

## Introduction

The Bible is full of great journeys and exotic sounding place names. Without an in depth knowledge of the landscape of ancient times, it can be difficult to visualise these locations, and to understand how monumental some of the journeys were; the better you understand the lands of the Bible, the better you will understand the Bible itself.

The Bible follows the story of the Jewish people – their relationship with God, but also their relationship with the land, for their history was bound to the land. Maps help us both to envision and to understand the impact of physical barriers, such as lakes, seas, mountains, rivers and deserts. It's clear the landscape played an important role in the story of the Bible: important trade routes are the source of conflict and friction, and fertile land is always fought over – particularly significant, because Canaan, the Promised Land, was in the Fertile Crescent (an arc of land cultivated by the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers). When God tells Abraham to leave his comfortable, fertile home and to go to the land of Canaan, promising that he would make him the father of a great nation, it may be hard to immediately grasp why Canaan is so important. But maps can help us see that it was right in the heart of the ancient world, at the meeting-point of three enormous land masses – Asia, Africa and Europe. With the Mediterranean sea to the west, and all the prosperity and opportunity that that offered, and the inhospitable desert to the east, Canaan was an important trading route linking Egypt and the city-states of Mesopotamia, and of immense strategic value. When you look at the position of Canaan on a map, all this becomes very clear.

Besides this, it is wonderful to see the actual location of places we have heard so much about: Jesus was born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, baptised in the river Jordan, preached by the Sea of Galilee, and was crucified in Jerusalem – the Bible becomes more real, looking at these places on a map.

In addition to this, we are able to conceive of the length and distance of the journeys depicted in the Bible so much better when looking at a physical representation of them: for example, Adam and Eve's migration east following their expulsion from the Garden of Eden, which is widely regarded as being located in Mesopotamia, and Abraham leaving his home in Ur, at one end of the Fertile Crescent in Mesopotamia, to travel to Canaan, at the other end. His great grandson Joseph is sold into slavery and taken from Canaan to Egypt, where he becomes second in command to Pharaoh himself, later being joined by his father Jacob and the rest of their people. The Hebrew people spend many years enslaved in Egypt before being led out by Moses, who takes them on a slow and arduous journey through the Wilderness (the barren and unforgiving Sinai Desert) back to the Promised Land of Canaan, although Moses himself only sees the land from the slopes of Mount Nebo.

The relationship between the Jewish people and their home in Canaan is one that is of central importance to the Bible. When they originally settled in the area, they slowly conquered cities and territories, dividing the land up amongst themselves. Under the rule of King David, the twelve tribes of Israel were united into one nation and Jerusalem became the capital city for that nation, and it is during the reign of his son, King Solomon, that the first Temple is built in the city.

Any stability is short-lived, and soon the land becomes divided into Israel in the north, and Judah in the south, and comes under threat from a number of opposing nations: the Assyrians, the Philistines, and finally the

mighty Babylonians. Both Judah and the city of Jerusalem fall to Babylonia, and many of the Israelites find themselves in exile. In time, with the Persian conquest of Babylon, the Jews are permitted to return to their homeland and begin the slow process of rebuilding their city and temple.

When we begin the New Testament it is the Roman Empire that holds sway over the land – it is because of the census ordered by the Roman emperor that Mary travels with Joseph to Bethlehem to register, and there she gives birth to Jesus. Mary and Joseph later flee with Jesus to Egypt, but afterwards return to Nazareth, their home town, where Jesus grows up. After the crucifixion and the resurrection we follow the travels of some of Jesus' disciples, in particular those of the apostle Paul, who journeys far and wide to lands including Greece and Asia Minor to preach the Good News. Imprisoned towards the end of his life in Rome, Paul still continues to send his letters of instruction, correction and hope to the fledgling churches in Asia. The Bible ends with the Book of Revelation, written on the Greek island of Patmos, where the author, John, has an incredible vision of the end of Days.

The Bible covers a variety of locations both familiar and unfamiliar to us, which provide more than just a backdrop to the events depicted – the landscape plays a vital role in the Bible story. Clearly it is crucial for us to understand the world that hugely important figures like Jesus, Abraham, Jacob, and Paul lived in.



*John on the island of Patmos. In his vision he was shown the End of Days, and then a new heaven and earth and the Holy City, shining with the glory of God*

# Books of the Bible



Please note: references may relate to where the book was written, or where it was set. In many cases this information is uncertain and open to debate.

\* The Book of John was probably begun in Israel and completed at Patmos.  
 \* Acts 13-28 written during Paul's missionary journeys.  
 \* Hebrews authorship and place of origin is uncertain.  
 \* Job authorship and origin is unknown.  
 \* 1 & 2 Peter authorship is contested.

While we may be used to picking up the Bible as one large volume, it is actually a collection of 66 individual books – 39 in the Old Testament, and 27 in the New Testament. Some of these books are short, others are longer. There are many different authors, and many different styles – from the poetry of the Book of Psalms to the more prosaic sermons of Deuteronomy or the narratives of Kings. There are lists of wise sayings, personal letters and comprehensive inventories of people or items. Some were written in the time of the Roman Empire, while others were begun nearly 3500 years ago!

**THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT**

Christians traditionally divide the books of the Old Testament into four groupings:

- The Law (*Genesis to Deuteronomy*)
- History (*Joshua to Esther*)
- Wisdom (*Job to the Song of Solomon*)
- Prophets (*Isaiah to Malachi*)

**TRANSLATING GOD'S WORD**

The earliest translation of the Bible was from the original Old Testament Hebrew manuscripts into Greek, by a group of Jewish monks in the 3rd century BC. In the 4th century BC the Bible was translated into Latin by St Jerome, the leading biblical scholar of the time. This definitive version was known as the Vulgate.

The first English versions were translated by John Wycliffe in the late 14th century, and later by William Tyndale – who was executed at the stake for his pains in 1536! Nevertheless, Tyndale's work was instrumental in the creation of the definitive King James Bible (also known as the Authorised Version), which aimed to take the best from all earlier translations.

During the 19th century, the Bible, or sections of it, were published in some 400 new languages, a number that doubled in the 20th century.

According to the Wycliffe Global Alliance, by September 2016 the full Bible had been translated into 636 languages, the New Testament into 1442 languages, and stories from the Bible into 1145 other languages, spreading the Gospel to every corner of the world!

**THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The New Testament can be divided into five sections:

- Gospels (*Matthew to John*)
- History (*the Book of Acts*)
- Pauline Epistles (*Romans to Philemon*)
- General Epistles (*Hebrews to Jude*)
- Prophecy (*the Book of Revelation*)



Many of the words of wisdom set down in the Book of Proverbs are attributed to King Solomon

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# Old Testament Nations



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Map 2 E4

## ISRAEL

'Israel' as a nation did not exist as we know it during the Old Testament – it was made up of 12 tribes, descended from the sons of Jacob. These tribes, known as the United Monarchy when they were ruled by David and Solomon, later split into two main groups, the Kingdom of Judah in the south (including the city of Jerusalem) made up of the descendants of Judah and Benjamin, and the Kingdom of Israel in the north. Though 'Israelites', 'Hebrews' and 'Jews' tend to be used interchangeably, the Jews actually descended from the Kingdom of Judah in the south. After the conquest of Israel by the Assyrians, the northern tribes were dispersed. Judah also fell to invading forces which resulted in the exile of the Jewish people.

Map 2 E4

## BABYLONIA

Babylon is described as a magnificent city with lavish gardens, canals, and impressive walls. On multiple occasions, the Babylonians (often referred to as Chaldeans) took a number of Jews captive, leading to the period in Jewish history known as the Babylonian exile. Perhaps their most notable king was Nebuchadnezzar, who had Daniel as one of his trusted advisors, and who fought against Tyre and Egypt, and captured the city of Jerusalem. In 539 BC Babylon fell to the Persian king Cyrus II, who liberated the exiled Jews, allowing them to return to Jerusalem. The city was later destroyed by Xerxes I of Persia.

## PHILISTIA

Philistia, a state made up of five main cities (Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron) was the land of the Philistines, who are largely shown in the Bible as the enemy of Israel. Goliath, the giant warrior who was slain by David, was from the city of Gath; his defeat leads to the victory of Saul and the Israelites over the Philistines in the Book of Samuel.

## SYRIA

Syria, also known as Aram, was a nation that was, for large periods of time, under the control of Assyria. Its capital city Damascus was also captured by David (of Israel), although it regained its independence soon after. The destruction of the city was predicted by Isaiah, and indeed it fell to the Assyrians in 732 BC, marking the end of this period of Aramaic Syria.

## MEDIA

Media, the land of the Medes, was one of the major powers in its region. It was first controlled by Assyria, then Babylonia, and finally brought into the Persian empire by Cyrus the Great, although the people later rebelled against Darius I and II.

## EGYPT

It was to Egypt that Joseph was taken when he was sold into slavery, an ancient nation already a thousand years old when Abraham visited it. The pyramids had been standing for hundreds of years at this point, and the people worshipped many different gods, such as Osiris, the ruler of the dead, and Amun, the king of the gods. Their ruler, known as the Pharaoh, was seen as being somewhere between a human and a god. Initially the Egyptians welcomed the Israelites, but as they grew in number and wealth they turned on them, enslaving them until Moses led them out.



## ASSYRIA

Assyria, located to the north-east of Israel, was a warlike nation and one of the major powers of antiquity, conquering states and forcing them into allegiance to Assyria and her deities (those of the ancient Mesopotamian religion, with a focus on their national god Ashur). At times, the Assyrians were in control of both Israel and Judah, and were in conflict with the Babylonians: Jonah was sent to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, to warn them about a coming Babylonian invasion, leading the Assyrians to fast and repent, and consequently God spared their lives. Ultimately, however, the Assyrian empire did fall to Babylon, following the capture of Nineveh in 612 BC.

## PERSIA

One of the great nations of antiquity, the Persian people originally migrated from central Asia to the region east of the Persian Gulf. When King Cyrus II, widely known as Cyrus the Great, overthrew Media and conquered Babylon it marked the beginning of the Persian Achaemenid Empire, which at its height stretched over three continents and 25 nations. Persia was at times sympathetic towards the Jews – King Darius I enabled the completion of the rebuilding of Jerusalem's temple and city walls, whilst King Xerxes I saved many exiled Jews from persecution. The empire was eventually defeated by Alexander the Great in 331 BC.

## EDOM

The Edomites, descendants of Esau, inhabited the region south of the Dead Sea. Throughout its history the nation was in conflict with Israel, with the Edomites refusing to allow the Israelites to pass through their land on their exodus, and also participating in the plundering of Jerusalem when the city fell to Nebuchadnezzar.

## MIDIAN

The Midianites were the descendants of Midian (a son of Abraham) who settled in the deserts of Moab and Edom. An enemy of Israel, they resisted the Israelites as they travelled to Canaan.





## In the Beginning

In the beginning, there was nothing at all. Then God created the heaven and the earth, and illuminated the world with light, making day and night. He separated the water from the land, and filled it with beautiful plants and trees, lighting up the sky with the sun, the moon, and the stars. Next he created animals, filling the seas with fish and the land with all kinds of wonderful creatures.

Last of all, God made man, and told him to take care of all of his amazing creations. He was pleased with what he had done, and he made the final seventh day a day of rest.

Genesis 1-2



### THE GARDEN OF EDEN

As a home for Adam, the first man, God created the beautiful Garden of Eden – a paradise filled with colourful flowers and trees, and wonderful animals. He made Eve to be a companion for Adam, and told them they could eat from any plant in the garden except one – the Tree of Knowledge.

But one day when Eve was alone, the cunning snake tempted her to take a bite of an apple from the tree. She convinced Adam to try some too, and they both ate it. Immediately, it was as if their eyes had been opened, and they realised that they were naked, and covered themselves with fig leaves.

God knew exactly what had happened and was very angry that they had disobeyed him. He banished them from the Garden of Eden, casting them out into the wide world and placing an angel to guard the entrance.

Genesis 2-3

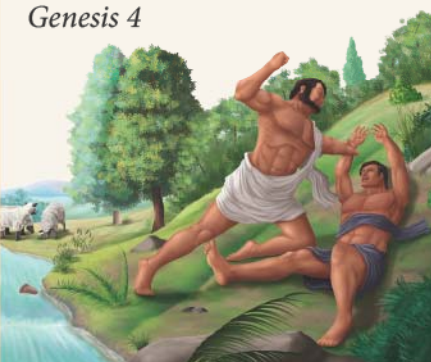


### CAIN AND ABEL

Time passed and Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. One day they each brought offerings to God, Abel pleasing him with the best and fattest of his lambs. However God wasn't so pleased with Cain's offering of crops – Cain was too proud – and he told him off.

Cain was very jealous of his brother, and furious at both him and God! With evil in his heart, he took Abel out into the fields and murdered him. Of course, God knew what had happened, and was very angry. He punished Cain and sent him away, to wander from place to place without a home.

Genesis 4



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# Noah and the Flood

## THE FLOOD MYTH

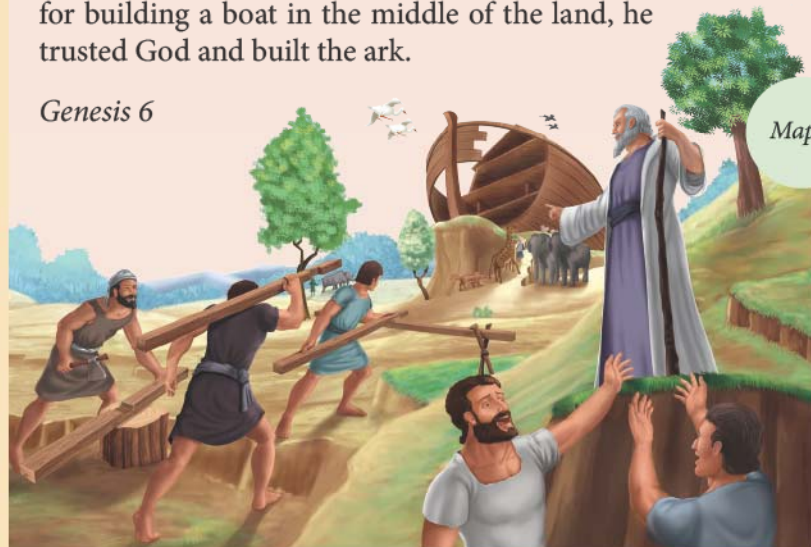
The story of a great flood being sent to destroy civilisation is one that appears in many different mythologies from around the world. It is found in the Greek myth of Deucalion, in Hindu texts from India, in the story of the Norse frost giant Bergelmir, and in many more, even stretching to America and Australia!

## NOAH BUILDS THE ARK

Many years passed, and soon the world was filled with people. But they were becoming more and more wicked, and it was making God very sad. Finally, he decided to send a flood to clean the world of their sin.

But there was still one good man on earth, whose name was Noah. God told Noah to build an enormous boat so that he and his family might be saved, along with the creatures God had made. Though everyone else made fun of Noah for building a boat in the middle of the land, he trusted God and built the ark.

Genesis 6



Map 4

## LONG LIVED

Noah was the grandson of Methuselah, the oldest person in the Bible, who died at 969 years old in the year of the Flood. Noah himself was already 500 years old when he became a father, and died at the age of 950!

Men lived longer the closer in descent they were to Adam and Eve, who had been created to live forever before they disobeyed and were punished by becoming subject to death. The patriarchs (excluding Enoch) who lived before the flood lived an average of 912 years.

## THE BUILDING OF THE ARK

God told Noah exactly how to build the ark:

“Build a boat out of good timber, with rooms inside, and cover it with tar inside and out. Make it 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. Make a roof for it and leave a space of 18 inches between the roof and the sides. Build it three decks high and put a door in the side.”

## TWO BY TWO

When the ark was finished, Noah loaded it with food for his family and the animals, and then God sent the animals to the ark, two by two, one male and one female of every kind of animal and bird that lived upon the earth or flew in the skies.

Genesis 7



## THE FLOOD

Once they were all safely in, it started to rain. It rained for forty days and forty nights, until the earth was completely covered with water. Everything and everyone not on the ark were washed away by the flood.

At last, the rain stopped, and eventually, after one hundred and fifty days, Noah sent out a dove to see if they could disembark. The dove came back with an olive leaf in its beak, showing that the trees were growing again, and that they could all return to the land and start again.

Genesis 7-9



Mount Ararat, in the east of Turkey, is traditionally seen as the resting place of Noah's ark. Even as recently as 2010, Christian explorers claim to have found wood from the ark buried beneath the snow and volcanic debris there.

## GOD'S COVENANT WITH NOAH

Noah was filled with gratitude that he had survived, and he made a sacrifice to God. Then God blessed Noah and his family, saying “Be fruitful and multiply.” He laid down some rules to help men not to become so wicked, and made a promise that he would never again send such a dreadful flood. He put a beautiful rainbow in the sky to remind him of this promise.

Genesis 9



Map 4  
F1

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