Key Terms

- Fertile Crescent: region including the Nile River valley and delta, the plains of Syro-Palestine by the Mediterranean, and the river valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates. Here, the earliest civilizations of the ancient Near East (ANE) developed.
- Mesopotamia: the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers
- alluvial: clay, silt, sand, and soil deposited by running water
- Levant: lands located along the 400-mile stretch of the Eastern Mediterranean between Turkey and Egypt (including modern-day Syria, Lebanon, and Israel)
- Baal: the Canaanite storm god, deity of agriculture and reproductive fertility
- Apis: the Egyptian bull god, deity of agriculture and reproductive fertility
- oracle: an authoritative prophetic speech
- steppe: level and treeless land, usually arid
- wadi: river bed or valley that is dry except during the rainy season
- syncretism: the combination of different forms of religious belief and practice
- elect: the choice of the people of Israel (through Abraham) to be God's covenant people

Key Ideas

- The nation of Israel developed in a specific geographic context; through the importance of geography in the OT narratives, we see that the Bible records real events taking place in time and space. Our study of geography enriches our understanding of the OT.
- The geography of the ANE immensely influenced Israelite history and culture as Israel interacted with the people groups of the region.
- The land of Canaan was of immense theological significance for the people of Israel, constituting the goal of and reward for obedience to the covenant stipulations.

Chapter Summary

The history of Israel begins in northern Mesopotamia, the home of the Israelite patriarchs. Later Israelite history was greatly influenced by the empire nations of Mesopotamia: Assyria, Babylon, and Persia.

Asia Minor was the home of the Hittites, who vied with Egypt for control of Syro-Palestine. The covenant between Yahweh and Israel is very similar to the Hittite treaty form.

The land of Palestine was promised to Israel as part of the covenant, but Israel failed to completely conquer the native inhabitants, whose gods proved Israel's downfall.

The land of Egypt featured prominently in Israel's history. Abraham sojourned in Egypt, probably during the Second Intermediate Period (1786–1570 BC). Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt during the time of the New Kingdom (1570–1985 BC). Egypt also played a role in later Israelite history. The language and literature of the Hebrew Bible (HB) demonstrates significant cultural, linguistic, and possibly religious influences from Egypt.

The northern region of the Arabian Peninsula was the home of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Amalekites, and Midianites—all of whom appear often in Israelite history.

Palestine was named for the Philistines, who migrated to the land of Canaan during 1300–1200 BC Palestine became the geographical and theological center of the ancient world: here, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam originated. This region is divided into the Coastal Plain, the Central Hill Country, the Jordan Rift,

and the Transjordan Plateau. The last of these was the first area settled by the Hebrews during the conquest of Palestine.

From very early, Palestine was an important trade route because it connected Africa and Eurasia. The people of Israel were greatly influenced by the centrality of this region as foreign powers continually sought to gain control of the land.

The land of Canaan was of immense theological significance to the Israelites, for God promised this region to Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3. The land was an important part of God's covenant with Israel: the goal of and reward for obedience to the covenant. In fulfillment of the covenant, Joshua led the Israelites in a "holy war" to remove the indigenous peoples of the land. Integrated into the covenant was the concept that, if Israel failed to obey the covenant, they too would be displaced from the land. This took place in the exile of Israel to Assyria and Judah to Babylon.