

Episode 1: A People is Born

I-1 Mediterranean: 2150 BCE

It is worth looking at the geography of the development of civilization and cities in this area of Mesopotamia.

- Point out the locations of Egypt, Canaan, and Mesopotamia on the map.
- Click the Map Legend button at the bottom to show the mileage scale of the map and explain the distances involved between these centers. Click the button again to make the Legend go away.
- Click on the “T” in the word “MESOPOTAMIA” to Zoom In on that area.
- Point out the pair of rivers (Tigris to the northeast, Euphrates to the southwest), and key cities, especially those of Biblical relevance, e.g., Ur, Nineveh, and Assur on the Tigris, and Susa (Shushan of Purim fame) east of the Tigris. If desired, point out areas of key archaeological interest, e.g., Ur, Nippur, Mari, and, further east, sites like Ebla and Ugarit.
- Click the Modern View button at the bottom to show the modern states in this area. Note that Nineveh is now the modern city of Mosul, Iraq. Click the button again to revert to Historic View.
- Use the red frame in the Thumbnail Map at the lower left to survey other areas of the region, as desired.

I-2 Atlas: Near East: 1750 BCE

Many scholars question his starting point, Ur of the Chaldees, since the Chaldean people did not dominate the vicinity of Ur, in modern southern Iraq, until many centuries after the time of Abraham. These scholars believe that the crucial move by Abraham actually began in modern northern Syria at Haran, in what was then the land of the Hurrians. Many patriarchal tales in the Bible seem to reflect the culture and laws of the Hurrians.

- Point out the critical points in Abraham’s journey.
- Click on Jerusalem to zoom in to the map of Canaan, and point out the various sites pertinent to the Patriarchs and Matriarchs:
 - Shechem – Abram’s first stop in Canaan, and an important city in the Jacob narrative
 - Bethel – Abram’s next stop and also the site of Jacob’s dream of a stairway to heaven
 - Hebron – one of Abram’s dwelling places
 - Beersheva – another one of Abram’s places and Isaac’s main residence
 - Sodom (and Gomorrah) – Lot’s hometown

I-3 Atlas: Near East: 1500 BCE

According to the bible, Abraham and his descendents wandered the area of Canaan, with occasional brief forays back to modern Syria (called Aram in the Bible) and down to Egypt. All this was to change with Abraham's great-grandsons – the sons of Jacob/Israel. The Book of Genesis ends with the tale of the entire family moving to the area of Goshen in Egypt.

- Point out the areas of Aram (near Aleppo) and the eastern Nile delta (northeast of Giza).
- Summarize the Patriarchal period that is covered in the Book of Genesis, up through the migration of Jacob's family to Egypt.

I-4 Atlas: Near East: 1220 BCE

The Israelites' slave-labor building projects in Egypt included storage and fortress facilities at a location called Rameses, named for a major Pharaoh of the nineteenth Egyptian dynasty.

- Point out the location of Rameses (Raamses) on the map, and note its location relative to the Israelite residence on the eastern Nile delta.

I-5 Atlas: Israel-Palestine: 1220 BCE

The Israelite people wandered for decades in the wilderness, and eventually conquered and settled in Canaan. The society they built was hardly the ideal one postulated in the Torah. Fragmented into tribal units, and constantly backsliding in their allegiance to the covenants of fealty to divine law and national unity, they were at continual risk of being displaced from their new homeland by other Semitic groups, and by maritime invaders from the Mediterranean Sea.

Their tenuous grasp on Canaan would continue until a central monarchy translated the idea of Israel into a true nation of Israel.

- Point out the tribal regions in settlement-Israel, and the surrounding peoples.
- Note the maroon arrows on the Mediterranean shore, indicating the arrival in Canaan of the Sea Peoples from the west at roughly the same time that Israel invaded Canaan from the east.
- Navigate with the red frame on the Thumbnail map at the lower left as needed to show the areas of Israelite settlement.

I-6 Atlas: Israel-Palestine: 1220 BCE

As described in the Torah and the Book of Joshua, the area of Canaan was divided and allocated to each of the twelve tribes of Israel. It seems from the narrative in the book of Judges that most of the people's identity and loyalty was primarily to the tribe, rather than Israel. The loose confederation of Israelite tribes, in which someone would identify himself as, for example, a "Benjaminite" first and foremost, would be echoed in post-revolutionary America, with its regionalism and state-identification.

- Point out the key tribal areas, including Judah and Ephraim. Also note that the tribe of Dan appears both in the Shephelah region (where it could never establish itself due to the Philistines' coastal hegemony) and all the way in the north (to which it migrated in frustration late in the period of the judges). Point out also the trans-Jordanian tribes of Reuben and Gad.

I-7 Atlas: Israel-Palestine: 928 BCE

The two kingdoms shared an east-to-west border located just north of Jerusalem. Because the northern kings wished to eliminate Jerusalem as a religious center, they established northerly royal shrines, in Bethel – on the pilgrimage road to Jerusalem -- and in Dan – at the northern edge of their kingdom.

- Point out the border (the thin red line that snakes below Bethel and Jericho) between the two kingdoms.
- Use the thumbnail map slider to scan the map, pointing out the cities of Bethel, Dan and Jerusalem, and mentioning the surrounding nations.
- Zoom out, and point out the relative sizes of the kingdoms, and their geographical relationships to Egypt and Assyria.