

# Joshua and Judges – Session Five

## Dividing the Land

(Joshua 13 - 19)



Map of the Holy Land, Pietro Vesconte, 1321, showing the allotments of the tribes of Israel. Described by Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld as “the first non-Ptolemaic map of a definite country.”; provided by the British Library (Wikipedia)

### ***The Book of Apportionments – An Overview***

### ***Joshua and History***

### ***Map of the Division of the Land***

### ***The Book of Apportionments – An Overview***

The destruction of the kings and their royal cities allows for the repopulating of the promised land in Joshua 13 – 24 as a more rural and tribal society. Joshua 13 – 19 describes the distribution of the land to the tribes. The process begins in Joshua 13 with the tribal regions east of the Jordan River, including the territories of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh, before the focus shifts to the western region in Joshua 14

- 19. The allotment of the western land includes Judah (Josh 15), the two tribes of Joseph, Ephraim, and half of Manasseh (Josh 16 – 17), and the remaining seven tribes of Benjamin, Simon, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan (Josh 18 – 19). Joshua 20 – 21 clarifies that the only appropriate cities in the promised land are judicial centers of refuge (Josh 20) and Levitical religious centers (Josh 21), rather than the royal cities of the past indigenous kings. Once the tribal distribution is complete and the cities are established, Josh 22 addresses the topic of ethnic identity by exploring the relationship between the eastern and western tribes. The book concludes with two speeches by Joshua in Josh 23 – 24. The first is a call for continued social and religious exclusion of the indigenous nations (Josh 23), and the second stresses more the need for the tribes to resist returning to the archaic polytheistic religion of the ancestors and to continue worshiping only Yahweh (Josh 24). The book ends with the burial notices of Joshua and Eleazar, as well as the interment of the bones of Jacob (24:29 – 33).

- *Thomas B. Dozeman (from Joshua 1 – 12: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (The Anchor Bible), Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2015*

### ***Joshua and History***

Joshua is fundamentally a theological and literary work. Hardly any of the material it preserves is of the sort that can be directly used for historical reconstruction. Joshua's traditional tales display a folkloristic character and a strong etiological inclination. Their themes of divine war and conquest served to build and strengthen Israel's group identity and to explain features of geography and social life, but do not necessarily reflect genuine memories of Israel's origins. The overall narrative structure of invasion and total conquest is the contribution of the authorial and redactional process and not something dictated by the earliest forms of the constituent tales. Only the geographical lists and boundaries can be considered as credible historical sources, witnessing to actual administrative structures, although from a period later than Israel's first emergence in the land. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Joshua's account of a large-scale invasion of Canaan by Israel cannot be supported by the archaeological evidence.

The Merneptah Stele (about 1210 B.C.E.) documents that a people called Israel existed in Palestine at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. However, little can be said with any certainty about how Israel actually came into being as an identifiable ethnic and cultural entity. One thing has become increasingly clear, however. The archaeological record does not support Joshua's story of a conquest by a people arriving from outside Palestine. Some cities important to the biblical story of conquest (Jericho, Ai, Heshbon) were not occupied in a significant way in the Late Bronze II period (LB II about 1400 – 1200 B.C.E.). They could not have been the

victims of an Israelite conquest that would coordinate with the start of the Iron I period (about 1200 – 1000 B.C.E.). It cannot be determined just who caused the destruction of other cities such as Bethel, Hazor, or Lachish, but there are several likely candidates besides Israel. Moreover, these devastations were not followed quickly by settlement that can be identified as Israelite. Finally, many LB II urban sites were not destroyed at all in the transition into the Iron I period.

Archaeologists tend to connect the emergence of Israel with the inauguration of hundreds of small unfortified Iron Age I settlements founded in the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early 12<sup>th</sup> century, primarily in the central hill country. These testify to the influx of settlers into previously unoccupied areas not under the control of the Late Bronze Age Canaanite urban centers. Because the pottery of these settlements exhibits strong continuity with that of the LB II Canaan and because the associated epigraphic finds utilize the Canaanite alphabet, there is no reason to see these pioneers as infiltrators or invaders from somewhere outside Palestine.

These villages lack any sort of elitist architecture such as exceptionally large houses, suggesting a simple, egalitarian social structure. Other distinguishing cultural features seem to have been determined by the demands of agricultural life in the highlands: “four room” courtyard houses, rock-hewn cisterns, hillside terraces, and large “collar-rim” jars appropriate for the storage of agricultural products. All this suggests that the emergence of Israel was an indigenous development, related to economic, social, and demographic transformations occurring within the borders of Palestine itself. The Late Bronze Age urban culture of Canaan suffered profound dislocations, associated in part with the increasing weakness of Egypt, Canaan’s former imperial master. The rapid influx of new settlers into the highlands may represent the peaceful infiltration of former pastoralists settling down to agriculture. The more likely option is that they were elements of the indigenous peasant population of Palestine attracted to new economic opportunities in the highlands and/or disaffected by life dominated by the economic and political power of the Canaanite city-states.

Thus, Palestine seems to have been home to two parallel cultures in the early Iron Age, each occupying a different geographic and economic niche. In the lowlands was the established, elitist culture of the city-states with their kings and chariots. At the same time, an alternate social system was developing in the highlands. This was an egalitarian, rural village culture, without the social stratification that comes with being organized as a state. It depended on a largely self-contained economy base on farming and herding. The stories in the book of Judges seem to reflect the lifestyle and social organizations of this society.

It was this highland group that came to identify itself as Israel. The origins of their sense of shared identity remain obscure, but the archaic poetry preserved by their descendants (Exodus 15, Judges 5) suggests that a shared devotion to Yahweh played an important role in this process of ethnic formation. Another factor would have been the forging of systems of affinity between extended families, endogamous

clans, and eventually territorially based tribes. Traditions of military activity with the support of Yahweh, like those preserved in Joshua, doubtless played an important role in Israel's process of self-identification and differentiation. Certainly, some limited armed conflict between these two societies can be assumed to have taken place, as evidenced by the Song of Deborah (Judges 5). However, the concept of an invasion and conquest of Canaan by Israel, either of the comprehensive sort recounted in Joshua or the more piecemeal and limited type suggested by Judges, chapter 1, must be excluded on the basis of the evidence.

Joshua's true historical value consists in what it reveals about the social and ideological world of those who told these stories, collected and redacted them, and then read the resulting literary product. Joshua is a historical witness to what later generations believed had happened to their ancestors. The needs of an increasingly centralized monarchy would have favored the growth of a unified narrative of origins. Any such narrative was bound to tell of a unified invasion and successful conquest from the outside, for that would be the best way to coordinate Israel's presence in and claim on the land with its deeply-rooted tradition of an exodus from Egypt and its poems and tales of Yahweh as Divine Warrior. It is common for traditions of national origin to speak of immigration from another place, as Israel itself was aware (Genesis 10; Amos 9:7). Israel's early "xenophobic" martial poetry (Joshua 10:12b-13a; Exodus 15:13-17); Judges 5:19-21) likely played an important role in shaping a self-understanding founded on the notion of conquest. Victories over vanished peoples provided a natural explanation for the ruined cities that dotted the landscape. The social stratification and ethnically mixed nature of the monarchic state (Gen. 9:26-27; 2 Sam. 21:1-6; I Kings 9:20-21; Ezek. 16:3) could be readily explained in terms of older peoples dominated by the new invaders. Contemporary tribal demography was traced back to an initial territorial allotment at Yahweh's command and under Yahweh's control.

- *Richard D. Nelson* (from *Joshua (The Old Testament Library)*, Westminster John Knox Press, 1997

## Division of the Land



Division of the Land among the Tribes of Israel (World History Encyclopedia)

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