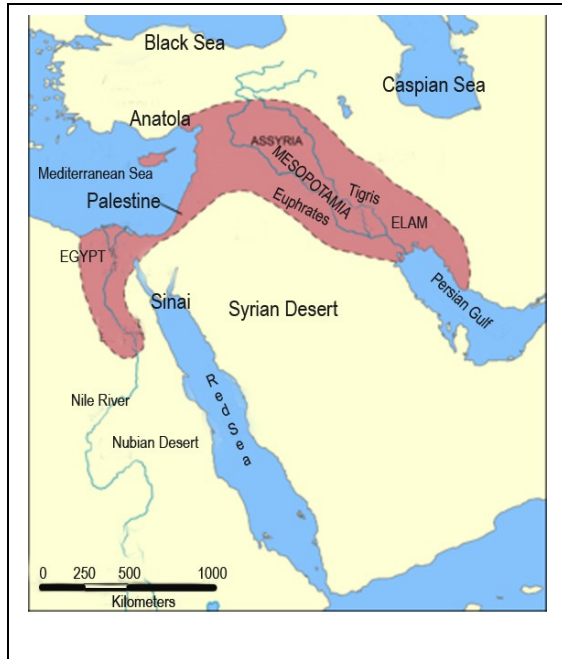


Lecture Two : The Land

Fertile Crescent – The Cradle of Civilization



BY THE WAY...

The rich Mesopotamian marshlands known for centuries as the Fertile Crescent have almost completely disappeared, with only 10 percent of the important ecosystem still remaining, according to a study based on satellite images of the region.

The Fertile Crescent lies at the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates in southern Iraq and extends into Iran. Analyzing historical data and new images from NASA's Landsat satellites, scientists at the U.N. Environment Program (UNEP) found that the marshy area has almost completely dried up over the past three decades and is now mainly desert with large salt-encrusted patches. A small northern fringe of marsh that straddles the Iraq-Iran border is all that remains.

The researchers say the damage is a result of extensive damming of the two rivers and heavy draining of the river basin in recent decades. One of the worst droughts in the past decade settled heavily over the Fertile Crescent region of Iraq and Syria in the winter of 2007-2008.

Sources

http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2001/05/0518_crescent.html

<http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/NaturalHazards/view.php?id=20010>

The "Fertile Crescent," - a great arc of fertile, naturally irrigated land that extended from the Persian Gulf, up and around Mesopotamia and back down to Israel and Egypt.

You are aware that Scripture describes the land as one flowing with “milk and honey “ Speaking to Moses from the burning bush, Yahweh announces his plan to bring Israel out of Egypt to a "land flowing with milk and honey." God means Palestine, the land he promised to Abraham (Genesis 12) and again to Jacob (Genesis 28).

And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey: unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Exodus Ch 3

In our time we have come to think of the middle East as the “Holy Land”. The Bible claims the whole of the land, (and beyond) for the tribes of Israel.

If we look at the map we see that the very location of the land meant that it served as a “Land Bridge” between Egypt (Africa) and Anatolia, Syria, Mesopotamia (Asia).

There are two things to note here

1. The importance of that travel route could easily lead to conflict. Whoever lived there would be caught in any power struggle between Mesopotamia and Egypt.
2. People in the fertile Crescent had some basic things in common. Culture, language, Literature, understanding of Mythology, theology and the like.

Palestine is a land of contrasts.

Generally when reading scripture the stories of journeys and visits, might lead one to think that people were traveling great distances. Not so.

Palestine has a wonderful diversity of geography and climate.

For example from the coastal plain ,passing through Jerusalem and arriving at the Eastern Desert you would travel (as the crow flies) a distance of about 80 miles.

(see the line through the map)

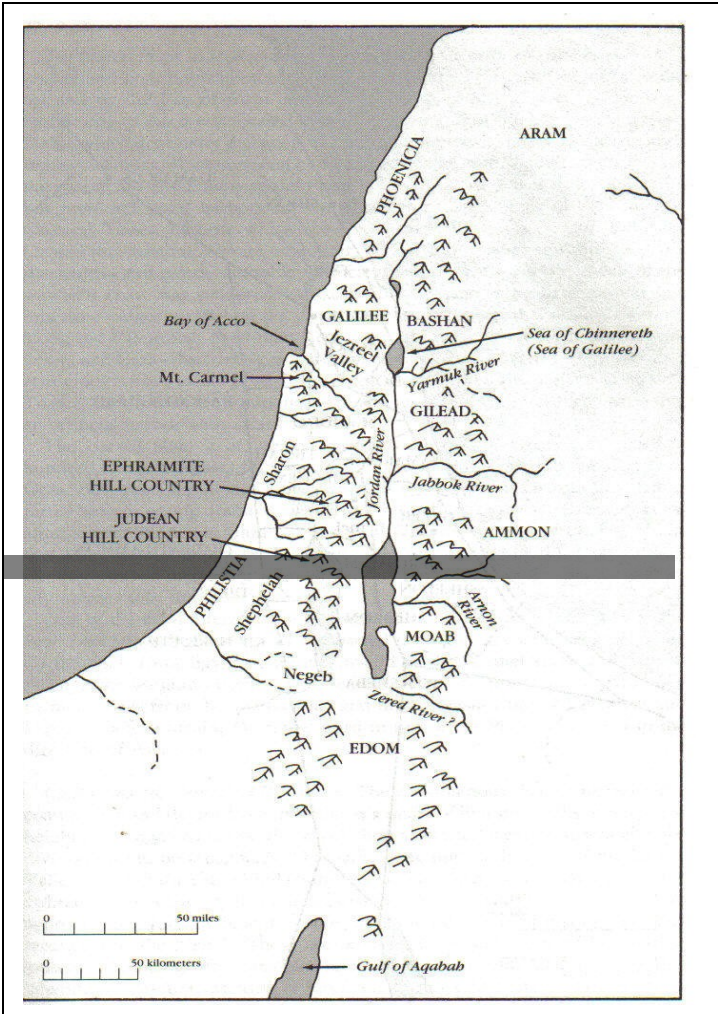
First, at the coast you would experience a tropical climate and vegetation including palm trees.

You would then climb the low hills of the Shephelah, pass by fields of barley and wheat, vineyards, olive and sycamore trees and low brush.

The Judean Hills are next, and you climb them to an elevation of 3000 feet, with possibilities of heavy snow. This is a barren land with forests scattered here and there.

Passing Jerusalem one descends the eastern slopes of the Central Hill country the land changes to “Wilderness”. Here Nomads, sheep and tents inhabit the desert. Just a few miles further is the Jordan Valley, a place of heat, humidity and the fertile Oasis of Jericho.

The Jordan River leaves the Sea of Galilee, falling lower and lower in altitude until it empties into the Dead sea. A distance of 65 miles. From Mount Hermon to the Dead sea you travel 125 miles... and move from 9000 fee above sea level to 1300 feet below sea level.



What was Life like in Ancient Palestine?

1. We view ancient life through the eyes of our world and time. It is important to try and do so from an ancient perspective.
2. How?
3. By Archeology. Material remains such as houses, public and official buildings, tools, weapons, pottery, art, coins, etc can give us insight.
4. Remember that life was immersed in the Climate of the Country, and in the agricultural patterns.
5. Fall – Plow and Sow, Winter prune and tend, Spring Harvest, Summer crop preparation (Threshing floors) When it rained, the pastures were green – it was time to graze.
6. Because there was no refrigeration, food processing was essential. Fruits and vegetables that could not be preserved had to be eaten before they perished. The diet was mainly vegetarian. Meat was not eaten as a staple (dietary laws?)
7. Living in an area where rainfall fell in cycles of wet and dry years meant that people were no strangers to Flood or Drought.
8. Living in an area friendly to the habitat of locusts and other pests, meant that people were not strangers to devastation. We can understand the connection between an idea of blessedness and plenty being connected to good crops, health and peace.
9. Routines through the year were marked by festivals and celebrations, usually connected with the growth and thanksgiving of harvest.
10. ie: Festival of Unleavened bread (Beginning of Harvest) and Feast of the Harvest (just after) The fall festival of Ingathering...feasts, drinking and revelry
11. Villages and towns were the main mark of society, tightly knit towns, where people would gather as a starting point for their work.
12. Crafts and Skills being passed on through generations.
13. Large families considered a blessing Labour, social security for parents, family name.
14. Women had few legal rights, but many responsibilities for running households.
15. Travel was rare