# Contents

Foreword by Walter C. Kaiser Jr. ................................................. 15
Bringing Life to the Ancient Near East ........................................... 17

**PART 1: A SURVEY OF THE WORLD OF THE BIBLE**

1. An Introduction to the Biblical World ........................................... 21
2. The World of the Genesis Patriarchs ............................................ 43
3. The World of Moses and Joshua ................................................... 89
4. The World of the Israelite Judges ................................................... 137
5. The World of David and Solomon ................................................... 159
6. The World of Israel and Judah ....................................................... 187
7. The World of the Exile and Return ................................................... 219
8. The World Between the Old and New Testaments .......................... 241

**PART 2: WHAT ARCHAEOLOGY HAS REVEALED TO US**

10. Archaeology and the Bible .......................................................... 315
11. Archaeological Discoveries Supporting the Authenticity of the Bible .................................................. 333

Bibliography ....................................................................................... 361
Indexes .............................................................................................. 385
  Index of Breakouts ........................................................................... 387
  Index of Figures ............................................................................... 389
  Index of Maps ................................................................................. 392
Notes ................................................................................................. 393
The Bible lands have been a source of awe and wonder for millions of travelers who seek a glimpse of the ancient biblical past. To walk where Abraham, Moses, and Jesus walked, and to experience a slice of God’s redemptive plan, has fascinated tourists and scholars alike. This has been made possible over the last 150 years by men and women who have dedicated their lives to research aided by disciplines such as archaeology, geography, cultural anthropology, history, linguistics, and other crucial fields of study.

The modern advances these disciplines have contributed to Near Eastern studies have been instrumental in rooting the biblical narratives in the space-time world, with real geography, persons, places, and artifacts of material culture. As a result, critical arguments marshalled against the authenticity of the Bible are no longer allowed to roam unchecked without strong counterarguments challenging the very presuppositions on which the criticism is based. Far from adopting a view that understands the biblical narratives as simply products of the fertile imagination of a Jewish mind or stories emerging from late Judahite priests, the narratives have taken on a life and vitality of their own—and are grounded in reality!

The Harvest Handbook of Bible Lands seeks to bring the reader into the epochs of the biblical world through well-written narrative-style text, maps, photographs, illustrations, timelines, and breakout articles. It brings to life the ancient Near East in the clearest and most concise terms possible. Though it incorporates current ancient Near Eastern studies and archaeology, this Handbook takes advantage of the most recent information from all the biblical and scientific disciplines upon which it touches. In the process, not a few traditional-but-errorone views are dismissed and replaced by more accurate information. The logic of design and presentation keeps the needs of the reader in mind so that they experience ease in discovering the information they seek. It is, at the same time, both an exciting read and a reference book. It is a marvelous tool for all ages as well as a faithful representation of the ancient Near Eastern biblical world for serious Bible students, pastors, and scholars.

Jesus’s words are instructive when we consider the important link between history and doctrine, “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” (John 3:12). The doctrines of Scripture, along with their spiritual benefits, flow out of historical bedrock (Romans 4:25). If this material helps you see the world of the ancient Near East (“earthly things”) more clearly, then we have successfully achieved our goal of building confidence in the Bible (“heavenly things”).

Steven Collins, PhD
Joseph M. Holden, PhD
General Editors
Chapter 1

An Introduction to the Biblical World

The Bible is the divinely inspired and inerrant Word of God. This unique (Latin, *sui generis*) collection of Scripture was delivered to, through, and by human authors across millennia. The books of the Old and New Testaments trace the history of the universe from the acts of creation, through the origins of humanity, to a surviving family, through multiplying clans, tribes, and nations, to a focal ancestor and his promised son, to a people wielding the name of Yahweh, through a chosen tribe and royal lineage, to a Judaite maiden and the virgin-born Word-made-flesh, through the Messiah’s earthly career, his death, burial, and resurrection, to visions of his triumphant return. No other book equals this book—his Book.

But this *Handbook* isn’t about how all the above themes figure into Christian thought. Neither is it about individual Bible books, spiritual themes, or theological perspectives. These are expounded in countless sources from children’s books to scholarly tomes. But not here. This *Handbook* is about physical reality—in particular, the Bible’s physical reality.

While we can’t help touching upon spiritual and theological themes, the goal is to set both the Hebrew Scriptures and the Ultimate Covenant in their respective physical worlds that reflect tangible and threedimensional reality.

In the following pages, you have at your fingertips concise yet exacting descriptions of the biblical world. This information is brought together from the latest and best historical, archaeological, anthropological, geographical, and textual research. This means some old ideas must move aside to make room for new, more precise conceptions about Bible characters, when and how they lived, and what they saw, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled on a daily basis. And let’s not forget things like peoples and politics!

**FROM THEM TO US**

Once the biblical writers had penned their books, which were later compiled into collections we call the Old and New Testaments, how did they get to us? This process is called textual transmission.

Many cultures in the ancient Near East (ANE) had writing systems and literature. Their many texts, both secular and religious, were often kept “alive” by copying and recopying. Before the invention of writing (after c. 3300 BC), stories were passed along from...
one generation to the next by memorization and recitation. Without writing, such oral tradition was the only means of preserving knowledge of the past. When writing became available and societies advanced, much of their oral tradition was committed to papyrus (Egypt; see Figure 1.01) and clay tablets (Mesopotamia; see Figure 1.02) (see Breakouts 3.11, 3.12). An official class of specially educated scribes developed in all literate cultures. Keeping texts—especially sacred ones—“in print” was a major scribal responsibility.

From the time the Old and New Testament texts were written down, Hebrew and later Christian scribes maintained rigorous and meticulous methods of replacing old, worn copies with fresh, new ones. But, on average, manuscripts (MSS) did last for a long time: clay tablets (basically, forever!), papyrus (200–300 years), parchment (300–500 years). Because documents lasted for so long, 1,000 years could easily be spanned by only two or three generations of MSS (see Figure 1.03). Thus, the idea that hundreds of “generations” of copying biblical texts obscured the original meanings is simply an urban myth!

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (see Figure 1.04; Breakouts 8.13, 8.14) gave us copies of biblical books in Hebrew well over 1,000 years older than previously known Old Testament MSS. And, yes, the scribes did their job accurately! But preserving ancient texts, including the Bible, was not simply about copying manuscripts. Languages evolve and diverge over time, and accommodating language change was always an important part of textual transmission (that is, copying).
Pronouncing Bible Names and Places

The pronunciations of Bible names and places are typically butchered by almost everyone who attempts to read them out loud. But if you have a desire to pronounce them more correctly, there is a way to do it with relative accuracy.

Because all languages change through time, there really is no such thing as uniformity of pronunciation, as much as dictionary publishers would like us to think! Generally speaking, if any language is spoken for hundreds of years, it will undergo enough changes to make it virtually unintelligible to individuals using the same language but separated in time. For example, speakers of Old English (before AD 1200) would not be able to converse very well with speakers of Middle English (after AD 1200 to about AD 1500). And if someone speaking Middle English tried talking with you today, you would probably not understand a single word he or she said. All languages change dramatically in this way, eventually becoming entirely “new” languages.

This basic principle of language evolution also applies to the biblical world. If somehow a Hebrew-speaking Moses (fifteenth/fourteenth century BC) met face to face with a Hebrew-speaking King David (eleventh/tenth century BC), their conversation would not go very well! They might catch a word here and there, but their pronunciations—as well as word meanings and idioms—would be so different that they would need an interpreter. And the prophet Isaiah probably would not understand much of what King David said, should they find a way to communicate across time.

The same is true of Greek from the New Testament era. No one—not even a top linguist—knows what Koine (common) Greek sounded like in Jesus’s and Paul’s day. Admittedly, the New Testament Greek taught today is mostly pronounced like English, but some try to use today’s Greek as a model. Plato would be lost in modern-day Athens except for recognizing (maybe!) some printed words on signs. And Plato (fifth/fourth century BC) would find it hard to figure out what the apostle Paul was saying in Greek. This is simply what happens to languages over long periods of time. Geographical isolation also adds to this process of change.

Even though we don’t know precisely how Hebrew and Greek sounded in antiquity, there are some basic linguistic rules that can lead to a more accurate pronunciation of biblical names and places. Because most of these are transliterated (an English rendering of foreign letters/words) and not translated (meanings of foreign words), a few guidelines can help avoid some of the worst mispronunciations. These guidelines work for both anglicized Hebrew and Greek words:

- **ch** is always a *k* sound, as in *chemical* (Chedorlaomer is *Kedorlaomer*; cherubim is *kerubim*; Chinnereth is *Kinnereth*).
- There is no long *i* sound in Hebrew or Greek (always *i* as in it or magazine; never *i* as in idle; Isaiah is not pronounced *eyesaiah!*).
- There is no *j* sound as in jump; *j* is actually *y* (Hebrew, *yod*), and is pronounced like the *y* in yellow; Jacob is *Yacob*; Joshua is *Yoshua*; Jesus is *Yesus* (Greek) or *Yeshua* (Hebrew).
- Overall, if you pronounce biblical words as you would in Spanish, you will always be close to a correct pronunciation; unlike English, Spanish has a just one vocal sound for each consonant and vowel, and this works very well for a more authentic pronunciation of Bible names and places.

The more accurate your pronunciation of Bible names and places is, the less people are likely to look at you as if you are from another planet. Have fun with your pronunciations!

S. Collins
The dynamics of keeping ancient texts understandable from generation to generation is called textual contemporization. Over the course of hundreds of years, word meanings can drift, new words are invented, idioms and manners of speaking change, place-names are updated, dialects develop, and often “daughter” languages emerge. We experience this in the English language every day! It was no different in ancient times. Thus, scribes often replaced archaic terms with contemporary ones, sometimes inserting explanatory “notes” marking their alterations. This happened a lot with geographical names. For example, in the Middle Bronze Age (MBA) story of Abraham, the town of Laish is called Dan. Later readers would only have known Dan and not Laish, so Dan is used. But the name wasn’t changed until much later, during the time of the Judges (Genesis 14:14; cf. Judges 18).

While the present Hebrew text of the Old Testament has a distinctive Iron Age (IA) flavor because it was transmitted during the tenth through the sixth centuries BC, many linguistic features of Genesis through Judges—the Bronze Age (BA) scriptures—preserve authentic cultural “artifacts” from the MBA ( time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; see Breakout 2.05) and Late Bronze Age (LBA; time of Moses and Joshua; see Breakouts 3.02, 3.05, 3.11).
While the physical and mental processes of transmitting and contemporizing biblical texts have produced for us a Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament that are remarkably accurate to their ancient originals, one step remains: translation. Most of the currently available English translations of the Bible are reasonably good. Some may even be classed as excellent. But using several translations for comparison purposes is always a good idea.

KEEPING THE BIBLE IN THE REAL WORLD

Every biblical text is organically connected to the era of its writing. Whether looking back to the past, recording the present, or projecting into the future, every Bible passage or book is linguistically, historically, and culturally a product of its day. Here is a hard-and-fast rule of interpreting any part of the Bible: Never project present ideas onto ancient texts! Also, avoid superimposing later biblical ideas on earlier ones. Remember, the time and culture of King David was a far cry from that of Abraham’s day, and Daniel’s epoch was a world away from King David’s. Not to mention the historical and cultural distance between Daniel and the apostle Paul! And beware when you hear it said, “Take the Bible literally.” What does that mean anyway? Literal is a slippery concept. Most often it winds up being what somebody thinks a biblical passage “literally” says “to them.” This approach is dangerous when we seek to interpret the Bible accurately.

The proper way to understand the Bible is authentically. As far as possible, this means seeing it in its original historical context. An authentic interpretation is one that respects an author’s language, culture, and history without superimposing elements that are foreign or anachronistic to the time of writing. While we may not be able to know every detail of an author’s historical setting, getting as much accurate information as possible will always enhance our understanding of the text.

This is where a discipline like archaeology proves invaluable. The worlds of the biblical characters were real worlds. Sights, sounds, and smells. Blood, guts, and grime. Cities, towns, and villages. Houses, temples, and palaces. Swords, spears, and arrows. Jars, bowls, and lamps. A significant portion of the Bible deals with the accoutrements and objects of material culture. Such things are accessible only by the trowels and brushes.
of archaeological excavations. While ancient history is pieced together mostly from written texts and inscriptions (see Figure 1.05), the finer details and nuances of societies and cultures are best illuminated from the physical remains buried in the eroding sediments of past civilizations. Indeed, archaeology has a lot to say on the subject of biblical interpretation!

Unfortunately, there are two extreme views on the subject of the Bible and archaeology. On the far left are scholars who want the Bible eliminated from ANE archaeology altogether. Archaeology should not be done with a biblical “agenda,” they say. They want archaeology for archaeology’s sake, without a biblical bias attached to it. For these so-called biblical minimalists, the Bible gets little or no voice in the pursuit of archaeology.

On the far right are those who think the exact opposite. They disallow archaeology a place in studying the Bible. Put more accurately, they reject any
Map 1.04
SOME IMPORTANT BRONZE AGE CITIES & TOWNS in the N LEVANT

© Copyright Steven Collins & Joseph M. Holden, 2019. All Rights Reserved.
The Harvest Handbook of Bible Lands

BREAKOUT 1.02
A THUMBNAIL SKETCH OF MESOPOTAMIA AND THE BIBLE

Geography. Ancient Mesopotamia—“the Land Between Rivers”—is generally the territory between the Euphrates River in the west and the Tigris River in the east, roughly equivalent to modern Iraq (see Maps: 1.02, 1.03, 1.06). The Euphrates River started in the mountains of east Anatolia (east Turkey). The Tigris (Akkadian, *iddiglat* = “arrow”; cf. Hebrew, *hiddekel*), as its name implies, was a swifter river flowing from the western slopes of the Zagros Mountains. The two rivers came close to each other near ancient Babylon. They merged into a single river, the Shatt al-Arab, before entering the Persian Gulf. The rivers were useful for irrigation and were interconnected by canals. The hot, dry climate in Mesopotamia caused evaporation that deposited salts on the soil’s surface, affecting especially the growth of wheat. Barley was harder. The main trees were date palms. Lacking timber, the Mesopotamians from the second millennium BC coveted the cedars of Lebanon. They lacked metal and needed to trade for it. The primary building material was clay.

History. Mesopotamia is known as “the Cradle of Civilization,” as writing in cuneiform (wedge-shaped) script was developed there beginning c. 3300 BC. The earliest cities were in lower Mesopotamia and developed by the Sumerians. Their cuneiform script was adopted by Semitic Akkadians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Hurrians, Hittites, and even Levantine peoples. During the Neo-Assyrian period (910–612 BC), the Assyrians began an aggressive military expansion against Urartu to the north and Syria to the west. The Assyrians were defeated by a coalition of Medes and Chaldeans in 612 BC. The latter formed the Neo-Babylonian Empire, whose great King Nebuchadnezzar (605–562 BC) built the famed Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

The Old Testament. The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers were two of the four rivers that flowed from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:10-14). The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) seems to reflect a very early version of what was later, in Babylonia, called a ziggurat. God directed Abraham from Ur in southern Mesopotamia to Haran in northern Mesopotamia (Genesis 11:31), before he migrated to Canaan. Later Abraham sought a bride for Isaac from that region (Aram Naharaim); Jacob also sought refuge in Haran (Genesis 27:43). The Assyrian king Tiglath Pileser III destroyed the Aramean Bronze Age Mesopotamian cylinder seals with impressions (photo: James Barber, courtesy of Bible Lands Museum, Jerusalem)
archaeological data that casts doubt on their own interpretation of the Bible (for example, see Breakouts 2.04, 3.07). In their minds, because archaeology seems to contradict many of their traditional interpretations of the Bible, they would just as soon steer clear of both archaeology and ANE scholarship. For them, archaeology has no right to speak to biblical interpretation.

Neither of these extreme views is valid. Because the Bible and archaeology arise from the same soil, from the same worlds, both the text and the ground must be allowed to speak. Both are components of the same reality. They belong together in a mutual conversation—a dialogical approach to the Bible and archaeology.

The worlds that gave rise to biblical stories are the same worlds that left behind a wealth of material remains in the stratified ground. They are all part of the same reality. One is the same as the other, whether by word or by physical object. Because this is so, a text
A Thumbnail Sketch of the Levant and the Bible

Geography. The Levant, a word derived from Italian meaning “the rising of the sun or the east,” refers to the area to the east of the Mediterranean (see Maps 1.02, 1.04, 1.05, 1.06, 1.07). Ancient Syria had a coastal region watered by the Orontes River. Its principal city, Antioch, was situated on the Orontes, 20 miles from the coast. It provided a gateway into Mesopotamia to the east. Ancient Phoenicia occupied the area of modern Lebanon. Its mountains came close to the shore, which left little arable land. This area was known for its cedars and other coniferous trees. It also had excellent harbors, such as Byblos, Sidon, and Tyre. Palestine is a very small area, only a little larger than the state of Vermont in the USA. It is 150 miles from Dan to Beersheba, and about 50 miles from Jaffa to Jericho. Palestine’s importance lay in its central location connecting Egypt with areas to the north. Melting snows from Mount Hermon (9,000+ feet) fed the headwaters of the Jordan River, which flowed into the Sea of Galilee, situated in a depression 600+ feet below sea level. The Jordan then meandered into the Dead Sea, the lowest spot on earth. Jerusalem is located about 2,500 feet above sea level. Because the prevailing winds are from the west, rain falls on the western slopes of the hills, leaving an arid “rain shadow” in the Judean desert. Valuable copper was mined in the Arabah Valley south of the Dead Sea. Palestine was noted for its grapes, olives, and figs.

History. As early as 2500 BC, Egypt was acquiring cedars from Byblos. Texts from Mari in Mesopotamia (eighteenth century BC) mention trade with Hazor. The Amarna correspondence (fourteenth century BC) between Amenhotep III and IV with kings in Mesopotamia mention a number of cities in Phoenicia and Palestine, including Jerusalem. The city of Ugarit in Syria, destroyed c. 1200 BC, yielded texts that illuminate Canaanite religion. The Phoenicians brought the Semitic alphabet—invented by Semitic peoples living in Egypt and brought into Canaan by the Hebrews and others—to the Greeks. The Phoenicians established trading colonies throughout the Mediterranean. The Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians added the Levant to their empires. After Alexander the Great died, his successors—the Seleucids in Syria and the Ptolemies in Egypt—fought numerous wars over Palestine. With the Maccabean Revolution against the Seleucids in 165 BC, the Jews enjoyed a century of independence before the conquest of the Romans under Pompey in 63 BC. Judea was ruled by Herod (37–4 BC), then by Roman governors.

The Old Testament. After the conquest of Canaan, Israel enjoyed but a century of independence under Saul, David, and Solomon (tenth century BC). At first Israel’s main rival was the Aramean state of Damascus in Syria. But the Assyrians destroyed Damascus in 732 BC, and then Samaria in 722 BC. Judah was conquered by the Babylonians in the sixth century BC, then ruled by the Persians during the fifth century BC.

The New Testament. Jesus was born c. 5 BC in Bethlehem but raised in Nazareth. A significant portion of his ministry took place at Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee, and he also ventured to the Phoenician coast (Mark 7:24; Luke 4:26). He was tried and crucified in AD 30 or 33 in Jerusalem. The gospel spread to Antioch, where followers of Jesus were first called Christians. Antioch became the center from which Paul spread the gospel throughout the Mediterranean region.

E. Yamauchi