

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

Few writings have shaped the world as much as the book of Isaiah. Its lyricism, imagery, theology, and ethics are all deeply ingrained into us, and into Jewish and Christian culture more generally. It has been a cultural touchstone from the time when it was formed, and it influenced later biblical authors as well. The book of Isaiah is also a complex work of literature, dense with poetry, rhetoric, and theology, and richly intertwined with ancient history. For all these reasons, it is a challenge to read well. *The Cambridge Companion to Isaiah* serves as an up-to-date and reliable guide to this biblical book. Including diverse perspectives from leading scholars all over the world, it approaches Isaiah from a wide range of methodological approaches. It also introduces the worlds in which the book was produced, the way it was formed, and the impacts it has had on contemporary and later audiences in an accessible way.

Christopher B. Hays is the D. Wilson Moore Professor of Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary and a research associate of the University of Pretoria (South Africa). He is the author of *The Origins of Isaiah 24–27* (Cambridge University Press, 2019) and *Death in the Iron Age II and in First Isaiah* (2011), and coauthor of *Isaiah: A Paradigmatic Prophet and His Interpreters* (2022). He co-translated Isaiah for the Common English Bible.



Frontispiece A seal impression from 2009 excavations in the Jerusalem Ophel. Source: Reese Zoellner/Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology

The impression, or bulla, shown in the frontispiece is incomplete, but it bears the given name Isaiah (יִשְׁעִיָּהוּ) in the top register; the second register was understood by the excavator Eilat Mazar to read נְבִיא, “prophet.”¹ Because the bulla can be dated both stratigraphically and epigraphically to the end of the eighth century, it was interpreted as being an impression of the seal of Isaiah ben Amoz himself. It was found just a few feet from a bulla of Hezekiah, with whom the prophet is closely linked in 2 Kgs 19–20||Isa 37–39, and Isaiah is quoted as saying, “Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching among my disciples” (8:16), which implies the use of just such a seal.

Although the find was part of a scientific excavation, and its authenticity is not in question, doubts have been raised about its interpretation. The restoration of the word “prophet” can be questioned, and there are some uncommon features in the form and content of the proposed seal. Some of these concerns have already begun to be addressed as the conversation has unfolded,² but it is

¹ Eilat Mazar, *The Ophel Excavations to the South of the Temple Mount, 2009–2013: Final Reports 1* (Jerusalem: Shoham Academic Research and Publication, 2015), 175–186.

² William Schniedewind, “The Isaiah Bulla, Jeremiah the Priest/Prophet, and Reinterpreting the Prophet (Nby’) in the Persian Scribal Community,” in *Jewish Culture and Creativity: Essays in Honor of Michael Fishbane on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Eitan P. Fishbane and Elisha Russ-Fishbane. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2023], 36–52.

possible that not even the discovery of a complete bulla or the seal itself would fully resolve the matter.³

In the end, I have selected this image not because its significance is certain, but because it is evocative of the origins of the tradition that became the book of Isaiah.

³ Christopher A. Rollston, "The Yeša'yah[û] ("Isaiah") Bulla and the Putative Connection with the Biblical Prophet: A Case Study in Proposography and the Necessity of Methodological Caution," in Christopher A. Rollston, Susanna Garfein, and Neal H. Walls, eds., *Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honor of P. Kyle McCarter Jr.*, ANEM 27 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2022), 409–426.

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Edited by Christopher B. Hays

Frontmatter

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Christopher B. Hays
Fuller Theological Seminary



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Notes on Contributors

Shawn Zelig Aster is Associate Professor in the Martin (Szusz) Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology at Bar-Ilan University. He recently published *Reflections of Empire in Isaiah 1–39: Responses to Assyrian Ideology* (2017); and with Avraham Faust he co-edited *The Southern Levant Under Assyrian Domination* (2018).

Brennan Breed is Associate Professor of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary and Theologian-in-Residence at First Presbyterian Church of Marietta, Georgia. He is author of *Nomadic Text: A Theory of Biblical Reception History* (2014) and provided reception-historical studies for Carol Newsom's *Daniel* commentary (2014).

Joshua Ezra Burns is Associate Professor in the Department of Theology at Marquette University and Associate Dean of Academic Affairs for the Klingler College of Arts and Sciences. He is the author of *The Christian Schism in Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

M. Daniel Carroll R. (Rodas) is Scripture Press Ministries Professor of Biblical Studies and Pedagogy at Wheaton College and Graduate School. He has written extensively on Old Testament ethics and immigration. He wrote the commentary on Amos for the New International Commentary on the Old Testament series (2020) and his latest book is *The Lord Roars: Recovering the Prophetic Voice for Today* (2022).

Michael J. Chan is the Executive Director for Faith and Learning at Concordia College. Prior to that, he was Associate Professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, and a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Helsinki. He is the author of *The Wealth of Nations: A Tradition-Historical Study* (2017) and numerous articles on Isaiah in its ancient Near Eastern environments.

J. Blake Couey is Professor of Religion at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota. He is the author of *Reading the Poetry of First Isaiah: The Most Perfect Model of the Prophetic Poetry* (2015) and coeditor of *Biblical Poetry and the Art of Close Reading* (Cambridge University Press, 2018). His current research focuses on Isaiah and animal studies.

C. L. Crouch is Professor of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and Ancient Judaism and Chair of the Department of Textual, Historical and Systematic Studies of

Judaism and Christianity at Radboud University (Nijmegen, Netherlands). She is also a research associate of the University of Pretoria (South Africa) and the coauthor of *Isaiah: A Paradigmatic Prophet and His Interpreters* (2022), as well as numerous other books and articles about the Hebrew prophets.

Christopher B. Hays is D. Wilson Moore Professor of Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary and a research associate of the University of Pretoria. He is the author of *The Origins of Isaiah 24–27* (Cambridge University Press, 2019) and *Death in the Iron Age II and in First Isaiah* (2011), and coauthor of *Isaiah: A Paradigmatic Prophet and His Interpreters* (2022). He co-translated Isaiah for the Common English Bible.

J. Todd Hibbard is Professor and Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Detroit Mercy. He is the author of *Intertextuality in Isaiah 24–27: The Reuse and Evocation of Earlier Texts and Traditions* (2006). With Jacob Stromberg, he coedited *The History of Isaiah* (2022) and is currently working on a commentary on Isaiah.

Jesper Høgenhaven is Professor of the Old Testament at the University of Copenhagen. He wrote his doctoral thesis on the book of Isaiah (*Gott und Volk bei Jesaja*, 1988) and has published extensively on a number of Old Testament topics, including prophetic writings and wisdom literature, and, in particular, the Dead Sea Scrolls and apocalypticism. His most recent monograph is *The Cave 3 Copper Scroll: A Symbolic Journey* (2020).

Hyun Chul Paul Kim is Harold B. Williams Professor of Hebrew Bible at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio. His publications include *Reading Isaiah: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (2016); *You Are My People: An Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (coauthored with Louis Stulman, 2010); *Second Wave Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (coedited with Marianne Grohmann, 2019); and *Formation and Intertextuality in Isaiah 24–27* (coedited with J. Todd Hibbard, 2013).

Hanne Løland Levinson is Associate Professor in the Department of Classical and Near Eastern Religions and Cultures at the University of Minnesota. Her first book, *Silent or Salient Gender?: The Interpretation of Gendered God-Language in the Hebrew Bible* (2008), received the John Templeton Award for Theological Promise. She is also the author of *The Death Wish in the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge University Press, 2021). She is currently working on the use of the Bible in contemporary dystopian novels. She cofounded the SBL program unit on metaphor theory and the Hebrew Bible.

David W. Pao is Academic Dean and Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Among his publications are *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (2000), *Thanksgiving: An Investigation of a Pauline Theme* (2002), *Commentary on Colossians and Philemon* (2012), and *1–2 Timothy, Titus*. Brill Exegetical Commentary Series (2023).

Matthew R. Schlimm is Professor of Old Testament at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary. His work includes *This Strange and Sacred Scripture: Wrestling with the Old Testament and Its Oddities* (Baker Academic, 2015). His expertise is in the areas of biblical theology, ethics, and emotion.

Lucas L. Schulte is the author of *My Shepherd, Though You Do Not Know Me: The Persian Royal Propaganda Model in the Nehemiah Memoir* (2016). He is a research fellow of the Harris Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Nebraska and Program Associate for the Tri-Faith Initiative in Omaha, Nebraska. He cofounded and cochaired Claremont's annual Religions in Conversation Conference and has excavated at Ramat Rahel and Tel Akko. He has taught at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Claremont School of Theology, and Pomona College, among others.

Jonathan Stökl is Assistant Professor in Hebrew and Aramaic at Leiden University's Institute for Area Studies and was formerly Reader in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament at King's College London. He is the author of *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: A Philological and Sociological Comparison* (2012) and coeditor of *Prophets Male and Female: Gender and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Ancient Near East* (2013). His research focuses on the language and culture of ancient Israel and Judah in the context of the Middle East in antiquity, with special attention to religious institutions such as the priesthood and prophecy.

Marvin A. Sweeney is Professor of Hebrew Bible at Claremont School of Theology and serves on the faculty of Religion at Claremont Graduate University. His books include *Isaiah 1–39* and *Isaiah 40–66* in the Forms of the Old Testament Literature series (1996 and 2016); *Reading Prophetic Books* (FAT 89; 2014); *The Prophetic Literature: Interpreting Biblical Texts* (2005); and *Isaiah 1–4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition* (BZAW 171; 1988).

Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer is Professor of Old Testament Exegesis at Örebro School of Theology, Sweden, and Research Associate at the Department of Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria. She has worked extensively on biblical prophecy, with two monographs on Isaiah: *Priestly Rites and Prophetic Rage: Post-Exilic Prophetic Critique of the Priesthood* (2006) and *For the Comfort of Zion: The Geographical and Theological Location of Isaiah 40–55* (2011). She also edited the *Oxford Handbook of Isaiah* (2020).

Ronald L. Troxel is Professor Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where he taught courses in the Hebrew Bible, Hellenistic Judaism, and early Christian literature. Many of his publications addressed issues in textual criticism, especially *LXX-Isaiah as Translation and Interpretation* (2008) and *A Commentary on the Old Greek and Peshitta of Isaiah 1–25* (2021).

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Timeline of Events Related to the Book of Isaiah

At the end of the Late Bronze Age, the great powers that had dominated the Near East – notably the Hittite Empire in the north and the Egyptian New Kingdom in the south – had collapsed or largely withdrawn from the western shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Thus in the early first millennium (1000–800 BCE), the Levant was a collection of small kingdoms still emerging within a complex matrix of cultural connections. These included Israel, Judah, Moab, Aram, and Philistia. Without the burden of an imperial overlord or tribute payments, many of these experienced a period of relative prosperity, especially in the eighth century.

Isaiah ben Amoz began to prophesy in the second half of the eighth century, when Mesopotamian imperialism began to make itself felt: The Neo-Assyrian Empire, which would go on to conquer the entire region, was already on the rise to the northeast. The superscript of the book (Isa 1:1) dates the prophet's career to the reigns of four kings of Judah: Uzziah (r. 783–742), Jotham (r. 742–735), Ahaz (r. 735–715), and Hezekiah (r. 715–687). The book's formation continued, however, notably under Josiah (r. 640–609) and into the Persian Period after the Babylonian Exile; it even names Cyrus the Great, one of the architects of the Achaemenid Empire (44:28; 45:1). Still later layers of the book attest the building of the Second Temple (56:5; 66:6, 20). The earliest surviving witnesses to the text of Isaiah are from the second century BCE.

xviii TIMELINE OF EVENTS RELATED TO THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

750 BCE	<p>745: Tiglath-pileser III becomes king in Assyria and begins westward expansion.</p> <p>734–731: The “Syro-Ephraimite Crisis”: The northern kingdom of Israel and its Syrian allies try to force Judah to join a coalition against Assyria, but Judah resists and sides with the empire (Isa 7, etc.).</p> <p>722: Israel rebels against Assyria, prompting the Assyrians to besiege Samaria. The city is defeated and much of its population deported. Israel is broken up into Assyrian provinces. Deportees are sent from elsewhere in the empire are to repopulate the region (2 Kgs 17).</p> <p>714–712: Assyrian conquest of Ashdod (Isa 20).</p> <p>705: Sargon II of Assyria dies and Judah rebels, led by King Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:7).</p> <p>701: The new Assyrian king, Sennacherib, attacks Judah and gains its resubmission, but does not destroy Jerusalem (2 Kgs 18:13–16; Isa 36–37, etc.).</p>
700 BCE	<p>First half of the seventh century: Judah, under Hezekiah and Manasseh, is a client state of the Assyrian empire.</p>
650 BCE	<p>631(?): Aššurbanipal of Assyria dies; a series of short reigns follow.</p> <p>620s: Assyrian power begins to weaken; rebellions break out across the empire. Josiah begins to assert greater religio-political independence in Judah.</p> <p>612: Babylonia succeeds Assyria as the dominant power in Mesopotamia. Babylonia and Egypt fight for control of the Levant; Judah vacillates between the two (2 Kgs 24).</p> <p>609: Josiah killed by Pharaoh Necho in Megiddo (2 Kgs 23:29).</p>
600 BCE	<p>597: Judah rebels while a Babylonia vassal; Nebuchadnezzar lays siege to Jerusalem and defeats it, deporting the royal family and the king (Jehoiachin) to Babylon and installing Zedekiah as king (2 Kgs 24:13–17).</p> <p>587: Judah rebels again; Nebuchadnezzar besieges Jerusalem for a second time, destroys the city, and orders further deportations (2 Kgs 24:18–25:21).</p>

TIMELINE OF EVENTS RELATED TO THE BOOK OF ISAIAH xix

550 BCE	586–536: Many Judean elites taken to exile in Babylonia; part of the population remains in Judah; Jerusalem and the Temple are not rebuilt.
	539: The Persians, led by Cyrus, defeat the Babylonians and take over and expand their empire (Isa 44–45).
	536: The Edict of Cyrus allows Judeans and their descendants to return to their homelands; Judah is part of a Persian province (Ezra 1).
500 BCE	515(?): Rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, perhaps with Persian support.
	Mid-fifth century: Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah from Babylonia to Jerusalem; regular correspondence between Jerusalem temple leadership and Egyptian diaspora communities such as Elephantine; increasing evidence of sectarian disputes within the community.
200 BCE	Early second century: Copying of the Great Isaiah Scroll from Qumran (1QIsa ^a). Ca. 135: Septuagint translation of Isaiah into Greek.

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABS	<i>Archaeology and Biblical Studies</i>
ANEM	Ancient Near East Monographs
AO	<i>Der Alte Orient</i>
ARM	Archives Royales de Mari
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BBC	Blackwell Bible Commentaries
BBRSup	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i> , Supplements
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> , edited by Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BibleInt	The Bible and its Interpretation
BIOSCS	<i>Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies</i>
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
BWA(N)T	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten (und Neuen) Testament
BZABR	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> . Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956–2006.
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CD	Cairo Damascus Document
CEB	Common English Bible

ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series
COS	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> . Edited by William W. Hallo. 3 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997–2002.
CurTM	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
DSD	Dead Sea Discoveries
EB	Echter Bibel
EBR	<i>Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception</i> . Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009–
ETL	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FLP	Museum siglum, Free Library of Philadelphia
FM	Florilegium Marianum
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HBAI	<i>Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel</i>
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HBT	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HThKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
IOS	<i>Israel Oriental Studies</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JSJSupp	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period, Supplements</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
KAI	<i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften</i> . Herbert Donner and Wolfgang Röllig. 2nd ed. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1966–1969.
KD	<i>Kerygma und Dogma</i>

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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KTU ³	M. Dietrich et al. (eds.), <i>The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places</i> (Abhandlungen zur Literatur Alt-Syrien-Palästinas, 8; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 3rd ed., 2013)
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society
NovTSup	Novum Testament, Supplements
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTDH	Neukirchener Theologische Dissertationen und Habilitationen, Neukirchen-Vluyn
OBT	<i>Overtures to Biblical Theology</i>
OTE	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTRM	Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs
RA	<i>Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale</i>
RC	<i>Religion Compass</i>
RevQ	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
RevScRel	<i>Revue des sciences religieuses</i>
RIMA	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods
RIME	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods
RINAP	Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period
ROT	Reading the Old Testament
RS	Ras Shamra
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLAIL	Society of Biblical Literature Ancient Israel and its Literature
SBLANEM	Society of Biblical Literature Ancient Near East Monographs
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBSym	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SHANE	Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SOTS	Society for Old Testament Study
SOTSMS	Society for Old Testament Study Monograph Series
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah

<i>TDOT</i>	G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (eds.), <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Translated by J. T. Willis; 14 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974–1993
<i>Them</i>	<i>Themelios</i>
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum, Supplements
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WO	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

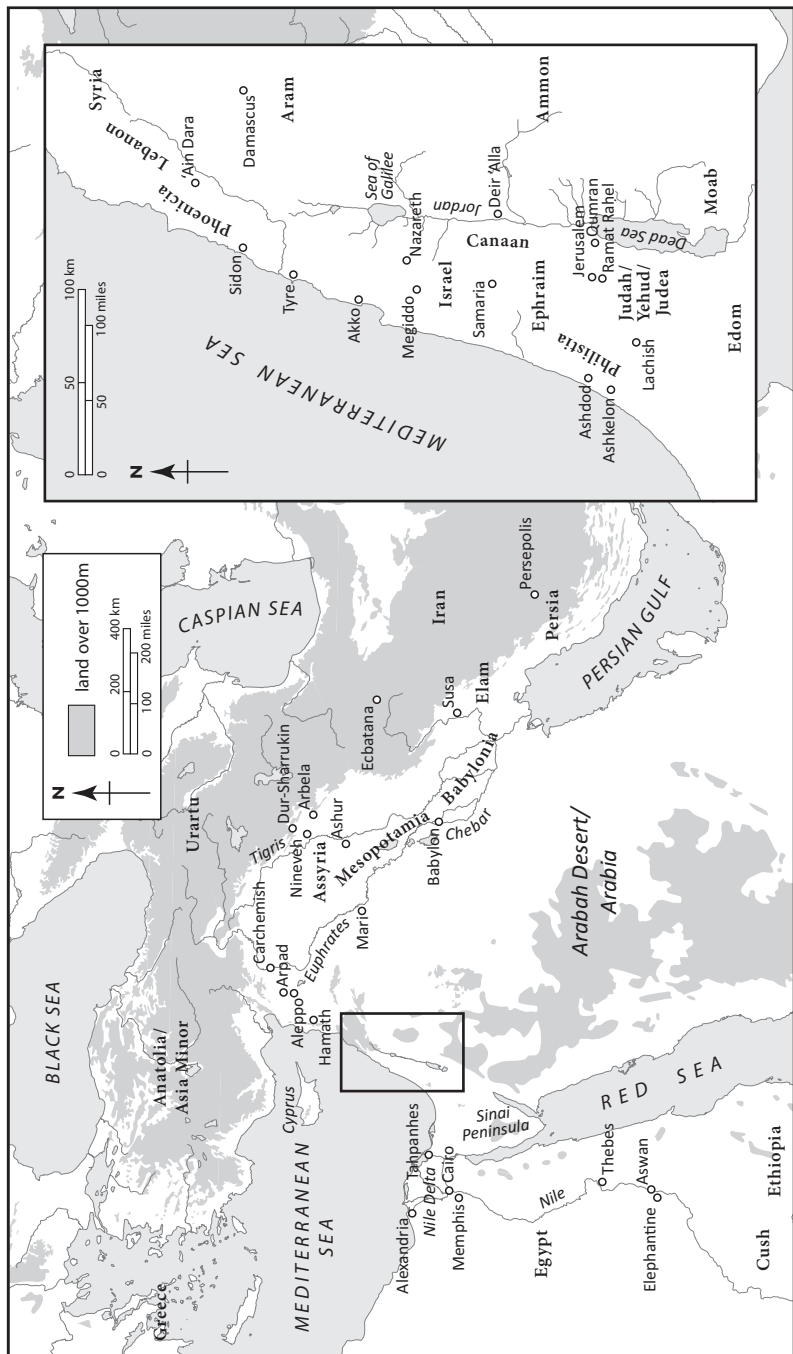


Figure 0.1 The Ancient Near East. Map by David McCutcheon FBCart.S www.dvdmmaps.co.uk.