

# Where Are They Now?

## BIBLICAL REGIONS TODAY

The “action” of the Bible takes place mainly around the Mediterranean and in the region that historians call the Ancient Near East. (Today, this region features in news reports as the Middle East.)

This map demonstrates the range of locations mentioned in the Bible, along with some selected Bible references.

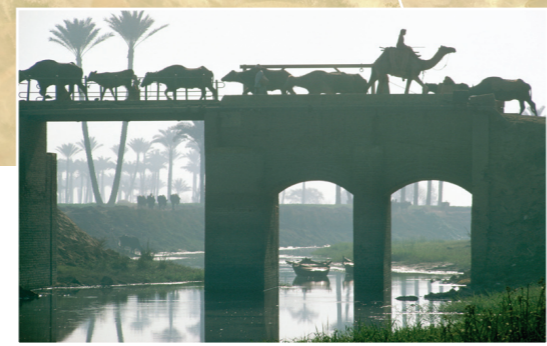
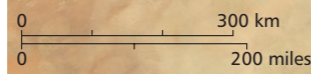


EPHESUS, Turkey. Remains of buildings in Curetes Street.



ROME. An overview of the Forum from the Campodoglio.

**THE BIBLE LANDS TODAY**  
The places mentioned in the Bible are today part of over fifteen different modern states. The great cities of Nineveh and Babylon are now ruins in modern Iraq; the cities where Paul walked are in Turkey, Greece and Italy. The Queen of Sheba most probably came from an area in modern Yemen, while Tarshish may have been on the coast of Spain. Jerusalem is still in Israel, but today’s state is very different from the country where Jesus walked. Some cities, like Jericho and Rome, are still thriving; many others have crumbled away.



At the Nile Delta in Egypt, farmers and livestock cross a bridge over a canal near the River Nile.



At Ur in modern-day Iraq, the large temple, now restored, was dedicated to the god Nanna and was built c. 2100 BC by King Ur-Nammu.



# Finding Out Where Places Were

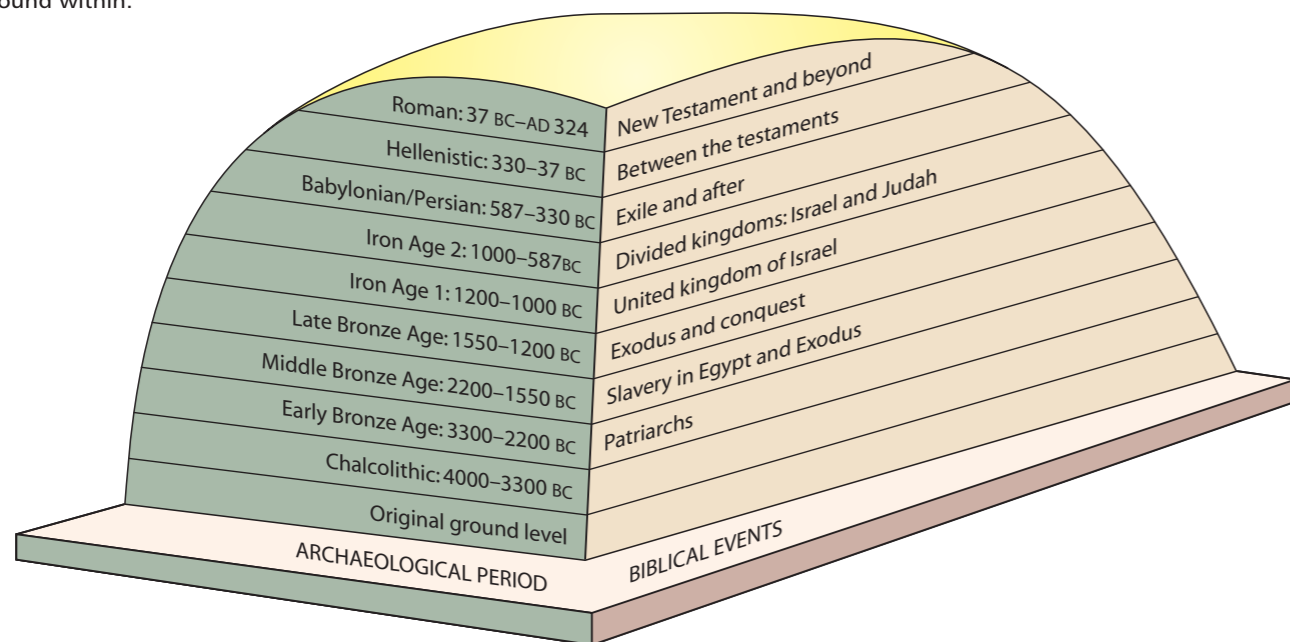
## MAPPING THE BIBLE

The biggest difficulty in mapping places referred to in the Bible is finding out where they were in the first place!

Some cities, such as Jerusalem, Rome and Jericho, have survived for thousands of years, so their location is not a problem; but the Bible refers to hundreds of different locations which, although well known at the time, have since been completely lost. It's not just the obscure places either – for example, no one really knows for sure where Mount Sinai was. Nor is it just the really ancient, Old Testament locations: Emmaus, mentioned in the New Testament, has never been identified with any certainty. So, how do we find out where things were? How do we put them on a map?

### SHOW AND TEL

The sites of most biblical cities and settlements are marked by mounds known as "tels". A tel is an artificial mound that contains the remains of a city or settlement. The remains are deposited on top of each other – often as a result of war, fire or earthquake, but sometimes through simple demolition – to form different strata. This allows archaeologists to date the various layers from the remains found within.



### Archaeology

Archaeology is the investigation of past cultures and civilizations, as revealed through human artefacts such as buildings, tools and inscriptions.

Modern archaeological research in Palestine and the Near East really only dates back to the nineteenth century. It was in 1890, for example, that Flinders Petrie first identified the many tels that dotted the landscape as the accumulated debris of ancient towns.

Nowadays, archaeology is a sophisticated science. It reveals four main kinds of evidence: architecture (buildings, walls, etc.), artefacts (tools, pots and other objects), various kinds of deposit (ashes, building debris, etc.) and floors (beaten earth, paving stones, street surfaces, etc.). All these tell archaeologists what kind of place they are dealing with.

Sometimes they find direct evidence – inscriptions with the place name on, for example. Another highly useful find for archaeologists are coins, since these will provide them with datable evidence. Or they may look for kinds of destruction that might tie in with a biblical description.

Archaeologists divide biblical history into distinct time periods. Depending on what objects are found, the different strata from tels and other excavations can be matched against different periods.

### Ancient Texts

The study of ancient writings – known as historical philology – often gives clues or details that help identification. Obviously, in our case, the main text is the Bible itself. We have seen, for example, that no one knows where Mount Sinai was for sure, but the Bible tells us it took “eleven days to walk from Mount Sinai to Kadesh Barnea by way of the Mount Seir Road” (Deuteronomy 1:2). Following that direction at least gives us the rough area. After that, we can use toponymy (see right) and local traditions to narrow down the probable site.

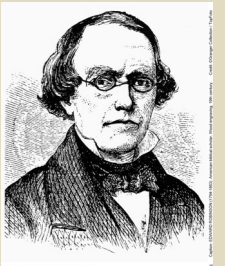
Sometimes the description of the place in the texts confirms the identification. For example, John’s Gospel records that the pool of Bethesda, where Jesus healed the lame man, had five covered colonnades (John 5:1-15). For many years experts questioned this, because the site that they had identified as Bethesda only had two colonnades. Then, further excavations revealed an extra three. So the identity of the site was confirmed – not to mention the accuracy of John’s details!

### The Discovery of Lystra

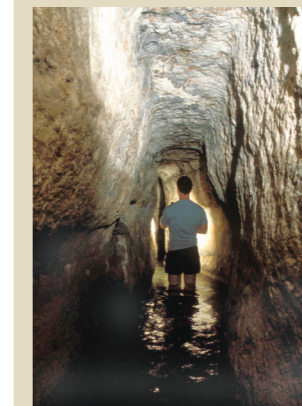
For many hundreds of years, the location of Lystra, one of the cities visited by Paul on his first missionary journey, was lost. Archaeologists knew roughly where it was located, but all traces of it had disappeared. Then, in 1885, a pagan altar was discovered, still in place, and with an inscription bearing the name LVSTRA – *Lustra* – the Latin version of Lystra. Nothing much else has been found of the city, but at least we know where it was.

### EDWARD ROBINSON AND THE NAMES OF PLACES

In 1838 a man called Edward Robinson began travelling through Palestine to find places mentioned in the Bible. Armed with only a compass, a thermometer, a telescope, measuring tapes, a Bible, and a thorough knowledge of Arabic, he and a companion – Eli Smith – travelled through Palestine noting the names of towns and villages. Smith believed that the modern place names would have traces of their ancient versions. (This is called toponymy – or the study of place names.) So, in a village called Anatha, he found an echo of Anathoth, the home of Jeremiah; El-Jib he believed was Gibeon; Seilun, Shiloh; Mukhmas, the site of the battle of Michmash; and Beitin, the site of ancient Bethel.



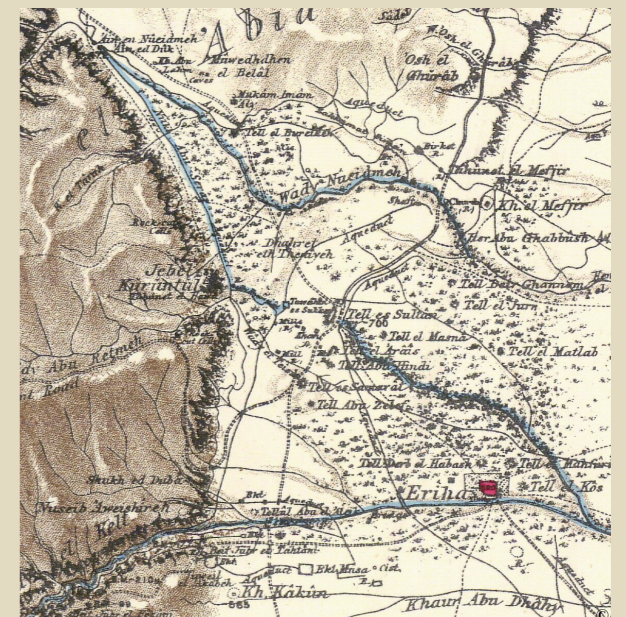
So successful was Robinson that every map of the Holy Land printed since his time relies on his investigations. He was not an archaeologist, although he did make some important discoveries. Robinson’s Arch in the Old City of Jerusalem is named after him.



Hezekiah’s tunnel, built at the end of the eighth century BC, provided Jerusalem with a secure source of water in the event of a possible siege of the city.

Robinson and Smith were followed by others. From 1872 to 1877 a team of Royal Engineers from the British Army covered the region and compiled a magnificent *Survey of Western Palestine*; a 26-sheet set of maps covering the entire country.

One of Robinson’s most famous discoveries is Hezekiah’s tunnel in Jerusalem. Although it was blocked up by silt, he and a companion crawled through it on all fours. “In several places,” Robinson wrote, “we could only get forward by lying at full length and dragging ourselves along on our elbows.”



Map from the *Survey of Western Palestine*, showing the location of Jericho.



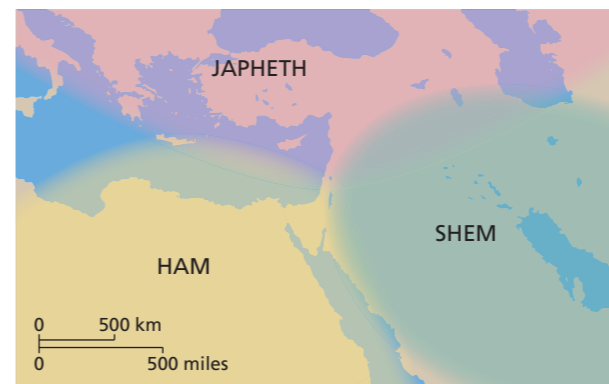
# In the Beginning...

## THE CRADLE OF CIVILIZATION

It has been called the cradle of civilization. It's the place where the first cities were built, where writing was invented, where the wheel first turned round. It's where centralized government first arose, where laws were first written down. It's the home of agriculture, astronomy and mathematics. (Not to mention slavery and organized warfare.) And, according to the Bible, it was home to Adam and Eve.

### The Garden in Eden

*"The Lord made a garden in a place called Eden, which was in the east, and he put the man there" (Genesis 2:8).* No one knows where, exactly, it all started. (Eden was the name of the region, rather than just the garden.) But the Bible describes four rivers that watered the garden: the Pishon, Gihon, Tigris and Euphrates (Genesis 2:8-14). The mention of the Tigris and the Euphrates indicates that it was somewhere in the Fertile Crescent. It is significant that the garden is situated in the place where agriculture began.



### It's A MAP, BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT...

Genesis 10 contains one of the world's first maps. It's not, admittedly, a map as we would know it, but it describes the people of the known world – the descendants of Ham, Shem and Japheth, the three sons of Noah – and assigns them to different regions.

Identifying the different rulers and their "sons" in the list is not always straightforward, but the areas cover roughly the following regions:

Japheth – Anatolia, Greece and the Caucasus.

Ham – Egypt, Nubia and North Africa (also Canaan).

Shem – Arabia, Mesopotamia. It is from Shem that we get the word "Semitic". Abraham, as an inhabitant of Ur, came from the lands of Shem.

### The Growth of Civilization

In the Bible, the descendants of Adam and Eve reflect the development of civilization. We get agriculture and farming with Cain who "tills the ground" and Abel, who is a shepherd. Enoch is a city-builder, while Jabal is a nomad; Jubal is the first musician; and Tubal-cain the first metal-worker (Genesis 4:2, 17, 20-22).

### HOME OF ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

**The Ancient Near East** – an area that covers from the eastern Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf – was the home of all the major empires from the very earliest years of civilization. It is often broken down into four main regions: Mesopotamia, Anatolia, the Levant and Egypt.

**Mesopotamia** (modern Iraq, Syria and Iran): home of the empires of Persia, Medea, Babylon and Assyria.

**Anatolia** (modern Turkey): home to the Hittites.

**The Levant** (modern Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine and Jordan): home to Israel, Phoenicia, Philistia, Moab and many others.

**Ancient Egypt** (modern Egypt, unsurprisingly): home to the great dynasties of Ancient Egypt.



### THE FERTILE CRESCENT

The term "Fertile Crescent" was coined to describe the region where agriculture first properly developed. Watered by the Tigris and the Euphrates, the region, with its rich, fertile soil, is a kind of crescent shape – hence the name.

Geographically, it's a diverse region with snow-covered mountains and fertile broad plains, which leads to a wide diversity of species of flora and fauna.

The Fertile Crescent was home to original versions of the crops which, even today, we still take for granted: wheat, barley, chick peas, lentils. It also was home to four of the five most important species of domesticated animals: cows, goats, sheep and pigs. (And the fifth species, the horse, lived nearby.)

All of which made it the ideal place for agriculture to develop. And with agriculture comes the development of trade, of tools and technology. Where people grow stuff to eat, then other things will follow...



# Abram Heads West

c. 2050 BC

We are told that Abram came from a place called Ur, but when God called him he was living far from there, in a place called Haran. Thus, although Abram is often depicted as a nomadic herdsman, his origins are those of a city dweller. Abram was to become a “wandering Aramean” (Deuteronomy 26:5) but he started life as a city boy.

## The Land of Canaan

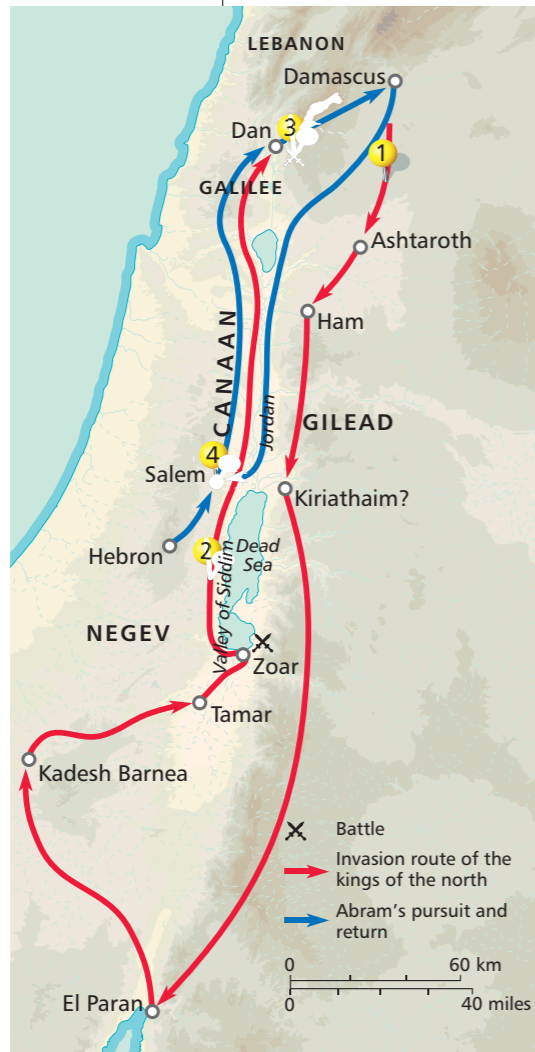
Outside the Bible, the name Canaan first crops up on clay tablets found in northern Syria in the 1970s and dating to c. 2300 BC. These tablets – found in the ruined city of Ebla – mention Canaan, as well as biblical sites such as Sodom and Zeboiim, two cities in the episode of the war of the kings (Genesis 14:1-16).

## Ur

Ur was an important city in Sumeria, which was particularly active around the time of Abram – 2000 BC. It was originally on the Euphrates (although the river course has since moved). The modern site is at Tel Muqqayyar, some 186 miles (300 km) south-east of modern Baghdad.

Despite the city only being mentioned once in the Bible, it was a very important commercial centre in ancient times, with strong trading links to countries of the Persian Gulf and the Indus valley as well.

The site was occupied as early as the middle of the fifth millennium BC, but it was between 2600 and 2500 BC that Ur really flourished, under its first kings, Mesanepada and Aanepada. It remained an important religious centre until the reign of Nabonidus, the last Babylonian sovereign (556-539 BC) but then gradually sank into oblivion.

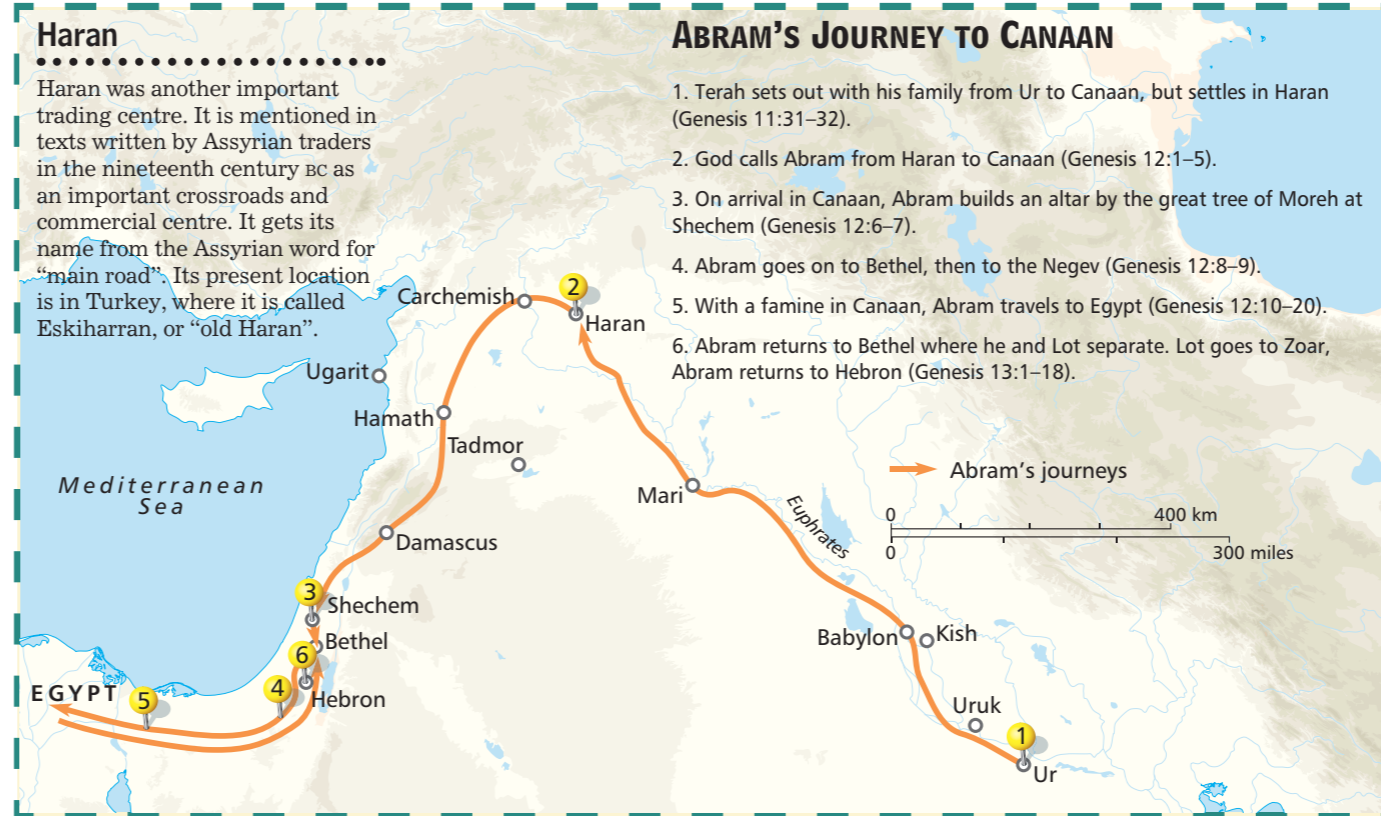


## Haran

Haran was another important trading centre. It is mentioned in texts written by Assyrian traders in the nineteenth century BC as an important crossroads and commercial centre. It gets its name from the Assyrian word for “main road”. Its present location is in Turkey, where it is called Eski-harran, or “old Haran”.

## ABRAM'S JOURNEY TO CANAAN

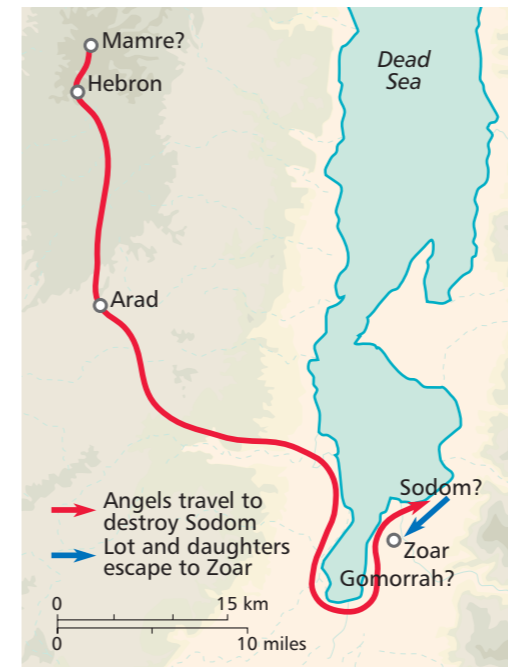
1. Terah sets out with his family from Ur to Canaan, but settles in Haran (Genesis 11:31-32).
2. God calls Abram from Haran to Canaan (Genesis 12:1-5).
3. On arrival in Canaan, Abram builds an altar by the great tree of Moreh at Shechem (Genesis 12:6-7).
4. Abram goes on to Bethel, then to the Negev (Genesis 12:8-9).
5. With a famine in Canaan, Abram travels to Egypt (Genesis 12:10-20).
6. Abram returns to Bethel where he and Lot separate. Lot goes to Zoar, Abram returns to Hebron (Genesis 13:1-18).



## THE KINGS OF THE NORTH

One incident in the life of Abram shows us that there was more to being a shepherd in the Bronze Age than knowing how to look after sheep. The story in Genesis 14 is the oldest piece of “military history” in the Bible. It preserves the original names of many Israelite towns; for example, “Bela, also known as the city of Zoar” (Genesis 14:2).

1. The kings of the north invade – following the route along the plateau (Genesis 14:1-7).
2. After a battle in the Valley of Siddim, at the south end of the Dead Sea, they sack Sodom and Gomorrah and head north, having also captured Lot (Genesis 14:8-12).
3. Abram chases and attacks them near Dan. The defeated kings are pursued beyond Damascus (Genesis 14:13-16).
4. Abram returns and meets Melchizedek, priest-king of Salem. Salem will later be called Jerusalem (Genesis 14:17-24).



## THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

The location of Sodom and Gomorrah has not been found, but most scholars place them to the south or south-west of the Dead Sea.

## Through the Bible: HEBRON

In Canaan, Abram eventually settled near the “trees of Mamre at Hebron” (Genesis 13:18). Hebron was strategically located on the crest of the Judean hill country, some 3,350 ft (1,020 m) above sea level.



The Tomb of the Patriarchs, which Herod the Great built on the traditional site of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

- c. 27 BC Herod the Great built a huge enclosure over the traditional site of the Cave of Machpelah.
- 537 BC It is recolonized with Jews after the exile (Nehemiah 11:25).
- c. 1011 BC David reigns in Hebron for seven and a half years (2 Samuel 2). He is anointed at Hebron as king over all the twelve tribes (2 Samuel 5:1-4).
- c. 1090 BC Samson steals the gates of Gaza and brings them to Hebron (Judges 16:3).
- c. 1400 BC Hebron conquered by Joshua (10:36-37). It becomes a Levitical city (Joshua 21:11-13) and one of the cities of refuge (Joshua 20:7; 21:13).
- c. 1885 BC Isaac is buried at Machpelah (Genesis 35:27-29).
- c. 1990 Abraham dies at Hebron and is buried with Sarah (Genesis 25:9-10).
- c. 2030 BC Abraham buys the Cave of Machpelah as a burial cave for Sarah (Genesis 23).
- 100 BC Under the Hasmonaeans the traditional site of Hebron was Antipater, the grandfather of Herod the Great.
- 586 BC After the fall of Jerusalem Hebron becomes an Edomite (Idumean) city.

