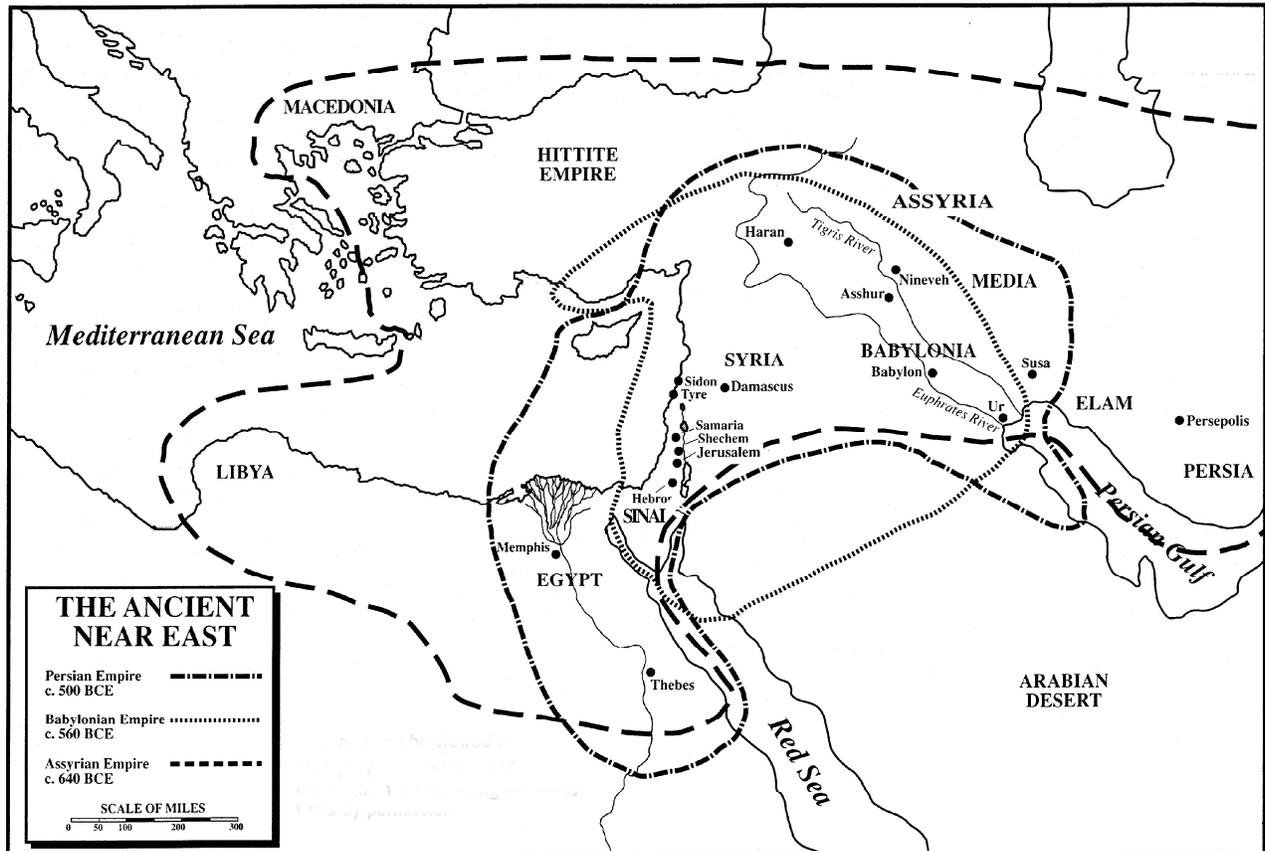


Ancient Near Eastern Geography

I. Ancient Near East



- A. The most important body of water in the region is the Mediterranean Sea. Israel had no natural harbors and so the Mediterranean really has minimal significance in understanding the Old Testament.
- B. To the South (North Africa) is Egypt. Bisected by the river Nile, which provided sustenance for a rather large and advanced civilization, Egypt was one of the major world powers in the region.
- C. Directly to the North is Asia Minor (or Anatolia), where today we find the modern nation of Turkey. Asia Minor had been settled by the Hittites, but at the time of the development of Israel there was no significant presence in this region.
- D. To the East are two rivers -- the Tigris and Euphrates -- that cut through a region known as Mesopotamia (the land between the rivers). Mesopotamia is considered the cradle of civilization because it was the place where writing originated and was the home of the first major empires, the first cities, etc. It is located on the site of modern day Iraq.
 1. To the North, on the banks of the Tigris, is Assyria, a major power with its capital city of Nineveh.
 2. Further to the South in Mesopotamia, on the banks of the Euphrates, is Babylon, another major power. Its capitol city is also called Babylon.

Ancient Near Eastern Geography

3. These two cities, along with Egypt in the South, formed a triangle of major powers which at various times struggled among each other for domination of the Middle East and adjacent lands.

II. Palestine

Palestine is located on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. A long rectangular shaped land, it was bordered by the sea on the west, the desert on the east, and by Syria on the north.

- A. We can divide Palestine into four geographic regions that parallel each other running north and south:
 1. A relatively narrow coastal plane was mostly settled by non-Israelites -- the Phoenicians in the north, and the Philistines in the south.
 2. The central highlands, a mountainous spine that runs through the center of the country, is the major area of Israelite settlement.
 3. The Jordan river valley, a deep cleft in the land through which the Jordan River flows, runs from the Sea of Galilee in the north to the Dead Sea in the south. The Dead Sea is many hundreds of feet below sea level.
 4. The Trans-Jordan plain, a relatively high and flat region to the East of the Jordan River, is settled largely by non-Israelite nations. It roughly corresponds to the modern country of Jordan..
- B. Palestine is used to describe the geographical territory without reference to who is living there. Canaan is a term for the same land, but now describing the people who lived there before the settlement of the Israelites. Israel is the term we will use for this land area when it is settled by the people that we call Israelites.
- C. Palestine, although not rich in resources, and settled by a whole series of third-rate powers, is strategically located. The northern super-powers must control Palestine if they hope to dominate Egypt (and vice verse), and every major battle for control took place in or near the region of Palestine.

III. The Sinai

The Sinai is a small triangular piece of land between Egypt and Southern Palestine, bordered by water. It was controlled by Egypt (and still is) and was the site of the Israelite's wilderness journeys after they left Egypt, and before they entered the land of Canaan.