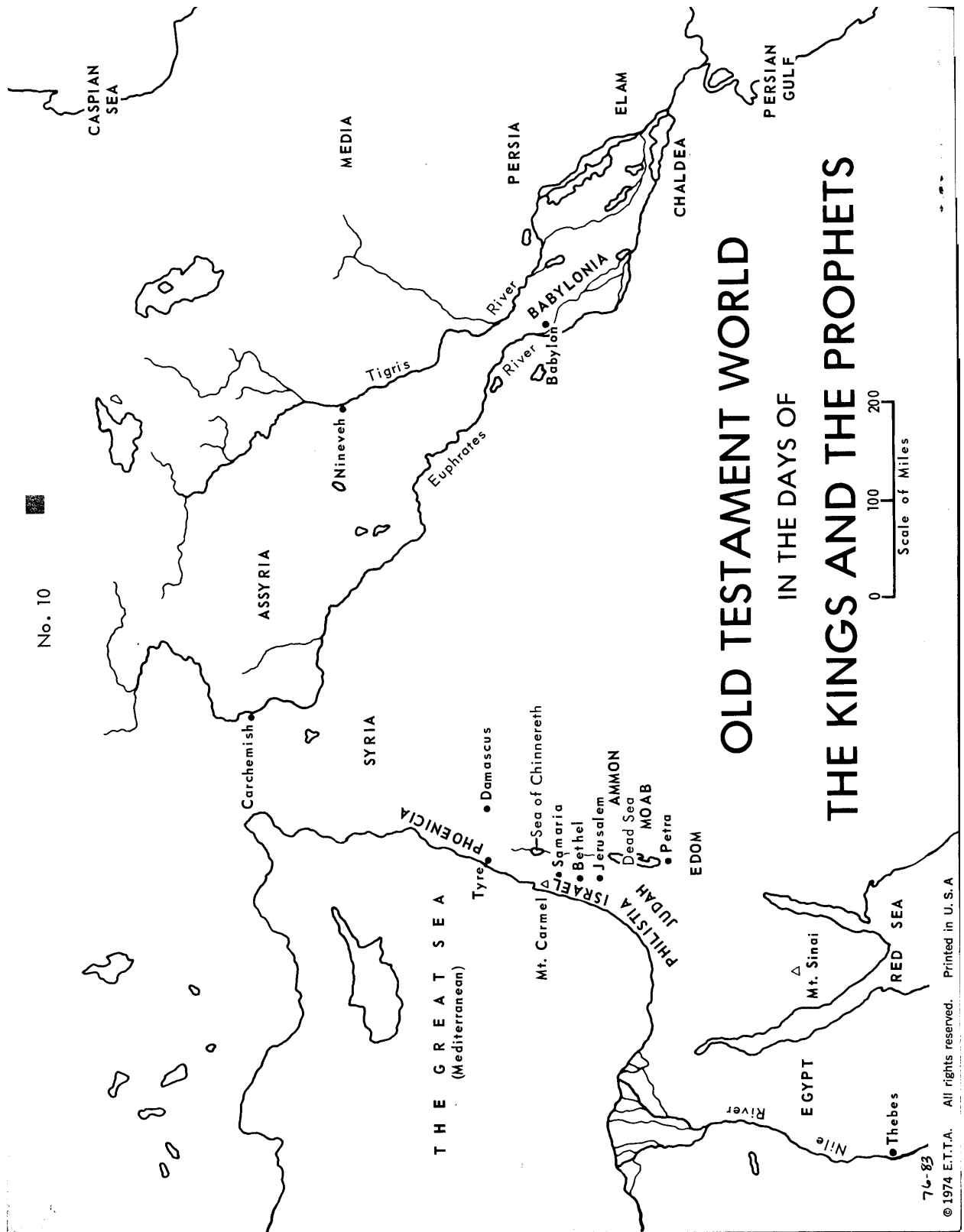
(3) The mountains of Ararat

- ✓ lay between the Caspian and the Black Sea, in northern reaches of eastern Mediterranean region
- ✓ very desolate, rugged, impassable

(4) The Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon Mountains

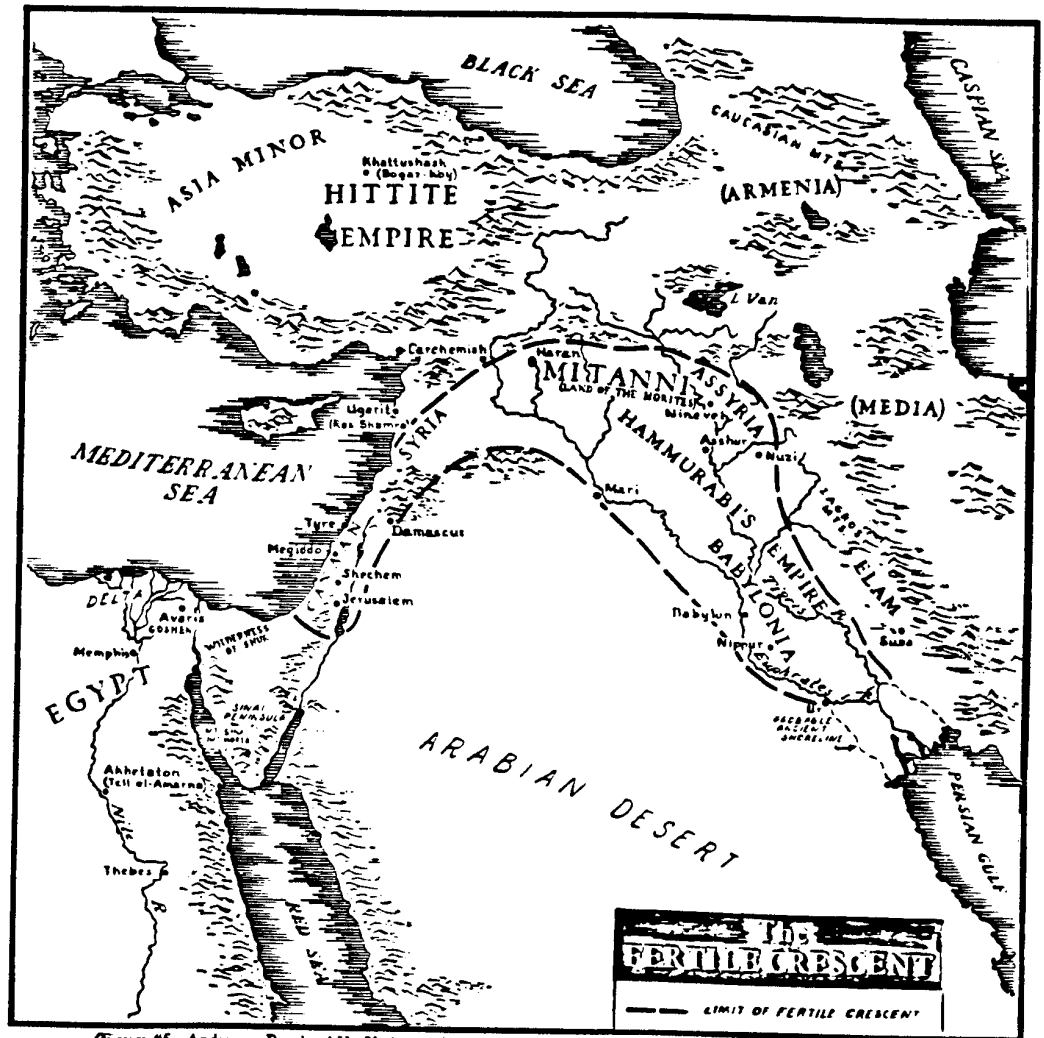
- ✓ configured north to south, just to north of the Sea of Galilee region
- ✓ Lebanons on the west (sea-ward), Anti-Lebanons face them on the east (inland)
- ✓ valley between them becomes the Jordan Rift, stretches south through Eretz Israel, Dead Sea
- ✓ provide water for Jordan system
- ✓ Galilee lies at the southern reaches of the Lebanon range
- ✓ Mt Hermon is part of the Lebanon range

This map includes most of the geographical features of the Old Testament narrative after Abraham.



B. The Fertile Crescent

1. Definition: a huge sickle of inhabitable and cultivable land stretching from the Persian Gulf on the east to the Mediterranean Sea, and thus to Egypt, on the west.



(Figure #5. Anderson, Bernhard H. *Understanding the Old Testament*. Englewood, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1957. p. 17)

2. Important: The fertile crescent was very strategic because it was an area in which three very important things could be done...
 - ✓ it could be traveled... ✓ it could be farmed, and... ✓ it could be inhabited in villages...

...and it was surrounded on all sides by territory in which none of those things was possible...

 - ✓ to the west, the *Mediterranean Sea*,
 - ✓ to the south, the *Arabian Desert*, and
 - ✓ to the north and east, *impassable mountains*.
3. Important: Eretz Israel is located at the southwest tip of the fertile crescent. Eretz Israel is the driest, narrowest, least fertile and most difficult to travel region in the fertile crescent, all of which is very important to the character of the land and its place in history. However, it is part of the fertile crescent.

C. Eretz Israel: the *Land Between*

1. The two most important areas of ancient civilization in the eastern Mediterranean world were **Mesopotamia** and **Lower Egypt**
2. The basic reason for the prominence of these two areas: a navigable river
 - ✓ In Mesopotamia, the **Tigris** and **Euphrates** Rivers
 - ✓ In Egypt, the **Nile** River
- a. Two reasons rivers were so important to the development of ancient civilizations:
 - (1) They made possible sufficient cultivation to support a sedentary, urbanized population
 - (2) They provided easy local transportation, facilitating the interchange of goods, ideas and customs, and thus making possible the development of an identifiable culture.
- b. Though Israel had the Jordan River running the length of it, that river never provided the advantages provided by the Tigris/Euphrates & Nile for their respective areas.

The reason(s) for this:

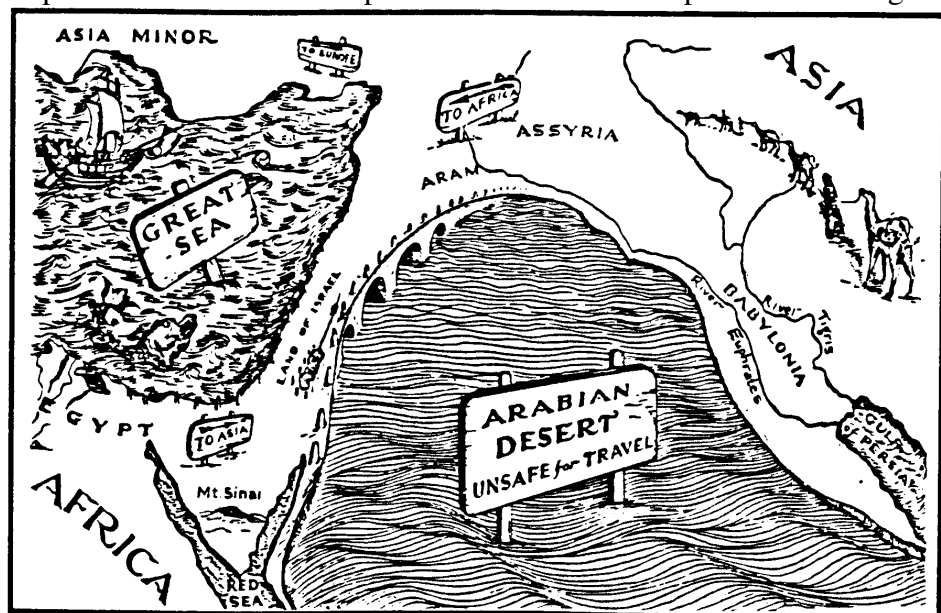


3. The only feasible route from Mesopotamia to Egypt had to pass *through Eretz Israel*
 - a. For this reason, Eretz Israel is often referred to as a **land bridge**

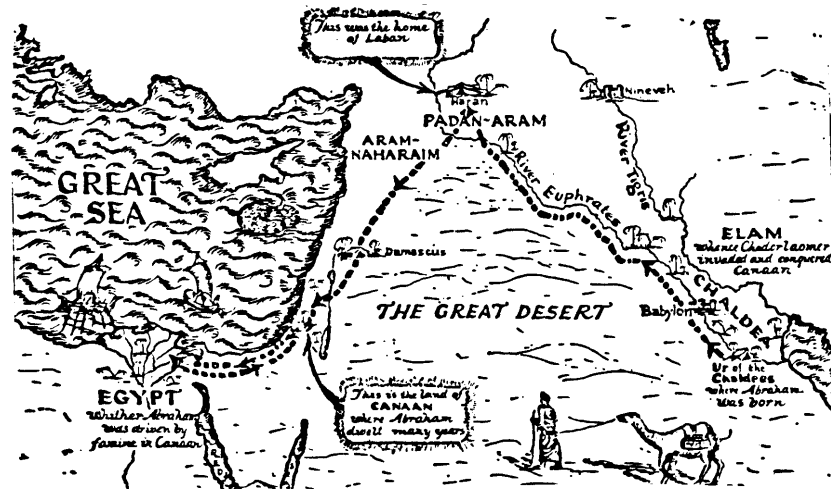
The great empires of the olden times grew up either in Africa on the banks of the Nile, or in Asia on the banks of the Tigris and the Euphrates, or in Europe on the Mediterranean Coast; and the only firm and open highway between these three regions ran through Palestine. The little land lay like a bridge between the continents. Therefore, Palestine could not help but become the most vital bit of territory in the ancient world.

Lewis Browne, *The Graphic Bible*, 19

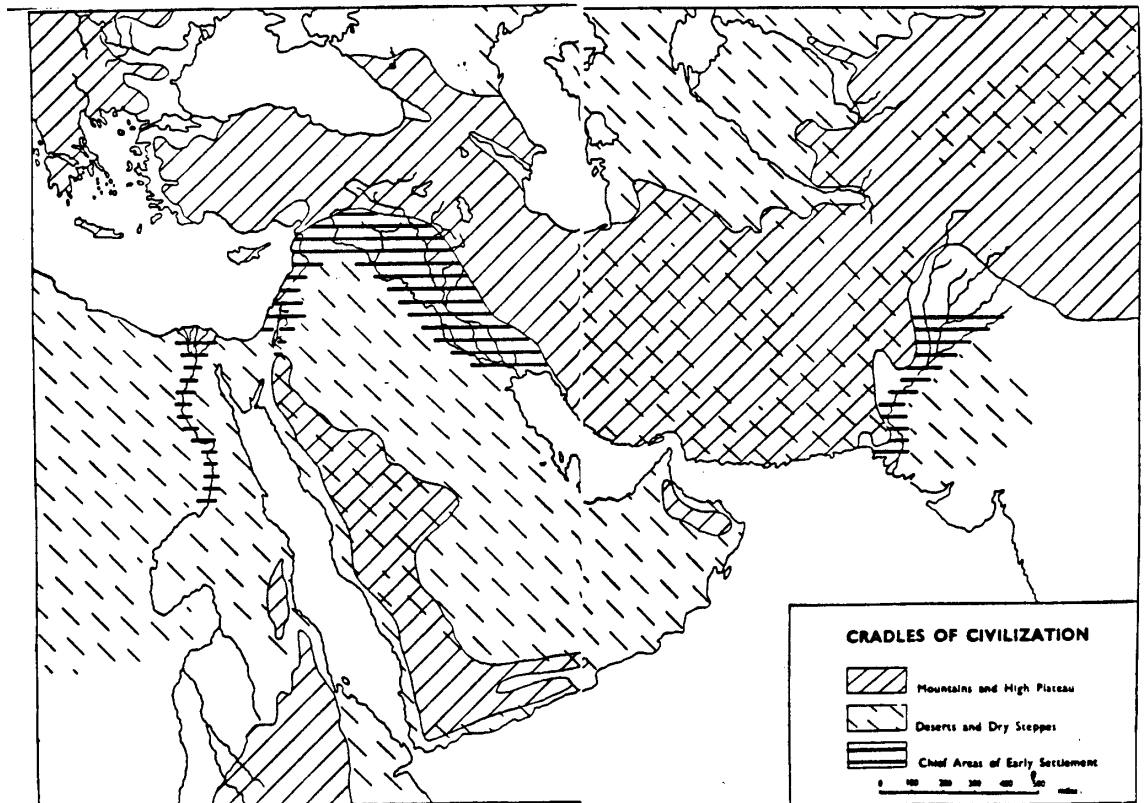
See the map below for a dramatic representation of the concept of a land bridge.



- b. Further, Eretz Israel was the narrowest and most defensible spot on the fertile crescent. (This will be discussed more carefully later.) Thus, if any nation wanted to control traffic on the fertile crescent, that nation had to gain control of the land of Israel.



- c. The very important point: the strategic character of Eretz Israel--the reason she has been so much sought after throughout time--is *not* because its fertile soil or its abundant resources; rather, its importance derives from its *location*.



D. The Five **Basic Geographic Regions** of Eretz Israel

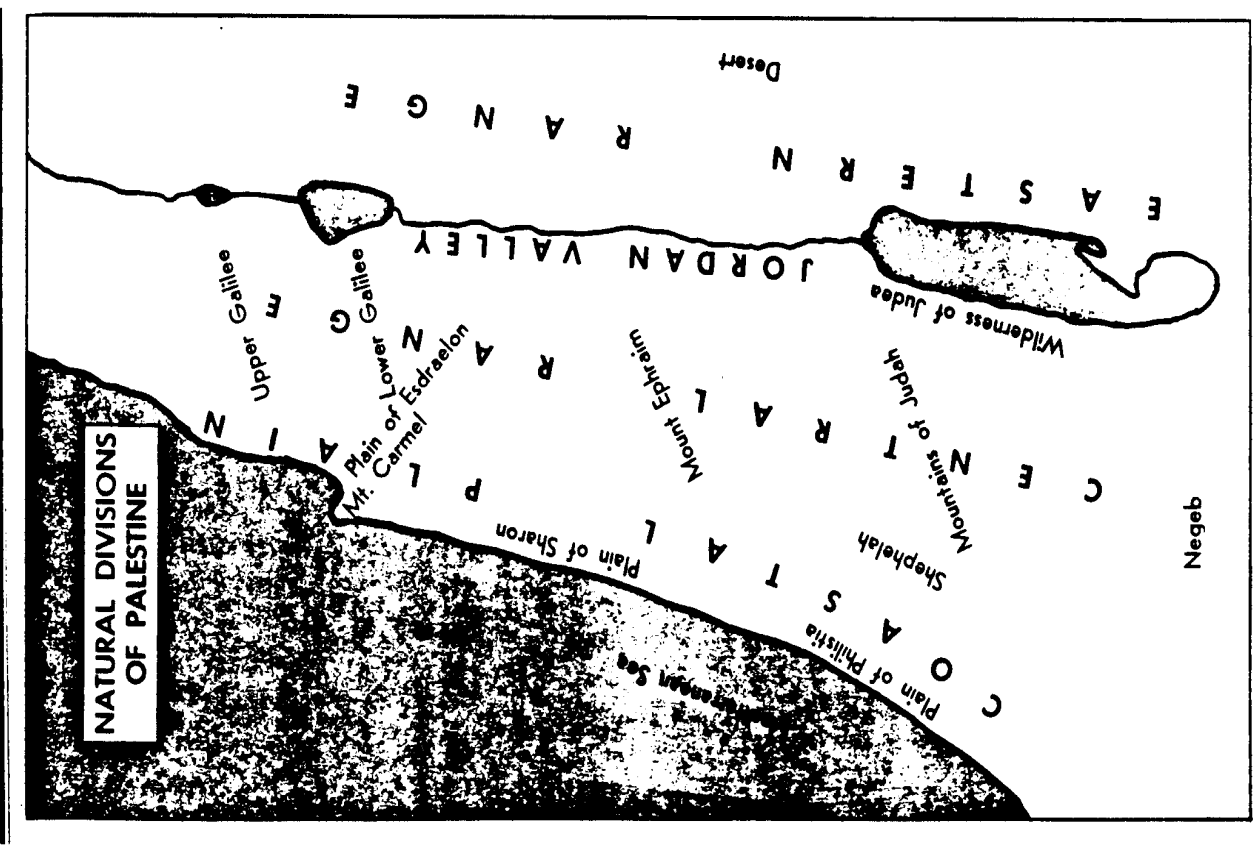
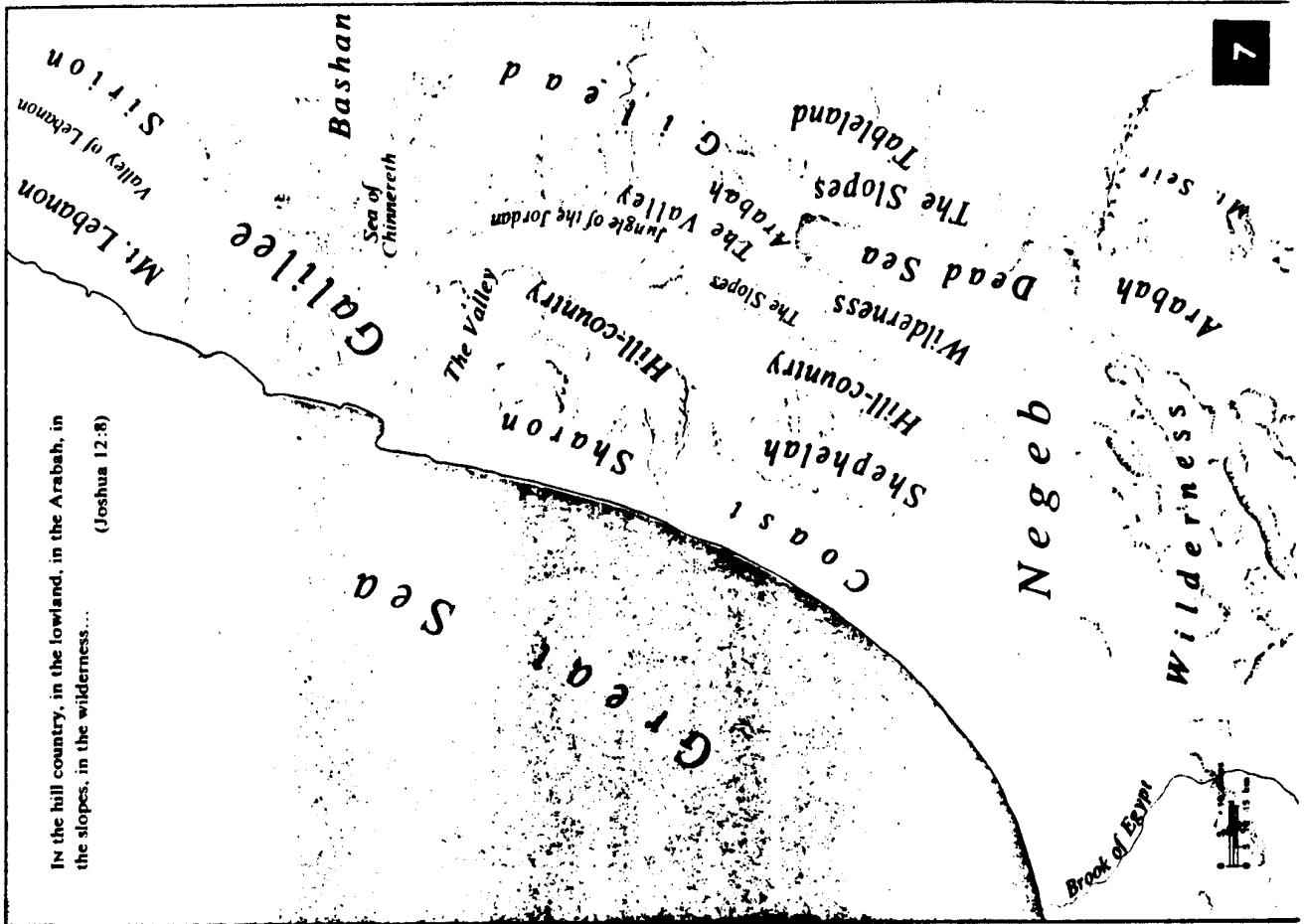
1. Overall statistics of Eretz Israel

- a. From north to south (“Dan to Beersheba”): 150 miles
- b. From east to west:
from 30 miles (at the Sea of Galilee)...
...to 80 miles (at the southern reach of the Dead Sea)
- c. In Transjordan (east of the Jordan Rift), the distance from the Jordan Rift to the Arabian Desert ranges from 80 miles in the north (where the edge of the desert presses to the east) to 30 miles in the south (where the edge of the desert pushes toward Eretz Israel)
- d. All of Cis-jordan (the area west of the Jordan Rift, between the Rift and the Mediterranean) includes an area of about 6000 square miles (ca. The size of Connecticut & Delaware)
- e. All of Transjordan (the area from the Jordan Rift west to the desert) includes an area of about 4000 miles
- f. The total area of Old Testament Israel at its greatest extent: about 10,000 square miles.

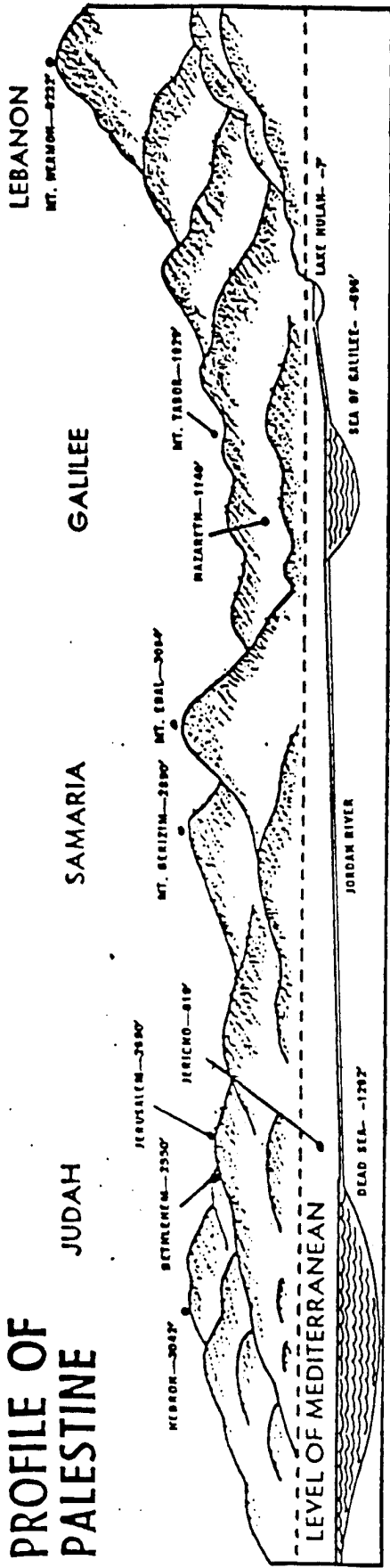
2. General features of the topography of Eretz Israel

- a. The most dramatic characteristic of the topography of Eretz Israel: its **DIVERSITY**
Note: The charts on the next page represent the remarkable topographical diversity of this land.
- b. The chief reason for the remarkable diversity of the tiny land of Israel:
 - (1) The **JORDAN RIFT** is a deep gorge in the earth’s surface, extending from north of Luke Hula (well north of the Sea of Galilee) south to the Dead Sea and beyond.
Note: The fault line seems to be connected to the valley between the Lebanon ranges; practically, this is so, but technically there are two separate fault lines involved.
 - (2) The Rift stretches almost due north to south.
 - (3) The Jordan River flows along the floor of the rift, from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. (The distance is about 60 miles, but the river travels almost 200 miles because of the twists in its course.)
 - (4) The Jordan Rift is marked by a remarkably steep descent as one moves south:
 - (a) Headwaters of the Jordan River (foot of Mt Hermon): 9232 feet above sea level
 - (b) Sea of Galilee (about 30 miles south of Mt Hermon) is 695 feet **below** sea level
 - (c) The Dead Sea (about 60 miles south of the Sea of Galilee) is **1290** feet below sea level at its surface; soundings have demonstrated it to be about **1300 feet deep!**
The land rises to the south of the Dead Sea, preventing water from flowing from it (thus the name).

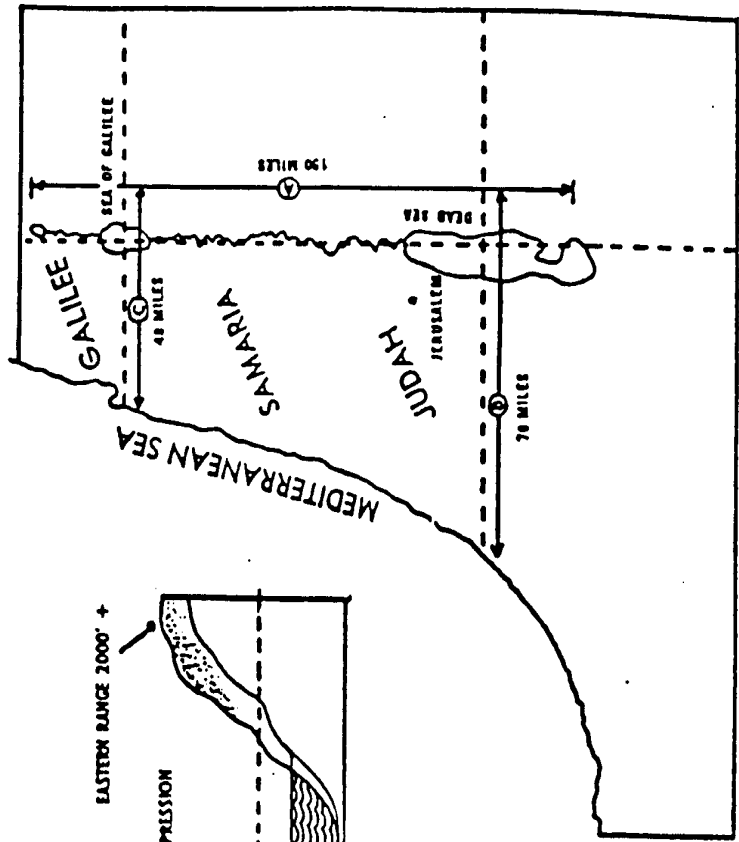
There is no other spot on earth which is not covered by water and which is so steep in descent as the rift which stretches from north of the Sea of Galilee all the way to the Dead Sea!



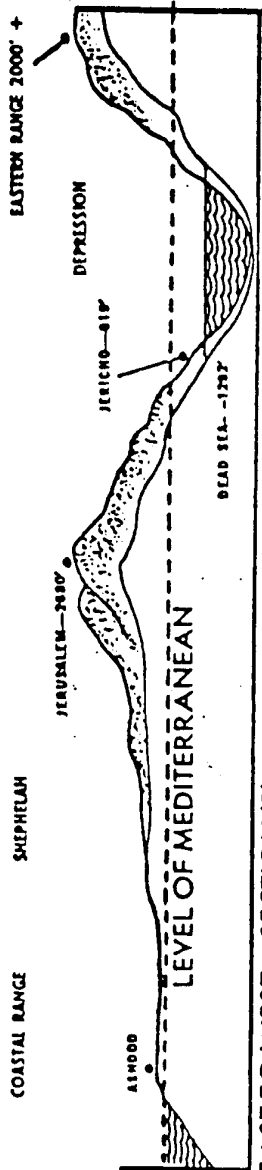
PROFILE OF PALESTINE



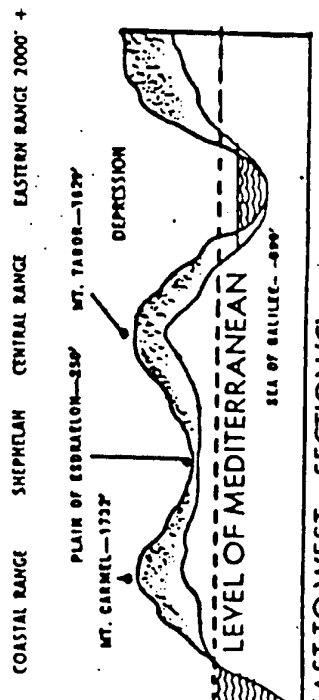
NORTH TO SOUTH—SECTION (A) (HEIGHTS EXAGGERATED 17 TIMES)



MAP OF CROSS SECTIONS



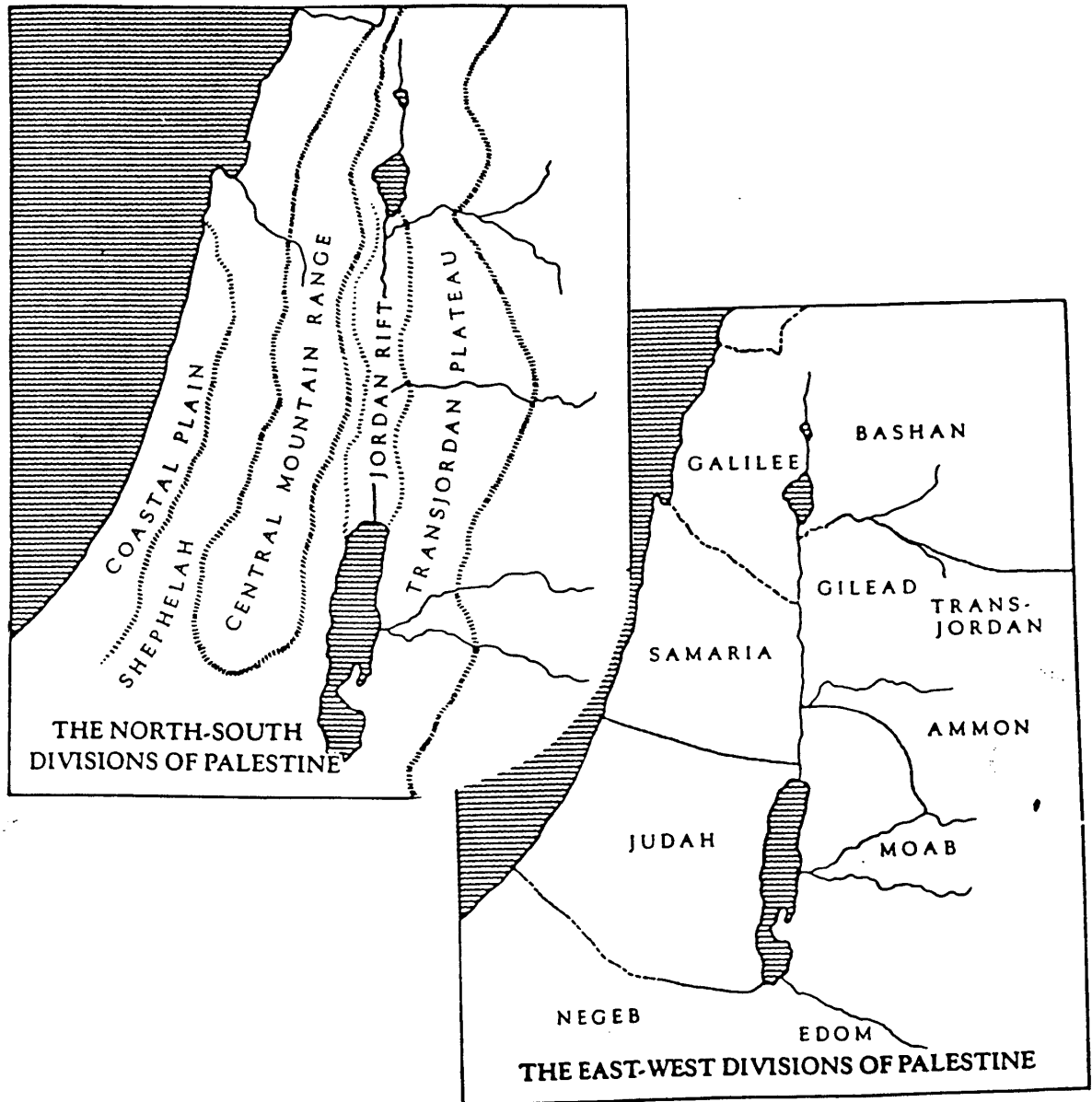
EAST TO WEST—SECTION (B) (HEIGHTS EXAGGERATED 10 TIMES)



EAST TO WEST—SECTION (C) (HEIGHTS EXAGGERATED 10 TIMES)

3. The five great geographical/topographical regions in Israel.

The maps on this page depict the five regions that you need to understand. These lie north to south, and moving from the Mediterranean (on the west) to the Arabian Desert (on the east), they are as follows:



Those five regions are described on the next two pages of notes.

a. **The Coastal Plain**

- ✓ runs the length of the Mediterranean coastline; mostly shifting sand dunes
- ✓ level, more “open” (i.e., passable) than not, difficult to defend in most cases
- ✓ narrow (thus, less open) in the north; broader (more open) to the south
- ✓ Israel actually possessed the coast only from Mt Carmel to Joppa; the area north of Carmel was controlled by Phoenicia, to the south of Joppa by the Philistines
- ✓ no good harbors because of current in the Mediterranean; however, in OT days, Joppa served as harbor, & in NT Herod built a harbor at Caesarea; Israel never a “sea-going” people
- ✓ cities tended to be built inland, away from the sea
- ✓ a major international highway traversed these plains
- ✓ includes (north to south):
 - ① **Asher** (or Acco), north of Carmel to “ladder of Tyre”
 - ② **Mt Carmel**, east-west mountain that cuts across the coastal plain, all the way to the sea
 - ③ **Jezreel** (or Esdralon), arrowhead-shaped valley, 20 miles on a side, which runs east to west just north of Carmel range (an eastern *extension* of the coastal plain), provides easiest passage from coastal plain to Jordan Rift
 - ④ **Sharon**, south of Carmel to regions of Joppa, in OT heavily forested, very fertile; in NT, site of Caesarea-Maritima
 - ⑤ **Philistia**, south from Joppa to the desert (Sinai), broad and very open, much traffic, five pagan city-states possessed in OT, troubled Israel

b. **The Shephelah** (i.e., piedmont or lowlands)

- ✓ a region of low rolling hills that lies between the *southern* coastal plain and the hill country of Judah; no Shephelah in north (Ephraim); thus poor drainage, many swamps, less open for travelers
- ✓ a rocky plateau, averages 500-1,000 feet high; just a few miles wide, about 50 miles north to south
- ✓ 4 east-west valleys cut through the Shephelah, provide access into the Judean hill country & Jerusalem
 - ① Valley of AJALON--northernmost, natural gateway to hill country, then south to Jerusalem; very important to defend; here the sun stood still; guarded by *Gezer*
 - ② Valley of SOREK--straight west of Jerusalem; most immediate route, but very rugged, hard for armies or caravans
 - ③ Valley of ELAH--broadest, easiest; ascends to Bethlehem, then north in hill country to Jerusalem; guarded by *Azekah & Socoh*
 - ④ Ascent to HEBRON--chief entrance from the south, up to Hebron, then north along ridge to Jerusalem; guarded by *Lachish*
- ✓ in ancient world, Shephelah rich with olives, sycamore trees (1 Kings 10:27)
- ✓ always important militarily; provided a buffer between hill country (where Jews lived, capital/temple was located) and international highway & Philistines

c. **The Central Mountain Range (Hill Country)**

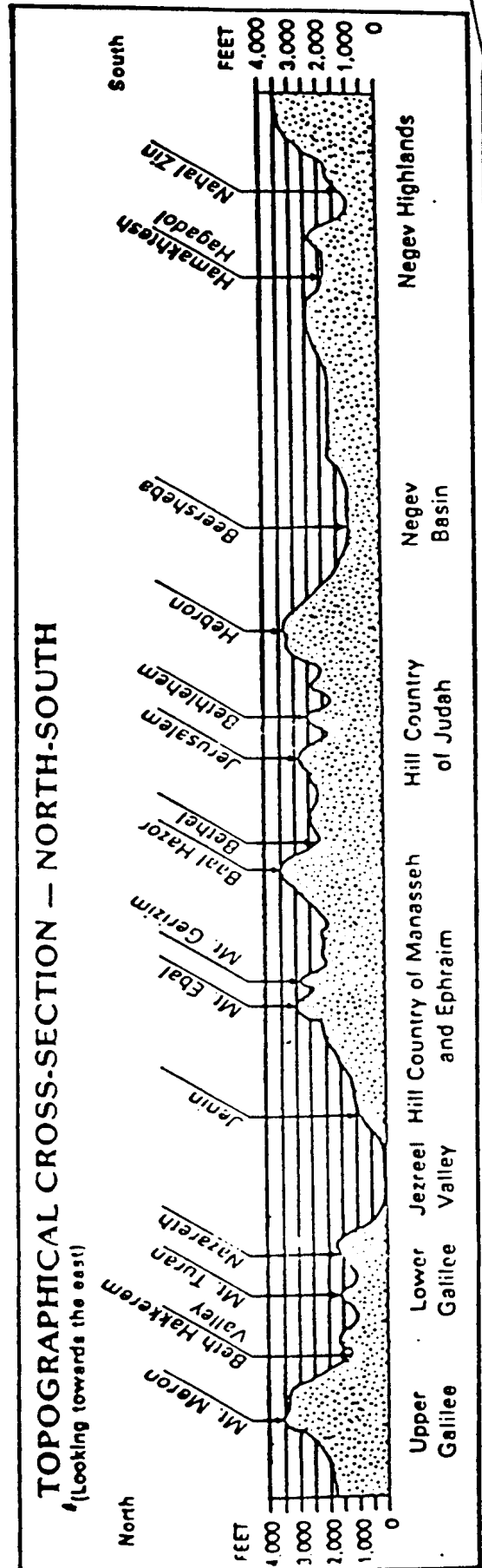
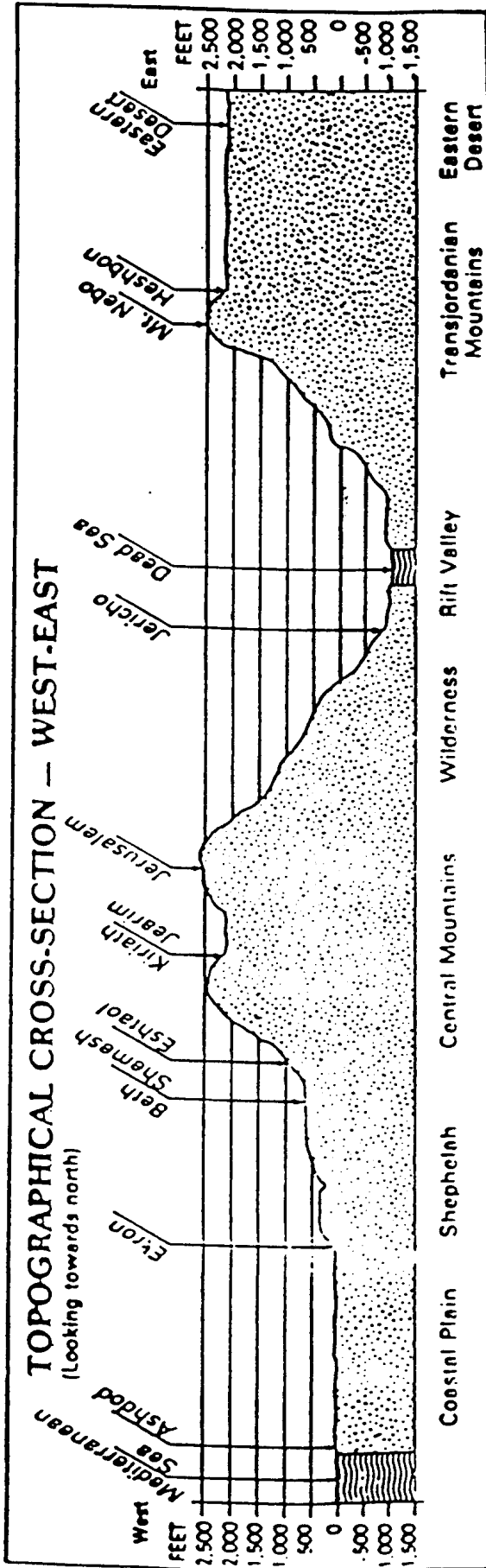
- ✓ a ridge of hills which rises sharply from the coastal plains in the north, from the Shephelah in the south
- ✓ hills tend to be steep, with V-shaped valleys, narrow ridges must be followed for north-south travel
- ✓ highlands of the hill country generally broader, more spacious to the north (Ephraim), narrower, less inviting to the south (Judah)
- ✓ in ancient times, much forested; today, quite barren
- ✓ Includes:
 - ① GALILEE--around the Sea of Galilee; divided into Upper Galilee (to north, ca. 2,000 - 4,000 feet high) and Lower Galilee (to south, all under 1850 ft in elevation); very fertile, could support large population
 - ② Hill Country of EPHRAIM/SAMARIA--named for tribe of Ephraim (largest in north); from south of Valley of Jezreel south to Central Benjamin Plateau; hills not quite so steep, more passable, tillable; but tend to terrace
 - ③ Hill Country of JUDAH--from Bethel/Ai south to the Negeb; hills steeper, soil scarcer; area ranges 2,000-3,000 feet in elevation; can grow fruit trees, vines, etc.
 - ④ The JESHIMON--or wilderness of Judea; lies west and north of the Dead Sea; baked by hot winds off the salty Dead Sea; arid soil and naked rock throughout; deserted, but not isolated (refuge for political rebels, outlaws, ascetics)
- ✓ to the south of the Hill Country, the eastern Negeb (Kadesh-Barnea)
- ✓ in ancient world, southernmost site with sufficient rainfall to support a city: Hebron

d. **The Jordan Rift**

- ✓ the deepest fault line on earth, the chief factor in shaping the landscape and topography of Eretz Israel
- ✓ from 2 to 15 miles wide, with barriers of cliffs on either side
- ✓ very dry climate, highest temperatures in the region
- ✓ Includes:
 - ① HULEH VALLEY--from foot of Mt Hermon (north) to Sea of Galilee; about 10 miles, but drops 840 feet; headwaters of Jordan River found here
 - ② The SEA OF GALILEE--the only natural sweet-water lake in Eretz Israel; 13 miles long, 7 miles wide, 630 feet below sea level at surface; many fish; because of location, situation, given to sudden, short, violent storms; in Jesus' day, densely populated area
 - ③ The JORDAN VALLEY (or "El Ghor")--65 miles from Sea of Galilee to Dead Sea (river travels 200 miles!); drops 590 feet in this distance; flood plain (called the *Zor*, or "the pride") is 1 mile wide at broadest, was covered by dense vegetation in ancient world
 - ④ The DEAD SEA ("SALT SEA")--about 6½ million tons of water into Dead Sea each day, no outlet; therefore high content of salt and minerals, no animal life; heat in area produces evaporation of about 6 - 8 million tons/day; sea is 26% solid (5 ✕ normal ocean water); about 46 miles north to south, 1200 feet deep in northern section; surrounded by high cliffs, narrow shore at spots
 - ⑤ The ARABAH--continuation of the Jordan Rift between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba (about 110 miles); almost totally barren, deserted; some copper mining

e. **The Transjordan Plateau (Eastern Range)**

- ✓ the area east of the Rift;
- ✓ north-south: extends ca 150 miles, from base of Mt. Hermon, south to southern tip of Dead Sea
- ✓ east-west: extends from the Jordan Rift east to the Arabian Desert
- ✓ mountains here higher and steeper, climate more temperate, rainfall more abundant than in Cis-Jordan
- ✓ this is the area where Reuben, Gad and ½ of Manasseh asked Moses to give them their inheritance
- ✓ this area very much affected by Arabian Desert immediately to the east: desert winds very uncomfortable, especially during transition seasons (sirocco); danger of invasion by desert nomads
- ✓ several perennial rivers flowing into the Jordan Rift:
 - ① Yarmuk River (just south of Sea of Galilee)
 - ② Jabbok River (half-way down the rift, b/w Sea of Galilee and Dead Sea)
 - ③ Arnon River (into the Dead Sea itself)
 - ④ Zered River (southern tip of the Dead Sea)
- ✓ Divisions of the Transjordan Range (north to south): *Bashan* (Damascus south to the Yarmuk); *Gilead* (Yarmuk south to Moab); *Moab* (area directly east of Dead Sea) and *Edom* (south of Zered to the desert)
- ✓ King's Highway (an international highway, more significant in early OT times [Abraham], less important than Way of the Sea as time goes by) passes through this region



E. The Basic Geology of Eretz Israel

1. The chief type of rock found throughout Eretz Israel: *limestones*

The point is that most of the rocks in the land are not *igneous* (rock formed deep in the molten core of the earth; virtually none of this in Israel) or *metamorphic* (rock which was originally igneous, but transformed through pressure, heat, water, etc; again, none in Israel).

Instead, virtually all of the rock in Israel is *sedimentary* (i.e., made of material that has been deposited. The two primary types of sedimentary rock are limestones (parent material from the sea) and sandstones (parent material from a continent). The geological substructure of the land of Israel is mostly *limestone*.

2. An important characteristic of limestone: *stratification* (or *bedding*)

3. Geologists identify each of these strata (layers) according to the *time* at which they deduce that the layer was produced (or deposited). The three strata which are important to Eretz Israel are as follows: (a) Eocene; (b) Senonian; © Cenomanian

Note: These titles are actually titles of geological time periods, which time periods an advocate of a “young earth” will reject. But the words are also used to designate the rock supposedly produced *in Israel* during those time periods. The words are used here to identify a distinguishable type of rock, without endorsing the evolutionary elements of the system of geological thought used to thus denominate the rocks.

The table summarizes the characteristics of the types of rock found plentifully in Israel.

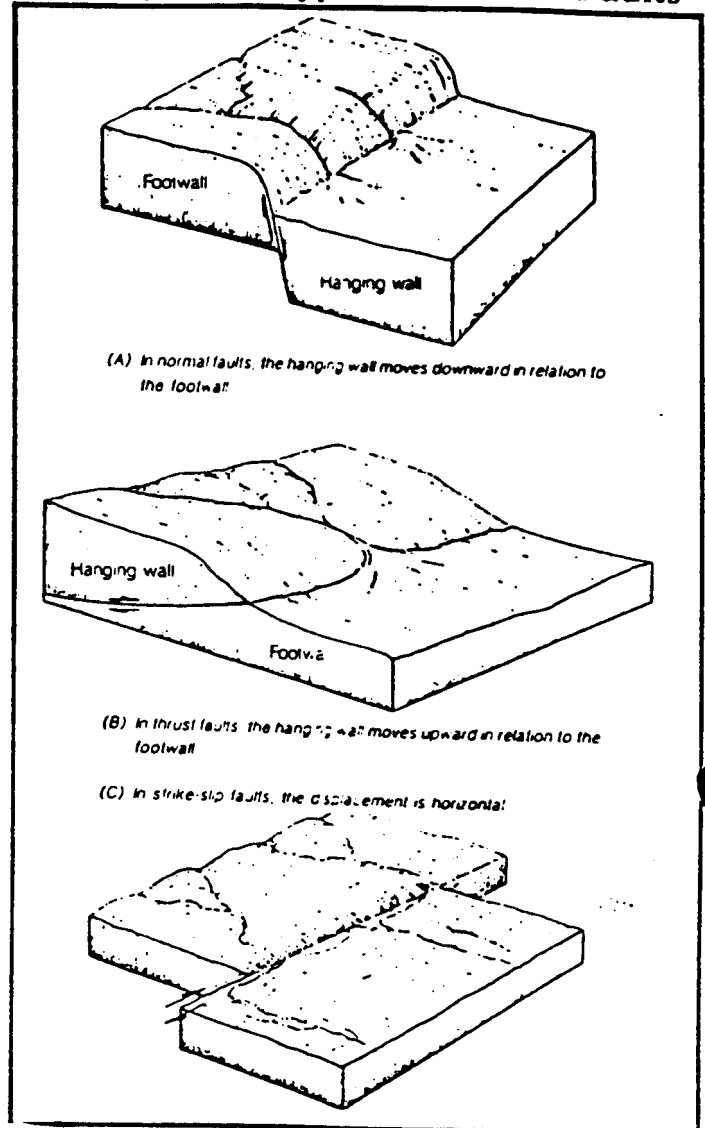
| Title (Geological Period) | | Type of Rock | Characteristics of this rock in Eretz Israel |
|---------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|---|
| | Not applicable | Basalt | --an igneous (lava) rock, found only in the region of Galilee (especially the Golan, around the Sea of Galilee) --very hard, non-porous; good for building, mortars, vases, anchors, tools |
| Limestone | Eocene | Soft Limestone and Chalk | Location: <i>lower hills, especially the Shephelah</i> Water Storage: <i>not very good, too soft (Jer 2:13)</i> Good for Building Material: <i>depends on hardness; often poor; easy to shape, but doesn't last very long</i> Soil and Land Use: <i>breaks down into brown mountain soil, will produce grain, small trees (e.g., sycamore)</i> Communication: <i>Good, produces very open areas (e.g., Shephelah)</i> Other: <i>these tend to be softer, weaker to the west; harder to the east</i> |
| | Senonian | Chalk and Chert | Location: <i>found in the wilderness (Jeshimon) and in the valleys</i> Water Storage: <i>very poor, will not hold water</i> Good for Building Material: <i>not good, can be used to make cement or plaster</i> Soil and Land Use: <i>breaks down into a chalky (rendzina) soil; will produce wheat if enough rain, won't support trees; very porous, dries quickly; plows rather easily, so preferred by farmers</i> Communication: <i>Good if not at an angle; will erode, and so steep deposits of Senonian very difficult for travel; forms a firm, smooth surface on roads, absorbs rain water</i> Other: <i>Between hard & soft limestone deposits, chalk passes formed; these are the key to communication in most of Palestine (valleys out of Jezreel); Chert (also from Senonian limestone) is found mostly in Negev; very hard, forms sharp edges; good for weapons, tools</i> |
| | Cenomanian | Hard Limestone | Location: <i>in the mountains, especially at the top of ridges; hard, resists erosion, impermeable by water</i> Water Storage: <i>very good for cisterns; many springs in these areas</i> Good for Building Material: <i>very good (most of building in Israel)</i> Soil and Land Use: <i>produces terra rosa, a rich red soil; good for vineyards, olives, almonds; must be terraced because of location</i> Communication: <i>basically these are closed areas; must travel atop the ridges, not in the V-shaped valleys; because no erosion, must follow contours, narrow ridges</i> Other: <i>spring=water percolating to a Cenomanian level, then flowing laterally till bursts from side of hill</i> |

4. The geological formation of the rocky substructure of Eretz Israel is affected by four primary factors:

a. *Faulting*

- (1) Places where the surface of the earth has cracked or slipped, the result of some sort of cataclysm
- (2) Faulted areas make travel very difficult; terrain very rough, and this is usually worsened by erosion, wadis

Examples of Types of Normal Faults



b. *Folding*

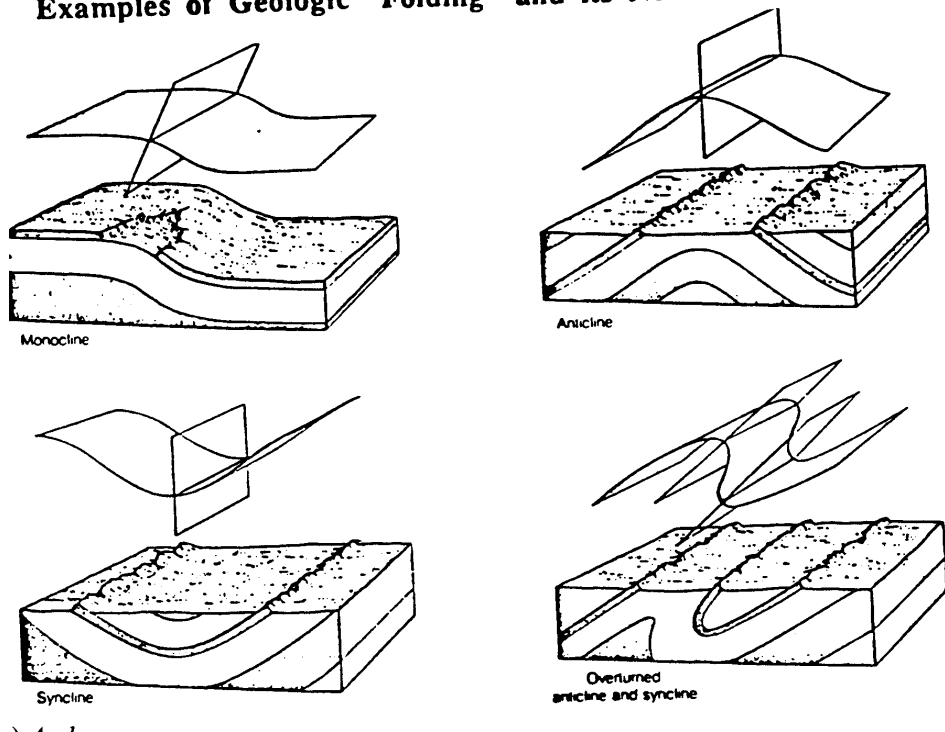
- (1) The compression of strata of rock *laterally*, producing ridges and troughs
- (2) The places where folding thrusts a strata *upward* are called ANTICLINES; where strata are thrust *downward*, they are called SYNCLINES

- (3) Topographical features don't necessarily reflect geological reality; a trough (or ANTICLINE, produced by the downward thrust of folding) may be filled in with earth, produce a high spot; or the upward thrust of folding (SYNCLINE) may produce a hill which splits open at the top, producing a valley (called a *machtesh*)

Note: There is much debate as to how such "folding" occurred. It is my conviction that such phenomena are the result of catastrophic causes, primarily the Noahic flood and the receding of the waters of that deluge. The evolutionary explanation posits millions of years of slowly shifting and accumulating strata of rock.

The important point here: the greater part of Eretz Israel is characterized by topography very much affected by very dramatic and violent **folding**.

Examples of Geologic "Folding" and its Nomenclature



- (4) *Arches*
- A ridge of impenetrable rock, stretching for miles *beneath the surface of the earth*
 - These ridges tend to lay northeast to southwest in Eretz Israel
 - The position of the subterranean ridge determines where rain water runs--to the Jordan Rift or to the Mediterranean (thus the Jericho spring)
 - Two primary ridges: the Ephraim Arch and the Judean Arch (see map on following page)
- (5) *Erosion*
- A simple equation: (wind/water/gravity) + time = erosion
 - The softer the stones, the more easily they will erode

F. The *Climate* of Eretz Israel

1. The climate of Israel is remarkably similar to that of southern California.

The reason for this: similar latitude, & Israel lies between the desert (Arabian) and the sea (Mediterranean).

2. There are two major seasons each year in Israel

- a. The summer [dry] season

- (1) Approximately May-September

- (2) During this season, there is **no rain** (1 Samuel 12:6); days are quite hot, and very uniform in temperature.

The word that most aptly characterizes Palestine's summer season is *stability*. During summer, the jet stream (which allows for the depression and convection of air masses and produces storms) has been forced northward to the vicinity of the Alps by the equatorial movement of the sun toward the northern hemisphere. In the wake of that, there develop a stationary high pressure cell over the Azores and a monsoonal low over Iran and Pakistan, which results in basically north-south isobars (barometric pressure lines) over Israel. When that happens, a thermal barrier is created that (1) produces uniformly clear daylight conditions, with some morning haziness manifested near the Mediterranean, and (2) prevents the formation of rain clouds, even in the face of an extremely high relative humidity. A storm in summer is most unexpected (1 Samuel 12:17,18). That means the summer season features consistently fine weather, regular westerly breezes, daytime heat, and almost complete drought. Those summer air masses, slightly cooled and moistened as they pass over the Mediterranean, condense to form the aforementioned dew, which nourishes the summer growth.

Beitzel, *Moody Atlas of Bible Lands*, 51-52

The course of a normal summer day is fairly easy to foretell. On the Coast Plain during the early hours there is almost complete calm, so that the smoke rises straight into the air and hangs lazily above its source. Sunrise produces an immediate rise in temperature, which remains within 5° F. Of the maximum for as long as 7 to 9 hours. This early calm and the sudden rise of temperature make the early hours on the coast in many ways the most unpleasant of the day. The heating of the land, however, triggers the sea breeze, and regularly every day the cool, camp air moves eastward across the coast to refresh the languid spirit and hold the temperature steady throughout the day.

The prolonged heat of a summer day is its most characteristic feature, but it must by no means be exaggerated; the summer climate, even on the Coast Plain, is a great deal more bearable than Washington, DC or New York, or indeed a large part of the United States at the same season. On the highlands the nights are cool, even though the days have been hot. The Rift is naturally hot, but at Tiberias and Beth-shan the arrival of the sea breeze brings relief, though farther south at Jericho it pours so tempestuously down the Judean hills, and is so warmed by its descent, that the effect is most uncomfortable.

Baly, *Bible Geography*, 46

- (3) The daily wind off the sea produces a heavy dew in much of the land during the dry season; the moisture of that dew is sufficient to grow such crops as grapes, olives, pomegranates, figs, etc during that season (therefore, these are harvested in the fall)
- (4) This is the "time when kings go out to war" (2 Sam 11:1); the weather is uniform, the roads are passable, and the (winter) crops do not need attending.

- b. The winter [rainy] season
 - (1) Approximately November-February
 - (2) During this season, intermittent rain (because of transition in prevailing weather systems which affect the land of Israel)

Note: All of Israel’s rain falls from October to April. Israel gets as much moisture as most countries in more temperate zones, but it all falls in this one season. Thus, the growing season is more crucial.

The winter season is characterized by *instability*. As they take advantage of the equatorial path of the sun toward the southern hemisphere, winter upper air masses become infused with an extremely cool surge of polarized air. From that mixing of air masses there develop three dominant high pressure currents, only one of which can collide unpredictably with the air that meanders through a Mediterranean depression, thus producing an instability and irregularity in atmospheric conditions. The first of those air masses, a so-called central Asian high, is a direct flow of polar air of extremely high pressure--as high as 1,036 millibars--that covers Asia and at time parts of Europe. When that polar mass descends across the Uratian and Zagros mountains, it sometimes traverses the entire Syrian desert and strikes Israel from the east with a blast of freezing air and frost....Then there is the Balkan high which, in the wake of a sever Mediterranean depression, can slide southward and strike Israel, usually with moister air from the west. This air system is generally responsible for snowfall on Israel...Third, there develops a somewhat less intense Libyan high that, in the face of a deep Mediterranean depression, can be attracted into the Negeb, bringing dust storms that can turn into rain.

Beitzel, *Moody Atlas of Bible Lands*, p 52

- (3) The rainy season is when grain crops are grown (barley, wheat, etc.); these are then harvested in late spring/early summer
- (4) Because of lay of land, rainfall tends to *decrease* as you go SOUTH, or EAST, or DOWN
- (5) Days are quite chilly, but the weather is very unpredictable during this season; the rule is: Cold climate, warm sun!

Note: The charts below and on the following page represent patterns of rainfall in Eretz Israel.

| | Tel Aviv | Jerusalem | Jericho |
|------------------------------------|----------|-----------|---------|
| Precipitation: April - October | 1.7" | 1.3" | 0.6" |
| Precipitation: December - February | 15.3" | 12.3" | 3.8" |
| Precipitation: Annual | 20.8" | 15.9" | 5.0" |
| Average Relative Humidity | 79% | 69% | 54% |

3. Besides these two basic seasons, there are two *transition seasons* each year
 - a. The *fall* transitional season
 - (1) This period may arrive at any time from September to November; the transition takes 3 - 4 weeks as the weather systems that dominate Eretz Israel shift away from the summer patterns and settle into the winter patterns
 - (2) During this time, the hot, dry winds known as *siroccos* (Arabic: *Hamsin*; Hebrew: *Sharav*) blow off the Arabian Desert
 - (a) Normally, prevailing winds blow off the Mediterranean; in transition seasons, winds shift, blow off the Arabian
 - (b) These will blow intermittently, sometimes 3 to 4 days at a time; they will force the temperature to rise 16-22 degrees above normal, the humidity will drop 30-40 percent
 - (c) The siroccos are worst east of the Jordan, closer to the Arabian Desert
 - (d) The Bible knows these as the “east wind” (Jer 4:11; Isa 27:8; Jonah 4:8; Luke 12:55; Ps 103:16; Hos 13:15)
 - (3) During this time, the “**early (former) rains**” come to Israel
 Note: These rains are absolutely necessary to Israel’s agriculture. The summer bakes the ground, and the rains were necessary to soften the ground so the farmer could break up the fallow ground. These “former rains” were promised to obedient Israel in the Old Testament (Dt 11:13,14; Hos 6:3; Joel 2:23).
 - (4) Weather is very **unpredictable** in the fall transitional season; storms can arise very quickly
 - (5) The Feast of Tabernacles (*Succoth*) comes at this time, and that feast had special prayers for rain. Every Israeli is longing for rain at this period.
 - b. The *spring* transitional season
 - (1) Sometime in March - May
 - (2) The sirocco winds may arise during this time as well; less dramatic
 - (3) The “**latter rains**” come during this period.
 Note: These rains are also very important; they mature the grains, cause them to swell up, come to maturity for harvest.

In March the rainfall tends to taper off, and the final storm usually comes early in April, though there may be a slight sprinkle as late as early May. The “latter rains” are desperately needed to swell the grain and insure a good harvest, and their failure is a sign of divine displeasure in Amos 4:7. In actual fact, three-quarters of the rain tends to come in the three months of December-February, but so important is the beginning and end that the former and latter rains are often spoken of as the most significant.

Baly, 50

4. Six basic rules for determining rainfall in Eretz Israel
 - a. Rainfall tends to *decrease* as one goes from north to south.
 - b. Rainfall tends to *decrease* as one goes from east to west.
 - c. Rainfall tends to **increase** as goes up the mountains.
 - d. Rainfall tends to *decrease* on the east side of the mountains.
 - e. Temperatures tend to *decrease* with an increase in elevation.
 - f. Temperature ranges (high to low) tend to increase with the decrease in rainfall.

G. Roads of Eretz Israel: International and Internal

Introduction

Remember: much of Israel is *very isolated*, seldom penetrated by foreign powers & travelers
✓ The **reason**: the steep hills that guard the interior of the land.

At the same time, Eretz Israel saw a constant flow of foreign traffic through the land.

✓ The **reason**: the very important *international highways* that cross the land at its borders

The point: it is very important to understand the roads that crossed the land of Israel.

1. *International* routes in the land of Israel

Note: Understand the distinction between:

⇒ **international routes** (take the traveler from country to country), and

⇒ **internal routes** (take the traveler from village to village).

a. The *Way of the Sea* (Via Maris)

(1) This is part of a highway which runs from Egypt to the Mesopotamian Delta.

There is some dispute about the name, but this is the title assigned it in virtually all of the literature. Both the name and the dispute arise from Isaiah 9:1.

(2) The *Way of the Sea* was used in every period of biblical history; it was carefully fortified, and wells were dug and protected along the way

(3) **IMPORTANT**: *This* was the military objective which caused Eretz Israel to be so coveted by every foreign power which longed to control and make merchandise of the eastern Mediterranean world.

(4) **Three divisions** to the *Way of the Sea* as it passes through the land of Israel:

(a) From the border of Egypt north across the plain of Philistia

i) The coast is broad and open here (because of the Shephelah of Judah); therefore there were two branches of the *Way of the Sea* in this region, so it was difficult to fortify the road here.

ii) Three of the five Philistine cities (**Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod**) were situated on the eastern (inland) arm of this route

(b) From the Philistine plain to the Jezreel Valley

i) The coastal plain much more narrow here; two arms to south become one at **Aphék** (NT: **Antipatris**), so Aphék became an important fortification

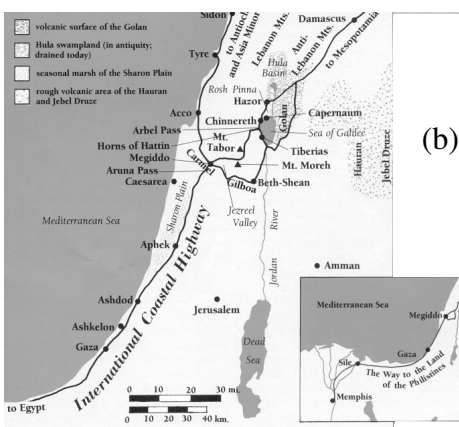
ii) The *Way of the Sea* stays about 8 miles inland through this stretch, hugs the line between the hills of Ephraim/Samaria and the coastal plains (which are swampy, forested here because no Shephelah).

iii) Nonetheless, area sufficiently open that control of the *Way of the Sea* is difficult here.

(c) Across the Jezreel Valley, and then north to Damascus

i) Mt Carmel lays east-west across the route of the *Way of the Sea*; the traveler must get through/across the mountain in order to proceed

ii) There are only three “gateways” through Carmel and into the Jezreel Valley:
✧ The **Megiddo** Pass (central, most direct, shortest, most desirable)



✧The **Dothan-Taanaach** pass (south of Megiddo, brought the traveler out to southeast end of the Jezreel Valley, and thus facilitated the use of the Beth-shan valley to the Rift and on to Damascus)

✧The Jokneam pass (well to north; the most difficult, out of the way; least used)

Very Important:

This is the “bottleneck” on the *Way of the Sea*. That is, because that highway had to pass through the Jezreel Valley, and because that valley was bordered on the south by Mt. Carmel, and finally because there were only three ways to get through that mountain with a caravan or an army (i.e., the three passes listed above), the nation which fortified those three places--**Jokneam**, which guarded the northern pass; **Megiddo**, which fortified the central and easiest pass; and **Dothan-Taanaach**, which guarded the southernmost pass--controlled traffic on the *Way of the Sea*, and thus functionally traffic in that part of the world.

The passes of the *Via Maris* from the Sharon to the Plain of the Jezreel through the ravines of the northern Ephraimite hill country were the most sensitive points on this route, because they were so easily blocked....The three major tells on the southwestern edge of the Jezreel plain--Taanach, Megiddo, and Jokneam--guarded these three important passes of the *Via Maris*.

Aharoni, *Land of the Bible*, 44

b. The second major international highway: *The King's Highway*

(1) The name of this highway is taken from Numbers 20:17; 21:22.

(2) The route of *The King's Highway*:

➔ Beginning at Damascus (far to the north), the route runs due south through the entire length of Transjordan

Note: At points along this stretch there are two arms of the highway.

The reason: the traveler had to choose between danger and inconvenience:

- a) If he bore to the east (close to the Arabian Desert), he exposed himself to robbers
- b) If he bore to the west (close to the Jordan Rift), he had to cross the deep gorges formed by the rivers flowing into the Rift

➔ South of the Dead Sea, the route heads west to Egypt

Note: south of the Dead Sea there are *two branches* of the King's Highway heading toward Egypt:

- a) The *northern* route: Bozrah→Tamar→Kadesh-Barnea →Egypt by way of the wilderness of Shur
- b) The *southern* route: Edomite hill country→Elath, across wilderness of Paran→Egypt near Suez

(3) Principal cities along the King's Highway (north to south)

- (a) Damascus--capital city of Syria, important stop on the way across the fertile crescent
- (b) Ashtaroth--chief city of Bashan
- (c) Rabboth-Ammon--spot where the two arms of the route came together, therefore strategic
- (d) Rammoth-gilead
- (e) Heshbon
- (f) Bozrah
- (g) Elah
- (h) Sela (Petra??)

(4) The importance of The King's Highway:

In biblical times a thriving population is indicated along the length of the King's Highway in two periods: first, at the end of the third millennium BC, and second, with the occupation of the Hebrew tribes from the thirteenth (*sic*) century to the end of the Iron Age. During the long period of

On the other hand, the King's Highway...ran along the length of the Trans-jordanian range, close to the desert fringe. For long periods this route was the exclusive possession of nomads, who kept it free of any settlement or fortification. But at other times a chain of important settlements also developed along its length which were able to compete with those on the *Via Maris*.

Aharoni, 45

2. Internal routes in the land of Israel

Note:

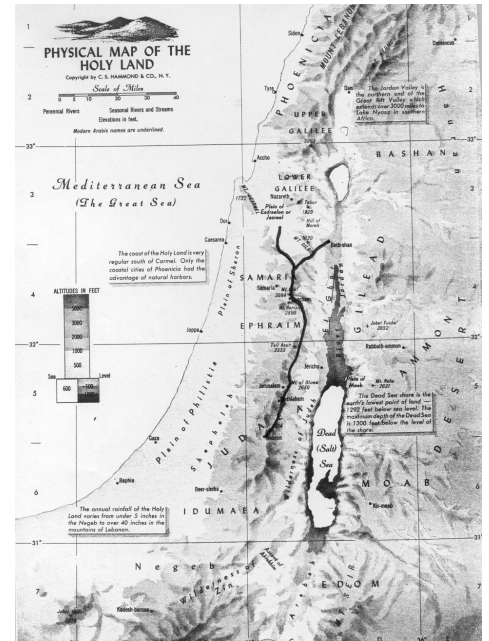
The *international* traffic which traveled through Israel in Bible times seldom left the two main highways--the *Way of the Sea* and the *King's Highway*--simply because of the unaccommodating topography. And yet, the inhabitants of Israel had to travel across the land for trade, to defend themselves, for social purposes, and so on. Thus, the land was laced by local or internal routes. We will consider only a few of the most strategic of those. They are usually classified as follows:

- ❶ Longitudinal routes (north-south, or *parallel* to the international routes)
- ❷ Latitudinal routes (east-west, *between* the international highways).

a. Primary longitudinal (north-south) internal routes

(1) The Judean Ridge Route

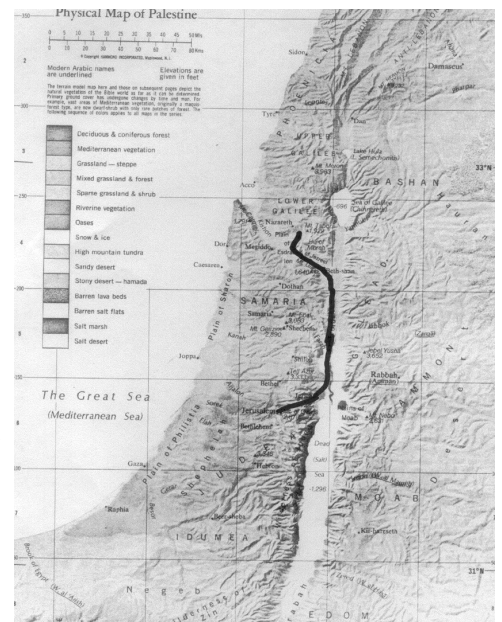
- (a) Other names: the *water-parting route*, or the *way of the patriarchs*
- (b) This route runs along the narrow ridges atop the central hill country; it is narrow and winding, and it's easy to lose it; however, if the route is followed, it provides a relatively easy and direct north-south artery in the interior of the land.
- (c) Runs north-south from Hebron in the south, through Bethlehem, adjacent to Jerusalem, across the Bethel plateau, to the Benjamin hill country
- (d) At Shechem, it forks out into two branches:
 - i) western branch--through Samaria, Dothan, Ibleam to Jezreel Plain
 - ii) eastern branch--through Tirzah to valley of Beth-shan
- (e) Important: Jerusalem sits directly adjacent to this route (Judges 19:9-13)



(2) The Jordan River Route

- (a) This route follows the Jordan Rift valley from Jericho north to Beth-shan.
- (b) There are actually two routes, one on each side of the river.

[The eastern route was more used because of the many settlements along the way: Adam, Zerethan, Succoth, Zaphon]
- (c) The route actually continued south of the Dead Sea, all the way to the Gulf of Aqaba
- (d) This route became especially important in the NT era, when Galilean Jews traveling to Jerusalem for feasts tended to use it in order to avoid traveling through Samaria (on the Ridge Route)



- (3) In the Shephelah, where topographical difficulties are few, a number of longitudinal routes were established.

b. Primary latitudinal (east-west) internal routes

(1) The **Lowland Route**

- (a) Runs from the plain of Acco (on Mediterranean coast) through the Valley of Jezreel, down Harod Valley (shaft of arrow) to Beth-shan, then up on the Transjordanian plateau toward Rammoth-gilead, thence to Damascus
- (b) This latitudinal route connected the Coastal Highway (“*Way of the Sea*”) with the *King’s Highway* in the NORTH of the land.

(2) There were four internal, latitudinal routes which provided access from the coastal highway (*Way of the Sea*) to the central hill country, and from there down to the Jordan Rift, up to the Transjordan Plateau, and thus to the *King’s Highway*.

[The maps on the next 2 pages show the 4 internal routes leading from the coastal highway into the hill country.]

Note:

These four routes were very important to the nation of Jerusalem, simply because they were the means of monitoring traffic approaching Jerusalem. Thus, in order to secure the capital city, these valleys had to be well secured.

(a) The **Ajalon Valley** route

- i) The primary means of access from the coastal highway to the hill country, this route brings one out NORTH of the city of Jerusalem
- ii) Winds up the Ajalon Valley, climbs a ridge, past the city of Beth-horon, to the Central Benjamin Plateau (bounded by Gibeah on the south, Ramah on the east, Mizpah on the north, Gibeon on the west)
- iii) IMPORTANT: Jerusalem is most vulnerable from the north, and the central Benjamin plateau provides a very effective staging area for such an attack; therefore, Jerusalem was usually attacked from that direction, and thus this route was very strategic.

(b) The **Sorek System** route

- i) This was the most difficult approach; it was virtually impassable by troops or caravans (unless locals); it brings one out in the Rephaim Valley just outside of Jerusalem
- ii) Chief cities: Ekron, Timnah, Beth-shemesh

(c) The **Elah Valley** route

- i) This approach was very passable; brings one out at Bethlehem on the ridge route, then north about 5 miles if traveling to Jerusalem
- ii) Chief cities: Gath, Azekah (guarded entrance), Socoh
- iii) Here is where David defeated Goliath

(d) The **Lachish** route

- i) This route brings one up to Hebron, then north up ridge route if traveling to Jerusalem
- ii) The most immediate access to the ridge route if coming from Egypt via the *Way of the Sea*
- iii) Chief city: Lachish (important city site on Shephelah, could survey traffic, guard this entrance to hill country)

Note:

These four routes--Ajalon, Sorek, Elah, and Lachish--provided the feasible entrances to the Judean Ridge, and thus to Jerusalem, from the busiest international highway, the *Way of the Sea*.

Thus these played a very strategic role in the history of that land.

NOTE: The map on this page is a schematic of the regions and topographical features of the land of Israel. Although it may seem a bit mysterious at first glance, it is actually very helpful.

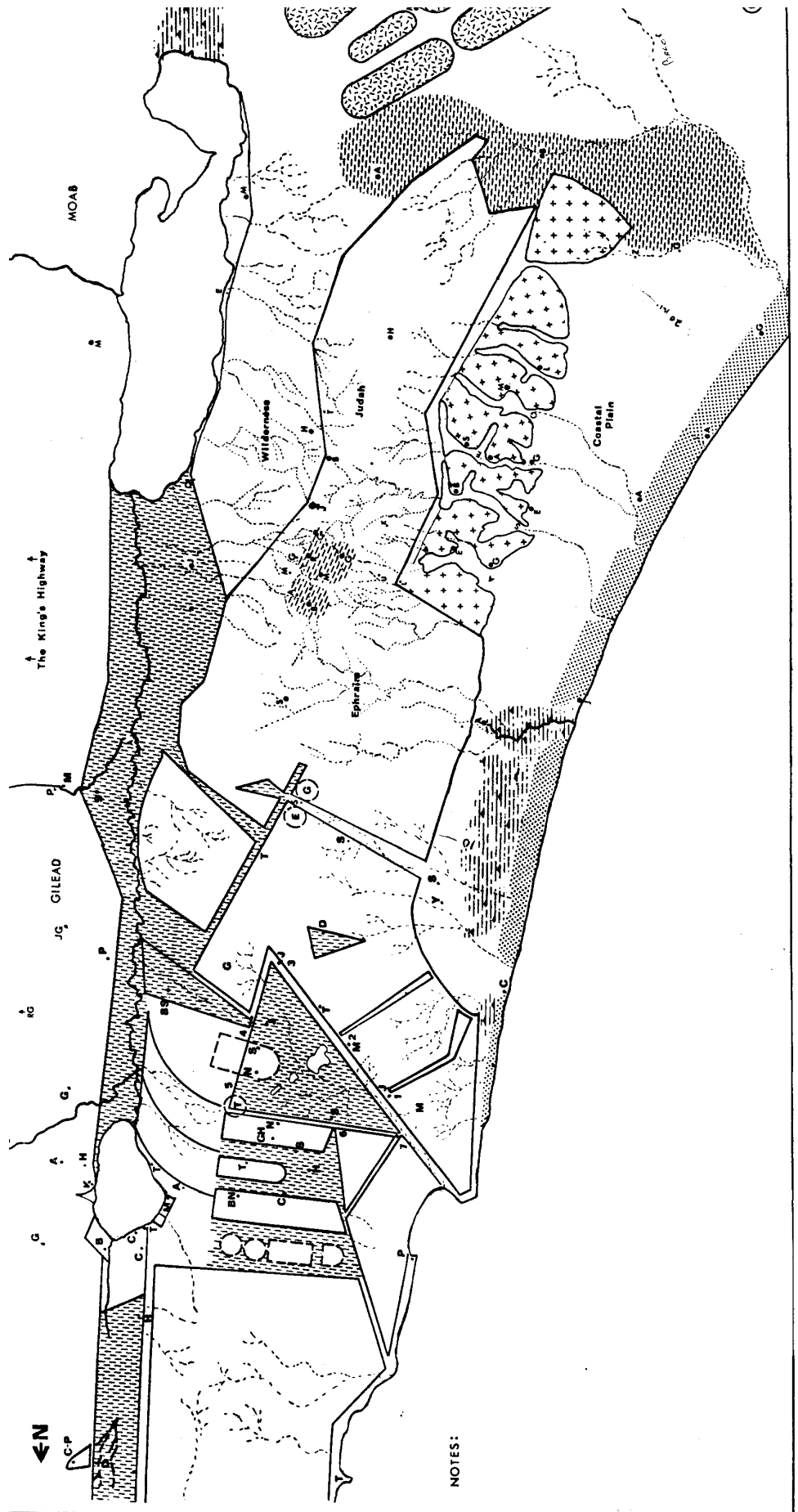
Notice the following features:

① Notice that the map is laid out in an eastward orientation; thus, north is to the left (per the arrow).

② Find the Jezreel Valley (arrowhead shaped, pointing to the place where the coastline juts into the Mediterranean; the shaft of the arrow stretches to the Jordan Rift, with BS [Beth-shan] near the rift).

③ South (left) of the (triangular shaped) Jezreel Valley is a large mass of land; this is Mt. Carmel, the “bottleneck” on the international highway. Trace the three passes through Carmel: Jokneam (marked #1), Megiddo (#2), and Dothan-Ibleam-Taanach (#3). Remember that these were the corridors by which international traffic made its way from the Jezreel Valley to the coastal plains, and thus on across the Sinai to Egypt.

Notice the area between the Coastal Plain (Philistia) and Judah. This is the Shephelah (marked on the schematic map with small +’s). This area guarded the approach to the hill country from the Coastal plain, and thus it guarded Jerusalem. Notice the four primary routes: the Ajalon Valley (A) to the north (ascending to the north of Jerusalem); the Sorek system (S), very rugged, but ascending directly to Jerusalem; the Elah Valley (E), ascending to Bethlehem; and the Guvrim (G) valley, ascending to Hebron. These were very important because armies would always approach via the coastal plain, and thus would attack the hill country (and most importantly Jerusalem) through these valley systems. A puzzle: See how many of the initials you can identify.



H. WATER: Getting it and Keeping it in Eretz Israel

1. The chief consideration in everyday life in ancient Israel: WATER

Note in this regard:

There were three basic considerations in determining where to establish a village in the ancient world:

- ❶ A source of water sufficient for a city, and defensible in a time of siege.
- ❷ The ability to defend the city (usually: find a hill with steep sides, build walls toward top of those steep sides).
- ❸ Proximity to routes (least important)

2. Three chief sources of water in a city/village in Israel

a. A well

- (1) Definition: A hole or shaft dug through several layers of earth until it reaches a water table (water having flowed through the earth to an impermeable layer of rock, pooled there)
- (2) Method of retrieving water: steps or rope & bucket

b. A cistern

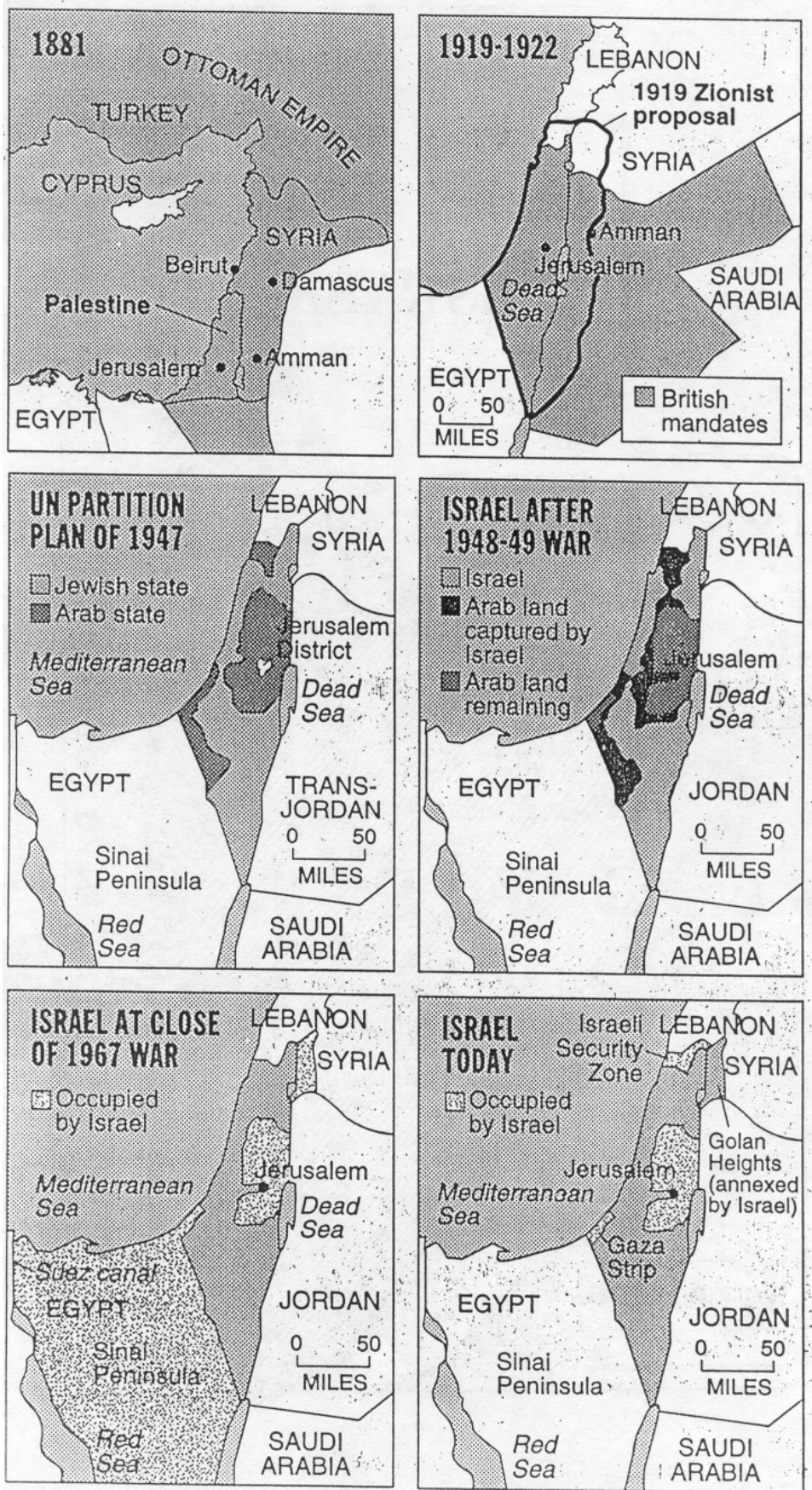
- (1) Definition: an artificial, man-made storage device, usually dug at the bottom of a hill, then lined with plaster and filled by natural run-off of rain water from higher elevations.
- (2) Usually underground to avoid evaporation (surface pools were reservoirs, served as collection points for rainwater, but water was then channeled to a cistern)
- (3) Sometimes very elaborate

c. A spring

- (1) Definition: a continuous supply of fresh (“living”) water from the side of a hill, the result of water which has seeped down to a layer of impermeable rock, then flowed laterally to a place where it could escape from the earth
- (2) The most precious source of water
- (3) Usually low on the hill, whereas walls were high on the hill; therefore, one of the most difficult civic tasks in building a city = contrive a way to hide and protect the spring in case of a siege, and to access the water from within the walls of the city.

I. The Land of Israel since the Days of the Bible

The maps at right trace the history of the land since World War I.



The History of Jerusalem

The table below charts in superficial form the history of the city of Jerusalem. That history is reflective of the history of the land of Israel as a whole.

| Title of the Period | Dates | Historical Overview |
|--|------------------|---|
| Jebusite Period | Until ca 1000 BC | City settled from ancient times because of ready defenses and plentiful water supply (Gihon spring); in days of the Conquest under Joshua, tribe known as Jebusites controlled the city; fortified only approximately 14 acres of lower city |
| David's Jerusalem | 1010-970 BC | David (through Joab) captures the city from the Jebusites because of neutral & central location makes it his capital when he becomes king over 12 tribes; purchases threshing floor from Auranah, brings Ark of the Covenant there; denied request to build Temple for Yahweh, but makes all arrangements for that construction; extends only to lower city (City of David) |
| Solomon's Jerusalem | 970-930 BC | Solomon constructs temple on Mt Moriah [<i>First Temple Period</i> begins], fortifies that section of city with walls; builds palace on northern reaches of City of David |
| Division & Difficulty; From the Death of Solomon to the destruction by Babylon | 930-586 BC | At the division of the kingdom, 10 northern tribes rebel against the Davidic kings, reject worship at Jerusalem; under King Hezekiah city walls are extended to the Western Hill; Hezekiah also constructs tunnel to bring water from the Gihon inside city walls at the Pool of Siloam |
| Exile & Restoration; From the Exile in Babylon through days of Nehemiah | 586-400 BC | City leveled by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 586 BC [<i>First Temple Period</i> ends]; Samaritans control area; Persian overlords allow Jews to return under Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple (536-516 BC) [<i>Second Temple Period</i> begins], then to rebuild & reinhabit the city under Nehemiah (440 BC) Persians continue to control. |
| Hellenizing Period; Between the Testaments | 400 BC - AD 70 | Persia is replaced by the Greeks (Alexander); Maccabees revolt against the Seleucids (Greek family ruling Syria/Palestine), win autonomy until Rome controls; Herod renovates Second Temple, beautifies city in many ways, strengthens defenses of city to the north; Jews revolt against Rom (AD 66-73), third wall goes up on north; city finally destroyed by Titus Vespasian in AD 70 [<i>Second Temple Period</i> ends] |
| Roman Period | AD 70-330 | Because of Bar Kochba Revolt (AD 132-135), Jews and Christians prohibited from entering city; Hadrian has city rebuilt as Roman capital of region, renamed <i>Aelia Capitolina</i> ; Roman temples/idols erected atop all known Jewish/Christian holy places |
| Byzantine Period | AD 330-638 | Emperor Constantine moves capital of Roman Empire to Byzantium (Constantinople); Constantine converted to Christianity; Helena (mother of Constantine) travels to Jerusalem attempts to restore holy sites; with occasional brief interruptions, Christians enjoy ready access to Jerusalem; Jews often persecuted, prohibited from entering city |
| First Moslem Period | AD 638-1099 | Turkish followers of Muhammad capture Jerusalem; Jews welcome Muslim invaders as deliverers from "Christian" (Byzantine) persecutors; Jerusalem in hands of Muslims until Crusades; Islam becomes increasingly anti-Christian |

| | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|---|
| Crusader Period | AD 1099-1187 | Pope calls upon European Christians to free Holy City from “infidel” Muslim captors; knights lead march to Jerusalem; many abuses; Jerusalem temporarily captured by Crusaders, who restrict Moslems and Jews from entering city; by 1187 Arab general Salahadin had retaken Jerusalem, Crusaders had fled |
| Second Moslem Period | AD 1187-1917 | Various Turkish families control; Ayubid and Mamluk families (1187-1517), during which time some Jewish settlement allowed in the city of Jerusalem, but great poverty and squalor developed; followed by the Ottomans, the first of whom was Sulemain I (who built the walls that stand today); many Jews emigrate to Israel, but were regarded as second class citizens by Muslim overlords; great numbers of Jews began to arrive in 1800's, and the Zionist movement excited desire for a national homeland for the Jews on the banks of the Jordan River |
| British Mandate | AD 1917-1948 | In the First World War Britain defeats the Turks, recaptures the area of Palestine; Balfour Declaration commits United Kingdom to provide homeland for the Jews; area of British Mandate divided between Emir Abdullah [Transjordan, which was immediately closed to Jewish settlement] and the region of the Jewish National Home; these boundaries were replaced by the UN Partition Plan in 1947; struggles/violence continue in region, British grow more and more frustrated |
| The State of Israel | AD 1948 - Present | After WWII, Britain departs; on May 14, 1948 (one day before British forces depart the area) David Ben-Gurion announces establishment of the State of Israel; Arab nations attack, but truce is established on Jan 2, 1949; Jordan is granted the West Bank, Jerusalem is a divided city |
| | 1967 | Six Day War; Israel gains control of West Bank, Sinai, Golan Heights; East Jerusalem is immediately annexed as part of the State of Israel |
| | 1973 | Yom Kippur War; Oct 6--Egypt attacks Israel across the Suez, Syria attacks the Golan Heights; by Oct 14, Jewish forces within 35 miles of Damascus, have crossed the Suez and are marching toward Cairo; on Oct 22, a cease-fire is effected |
| | 1979 | Camp David accords; Egypt acknowledges Israel’s right to exist, ceases hostilities; the only Arab nation heretofore to have done so officially. |

The map at right shows the position of the State of Israel in the modern middle Eastern world.

