Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament

CULTURAL, SOCIAL, AND HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

EDITED BY
Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton
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### Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AASOR</td>
<td>Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Anchor Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Archaeology and Biblical Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIL</td>
<td>Ancient Israel and Its Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJA</td>
<td>American Journal of Archaeology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>Ägypten und Levante / Egypt and the Levant</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMD</td>
<td>Ancient Magic and Divination</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANEM</td>
<td>Ancient Near East Monographs</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANESSup</td>
<td>Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ant.</td>
<td>Josephus, Jewish Antiquities</td>
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<td>AO</td>
<td>Der Alte Orient</td>
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<td>AOAT</td>
<td>Alter Orient und Altes Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>AoF</td>
<td>Altorientalische Forschungen</td>
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<tr>
<td>AOS</td>
<td>American Oriental Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apion</td>
<td>Josephus, Against Apion</td>
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<tr>
<td>AUSS</td>
<td>Andrews University Seminary Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Biblical Archaeologist</td>
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<tr>
<td>BAR</td>
<td>Biblical Archaeology Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>BASOR</td>
<td>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>BBR</td>
<td>Bulletin for Biblical Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>BBRSup</td>
<td>Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplements</td>
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<tr>
<td>BCE</td>
<td>before the Common Era (= BC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bib</td>
<td>Biblica</td>
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<td>BibOr</td>
<td>Biblica et Orientalia</td>
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<tr>
<td>BJS</td>
<td>Brown Judaic Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>BJSUCSD</td>
<td>Biblical and Judaic Studies from the University of California, San Diego</td>
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<td>BO</td>
<td>Bibliotheca Orientalis</td>
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<tr>
<td>BP</td>
<td>before the present</td>
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<tr>
<td>BWANT</td>
<td>Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>BZA</td>
<td>Beiträge zu Zeitreich für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBET</td>
<td>Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBQ</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBQMS</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>CE</td>
<td>Common Era (= AD)</td>
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<td>CEB</td>
<td>Common English Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>CHANE</td>
<td>Culture and History of the Ancient Near East</td>
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<td>CPJ</td>
<td>Corpus papyrorum judaicarum. Edited by Victor A. Tcherikover. 3 vols.</td>
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Abbreviations


CUSAS Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology


DJD Discoveries in the Judean Desert

DMOA Documenta et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui

EA El-Amarna tablets

EC Early Christianity

Erts-Eretz-Israel

ESV English Standard Version

FAT Forschungen zum Alten Testament

FRLANT Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments


HdO Handbuch der Orientalistik

HSM Harvard Semitic Monographs

HSS Harvard Semitic Studies

HUCA Hebrew Union College Annual

IEJ Israel Exploration Journal

JANER Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions

JANES Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society

JAOS Journal of the American Oriental Society

JARCE Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt

JAS Journal of Archaeological Science

JBL Journal of Biblical Literature

JCS Journal of Cuneiform Studies

JE A Journal of Egyptian Archaeology

JESHO Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient

JISMER Journal of the Interdisciplinary Study of Monotheistic Religions

JNES Journal of Near Eastern Studies

JNSL Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages

JPOS Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society

JPS Jewish Publication Society Version

JSJ Journal of the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods

JSJSUP Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement Series

JSOT Journal for the Study of the Old Testament

JSOTSup Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series

JSSEA Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities


KJV King James Version


kya thousand years ago

LAI Library of Ancient Israel

LHB/OTS The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies

LIFE Josephus, Life of Josephus

LNTS The Library of New Testament Studies

MC Mesopotamian Civilizations

NEA Near Eastern Archaeology


NEASB Near Eastern Archaeological Society Bulletin

NIV New International Version

NJPS New Jewish Publication Society Version

NKJV New King James Version

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

OBO Orbis Biblius et Orientalis

OBOSA Orbis Biblius et Orientalis, Series Archaeologica


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<th>Abbreviations</th>
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<td>OIP</td>
<td>Oriental Institute Publications</td>
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<td>OIS</td>
<td>Oriental Institute Seminars</td>
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<td>OLA</td>
<td>Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta</td>
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<td>OTL</td>
<td>Old Testament Library</td>
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<td>OtSt</td>
<td>Oudtestamentische Studiën</td>
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<td>PÄ</td>
<td>Probleme der Ägyptologie</td>
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<td>Papyrus</td>
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<td>PEQ</td>
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<td>RAI</td>
<td>Rencontre assyriologique internationale</td>
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<td>Revue biblique</td>
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<td>RBS</td>
<td>Resources for Biblical Study</td>
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<td>Religion Compass</td>
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<td>RGRW</td>
<td>Religions in the Graeco-Roman World</td>
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<td>RSV</td>
<td>Revised Standard Version</td>
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<td>SAA</td>
<td>State Archives of Assyria</td>
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<td>SAAB</td>
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<td>SBL</td>
<td>Studies in Biblical Literature</td>
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<td>SHANE</td>
<td>Studies in the History (and Culture) of the Ancient Near East</td>
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<td>SJLA</td>
<td>Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity</td>
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<td>TAD</td>
<td>Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt. By B. Porten and</td>
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<td>A. Yardeni, 4 vols. Jerusalem: Hebrew University; Winona Lake, IN: Eise-</td>
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Introduction

Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton

The Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible, is an ancient collection of books written to ancient peoples. Yet it is also a book revered in contemporary communities of faith as God’s Word and appreciated by believers and unbelievers alike for its enduring impact on many civilizations today. Though it is not written to us, generations of confessional communities have believed that it is written for us. Nevertheless, these two contexts, the ancient world on the one hand and the modern world on the other, are separated from each other by vast chasms of time, space, culture, and language, and this reality often limits our understanding of what was being communicated by those ancient scribes to their early hearers. Thus, for those who seek to understand the message of the Bible in its context, some understanding of the ancient world—its geography, archaeology, literature, iconography, history, and culture—is an essential starting point. As true as this may be, many readers of the Bible do not recognize this reality or, if they do, they often do not have easy access to information about the ancient world. In fact, typical Bible classes in confessional and nonconfessional institutions frequently consist of detailed, literature-based canonical surveys with little reference to the ancient world. The result is that we subconsciously impose our own cultural understandings on the text, at the same time missing the point of the ancient communicators.

This volume aims to provide an entry point to this ancient world, in general, and to illuminate the historical, cultural, and social contexts of the world behind the Old Testament, in particular. As such, it introduces students to “background studies” and “comparative studies.” Background studies examine the literature, history, and material culture of the ancient world in order to understand the behavior, beliefs, culture, values, and worldview of the people. Comparative studies seek to juxtapose the data from two or more cultures, most often the Israelite culture compared to one or more of the ancient Near Eastern cultures. Such comparison offers the opportunity to observe both similarities and differences and helps readers to grasp the level of cultural embeddedness. These two disciplines together can be referred to as “cognitive environment criticism” and seek to help readers of the Old Testament recover the cultural layers from the world behind the text that were implicitly understood by the ancient audience but have been long lost to our modern world.
Introduction

This book is designed for classroom use alongside traditional literature-based, canonical surveys and, we hope, will fill a gap in typical “Introduction to the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible” courses. We also hope that it will serve as an accessible resource that will introduce readers—be they students, clergy, interested lay readers, or scholars from other subdisciplines within biblical and ancient Near Eastern studies—to a wide range of background materials relevant for understanding the Old Testament, including Levantine geography, archaeology, ancient Near Eastern texts and iconography, history, and a selection of religious, social, and economic topics. The concise treatments permit unparalleled breadth in the coverage of relevant subjects, thus allowing instructors flexibility in selecting chapters that may be best suited to meet their course objectives and offering all readers a handy, single-volume reference work.

We have assembled a panel of experts in the relevant fields from leading research institutions, confessional and nonconfessional, public and private universities and colleges, and seminaries in North America, Israel, Europe, Australia, South America, and Africa. As such, though we editors are confessional scholars working in Protestant institutions, our contributors represent a variety of perspectives about the theological nature of the text; for some it is Scripture understood within Jewish, Roman Catholic, or Protestant faith communities, yet for others, it is not. Different perspectives are also represented in the relationship of the text to history (and even the way one defines “biblical history”); for some the connection between the text and our understanding of history is close, and for others the gap is wider. Thus, a careful reader of this book will observe different opinions represented among these chapters, as not all of our authors represent the same perspectives as others or of the editors. We have left these tensions intact with the hope that they will enhance the pedagogical value of the volume in serving diverse readers in different settings and allowing instructors the opportunity to identify, discuss, and evaluate these different perspectives. Regardless, all of our contributors agree that understanding the ancient world illuminates our understanding of those early contexts of the Old Testament and are committed to sharing their expertise to that end with a broad audience. Indeed, these men and women represent some of the best scholars currently working on many of these topics, and we are honored to include their contributions in this work.

The design of the book is based upon viewing the history of ancient Israel through the lens of a “drama,” thus drawing a metaphor from the growing appreciation for the narrative art of the Israelite historians and the larger “story” framework in which the various genres of the Old Testament are embedded. As with any drama, much goes on “behind the scenes,” and we have organized this work to “pull back the curtain,” as it were, and illuminate the drama.

The first part, “Elements of the Drama,” is comprised of introductory chapters addressing the essential methods utilized in background studies along with regional and chronological surveys. The sections are delineated within the larger paradigm of “drama” and are grouped as follows:

I. The Stage: These chapters introduce the field of historical geography and provide information on the history of the field, the geological regions of the Levant and related lands, and their climates, flora, and fauna.

II. The Sets and Props: In this section the field of Levantine archaeology is introduced, and the material and biological remains of the region are described according to the standard archaeological time periods: Late Bronze Age, Iron Age I, Iron Age II, the Neo-Babylonian
and Persian periods, and the Hellenistic period.

III. The Scripts: These chapters introduce the field of the comparative study of ancient Near Eastern literature with introductions to Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Hittite, Ugaritic, and Hellenistic corpora as well as extrabiblical Hebrew and other Northwest Semitic inscriptions.

IV. The Frames: Ancient Near Eastern iconography is addressed in its own section with chapters introducing the field and specific treatments of Egyptian, Assyrian, and Canaanite/Israelite repertoires.

The second part, “Acts and Scenes of the Drama,” contains synthetic historical surveys, drawing upon the geographical, archaeological, textual, and iconographic methodologies described in the preceding section. It is divided into two sections: “Acts” and “Scenes.” This division is loosely based on the recognition that “history” functions at various levels of time.

V. Acts: This section deals with longer periods of time and is arranged according to the traditional stages of history from the perspective of the biblical story line in order to be most suitable for classroom use: the stories of the Ancestral period, the Egyptian sojourn, exodus and settlement, the Israelite kingdoms, exilic communities, Persian Yehud, and the Hasmonean.

VI. Scenes: In this section each chapter is based on a single event—often an event only alluded to, if mentioned at all, in the Bible—and the ramifications of that event for the biblical world either conceptually or historically. Such events include the reign of Akhenaten, the migration of the Sea Peoples, Sheshonq’s campaign, the Battle of Qarqar, the Moabite wars, the Jehu revolt, the invasion of Sennacherib, an eighth-century earthquake, the Battle of Carchemish, and the conquest of Alexander the Great. These episodic “scenes” demonstrate for students how major events shape the course of history and illustrate the sort of sociopolitical dynamics at work throughout Israel’s history.

The third and final part, “Themes of the Drama,” shifts from historical reconstructions to thematic treatments of important religious, social, and economic institutions (and the interaction among them), again drawing upon geographical, archaeological, textual, and iconographic materials across the breadth of the time periods and geographical regions in the section above. It is divided into four sections:

VII. God: This section focuses on Israelite religion and includes chapters on monotheism, polemics, the temple, the priesthood, sacrifice, “family” religion, propheticism-divination, and death and burial.

VIII. Family: The second section is centered on the topic of family with chapters on tribes, women, and children and inheritance.

IX. Sustenance: The third section focuses on the economy with chapters on seasons and crops, trade, slavery, local economies, technology (metallurgy, ceramics, and textiles), food preparation, feasting, and music and dance.

X. Governance: The fourth and final section is centered on social organization and includes chapters on kingship, social stratification, legal systems, wisdom traditions, and warfare.

It is our hope that readers will find this book accessible to all students of the Old Testament, comprehensive in range and scope, and practical for improving understanding. Ultimately, we trust that it will serve an important role in fostering a better understanding of the Hebrew Bible in its world to better equip readers to grapple with its message.
PART ONE

Elements of the Drama
SECTION I

The Stage

Historical Geography
The What and Why

There is truth to the adage that although history doesn’t repeat itself, it does rhyme. That it does so is probably due in part to the persistence of human nature, but also to facts on the ground—that is, realities of geography that prompt (and then reprompt) the nature of events. The discipline of historical geography is particularly helpful in our attempt to search out the how and why of the past in that, while it appreciates the uniqueness of individual moments in time, it especially notices patterns within regional contexts of place. A primary goal of historical geography is to understand the functionality and actual use of landscapes over time. A working appreciation of this “dynamic of the land” in turn reinforces, broadens, and deepens our understanding of events that are otherwise known primarily from texts.

As a discipline, historical geography looks at events within the context of the place and time in which they occurred. That it is geography places it in the realm of the sciences (both material and social). That it is historical, especially as it concerns itself with the conditions of ancient life that can be reconstructed from texts, places it in the humanities. This task, both by nature and practice, is multidisciplinary, drawing on the fields of physical geography, philology (textual studies), archaeology, and cultural and anthropological studies, among others. And, depending on the interests of the scholar or the particular task at hand, historical geography is subordinate to either one or more of these disciplines or the umbrella under which they might all be placed. In the process, the historical geographer asks a wide variety of questions, some event-related, others text-related. This human-land dimension includes things specific not just to individual events (what happened where and why) but to larger phenomena as well, such as settlement patterns, the use of natural resources, methods of adaptation to the environment, strategic locations and networks of natural routes, and the development of social, economic, and political units that live on, exploit,
or otherwise make use of natural regions. Note that our awareness of many of these factors comes from archaeology, and much of that derives, quite intentionally for many archaeologists, independently of texts (especially sacred texts). In any case, whether the history at hand is derived from texts or archaeology or both, an effective historical geographer must by nature be not only a wide-ranging collector of data but also a skilled synthesizer; a specialist as well as a generalist.

In making a case for students of the Old Testament to ground themselves in the world of the Bible, the biblical geographer Denis Baly passed on to his readers the words of his teacher, Percy Maude Roxby, that “geography, being concerned with everything upon the surface of the earth, is not one of the segments in the circle of sciences, but the center” (Baly 2005, 11). I do not wish to enter into a discussion about the relationship between geography (or, more specifically, its relevant subfield, historical geography) and theology, the latter long regarded (though for most no longer) as the queen of the sciences, but Roxby’s words do offer a necessary prompt. Its sacred and literary contexts notwithstanding, the Old Testament is a text about people living in real places (i.e., geography) over time (i.e., history). These are realities that impact our understandings of the meaning(s) of the text, and it is from them that points of relevance for modern readers, including theologians, arise.

Within the parameters of this volume, historical geography has as its goal the task of revealing the historical and geographical contexts of situations in life from the world of the Bible, including specific events recorded in the Old Testament. The discipline assumes that certain ways of life, or facts on the ground, informed the authors of the Old Testament, and that information about many of these facts can, to a reasonable extent, be recovered and analyzed. The fields explored are broad and anything but uniform. In the world of the Bible we find, for instance, shepherds and farmers, hill-country dwellers and flatlanders, drylanders and seafarers, urban sophisticates and rural peasants, task-specialists and task-generalists, among many others, all of whom cross ethnic and national identities and each of whom exploited diverse parts of the land in ways best suited to their own place and time. Each also viewed the natural (and spiritual) world in ways that were consistent with the horizon line they knew best: Is the sea scary or useful? Is a frontier town a crossroads of opportunity or an open sieve of threat? Can an invader be leveraged for mutual economic gain? Is the cosmos better understood as a city (Rev. 21:1–2), a tent (Isa. 40:22), or the arch of the bent-over Egyptian goddess Nwt? “Their gods are gods of the mountains,” while ours are gods of the plains (1 Kings 20:23); and so forth. And so a historical geographer has his or her feelers out for patterns of events but also for patterns of perception and thought, all of which are grounded in significant ways in realia of the landscapes of the past.

Historical geography is all about connectedness—one site to another, one region to another, one issue to another, one discipline to another. This is its strength. Still, core to the discipline is the idea that its relevance comes not only by studying the geographical setting of the events that shaped the world of the Old Testament but also by actually experiencing the land firsthand. Here we are reminded of the mandate of no less a scholar of the world of the Bible than Jerome: “Just as those who have seen Athens understand Greek history better, and just as those who have seen Troy understand the words of the poet Virgil, thus one will comprehend the Holy Scriptures with a clearer understanding who has seen the land of Judah with his own eyes” (Preface to Chronicles, cited in Freeman-Grenville, Chapman, and Taylor 2003, 2–3).

To this we can add the directive of the American geographer Carl Ortwin Sauer, also

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a fierce advocate of fieldwork, who speaks more broadly of cultural landscapes than of specific events: “The reconstruction of critical cultural landscapes of the past requires . . . the most intimate familiarity with the terrain which the given culture occupied. . . . One might say that [the historical geographer] needs the ability to see the land with the eyes of its former occupants, from the standpoint of their needs and capacities. This is about the most difficult task in all human geography” (Sauer 1963b, 362). So the land is not just the setting of events of the past but a laboratory, an arena for discovery and thought. Here, according to Sauer, “locomotion should be slow, the slower the better, and be often interrupted by leisurely halts to sit on vantage points and stop at question marks” (Sauer 1963a, 400). We should speak of field historical geographers just as readily as we speak of field archaeologists, in distinction to those of the lectern- or armchair-only variety, and encourage such activity in every way possible. When the stage and its settings are encountered personally, something transformative happens in the way that events are understood.

Development of the Discipline

Although historical geography as a scientific discipline traces its origins to the pioneering work of Edward Robinson and Eli Smith, who, on trips to Ottoman Palestine in 1838 and 1852, identified biblical places through names that were preserved as Arabic toponyms (Robinson and Smith 1841; 1856a), its roots are much older. The earliest written sources for biblical geography, both Jewish and Christian, attest to an interest in identifying places and describing characteristics of the land of ancient Israel that were part of the biblical story. This is only natural, given the essential connection to that land that is presupposed by the legal material, narrative line, and poetic expressions of the Bible (e.g., Exod. 12:25; 1 Kings 4:33; Matt. 6:26). Foremost among these sources is the Onomasticon of Eusebius, an annotated list of biblical place-names in Greek, together with comments identifying their locations as they were known in the early fourth century CE. In compiling his work, Eusebius, who was bishop of Caesarea, used both Jewish and Christian sources, some of which focused on the sacred character of the land while others seem to have been interested in the land for its own sake (Notley and Safrai 2005, xi–xxxvii; Freeman-Grenville, Chapman, and Taylor 2003). The Onomasticon was translated into Latin by Jerome in the late fourth century. In the mid-sixth century, mosaic artisans in Madaba, northeast of the Dead Sea in Transjordan, created a map on the floor of a church depicting the sacred geography of the Holy Land (Avi-Yonah 1954; Piccirillo and Alliata 1999) and based in part, it seems, on data from the Onomasticon. These, and a number of additional sources of various genre such as the Geography of Strabo, the medieval Tabula Peutingeriana (which was based on a map of the Roman Empire from the second century CE), and rabbinic writings including the Mishnah and Talmud are invaluable as primary sources to help historical geographers recover ways that biblical landscapes and place-names were preserved during and after the time of the New Testament.

To these we can add later works in Arabic by Eutychius, patriarch of Alexandria (877–940 CE), and in Hebrew by Jewish scholars such as Estori ha-Parḥi (fourteenth century), who wrote geographical treatises with the familiarity of insiders (Rainey and Notley 2014, 13). Numerous accounts of Jewish and Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land from the Byzantine period through Ottoman times can also be helpful, although they naturally emphasize the spiritual geography of pious pilgrims (Wilkin 1992).

Exploration of the Holy Land took on a new phase in the nineteenth century as Western powers became interested in the lands of the
Ottoman Empire for political and economic reasons. Most also claimed to want to protect the holy sites, though whether from genuine concern or as a pretext to gain a foothold in the region is a matter of debate (Silberman 1982). This coincided with a rise in critical methodologies of the Bible, in comparative approaches of texts from the ancient Near East generally, and in the development of earth and human sciences such as geology, archaeology, and anthropology. What followed were attempts to uncover contexts of the Bible that were wrapped not in sacred traditions but rather in discovering the land for its own sake, as well as efforts to reveal the physicality of the context of the Bible and contemporary texts. Though not the first to search out the location of biblical place-names, Robinson and Smith were able to establish a methodology of site identification through toponymy that was to dominate the field for the next century (Rainey 1978).

Historical geography by definition presupposes a recorded history and with it a record of place-names, and so quite naturally has focused on identifying as many toponyms as possible. In this, Robinson’s main contribution was one of method. He began by compiling, in the original languages, all the geographic information found in the primary sources available to him (i.e., from the classical world, since in his day cuneiform, hieroglyphic, and West Semitic alphabetic texts were just coming to light). This gave him a textual map of geographic data that he reasonably expected to coincide with actual facts on the ground. Once in the land, Robinson compared the data gleaned from these texts with the landscapes that he visited with the idea—correctly supposed, given his rigorous use of linguistics and Semitic philology—that many of the biblical place-names had indeed been preserved by Arabic toponyms (e.g., Beisan for Beth Shean, Mukhmas for Michmash, er-Rahja for Jericho). Robinson also found that the geographic data contained in ancient texts, including the Bible, by and large actually did coincide with what he encountered on the ground, and it was this that directed his search for individual sites. It is important to note that Robinson’s success predated archaeology, although archaeology quickly became the primary tool to corroborate and refine site identifications when a recorded name was preserved and to suggest identifications when it wasn’t. In any case, the philology-geography-toponymy-archaeology sequence has proved to be an invaluable tool for identifying ancient sites ever since.

A host of scholars (and pseudoscholar explorers) followed in Robinson’s wake (Y. Ben-Arieh 1983). Most important was the work of the Palestine Exploration Fund’s Survey of Western Palestine (1871–77), headed primarily by Lieutenants Claude Conder and Horatio Kitchener of the British Royal Engineers. This survey produced the first scientific map of the southern Levant, mapping 6,000 square miles west of the Jordan River from Tyre and Baniyas in the north to Gaza and Beersheba in the south. A vast amount of detailed geographical, archaeological, linguistic, and cultural data, including over ten thousand place-names, was collected and recorded in three hefty volumes and twenty-six map sheets (Conder and Kitchener 1881–83). Subsequent surveys in northern Transjordan by Gottlieb Schumacher (on behalf of the Deutsche Verein zur Erforschung Palästinas) and of the region between Gilead and Moab by Conder (of the Palestine Exploration Fund) provided additional important data. Perhaps the most far-reaching work of the late nineteenth century, however, was that of George Adam Smith, whose *Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (1894) remains the classic erudite template for combining scholarly insight regarding the land with biblical devotion in the field.

The twentieth century saw equal doses of geographical exploration and textual analysis, with fast-rising contributions of archaeology.
Notable are the works of Albrecht Alt on the history and character of territorial divisions within the land of ancient Israel (Alt 1925); William Foxwell Albright, whose annual trips into the field enriched his already magisterial efforts in collecting and synthesizing every aspect of the fast-emerging world of the Bible; Fr. E. M. Abel (1933, 1938), whose work represented the wide-ranging interests of the École Biblique in Jerusalem; and Nelson Glueck (1970), who explored regions east of the Jordan. Denis Baly’s *The Geography of the Bible* (1974) remains unsurpassed for its sensitive synthesis of geographical and biblical data. Israeli scholarship of the age is perhaps best represented by the insightful and comprehensive works of Yohanan Aharoni (1979), Michael Avi-Yonah (1966), and, most recently, Anson Rainey (Rainey and Notley 2014), all of whom have argued forcefully for a text-based methodology that is grounded first and foremost in philology.

By the latter third of the twentieth century most sites that could be identified in the land of ancient Israel had been identified, and the role of toponymy as the prime factor within the methodology of historical geography began to wane—this even though plenty of work tracking down the history of place-names remains to be done. The completion of this initial task of historical geography coincided with an exponential growth in archaeological data and a tendency to prioritize archaeology over textual data, especially that of the Bible, for understanding the world of ancient Israel. Indeed, as the “biblical” of biblical archaeology has become eclipsed in the last few decades by approaches that are more expansively based, so has the “historical” of historical geography, and largely for the same reasons (Dever 2001, 1–157; Rainey 2001b). That is, to the extent that the Bible has been disfavored as a source of historical data, *historical* geography has given way to a more broad-based human geography of the past, with archaeology rather than texts the main source of historical data. It is important to keep in mind that archaeology is very good at revealing living environments of the past, but much less often does it expose specific events (Sennacherib’s siege of Lachish in 701 BCE and the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 CE are notable exceptions), and virtually never can it do so independently of texts, biblical or otherwise. For this reason, an archaeological geography is not historical geography per se, although it does probe many of the same issues (e.g., the use of available resources by local populations, demographic and economic connections between regions or sites, means and lines of defense, etc.). And in the process, the results of archaeology are brought to bear on texts, thus closing the historical-geographical circle.

**Methodologies and Trends**

Scholars who use the discipline of historical geography to better understand the world of the Bible generally favor one of three basic approaches: diachronic geography, regional geography, and literary geography.

**Diachronic Geography**

Diachronic approaches use historical geography to understand the ebb and flow of events over long periods of time. Here time, or history, is the organizing principle. These are primarily event-based efforts and focus on the movement of peoples or the rise and fall of political entities on large tracks of real estate. This is the general approach of historical atlases (e.g., *The Carta Bible Atlas*). Diachronic approaches have the advantage of establishing chronology and focusing on individual events but tend to be static in that single-event maps that jump from here to there geographically can give the

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2. Note, for instance, Elitzur’s exhaustive treatment of the history of sixty place-names mentioned in the *Onomasticon* (Elitzur 2004).
impression that events (or series of events) are isolated occurrences in time or place.

**Regional Geography**

Regional approaches to historical geography focus on regions or groups of regions and attempt to define their character over time. Here geography is the organizing principle. We must again first mention Alt, for whom the defining criteria of a region were based primarily on official records found in texts (Alt 1989, 137). Relevant textual data tends to be of two types: either that reflecting administrative structures (political divisions, tax districts, conquered territories, and the like) or that reflecting demographics and ethnicity. The former presupposes some level of formal governmental jurisdiction (e.g., the city and boundary lists of Josh. 13–19, Solomon’s administrative districts preserved in 1 Kings 4:7–19, or the districts of Galilee, Perea, Samaria, and Judea in the first century CE as delineated in War 3.51–56). The latter reflects social patterns irrespective of formal borders (e.g., the genealogical material in 1 Chron. 1–8). Some texts likely preserve both, under the reasonable assumption that formal boundaries tended to respect ethnic and tribal realities on the ground. Specifics as to context are debated, including whether the recorded data reflects real or idealized situations (Rainey and Notley 2014, 174–85; Kaufmann 1953; Y. Ben-Arieh 1989).

Regional approaches also can be based on realities of geography itself rather than the historical development of boundaries over time. Here historical geographers define regions based on natural factors such as geology, topography, climate, soils, and natural resources. Only after determining actual living environments do they examine demographics, settlement patterns, or events over time, and that within the context of natural regions. Notable examples are works on the Shephelah and biblical Negev by Rainey (1983; 1984), in which applied data was drawn from texts, and on the Shephelah in the Iron Age and on the Sharon Plain and Yarqon Basin in the tenth century BCE by Faust (2007; 2013), in which applied data was drawn from archaeology. There is often some correspondence between a natural region and a cultural or ethnic region, and this needs to be defined in every case. Approaches based on geographical regions are generally more powerful than those based on political divisions, simply because geographical conditions are much more stable over time. Here archaeological excavations, regional archaeological projects, and broad-based surveys are particularly helpful in that they provide an ever-growing body of comprehensive and comparative data over long periods of time.

In either case, a regional approach to historical geography can provide a more holistic context in which to reexamine individual events recorded in texts such as the Old Testament than a diachronic approach can. As a case in point we might consider the Judean Shephelah, a place that, in the words of George Adam Smith (1894, 201), is the “debatable ground” between highlands and coast. The Philistine incursions through the Shephelah in Iron I (the time of the judges and emergent Israel) are attested both textually and archaeologically. How might it be possible to track Philistine expansion eastward through the Shephelah? And what were its effects on the indigenous Canaanites or the people who were becoming Israel up in the hills? Or, what was the relationship between Rehoboam’s western line of fortifications, which ran on a diagonal through the Shephelah (2 Chron. 11:5–10), and Shishak’s line of march through Judah and Israel (1 Kings 14:25; 2 Chron. 12:1–12; Rainey and Notley 2014, 185–89)? Or, what conditions prompted Gezer to function as the primary junction point between the Shephelah and the coast for Solomon and Pharaoh (likely Siamun; 1 Kings 9:15–17), while for Hezekiah the key Shephelah city facing the coast was...
Lachish (2 Kings 18:13–14)? And so on, even more so when the Shephelah is divided into its constituent natural subregions for a more nuanced study. For traditional readers of the Old Testament who are peering into the landed context of the biblical text for the first time, the horizon suddenly becomes alive with options. As we seek to understand the data before us, asking what the Philistines or Rehoboam or Hezekiah could have done in any given event-based context is as valid a historical question as what they actually did do, as it helps us understand the grounded reality of the actual choices made.

**Literary Geography**

Literary approaches are not traditionally part of historical geography, but they do offer a helpful rubric under which to consider yet other intersections of text and land (J. Beck 2015, 11–13). On the one hand, a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic of a region, including all the ways that human interaction takes place within that region and the regions to which it connects, helps the reader of a narrative understand the intent, motives, and actions of the characters within the story line (or those of the author of the story), and thus whether the story is properly historical or not. The Bible’s geographic data is too realistic and too precise to be dismissed otherwise. The historicity of the Bible’s conquest accounts, for instance, has been widely rejected by most historians of ancient Israel. What is much more difficult to dismiss is that the narrative line of Joshua’s march, and the response to it by the Canaanite kings (Josh. 6–11), makes perfect geographical sense when one considers the natural routes, strategic points, and resources of the land of ancient Israel. So too the Samson story (Judg. 13–16), which presents a detailed back-and-forth dynamic of the Shephelah that is timeless in its essence. Explanatory power derives from patterns as well as from individual events, whether the locus of study is the particulars of history or of literature. In both cases the danger of reductionism must be balanced against the danger of particularism, and a regional approach to historical geography tempers both.

An appreciation of literary geography will also help readers of ancient texts grasp ways that authors used the rich language of geography to inform the messages that they were trying to tell. This is perhaps most significant for the Bible, in which geographical images fill the narrative line but also the language of individual actors within the story line itself. A study of historical geography would be lacking if it did not look at ways that a people group shaped their self-awareness through the realities of their homeland, as revealed in their own texts. If we add to this a people’s encounters in their homeland with the world of the divine, the land itself provides a host of rich, geographically oriented theological images. For this reason, scholars of historical geography recognize a close relationship between reality and type: a rock can be studied as an object of geology or as a building material, but also as an image of God (Ps. 18:1; 31:2; 71:3) or of Peter (Matt. 16:18). The historical part of historical geography pays attention not just to events described but also to the processes by which those events were remembered, recorded, and made relevant for readers then and today.

Historical geography, then, is a multifaceted discipline. Specialists from its many subfields take turns drawing water from its rich well, and often drink together. Historical geography opens new avenues for understanding the Bible and places constraints on others. It helps readers determine which hermeneutical options are viable based on realities of the actual context of the world of the Bible, and which are less so. To use another geographic image, historical geography grounds interpretations but also allows them to spring to life out of the deep soil in which the actual events of the text itself find their roots.