



# **The Origins of the Nation Israel: Biblical, Historical, and Archaeological Data**

***Dr. Benjamin D. Sommer***

Benjamin D. Sommer joined The Jewish Theological Seminary faculty as professor of Bible in July 2008. Previously, he served as director of the Crown Family Center for Jewish Studies at Northwestern University, where he had taught since 1994. Dr. Sommer has been a fellow at the Israel Institute for Advanced Studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the Tikvah Center for Jewish Law and Civilization at the New York University School of Law, and the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. He has served as a visiting faculty member in the Department of Bible of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and at the Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, Texas. He has received fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies and the Yad Hanadiv/Berakha Foundation.

Dr. Sommer's most recent book, *Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition* received the prestigious Goldstein-Goren Prize in Jewish Thought from Ben Gurion University for the years 2014-2016 and was a finalist for both for the National Jewish Book Award for 2015 and the Association for Jewish Studies' Jordan Schnitzer Prize for 2014-2016. A Hebrew edition of the book, *Hitgallut Vesamkhut: Sinai Bamiqra Uvemasoret*, was published by Carmel Publishing House in Jerusalem in 2022. An earlier book by Professor Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*, received the Award for Excellence in the Study of Religion in 2010 awarded by the American Academy of Religion, as well as the Jordan Schnitzer Award from the Association for Jewish Studies for the years 2006-2009. The first book Dr. Sommer published, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66*, was awarded the Salo Wittmayer Baron Prize by the American Academy of Jewish Research in 1998. Dr. Sommer has long been active as a lecturer and scholar -in-residence, teaching rabbis, Jewish educators, and laypeople in a variety of settings in the United States and Israel.

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**Some Useful Terms**

**Middle Bronze Age:** roughly 2000 BCE until 1550 BCE (21st–16th centuries)

- Patriarchs / אבות?

**Late Bronze Age:** roughly 1550 BCE until 1200 BCE (16th–13th centuries)

- Patriarchs / אבות?
- Enslavement in Egypt?
- Pharaoh Raamses II (the Great) reigned 1279–1213 BCE
- Pharaoh Merneptah reigned 1213–1203 BCE
- Merneptah Stele: 1208 BCE

**Iron Age** in ancient Israel: roughly 1200 BCE until 586 BCE (12th–6th centuries)

- Arrival of Sea Peoples, end of Egyptian control over Canaan: 1200–1180 BCE
- New settlements in central hill country of Canaan:
  - 225 new settlements in Iron I period (12th–11th centuries), up from 29 settlements in the Late Bronze Age
  - An additional 266 new settlements in Iron II period (10th–7th centuries)
- **United monarchy** of Judah and Israel/Ephraim (Saul, David and Solomon): roughly 1025 BCE–928 BCE (11th–10th centuries)
- **Divided monarchy:** Judah (or the southern kingdom, with its capital in Jerusalem) separate from Israel (or Ephraim, or the northern kingdom, with its capital in Samaria), starting around 928 BCE (mid-10th century)
  - Tel Dan inscription: mid-9th century
  - Mesha inscription: mid-9th century
  - Kurkh Monolith and Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III: mid-9th century
- **Fall of Samaria and the northern kingdom to Assyria:** 722 BCE
- **Fall of Jerusalem and the southern kingdom to Babylonia:** 586 BCE

**Exilic Period:** 586–538 BCE

- Persians led by Cyrus conquer Babylonia, permit Judean exiles to return to Judah: 538 BCE

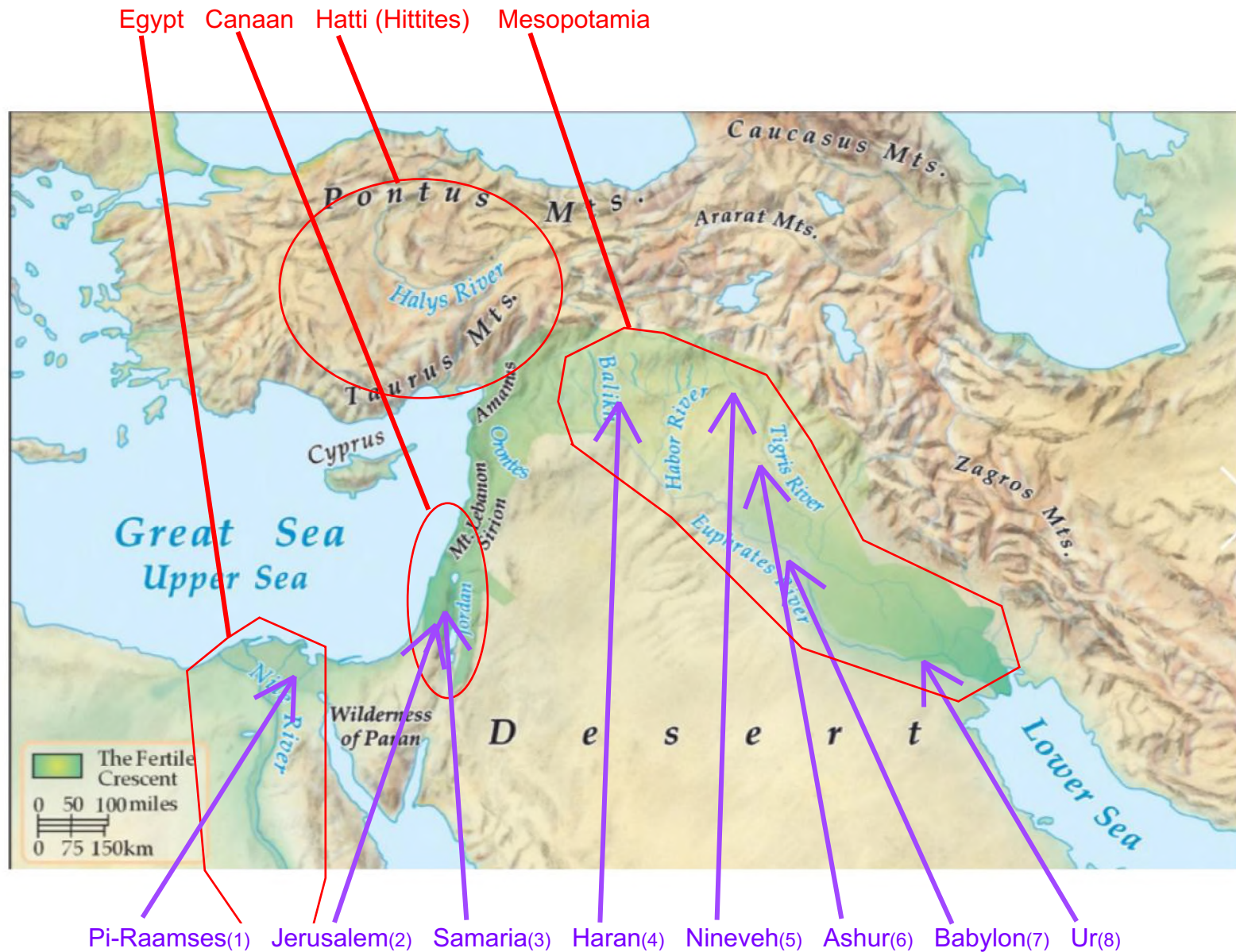
**Post-exilic Period / Persian Era** begins: 538 BCE

- Judah is now a Persian province, governed by a Persian appointee
- The Jerusalem Temple is rebuilt with Persian permission: 517 BCE

**Second Temple Era:** 517 BCE–70 CE

**Hellenistic Era:** 336 BCE–63 BCE

- Greeks under Alexander the Great conquer Persian empire, take over Judah: 336 BCE
- Maccabean or Hasmonean revolt against Syrian Greeks: 166–160 BCE.  
Judah becomes independent state under Hasmonean dynasty.
- Romans enter Judah, ending independent Jewish state: 63 BCE



- 1: New capital city established by Raamses II in mid-13th century; abandoned in mid-11th century
- 2: Capital of Judah (southern kingdom)
- 3: Capital of Israel/Ephraim (northern kingdom)
- 4: Mesopotamian city, in what Genesis identifies as area from which Patriarchs emigrated to Canaan
- 5: Capital of Assyrian empire from roughly 700 BCE onwards
- 6: Original capital of Assyrian empire
- 7: Capital of Babylonian empire
- 8: A leading Sumerian city

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