

# The Ottawa School of Theology & Spirituality

The Bible: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives

September 16 – November 25, 2013

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Lecture 4 (revised Nov. 10, 2013)

## **Israelite Origins and Every Day Life in the Countryside**

Available at <http://www.houseofdauid.ca/lecture4.pdf>

## To Learn More

### **Israelite Origins**

- ***Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?*** W. G. Dever 2006
- ***The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*** Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman (in Ottawa Public Library)

### **Everyday Life**

- ***Life in Biblical Israel (Library of Ancient Israel)*** by Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager 2002
- ***The Lives of Ordinary People in Ancient Israel: When Archaeology and the Bible Intersect*** by William G. Dever 2012
- ***Women's Lives in Biblical Times*** by Jennie R. Ebeling, 2010 (In OPL)

Also the videos – links on the outline

## “Patriarchal” Period – Work in Progress

The only conceivable period in which the story of Abraham could fit is the Middle Bronze c. 2000-1450 BCE. If so it is filled with anachronisms, e.g. -

- Camels, Philistines, Ur of the Chaldees, Arameans
- Abraham and the south

**We are forced to conclude that the Abraham story** (Genesis 11:26-25:10) **as a whole doesn't fit in any known period**

If this were Mesopotamia we could hope to dig up tablets verifying the existence of a historic Abraham and his life story. However, this is very unlikely in the Canaanite context.

Kitchen (*On the Reliability of the Old Testament*) has shown that the story of Abraham might have been as described in Genesis, but not that it was, on the balance of probabilities, historically accurate. **The large majority of scholars consider that no historically reliable information can be identified from this text which probably dates from the period c. 700-c. 500 BCE.**

## The Exodus – Work in Progress

- The vast number of Israelites mentioned in the Bible (600,000 warriors = 2-3 million total of an Egyptian population of perhaps 4 million) all living in a marginal edge of the country is inconceivable. The departure of such a number would lead to an imploding of the economy of which there is no trace.
- A group of that size could not have survived in the desert.
- Kitchen (*On the Reliability of the Old Testament*) and Hoffmeier (*Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition; Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition*) have shown:
  1. That the form of the tabernacle and its ceremonies relate most closely to second millennium BCE models and that the same is true of the form and content of the Sinai covenant; and,
  2. that the story related in the Book of Exodus (except for the numbers involved) **might be** historically true. However, **the large majority of scholars consider that no historically reliable information can be identified from this text which probably dates from the period c. 700-c. 500 BCE.**
- The tradition of slavery in Egypt, divine rescue and perhaps an originally separate Sinai tradition may have been the heritage of one of the groups that later formed Israel that became the heritage, and eventually the ideological foundation of Israel as a whole.

# Theories of the Conquest/Settlement 1

<b>Alternatives for Emergence of Israel</b>	<b>Fit with Archaeological, Environmental and Historic Facts</b>
<b>1. Pan-Israelite Exodus and Invasion</b> as per Book of Joshua. <b>Israel exists as a people before entering Canaan.</b>	<b>Disjuncture between the archaeological and biblical conquest narrative - cities destroyed (Jericho; Ai); no mention of Egyptians when they were garrisoning Canaan in force until about 1140 BCE; population (approx. 45,000 in hill country c. 1000 BCE vs. Bible's approx. 2-3 million in wilderness)</b> <b>Extremely unlikely to be historically accurate.</b>

## Theories of Conquest/Settlement 2

<b>Alternatives for Emergence of Israel</b>	<b>Fit with Archaeological, Environmental and Historic Facts</b>
<b>2. Independent migrations &amp; Settlement</b> by separate extended families or clans, in <b>unoccupied hill country</b> . Israel, and its constituent tribes, form after settlement in the hill country on the basis of geography.	<b>Fits reasonably with archaeology record and with descriptions in Book of Judges.</b>

## Theories of Origin 3

<b>Alternatives for Emergence of Israel</b>	<b>Fit with Archaeological, Environmental and Historic Facts</b>
<p><b>3. “Conquest” as Internal Revolt</b> -Canaanite peasants moving into hills to escape oppressive conditions under city-state aristocracies where they join up with small groups from outside Canaan. <b>Israel, and its constituent tribes, form after settlement in the hill country on the basis of geography.</b></p>	<p><b>Fits reasonably with archaeology record but contradicts what the Israelites themselves said about their past in Hebrew Bible.</b></p> <p>No trace of a popular revolt in the archaeological record.</p>

# Theories of Origin 4

<b>Alternatives for Emergence of Israel</b>	<b>Fit with Archaeological, Environmental and Historic Facts</b>
<p><b>4. Independent migrations &amp; Settlement</b> by separate extended families or clans, <b>in unoccupied hill country where they merged with Canaanites</b> leaving the city-state ruled low lands as per Finkelstein and many others. <b>Israel, and its constituent tribes, form after settlement in the hill country on the basis of geography.</b></p>	<p><b>Fits well with archaeology record and with descriptions in Book of Judges. In my view most likely to be correct.</b></p>



# Elements that might have Coalesced to form Ancient Israel 1

<b>Origin</b>	<b>Relative Quantity</b>	<b>Contributed</b>
<b>Canaanite</b>	<b>most</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•<b>El Worship</b></li><li>•<b>Religious and general culture</b></li><li>•<b>Language and Literary tradition</b></li><li>•<b>Pottery Styles</b></li><li>•<b>Agricultural Skills</b></li></ul>

# Elements that might have Coalesced to form Ancient Israel 2

<b>Origin</b>	<b>Relative Quantity</b>	<b>Contributed</b>
<b>Arameans</b>	<b>small</b>	<b>Abraham traditions</b>
<b>Midianite</b>	<b>small</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Yahweh worship</b></li><li>• <b>Sinai Tradition</b></li><li>• <b>Moses?</b></li></ul>
<b>Semites who Left Egypt</b>	<b>small</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Exodus traditions</b></li><li>• <b>Moses?</b></li></ul>

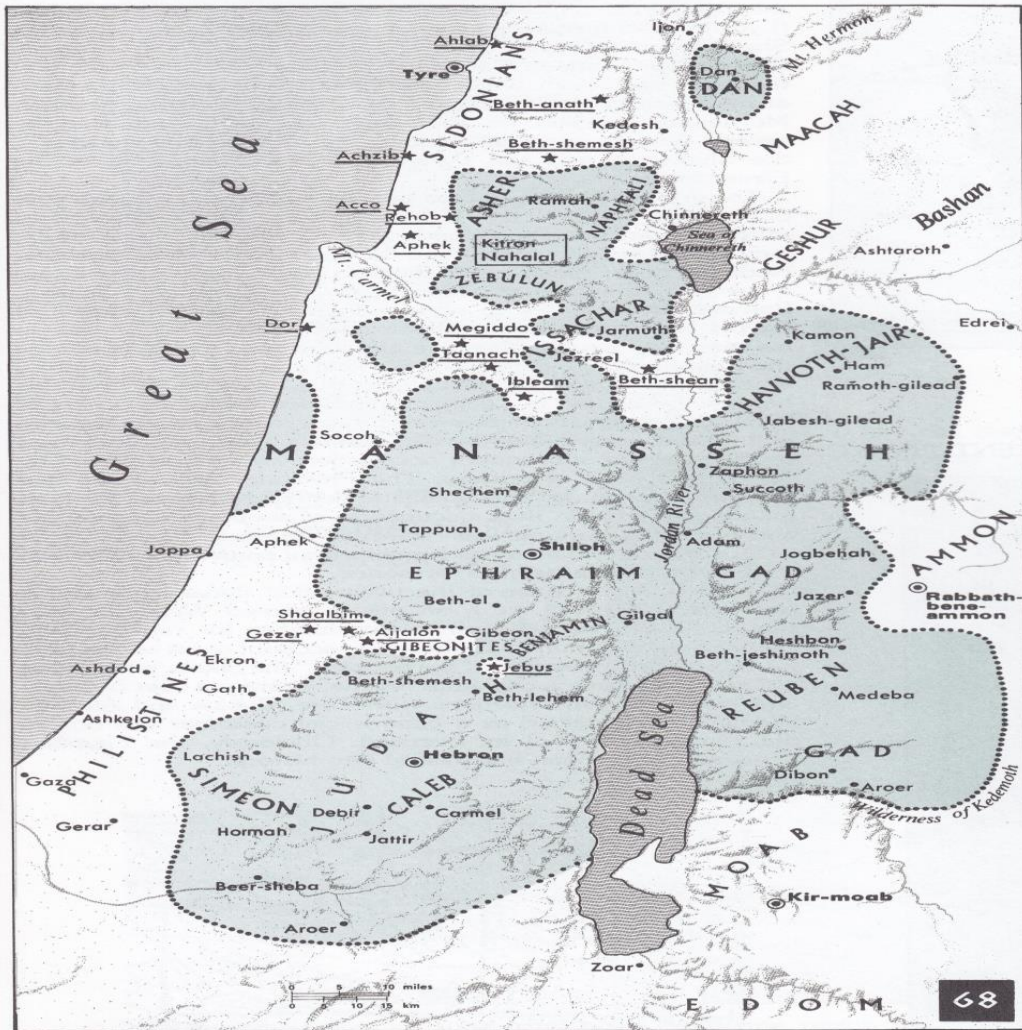
# Midianites

- The Midianites seem to have been centered around a **cultic site in Sinai at Mount Horeb**. This has led some scholars to speculate that the **worship of Yahweh may have actually begun among the Midianites**, to be adapted later by the Israelites.
- An Egyptian inscription refers to "Yhw in the land of the Shasu" as a tribe or people living in what would later become Midianite territory.
- According to the Bible the Midianites, like the Israelites, practiced circumcision

# **Process of Israel's Formation**

- 1. Unrelated groups move into unoccupied hill country from c. 1200 BCE forming tiny unfortified villages**
- 2. "Tribes" form as neighboring groups cooperate in defence against raiders**
- 3. Loose broader association of "proto-Israelites" formed joined by acceptance of El understood as Yahweh as sovereign and owner of all land. "Israel" = El Rules**
- 4. Philistine pressure force adoption of monarchy and development of army (1050-1000 BCE)**

# Israelite Areas



Area of Israelite control  
 Gezer Canaanite city not conquered (according to Judg. 1)

JOSH. 15:63; 16:10; 17: 11-18; JUDG. 1:21-35

# Hills



# Gezer Calendar 1

10th century BCE



## Gezer Calendar 2

One of the earliest Hebrew [epigraphs](#) (from around the time of Solomon), written on limestone, the text seems to be a calendar of agricultural tasks and seasons:

- Two months of harvest (*olives?*)
- Two months of planting (*cereals?*)
- Two months are late planting (*vegetables?*)
- One month of hoeing
- One month of barley-harvest
- One month of harvest and festival (*grain?*)
- Two months of grape harvesting
- One month of summer fruit (*or one last month?*)



# Everyday Life

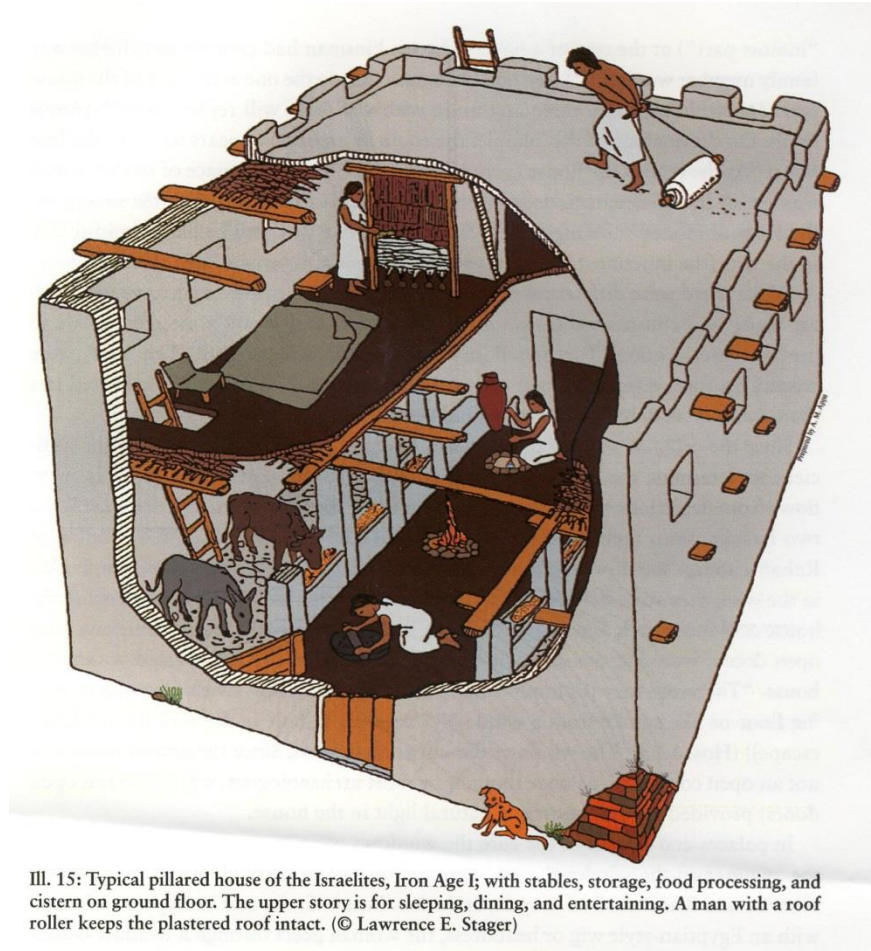
## The Centrality of Agriculture

- In pre-industrial society 85-90 percent of the population was agricultural producing a small surplus which could support the remaining 10-15 percent and could be taxed to support government and military
- Therefore government and armies had to be small or militias of farmers campaigning during the agricultural quiet time June-October.

# Society

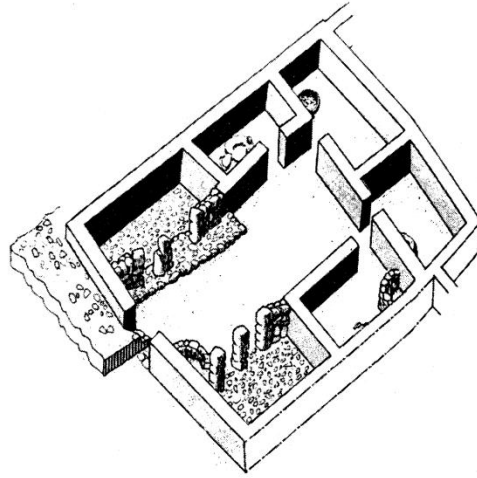
- Almost the entire early Israelite population lived in small unwallled villages in hill country almost unoccupied since the MB Age.
- Key technologies were terraces and lime plastered cisterns

# Pillared or 4-Room House



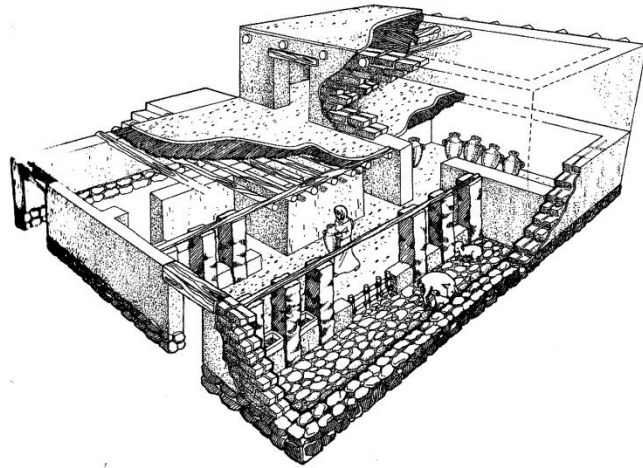
# Pillared or 4-Room House

*Defining and Contextualizing Religion*



Ground plan of "four-room" or "pillar-courtyard" house

James Hardin

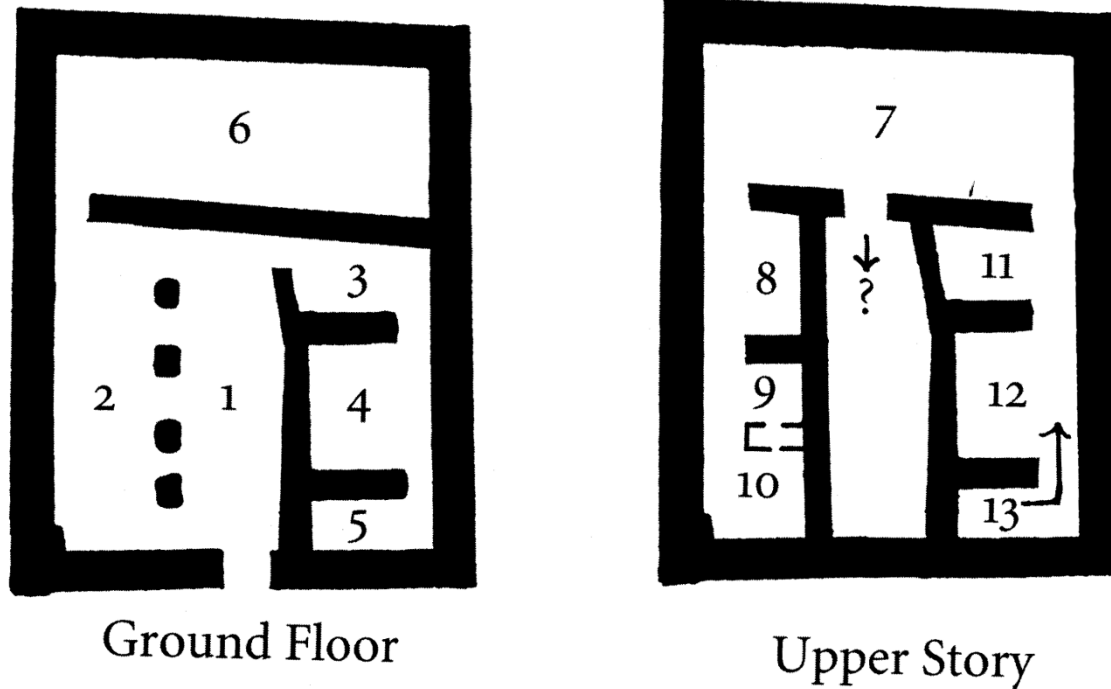


Artist's reconstruction of the Israelite "four-room house"

Giselle S. Hasel

# Pillared or 4-Room House

THE LIVES OF ORDINARY PEOPLE IN ANCIENT ISRAEL



0 5 m.

Fig. VI.8. Reconstruction of a typical "pillar-courtyard" house of the 8th century

# The Village



Ill. 10: Israelite joint family compound with two pillared houses and various courtyard activities. (Reconstruction: © L. E. Stager, Illustration: C. S. Alexander)

# The Village

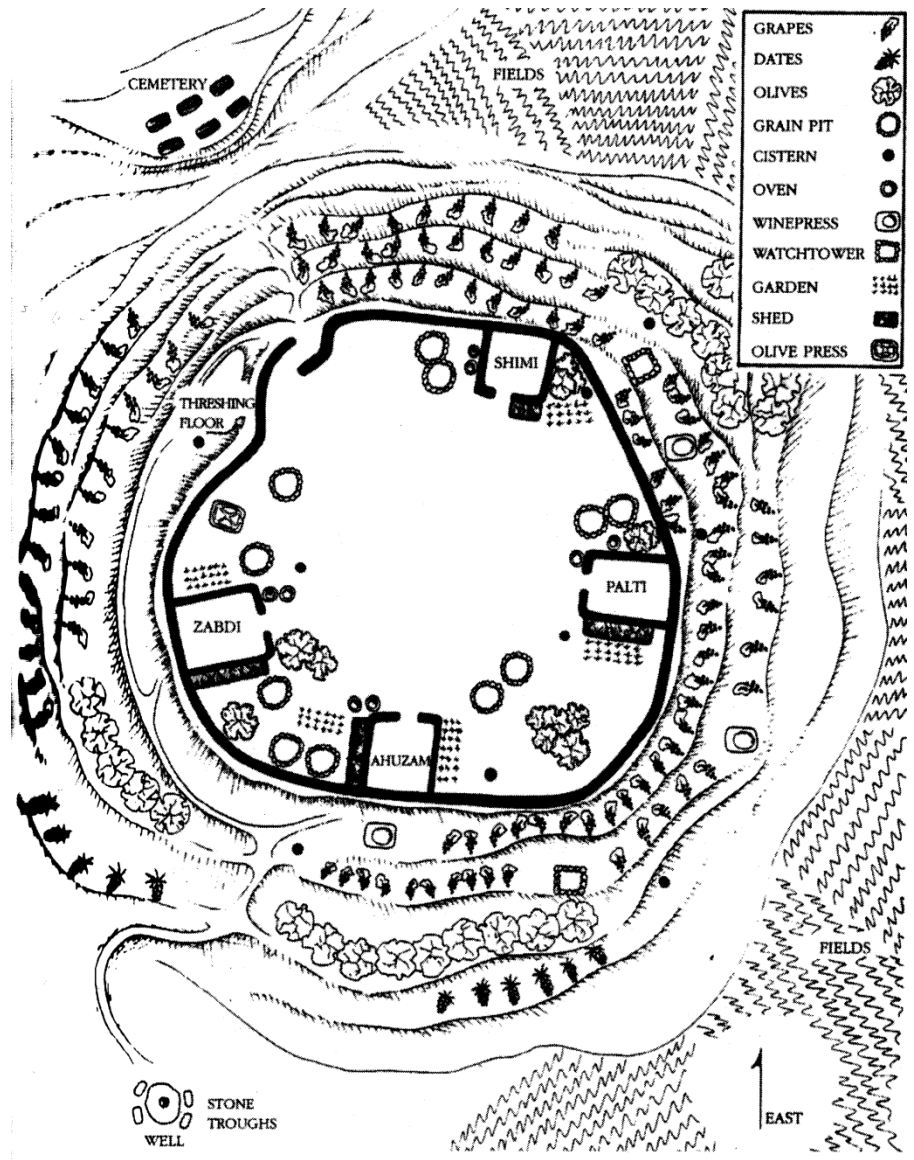
THE LIVES OF ORDINARY PEOPLE IN ANCIENT ISRAEL



Fig. VI.2. Reconstruction of a small unwalled village.

Drawing by Giselle Hasel

# The Village



Hamlet with four family compounds around open courtyard;  
population ca. 50-60

Borowski 2003, Fig. 7.1



# **Vegetation and Farming in Ancient Israel**

## **Three keys**

- **Climate=rainfall**
- **Topography**
- **Soils**

# Seasons

- **2 seasons: a mild and rainy winter, beginning with the first rain in October, and a hot and dry summer, beginning in May: "Cold and heat, summer and winter" (Genesis 8:22); Spring and autumn, being too brief, are seldom mentioned in the Bible as proper seasons.**
- **The amount of rain varies greatly with latitude and altitude and from one year to another. While the mean annual rainfall in some places in Upper Galilee amounts to 1000 mm., it drops to 600 mm. and 700 mm in Samaria and Judea; to 400 mm. in southern Judea and in the northern Negev to 200 mm.; while the southernmost Negev has an average of 25 mm. and may be rainless for several consecutive years.**
- **In areas where 200 mm. is the annual mean, only 50 mm. of rain may fall in one year and 400 mm. in another. Such irregularity is responsible for the frequency of drought and famine.**
- **The 'sown' land and the 'desert' are separated by a belt changing in width from year to year;**
- **The amount of annual rainfall has divided the country into wheat land and barley land. Barley cultivation can be maintained with a minimal rainfall of 200 mm., while wheat needs at least 400 mm. Wheat ripens a month or more later than the barley. Accordingly, the sheaf of the first harvest - brought to the Temple at Passover – consisted of barley, while the end of the wheat harvest was celebrated at Pentecost, seven weeks later.**

# Topography

- THE biblical Land of Israel comprised the areas on both sides of the Jordan. Then, as today, the land was a corridor connecting north and south and a crossroads between Asia and Africa.
- The environmental factors of the country are extremely diverse in terms of topography and climate, owing primarily to the contrasting altitudes, ranging from 2,800 m. in the north (Mt. Hermon) to 396 m. below sea-level in the south (Dead Sea area). These variegated landforms have decisively influenced the conditions and way of life of the people and molded much of the country's history.
- **The salient topographical feature is the elevated ridge system stretching like a backbone all along Cisjordan, sloping steeply down eastwards and gently towards the sea in the west - forming the four longitudinal topographic belts: the Coastal Plain, the Hill Country, the Rift Valley and the Transjordan Plateau. These belts are fairly well marked by differences in their geomorphological features, their climatic conditions and their plant-life.** This overall configuration has scarcely changed during the last million years, and looked in biblical times as it does today. All these longitudinal belts are split into latitudinal units. Two of the larger valleys across the hill belt are the Esdraelon Valley in the north

# Water

- **Water**
- water and water conservation primary considerations in the daily life of Israel.
- Unlike Egypt, whose agriculture is based on irrigation from the Nile, Canaan depends upon the seasonal rains
- A key point is not just the rather low annual rainfall, but its concentration in a period of four to six months in winter.
- Sources of water - streams, springs, wells, cisterns, and reservoirs. As for the figurative use of water, the range of the metaphor is evident in the book of Jeremiah, where he at one moment refers to God as "the fountain of living water " that is, the flowing water of a spring (Jer. 2:13).

# Springs

- The porous limestone of Palestine favors the formation of springs, as attested by the large number of places named for springs; for example, 'Ein-Gedi ("spring of the wild goat = Ibex"), an oasis on the west shore of the Dead Sea. According to the psalmist, springs are a manifestation of God's graciousness: "You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst" (Ps. 104:10-11). In preparation for Sennacherib's invasion of Jerusalem, Hezekiah blocked all the springs in the vicinity: "He [Hezekiah] planned with his officers and his mighty men to stopper the waters of the springs that were outside the city; and they helped him. A great many people gathered, and they stoppered all the springs and the brook that flowed through the land, saying, 'Why should the Assyrian kings come and find much water' (2 Chron. 32:3-4).
- The Jerusalem springs are the Gihon and 'En-Rogel. Springs often determined the location of settlements.
- Wells feature prominently in the Bible. Basically, a well is an artificial shaft sunk into the ground to tap into the water table.

# Cisterns

- Cisterns are mentioned frequently in the Bible. They are artificial reservoirs, usually cut into bedrock, for collecting and conserving rain runoff from roofs and courtyards. Cisterns had to be kept covered and were cleaned annually of accumulated sediment. The porous nature of the native bedrock often required that cisterns be waterproofed with lime plaster to prevent leakage. However, cisterns cut into hard limestone were usually impermeable, requiring no special lining. Jeremiah mentions "cracked cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13). Apparently these cisterns were hewn into porous rock that required a lime-plaster lining to be watertight, but the plaster had cracked and the cistern had leaked.
- Cisterns were of various sizes and shapes. Many were bottle-shaped, with a stone covering the small opening at the top. The neck was a narrow shaft through which vessels were lowered by rope into the cistern. Other cisterns were bell-shaped. Moses indicates that the Israelites will be able to take possession of "hewn cisterns that you [Israelites] did not hew" (Deut. 6:11).
- Occasionally a cistern could serve purposes other than water storage, as in the incident when Jeremiah was imprisoned in one:
- "So they took Jeremiah and threw him into the cistern (bor) of Malchiah, the king's son, which was in the court of the guard, letting Jeremiah down by ropes. Now there was no water in the cistern (bor), but only mud (tit), and Jeremiah sank in the mud (tit)" (Jer. 38:6).
- According to the biblical account, four men were required to extricate Jeremiah from the accumulated sediment of the cistern (Jer. 38: 11-13).

# Forests 1

- Forests in ancient Israel were much more extensive than they are today. The natural forestation of the highlands consisted principally of three of the trees mentioned above, the evergreen oak (*Quercus calliprinos*), the Aleppo pine (*Pinus halepensis*), and the terebinth (*Pistacia palaestina*). No barren hills existed before the human habitation of the area.
- A key cause of the degradation of the primeval forest in the highlands was the need for arable land, which was created on the many slopes of the hill country in the form of stepped terraces. Converting the hillsides into agricultural terraces in order to sustain agriculturally based villages dates as early as 1200 B.C.E.
- Ecological equilibrium was achieved in the hill country by constructing **agricultural terraces** that increased the subsistence base. In sum, as population increased, the creation of arable land and the increase in the various pyrotechnologies brought pressure on natural resources in this region.

## Forests 2

- With the transition from bronze to iron, pyrotechnology continued to need wood for fuel, which led to the depletion of the forests. Iron-tipped scratch plows, iron axes, and weapons of warfare were responsible in part for deforestation. Shipbuilding and the construction of dwellings using wood materials also accounted for the enormous reduction in forests. In addition, flocks of sheep and especially goats contributed to the decline of the wooded land. The pressures that led to broad deforestation during the Iron Age are appropriately depicted in a dialogue between Joshua and the Josephites:
- The sons of Joseph said:

"The highlands are not enough for us; yet the Canaanites living in the lowlands all have iron chariots, particularly those in Beth-Shean and its satellite villages and those in the Jezreel Valley."

Joshua replied to the house of Joseph, that is, to Ephraim and Manasseh:

"You are a numerous people and very strong. You shall not have one allotment only. The highlands shall be yours as well; true, it is a forest (ya'ar), but you will clear it and possess it to its farthest limits. And you shall also dispossess the Canaanites, despite their iron chariots and their strength."

(Josh. 17:16-18)



## The Seven Species

- The Bible describes Israel as a land blessed with **seven species** (*shiv'at hamminim*) of fruit and grain: "A land of **wheat, barley, grape vines, figs and pomegranates**, a land of **olive oil** and **(date) honey**'
- These seven species have a special place in Judaism and can be seen in most parts of Israel, cultivated in rural areas, adorning urban gardens and parks or growing wild.

# Evergreen Oak



[www.holidayinIsrael.com](http://www.holidayinIsrael.com)

# Cedar of Lebanon



# Aleppo Pine

