

One Hundred and Twenty-Four

Numbers 34:1–35:8; Ezekiel 45:1–8; Colossians 1:13–14

notes by Tim Hegg

קְאָרֶץ

The Land is an important, even central theme in the Torah. For instance, the blood of Abel cries out “from the ground, אֶדְמָה (Gen 4:10); the Land is given to Abraham and his descendents as an eternal inheritance (Gen 12:1ff; 15:1ff, etc.); immorality, idolatry, murder, and committing the abominations of the nations pollutes and defiles the Land (Lev 18:24ff; Num 35:34; Dt 21:23; Ezek 33:26); it was because Israel failed to observe the sabbatical year and give the Land its rest, that the nation was put into exile from the Land (2Chr 36:21). While many modern Christian theologians have suggested that the importance of the Land has now given way to the “spiritual” concept of God dwelling among His people, an open-eyed reading of the Scriptures will thoroughly convince anyone willing to be convinced that the Land continues to be a prominent issue in the mind and heart of HaShem, and it ought to therefore occupy the same position in our own thinking.

Our *parashah* deals with the apportionment of the Land to the 12 tribes of Israel as HaShem had promised. It concludes with the laws of how the Levites were to be supported, seeing that they received no inheritance of Land. But what exactly are the boundaries of the Land that HaShem has given to His people?

The first description of the Land that HaShem promised to Abraham and his offspring is found in Gen 15. Here, the western border is the River of Egypt (Nile) while the eastern border is the Euphrates. Northern and southern extremes appear to be detailed by naming various peoples/nations who inhabited the Land at the time of Abraham. Unfortunately, the exact locations of the listed people-groups cannot be precisely defined via extant archaeological remains and texts. The following is information upon which scholars generally agree regarding the various nations listed in Gen 15:19-21:

Kenites: metalworkers (from the root קִנָּן); this group probably refers to a settlement south of Hebron.

Kenizzites: not related to the later clan associated with the son of Eliphaz and grandson of Esau (Gen 36:11; 1Chr 1:36) nor with the younger brother of Caleb (Judg 1:13). Most presume this is an ancient people-group living near the city later called Jerusalem.

Kadmonites: means “easterners,” from קְדִמִּים. Perhaps near the Jordan or even trans-Jordan.

Hittite: the group of people designated as בְּנֵי חֵת, “children of Het,” from whom Abraham bought the cave of Machpelah (cf. Gen 10:15; 23:2, 5, 7, 10, 16, 20; 25:10). This cave is in modern-day Hebron.

Perizzite: perhaps a more general designation, distinguishing the Canaanites as a different group. Some feel Perizzite is similar to, or a sub-group of, the Amorites. If so, Canaanite is equivalent to the West Semitic languages and Perizzite to the East Semitic. The exact location of this clan is not known. Some feel that the close connection to the following designation, Rephaim, would indicate a trans-Jordan settlement, perhaps in the territory allocated to Manasseh.

Rephaim: Lxx translates Ραφαῖν (*Rafain*) in Gen 15 but γίγαντας “*gigantas*” (giant) in

14:5, cp Deut 3:13 with Josh 12:4; 13:12 where similar differentiation is made. Yet Deut 2:10 classes the Rephaim (2:11 Lxx “*rafain*”) with the Anakim—a trans-Jordan people.

Amorite: Akkadian *anurru* but at times the term denotes pre-Israelite population in general (cf. Hoffner, *ZPEB*, 1:141f).

Canaanite: this must be an overlapping designation with the term Amorite, cf. Gen 10:15, 16; Cp. 12:5, 6; 34:2, 30 with 48:22.

Girgashite: unknown group, but in Ugaritic a people-group is mentioned by the name *grgs*.

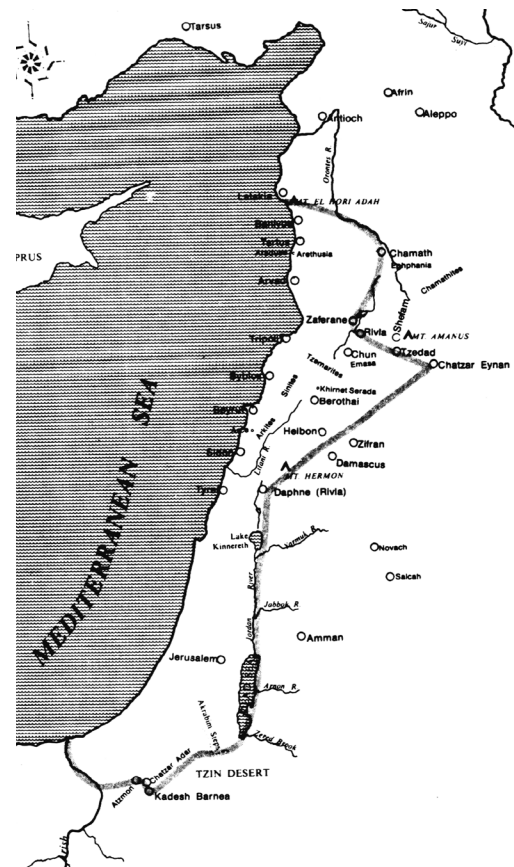
Jebusite: inhabitants of Jerusalem (cf. Jebus, Josh 15:63). In the Amarna Letters the area of Jerusalem is designated as the land of Urshelim, and connected with the Jebusites.

Thus, while Gen 15 gives us clear western and eastern borders for the Land it describes, the northern and southern borders, which are defined in terms of people-groups, are far less certain.

A second boundary description of the Land is given to Israel as they come out of Egypt, and as they prepare to enter the Land (Deut 1:7-8; 11:24; Josh 1:4; 13:2-5) which generally extended from Mt. Amanus to the Brook of Egypt (Wadi el-Arish, cf. b.*Gittin* 8a). The Sages considered this “the boundary for those coming out of Egypt.” The Sages likewise noted boundaries for those “returning from Babylon” after exile (cf. *Sifre* §51). This boundary comprised what the Talmud considered Eretz Israel in terms of *halachic* rulings. Excluding the Gentile coastal cities, the border extended from the coast of Galilee to Ijon (identified with ‘Ayyun, 2 miles north of Hammat on the Yarmuk River, biblical Ain [Num 34:11]), continued to Hauran in the east, followed the desert road down to Rabbat-Ammon and Petra, and returned to the coast along the Roman *limes* (pronounced *li-mez*, but also *lei-mis*). This was the term used by Flavian (69–96 CE) and later Roman emperors of the controlled borders in the frontier of the Empire. These northern and southern extremities of the Land are most likely what define the biblical designation “from Dan to Beer-Sheva” (2Sa 24:2 and 1Ki 5:5).

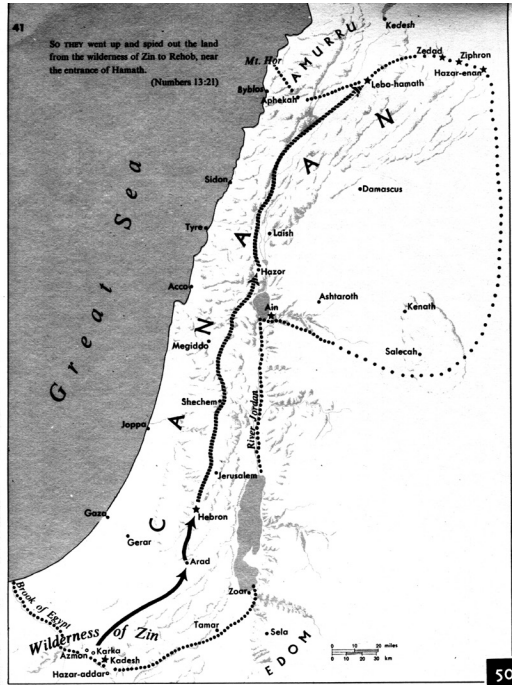
The Sages are not agreed as to the exact location of the cities and regions designated in our *parashah*. One key factor revolves around the identification of the place name Zifron, which seems to have been used by two different communities, one far north, and one north-east of the Kinneret. The majority of Sages accepted the boundaries indicated in the map above.

The map to the right (from Aharoni and Avi-Yonah) shows even a greater amount of land northeast of the Kinneret which our *parashah* appears to designate. It is also known that boundaries delineated in an Egyptian-Hittite treaty, signed following the battle of Kadesh, coincide exactly with those of our Torah text. These borders do not coincide, however, with Israelite settlement in any period as far as we know.



In Ezekiel 47:15–20, the prophet gives a future description of the Land when HaShem regathers Israel. Here, the northern expanse greatly exceeds any historic presence of Israel in the Land.

Our text for this Shabbat concludes with a description of the Land allocated for “open space”

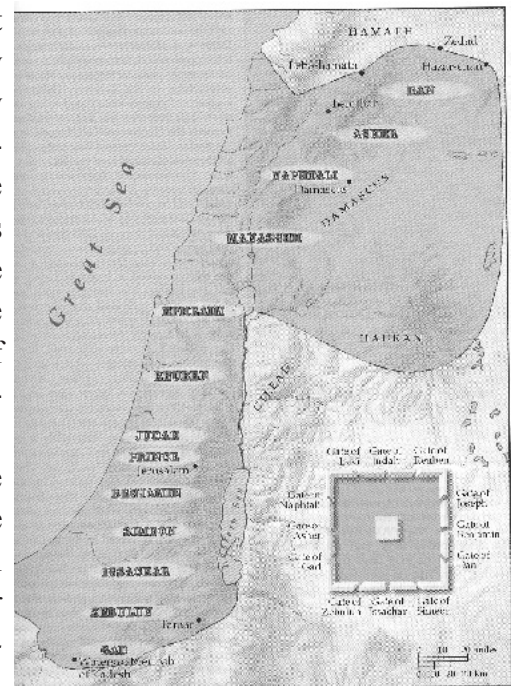


around a city, and land which the Levites were to use. The text seems contradictory at first, allotting 1000 cubits (35:4) around the city, then commanding to measure 2000 cubits in each direction (35:5). While the commentators arrive at different solutions, there is agreement that the first designation of 1000 cubits around a city designated a space which was to be left for beauty—it was forbidden to build or cultivate crops there. Outside of the 1000 cubit “buffer zone,” either an additional 1000 cubits (Rambam) were allotted for fields and vineyards, or an additional 2000 cubits (Rashi).

Having mentioned cities, the text naturally goes on to describe the six cities of refuge given to the Levites and set up for the administration of justice. Four possible situations could occur when a life was taken: 1) the act was accidental, and the perpetrator was not negligent. In this case he is absolved of guilt; 2) the act was accidental but

the result of some form of carelessness, in which case the perpetrator is exiled to a city of refuge; 3) the act was unintentional but carelessness of some sort is certain, and thus the sin is too grave to be absolved by exile. In this case appropriate punishment is meted out by the court; 4) the act was intentional, in which case capital punishment is administered. Thus, the cities of refuge were set up so that in the interim time when the court was coming to a conclusion as to the facts and the appropriate punishment, the perpetrator could flee to a city of refuge to await the word of the court. If he were not in a city of refuge, the avenger of blood (closest kin) was just in taking his life.

In addition to the six cities of refuge, 42 cities were allocated to the Levites as their possession, and these are named in Joshua 21, with four cities in each of the tribal allocations. (On the apparent discrepancies between our *parashah* and Joshua 21, see the notes of Milgrom, *Numbers* (JPS), pp. 504–09).



We see, then, that in every way God intended that justice prevail in the Land. The dwelling of Israel in the Land was to be a clear picture of God’s way of doing things. Justice and neighborly love were to be balanced against truth on the one hand, and need on the other.

The *haftarah* portion chosen by the Sages to accompany our Torah text is linked via the opening verse: “And when you divide by lot the land for inheritance....” The area described, however, is not of the entire Land, but of the portion given as a *terumah* (offering) to Adonai. The numbers given in most of our English translations follow the Lxx (note the textual variants in the MT). Moreover, in the Hebrew text, there are no units of measure, the word “cubit” in our English texts

being added by the translators. If one were to use only the Hebrew text, the exact dimensions of the sacred space occupied by the Temple is not precisely defined. Moreover, the cities allocated to the Priests and Levites are all located around the Temple (vv. 4–5). The import of this for the eschatological Temple is that all of the activities of the Temple, as well as the residence of the Priests and Levites are unified within the district of the rebuilt Temple. This emphasizes the centrality of the Temple in the millennial period.

We have chosen Colossians 1:13–14 as a midrashic parallel to our Torah *parashah*, for it utilizes “territory” language within an exodus motif. In the same manner that God sovereignly took Israel out of the land of Egypt and planted her in the Land, so in a salvific sense we all have been redeemed from the “domain of darkness” and transferred by the Great King into the “kingdom of His beloved Son.” Our spiritual exodus is no less a reality than the historic exodus from the slavery of Egypt. For in the same manner that the exodus was brought about by the mighty, outstretched arm of HaShem, so our eternal salvation was wrought by His work alone, and not ours. Whereas, before we lived under the tyranny of darkness, ruled by the “prince of this world,” now we are citizens of the “kingdom of His beloved Son.” The point Paul wishes to make is quite obvious: as citizens of the kingdom of Messiah, every aspect of our lives has changed. This is what Paul admonishes as well in Eph. 5:8, “for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.” Our daily lives are to manifest the reality of our true citizenship. We are members of His kingdom, and thus His rule and reign is our delight. We have been set free to serve Him, and to revel in the freedom that His redemption has afforded us.

But the combining of the three texts in this week’s study may also be used to emphasize another important lesson regarding our worldview. Early in the emerging Christian Church, gnosticism had a strong influence upon the theology and worldview of the Church Fathers. One of the core tenets of gnosticism is that all material things are imbued with evil. Since most of the early Greek Fathers were very much affected by Platonic philosophy and neo-Platonism, which also elevated ideas over material things, the gnostic mysticism that encouraged “escaping” from the one’s material existence to a “spiritual” realm was readily accepted. Eventually this gave rise to monasticism, which emphasized that the more holy a person was, the more he or she would disdain material things (food, daily comforts, marriage). This in turn meant that those who enjoyed the material things of this world were considered “worldly” or less than “holy.” Poverty was looked upon as a way to become detached from the “world” and to escape to a true “spiritual” existence.

But such a dualism, that despises the physical world and seeks to exist in the world of ideas and mysticism, is not something found in the Scriptures themselves. The very fact that the covenants God has made with Israel are all tied to the Land should be the first major indication that God does not consider the physical world to be inherently evil. After all, when He had created the world, He pronounced it as “good.” Further, the promise of a rebuilt Temple in the prophecy of Ezekiel makes it clear that God does not have a low regard for physicality within the worship He prescribes for His people. Indeed, the fact that a millennial Temple will be established re-emphasizes that the duty of God’s people is not to escape the physical world but to prepare a place for God’s dwelling within our world. The new heavens and earth will, of course, have physicality.

A biblical worldview, then, does not have as its ultimate goal to escape this “evil world” of material things in order to exist in a “celestial city,” but to honor God who created the physical world by sanctifying (setting apart) our world for His dwelling with us. Perhaps the greatest proof of God’s worldview, that both the physical and the non-physical are equally important, is the incar-

nation and the promise of resurrection. In the mystery of the incarnation, the Creator Himself, the Son of God, became man and took upon Himself human flesh. Moreover, this was not a temporary measure, as when HaShem appeared to Moses in the burning bush, but in His incarnation, Yeshua took upon Himself a human nature that He retains throughout eternity. Similarly, in the resurrection, our physical bodies will be made whole, and we will dwell in the presence of HaShem as created, physical beings forever. If God's highest good was an existence apart from physicality, He surely would not resurrect the bodies of those who have died in the Messiah.

This unified worldview, that finds divinely ordained "good" in both the physical and the non-physical realms, is essential for a biblically based view of Torah and Torah living. For the Torah itself can be defined as loving God and loving one's neighbor (Matt 22:37–39), and this love is demonstrated within our physical world, in matters relating to the "here-and-now," not to some ethereal realm of ideas. It is not "the thought that counts." It is the doing of the *mitzvot* that counts. Yeshua will not say "well thought out" or "well intended" but "well *done*, good and faithful servant." It is not our well-scripted theological creeds that prove our genuine faith in God and His Messiah. It is a life lived out in holiness that proves the reality of a changed heart and a vibrant, saving faith.