

Orientation

In this book, we approach the Bible from a wider perspective than is usual. We notice the native Canaanite tradition as well as that of the Yahweh people, and consider how ancient texts grow over time, adding new material – and in the process, creating contradictions which some readers see as problematic. For the historian, the contradictions are not the problem; they are the answer. They are evidence for change: for the replacement of one concept by another. They are the real Bible Story.

These chapters give some background information for the general reader.

(1) The Land. It lies along the Jordan River valley. From north to south, the main divisions are Galilee, Samaria, Judah, and the Negeb dryland.

(2) The Peoples. There were many of them, refugees from famine or war. The Canaanites, the Chaldeans, and the Hebrews will especially concern us.

(3) The Gods. Grove spirits punished intruders; ancestral spirits blessed their descendants. Some persons even possessed spiritual powers of their own.

(4) The Kings. As in all the antiquities, the shift to a secular government brought with it centralization and a focus on war, law, and commerce.

(5) Ancient Texts. They add material to reflect changes in doctrine or to respond to new conditions in the world outside.

With this much by way of orientation, we may turn to the Bible itself, beginning with the Canaanite tradition in Genesis 1-11.