

The Deuteronomistic History: Life in the Land (Joshua and Judges)

Lecture 12 Transcript

<https://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/rkst-145/lecture-12>

Overview

This lecture concludes the study of Deuteronomy and traces the contribution of the Deuteronomistic School: a historiography according to which Israel's fortunes are dependent upon and an indicator of her fidelity to the covenant. The books of the Former Prophets are introduced with attention to their historical and geographical context. The book of Joshua's account of Israel's conquest of Canaan is contrasted with scholarly accounts of Israel's emergence in Canaan and formation as a nation state.

Resources:

"Palestine in the Time of Saul." Atlas of the Historical Geography of the Holy Land. Smith, George Adam. London, 1915. Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin:
http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/palestine_1020bc.jpg

1. *Deuteronomy: A Capstone to the Pentateuchal Narrative*

come back to in a minute. I just want to throw it out here.

- [1] *Professor Christine Hayes:* I was talking last time about the concept of election or choice, God's choice of Israel, Israel as the chosen one, which occurs for the first time in the Book of Deuteronomy. And I was talking about the fact that for Deuteronomy the election of Israel, God's election of Israel means or entails the idea that Israel is a holy people, holy in the sense of separated to God — that root meaning of holiness which means to be separated from the common or the ordinary. So that separation entails separation from alien peoples and practices that are inconsistent with the worship of God. So for this reason, intermarriage with the Canaanites is prohibited in Deuteronomy. And, in fact, they are to be utterly destroyed. All alien practices are to be removed from the covenant community.
- [2] Now, given that there were probably no Canaanites at the time of Deuteronomy's composition, according to some scholars, these texts may be understood as a kind of internal polemic against those elements of Israelite society whose practices didn't conform to Deuteronomy's Yahweh-only policy, or Yahweh-only ideals. This is an idea we will
- [3] Separation entails also separation to God's service. That means, of course, the observance of his laws, especially the laws of purity, the rejection of pagan practices, and so on. So the privilege of having been chosen or singled out, of being a holy people to God entails obligations and responsibility.
- [4] At the same time, it's interesting that Deuteronomy seems to be aware of some of the dangers in this idea, the danger of a superiority complex, a moral danger involved in the notion of election. So Deuteronomy warns repeatedly: it is by no special virtue or merit that Israel was the one chosen. And Moses admonishes the Israelites not to suppose that their inheritance of the land of Canaan is due to their own powers, or on account of any righteousness or virtue that they possess. In fact, he says, far from it. Israel was chosen by Yahweh in an act of spontaneous love — it does not imply her perfection — an act of spontaneous love for the patriarchs. And the election was entirely God's initiative and is no cause for Israel to boast. So Deuteronomy 7, verses 6-8 read:
- [5] For you are a people consecrated [made holy] to the Lord your God: of all the

peoples on earth the Lord your God chose you to be His treasured people. It is not because you are the most numerous of peoples that the Lord set His heart on you and chose you — ; indeed, you are the smallest of peoples; but it was because the Lord favored you and kept the oath He made to your fathers that the Lord freed you with a mighty hand and rescued you from the house of bondage, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

He found him in a desert region,
In an empty howling waste.
He engirded him, watched over him,
Guarded him as the pupil of his eye.
Like an eagle who rouses his nestlings,
Gliding down to his young,
So did he spread his wings and take him,
Bear him along on his pinions;
The Lord alone did guide him....

- [6] So don't be tempted — Moses later warns the Israelites — don't be tempted to say to yourselves (this is in Deuteronomy 8:17), "My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me," or again, to say in Deuteronomy 9:4, "The Lord has enabled us to possess this land because of our virtues." On the contrary, he emphasizes, it is only because the wickedness of the Canaanites is so great that the Lord has to drive them from his land, and now he is giving you a chance. But it is conditional for you, just as it was for them. Don't fail him or he will drive you out just as he drove out the Canaanites. That's a theme in Deuteronomy. We are going to see in a moment how important that is, or in a few lectures, how important that idea is for the Deuteronomistic historian in general. But we will get there.

- [7] Another theme in the Book of Deuteronomy is the theme of providential concern, and that appears in Deuteronomy 8. God's providential love and care for Israel is expressed through various metaphors in the Bible. And the prophet Hosea, who seems to have very strong connections with the Book of Deuteronomy, the prophet Hosea will develop further this image of parent and child that occurs in Deuteronomy 8. So in a way, the language we were just referring to was really the language of husband and wife, you know, someone who simply loves someone, not because they are perfect, but that is their choice. They favor them. They love the person, and they make a bond with them. It does not imply anything about other people. It is simply [that] that is the person who has been the focus. So we have a lot of sort of love and marriage imagery, husband and wife imagery, used for God and Israel, but we also have this parent and child imagery that appears. In Deuteronomy 32:10, the image is that of an eagle that bears its young on its wings:

- [8] It almost seems to play on the idea that when teaching its young to fly, the eagle will push them out of the nest, swoop under them, bear them up for a while over and over until they get the idea. So God is repeatedly testing and correcting the Israelites until they are ready for the Promised Land.
- [9] So Deuteronomy's content, which are these farewell speeches and the death and the burial of Moses, are a fitting capstone to the Pentateuchal narrative. But at the same time, Deuteronomy really does not bring closure to this narrative, because at the end of Deuteronomy, the promises still are not fulfilled. The people are still outside the land. Some have suggested that this is quite purposeful. It points to an exilic date for the work's final composition: that is to say when it was finally redacted, the redactors were in exile, writing for a people living in exile. And the Deuteronomist wants to make it clear that it is fidelity to the Torah, rather than residence in the land that is critically important. But in any event, Deuteronomy is not simply the concluding book of the Pentateuch, or the story that began in Genesis; it's also the first part of a much larger, longer literary work, as I mentioned last time, a work that runs from Deuteronomy through to the end of 2 Kings. And we are going to consider today the program and the work of this so-called Deuteronomistic school.

2. Source Theory and the Pentateuch

- [10] But before we do that, I wanted to just make a few concluding remarks about source theory and the Pentateuch. We have talked about the Documentary Hypothesis. We have talked

about the different sources that scholars believe they have been able to identify as comprising the five books of the Pentateuch. And one of the things I mentioned a couple of times are some of the debates that occur on the question of dating. There is a great deal of ideological baggage that is involved in the dating of the sources. One of the issues that I think is a real problem is the fact that the Priestly source, P, is so often misjudged and maligned. I hope that the little bit of time that we have spent on the Priestly materials gave you some appreciation of its transformation of older Israelite rituals and traditions into symbolic practices that would communicate basic convictions about morality, convictions about holiness. I hope it gave you a sense of its communal ethic as opposed to an individual morality, the idea that the actions of every individual have an impact on society as a whole.

[11] But the anti-priest, anti-cult sentiment, of European Protestantism, is apparent in the history of biblical scholarship in the last few centuries. And it is apparent in that scholarship's negative assessment of the Priestly source of the Bible. So for Wellhausen, the Priestly source, which emphasizes cult and ritual — logically it had to represent a late degenerate stage in the evolution of Israelite religion, because priestly ritualistic cultic practices, these are degenerations. These are movements away from true spirit-filled religion in his view. So according to Wellhausen, the early period of ancient Israel must have been characterized by a free, more natural form of religion, an intimate relationship with God, unencumbered or unsullied by the legalistic cultic obsessions of priests and cult. He argued that in 586, with the destruction of Jerusalem and the people were taken into exile in Babylon, that was when, in Babylon, the priests were able to assume control, and they were able to play on the exiles' overwhelming feelings of guilt and failure. The priests were able to construct a new identity and religion that stressed the sinfulness of the people, and the need for ritual purity and ritual observance and legalism as the road back to God. And they were able to write themselves back into the narratives and stories of Israel's past. And this, according to Wellhausen, was a degeneration.

[12] Well, this reconstruction of the evolution of Israelite history, Israelite religion, excuse me,

is really driven more by theological prejudice than it is by historical evidence. And it stems from an obvious projection of the Protestant-Catholic tension onto Israelite history. It also is driven very much by a secessionist account of Judaism as being something that was moribund at the time of Jesus. Jesus came and revived this as a spirit-filled religion again, when it had decayed and withered and degenerated like a dead tree, as Wellhausen refers to it.

[13] This isn't to say that all scholars who date P to the post-exilic period are motivated by the same problematic assumptions. That is certainly not the case. There are scholars of all stripes and allegiances who view P as late; and there is some very good objective evidence for dating parts of P to the post-exilic period, just as there is good objective evidence for dating parts of D and the other sources to the post-exilic period. So when it comes to dating the sources, certainly I would say all scholars agree that the Priestly materials reach their final form in the exile or post-exilic period. So that is the sixth century, right? (You are going to find out, we are going to return from exile in the 530s, o.k.?) So when we talk about the post-exilic period, we are talking about the period after the return. So the period of the exile is the sixth century, the bulk of the middle of the sixth century. So it certainly reached its final form in that period [correction: exilic to post-exilic periods; scholars vary on the details], as did Deuteronomy, and the Pentateuch probably generally.

[14] Nevertheless, there are many data that suggest that the Priestly sources retain very early strata, just as D contains pre-exilic or early material. P espouses a communal ethic, and post-exilic priests are going to turn increasingly to an individual ethic. Many sections of P do not seem to assume a central sanctuary. Remember that the idea of the central sanctuary really took hold in 622, with Josiah and Josiah's reform. So it becomes a real watershed for us in dating texts: texts that are happy with the existence of shrines throughout the land of Israel are probably pre-Josiah, pre-622, pre-exilic. Texts that insist on a central sanctuary are probably Josiah's time or later. And there are many sections of P that don't seem to assume a central sanctuary. There are sections of P that do seem to assume a central sanctuary. More significantly, I think, P contains no universal ban on intermarriage. It does not employ its

purity laws or language to mark an inseparable boundary between classes within Israel or between Israelites and gentile others. The use of purity and purity language to inscribe boundaries between Israel and other nations is very characteristic of the post-exilic period. We are going to see that when we get there. So it is very hard to understand P's silence in this regard, if it stems entirely from the post-exilic, priestly circles.

3. Introduction to the Former Prophets

[15] So I think that instead of charting an evolution or a degeneration — as I have over on the side of the board- -an evolution or a degeneration from JE, the pure spirit-filled religion, to D, the humanitarian, ethical religion, to P, cultic obsessiveness and guilt-ridden legalism, as is done or implied in some classical source theory (some, not all), it may be better to see these three as really representing three distinct and roughly contemporaneous strands of ancient Israelite tradition and experience told from their own perspectives. These materials were transmitted and developed by different circles within Israelite society over centuries, and they crystallized at different times. JE has fragments that are quite old, but it probably reached its final form before the centralization of the sanctuary. It is still comfortable with the existence of many sacred places throughout the land, so probably before 622. Deuteronomy contains northern traditions from before the fall of Israel, which was in 722, but it was clearly finalized in the exile. There are many passages that make it clear that it's written from an exilic perspective [see note 1]. And the Priestly source, likewise, contains many, many older traditions, but reached its full and final form in the exilic or post-exilic period.

[16] So each of these complex, multi-layered sources — in each one of them you can find different layers — each one possesses its own emphases, its own agenda, its own perspectives. Sometimes they complement one another. Sometimes they challenge and contradict one another, but they are not best seen as linear, as telling a neat, linear story about Israelite religion flowering and fading. Their diversity has not been flattened or homogenized by the final editor of the text. It has been preserved in a manner that stimulates reflection and debate.

[17] So with those concluding remarks, we are going to move on now to the second major section of the Bible. We have been discussing the Torah, or Pentateuch, and now we are moving on to the section of the Bible that is referred to as the Prophets. This section of the Bible is divided into two parts we refer to as the “Former Prophets” and then the “Latter Prophets.” The Former Prophets will concern us for the next few lectures. And the Former Prophets include the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings. They read as a historical narrative.

[18] This material is a theologically oriented account of Israel's history from the conquest of Canaan, or what is represented as the conquest of Canaan, to the destruction of the state by the Babylonians in 587-586 BCE. This material is therefore crucial background to reading the Latter Prophets. Now the Latter Prophets is a collection of books, each of which bears the name of the individual whose prophecies it purports to contain. These prophets delivered their oracles at critical junctures in Israel's history, in the nation's history, so their words are only going to make sense to us if we first understand the particular historical crises that they are addressing. And that historical narrative that runs from Joshua through 2 Kings provides that information. It tells us of the critical junctures in the nation's history, and that will help us then slot the different prophets in.

[19] So the Former Prophets, or the historical books, like the books of the Bible that we have already studied, contain various older sources that have been put together by a later hand. We have an editor or a group of editors who reworked these older sources. They were oral traditions. Some of them were probably from royal archives and so on. And they wove them together into the form that we have now, and that is a process that is referred to as redaction or editing. The anonymous person or group or school that's responsible for the final composition, the final redaction of these books, would put the materials together by inserting verses and speeches that would frame the older sources and link them together, give them some sort of common uniting thread. The redactors' linking

and framing passages and their revisions of the older sources exhibit certain common features. They harp on the same themes over and over again; they use some of the same language over and over again; they share certain assumptions. And those features and assumptions have a lot in common with the book of Deuteronomy, a lot in common with the book of Deuteronomy; and that is what led the German scholar, Martin Noth, to surmise that Deuteronomy and these historical books really form a unit, so that Deuteronomy not only looks back and finishes off the Pentateuchal narrative, it looks forward as the beginning of really the historical account that is to follow.

[20] J, E and P really seem to come to an end here; there is some debate about this, but because the interpretive history that runs from Joshua to 2 Kings is based on ideals that are set out in the book of Deuteronomy, we refer to the person or the persons who redacted this whole unit as the Deuteronomistic historian, or the Deuteronomistic School. The whole unit, as a whole, was redacted after 622: that's clear. It assumes and insists upon the centralization of the cult. The last dated event that is mentioned in 2 Kings is something that occurred in 562. That was when King Jehoiachin was released from prison in Babylon, in 562. So the work was probably concluded shortly after that date: so in exile or towards the end of the exilic period. Martin Noth assumed that there was one editor. Other scholars have assumed that there were two, or even more, successive editions of this history because there are multiple perspectives that seem to be represented. But the last seems to be an exilic perspective, the perspective of someone sitting in exile and we will be returning to that in a future lecture.

[21] Some of the books within this very large unit, or at least the traditions within this very large unit, are less influenced by Deuteronomy and its themes and its concerns. Some contain clearly pre-Deuteronomistic elements and materials, if you will. But I encourage you to read the excellent introduction to the Prophets, the section of the Bible "The Prophets" which was written by Marc Brettler in your Jewish Study Bible. I think it is an excellent introduction to the complexity of this material. The most salient feature of the Deuteronomistic School is the conviction that Israel's residence in the land is a function of its

obedience or disobedience to the covenant with Yahweh. And that conviction is going to color its presentation, its evaluation and its interpretation of Israel's history and her kings from Joshua right through to 2 Kings. Yehezkel Kaufmann uses the term "historiosophy" which I have written up here, *historiosophy*, to describe this material. Where a historian might simply record events (as if that is such a simple thing to do, but let's go with that for a moment) — a historian might simply record events, however selectively or partially, might try to indicate cause and effect where possible; but a *historiosophy* is a more conscious philosophy of history. It's seeking to ascertain the meaning of events to draw larger philosophical, ideological conclusions from the events of history, and to point to the larger purpose or design of history, not to say just what happened, but to say why it happened and what it means for us today that it did happen. So the Deuteronomistic history is not simply a history of Israel until the destruction of Jerusalem, it is a *historiosophy*. It is making an argument and it's attempting to communicate the meaning and the significance of the events of that time, and it does so through a pattern, a literary pattern we will see, of reward and punishment. This is an important point, and as we begin to go through the material, we will be coming back to this. We will return to this idea.

[22] There are certain key features of Deuteronomistic thought that are evident from Joshua through 2 Kings. One is the belief in the divine election of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the city that is referred to in Deuteronomy when it says God will choose a place to cause his name to dwell. In the Deuteronomistic books, that place is going to be Jerusalem. There is also a belief in the divine election of David as the king of Israel and his dynasty. Now, it's interesting because the other four books of the Pentateuch never mention a king. In Genesis through Numbers none of the legal materials say: when you have a king this is what he shall do. It is only the book of Deuteronomy that assumes or prepares for a monarchy and contains legislation for a king, and the things that he should do. So this, again, underscores the connection between Deuteronomy and the following books. Deuteronomy assumes a king. It is being written and redacted at a time when there is a king in Israel, there have been kings in Israel, and it is providing laws for the

construction of an ideal monarchy. So David, the theme of David as the elected king of God, David also as the ideal king, is something else that is a theme of these books.

- [23] Another theme that we see in these books or feature of the Deuteronomistic School is the emphasis on what we call the Yahwist prophets — prophets like Elijah and Elisha. These prophets are held up as heroes and champions of religious purity. They are completely against any kind of mixture of Yahweh worship with other elements, any kind of syncretism. The other thing we see in the Deuteronomistic material is a preference for Judah, the Southern Kingdom, as compared with a very negative presentation of the Northern Kingdom, Israel. The Northern Kingdom Israel is going to come in for very, very bad press at the hands of the Deuteronomistic writers, which shows that they probably favor or come from Judah. So the northern kings are going to be uniformly denigrated. They are going to be denigrated because they maintain cults that rival the central sanctuary of Jerusalem. And this is going to be what does them in. The other theme that we see throughout the Deuteronomistic material is the negative presentation of the Canaanites. But we will talk more about who these Canaanites were and how complicated, in fact, that presentation is.

4. Geographical Setting and Its Historical Implications

- [24] Now, the books of Joshua and Judges that open the Deuteronomistic history, these books recount or relate the story of the conquest of the land of Canaan by the Israelite tribes, and the early years of the settlement: that's in Judges. To gain an understanding of some of the issues involved, and the emergence of a tribal structure in the land, it's helpful to know something about the geography of Israel, which is why I have handed out for you a couple of different maps, but one that gives you physical features (and that is on the top). It has often been pointed out that in the past 4000 years more wars have been fought for the possession of the tiny strip of land known as Canaan, or the land of Israel, or Palestine, than have been fought for almost any other area in the world. And in the ancient world, the reason for this was that this very small rectangle — it's about

150 miles long and 70 miles wide, about the size of Rhode Island — this very small rectangle lies on the way to anywhere worth going in the Ancient Near East. You've got Egypt over here. You've got Asia Minor up here, and you've got Mesopotamia over here. Not a tremendous amount of inherent value in this strip of land, but it is important for where you could go by traveling through it. So you have three main trade routes that cross the country, and they were used by trading caravans that would carry gold and grain and spices and textiles and other goods between Egypt and the rest of the Fertile Crescent and up into Asia Minor.

- [25] So control of these international highways brought a great deal of wealth to the area, but the central location was a double-edged sword, because in times of peace it would bring prosperity, but, of course, in times of war the land was perpetually invaded as armies would crisscross the land going off to do battle with the great powers. So on their way to conquests in Egypt, or Asia Minor or Mesopotamia, armies would tramp through the land. And that explains the succession of rulers that have held the region: the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Israelites, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Greek Ptolemies, the Seleucids, the Romans, and the list continues as we go on into the medieval and the modern periods.

- [26] Now, despite the fact that this is a very small piece of land, it boasts great geographical diversity. So there are three main geographical subdivisions. You can see them on your map, and they really run in strips from north to south. If you look at your map you will see first on the west side, you've got a low coastal plain. It is about 20 or 30 miles wide. It is the coastal plain, and that provides, or that is the main highway out of Egypt or down to Egypt. That area was controlled by Egypt at the purported time of the Exodus. Running north to south, next to that coastal plain, is a region of low mountains. These low mountains are cut by some valleys that sort of run east-west: you will see one there, the Valley of Jezreel, in particular; that was a particularly fertile valley. So the valleys that cut through the mountains are extremely fertile. The Plain of Megiddo also joins with the Valley of Jezreel. That is the most fertile part of the country, but it was also the site of many of the most bloody battles in

Israel's history. Then next to that north-south central hill country, you've got also running north to south, what we call the Great Jordan Rift Valley. It goes the entire length of the country. And the Jordan River runs through this valley. It rises in the Sea of Galilee or the Kinneret in the north, and then it flows about 65 miles, I believe, down to the Dead Sea. At the northern extreme of the Rift Valley, is Mount Hermon, which is the highest point. It is snow covered, Mount Hermon. And that is the highest point in Israel, it rises about 10,000 feet above sea level. The central mountain area, those are between 4000 and 10,000 feet above sea level. As you move from the central area over to Jerusalem — Jerusalem is about 2,500 feet above sea level — but then as you continue moving east towards the Rift Valley, that area is dramatically lower — and you feel it as you travel the road there, just how quickly it drops, so that by the time you get to the Sea of Galilee you are 700 feet below sea level, and the Dead Sea is nearly 1300 feet below sea level. That is the lowest point on the earth's land surface — so this dramatic drop in just a very short geographical area. Up in the north, the river is surrounded by very lush vegetation on both sides, but there is no life 65 miles south down by the Dead Sea. This is because the water is 25% salts and minerals — although I hear they found some sort of bacteria or something there, so I guess I should not say anymore that there is no life — but essentially there is no life we would care about in the Dead Sea area. So it is a very desolate area. And tradition identifies this as the site of Sodom and Gomorrah. The area around the Sea is basically semi-desert. We call this the wilderness, the wilderness of Judea between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea, the wilderness of Judah or Judea.

[27] So within this relatively tiny area there are radically diverse regions, and this fact held important implications for Israel's history. Unity was difficult. Being somewhat isolated, the inhabitants of each region developed a distinctive economic and cultural character. You have the small settled farmer in the more fertile areas. You have semi-nomadic shepherds. You have city dwellers. You have merchants and traders who are handling the commerce on the trade routes and enjoying broader cultural contacts. So that's the geographical setting for what we are about to read in the Book of Joshua.

5. Structure of Joshua

- [28] The structure of Joshua is really somewhat simple. We can really divide it into two major parts. The first 12 chapters form a unit that conveys the invasion and conquest. There are certain important elements. In chapter 2 we have Joshua sending out spies to scout out the land. In chapter 3 we have the account of crossing the Jordan River. In chapter 6 we have the Battle of Jericho. The story of the Battle of Jericho is really a composite of two accounts that have been woven together into a single narrative. So in one of them Joshua's warriors seem to march silently around the city seven times. In another, the priests carry the Ark around the city 13 times, so scholars think there are two different accounts here woven together. Chapter 8 describes the victory at a place called Ai, which is near Jericho. Chapter 9 tells the story of the Gibeonites who join the Israelites; they are a local group that seems to join them. And then 10 and 11 give us two further military campaigns.
- [29] Towards the end of 11, we have summary statements. In Joshua 10:40, we read: "So Joshua defeated the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb" — ;that's the desert here to the south — ;"and the lowland" — so you have the hill country, the low land — ;"and the slopes, and all their kings; he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed" [RSV; see note 2]. Chapter 11 goes on to stress that Joshua completed the task that had been begun by Moses. In verse 15: "Just as the Lord had commanded His servant Moses, so Moses had charged Joshua, and so Joshua did; he left nothing undone of all that the Lord had commanded Moses." And again, in verse 23, the insistence: "Thus Joshua conquered the whole country, just as the Lord had promised Moses; and Joshua assigned it to Israel to share according to their tribal divisions, and the land had rest from war." So Chapters 13 and 21 go on to describe the division of the land among the tribes and then we have some sort of tidying up at the end. The remaining chapters are appendices: 23 is a farewell address, and 24 is a renewal of the covenant at Shechem, which brings everything to a nice conclusion.
- [30] So the narrative in the first part of Joshua, Joshua 2 to 12, describes the invading Israelites

as an organized confederation of 12 tribes whose conquest is accomplished in a few decisive battles under the military leadership of Joshua. And the disunited Canaanites put up little or no resistance: they're paralyzed by a fear that is sent by God. All of those who were conquered are put to the ban or the herem — that's the sacred devotion of objects and persons to God, which entailed killing them, so they were utterly destroyed. So the first half of the book of Joshua contains a streamlined, idealized account according to which the Israelites managed in a relatively short period to take the central hill country, confining the Philistines to a little strip here on the coastal plain. We will come to the Philistines in a minute.

despite that victory they failed to actually drive out the inhabitants, the Jebusites, who lived there. And it is not until King David, 200 years later that, in fact, we will read about the capture of Jerusalem. Judges 1 gives a long list of the places from which the Canaanites were not expelled.

[31] The account of the conquest in Joshua 2 through 12, is concerned to express the basic idea that Israel's victories would not have been possible without Yahweh, without his wondrous help. It was Yahweh who divided the Jordan before them. It was Yahweh who broke down the walls of Jericho. It was Yahweh who put fear in the hearts of the Canaanites. Yahweh was present at every battle. The Ark was a visible sign of his presence and it marched before them. And soon after the conquest representatives of all of the tribes of Israel are going to meet and make a solemn covenant at Shechem to be the people of Yahweh, to worship him alone. And according to the Book of Joshua, Israel's tribal structure assumed its classical form at this time.

[32] This is a very neat picture of the rapid conquest of Canaan, but it's at odds with statements elsewhere in Joshua and in the book of Judges. For example, the victories in Chapters 2 through 10 are confined to a very small area, what would actually be the tribe of Benjamin basically, so just one small area. In Joshua 13:1: Joshua 13 opens with the statement that Joshua was old, advanced in years, and there was much of the land remaining to be possessed. In Joshua 10 (which is in the first part of Joshua — Joshua 10) verses 36-39 report the conquest of several cities in the south, including Hebron and Debir. But in Judges, we read that they had not been captured: they were captured later, after Joshua's death. Joshua 12:10 reports the defeat of the king of Jerusalem. In Judges 1:8 and 21, we read that the people of Judah did this (conquered the king of Jerusalem) and that

[33] Also archaeological evidence contradicts the picture in Joshua. In the Ancient Near East, destroyed cities tended to be leveled, and then a new city would just be built on top of the ruins, and you would have these slowly rising mounds — each one of those is called a tell (so you may have heard of Tell Dor?). These are mounds which represent the successive layers of destroyed and rebuilt cities. And excavations will reveal the destruction layers under the floor of new cities. So following the biblical account, we would expect evidence of a thirteenth century destruction of Canaanite cities. And archaeologists for a long time were convinced that they would find these destruction layers. But they were disappointed. They have found really no evidence of extensive conquest and destruction in thirteenth and twelfth century archaeological layers. Some of the sites that are said to be destroyed by Joshua and the Israelites weren't even occupied in this period, the late Bronze Age, beginning of the Iron Age; the Iron Age begins around 1200. Excavations at Jericho and Ai indicate that both of these towns were laid waste at least 200 years before the probable time of Joshua; so there weren't even any walls in Jericho at the time of Joshua. Of 20 identifiable sites that were said to be conquered or captured by Joshua and the next generations, only two show destruction layers for this time, Hazor and Beth-el. And yet interestingly enough, Hazor's capture described in Joshua is contradicted elsewhere in the Bible, because in Judges 4 and 5, it is still a Canaanite city. It is said there that it is still a Canaanite city and Joshua failed to take it.

6. Three Scholarly Models for the Emergence of the Nation State of Israel

[34] So the conclusion one can draw from all of this is that Joshua 2 through 12 is a kind of ideological construction, the significance and the purpose of which we will come back to in a moment. But clearly the formation of the nation state, Israel, was much more complicated than

the picture that's presented in Joshua 2 through 12. Scholars have proposed three possible models to explain the formation of Israel. The first is an immigration model. This was first posed by German scholars. Since the main Canaanite cities that existed in the land at that time were fortified or walled cities down on the plains, the Israelites, it's thought according to this model, would have entered and they would have occupied the very sparsely populated central highlands. They would slowly have begun to take control of the plains coming down from the highlands. Well, we do know that at the end of the late Bronze Age, beginning of the Iron Age, around 1200, this was a time of great upheaval throughout the Mediterranean world. We have the collapse of Mycenaean civilization. We have the Trojan Wars. The Hittites are invading Asia Minor, modern day Turkey to the north. And these upheavals are leading to mass migrations, migrations of people. Many are sailing from mainland Greece and from the Greek Islands, and they are flooding this area, the coasts of Phoenicia, the coasts of Canaan and Egypt. And these people are spoken about in a lot of our ancient sources. They are referred to as "peoples of the sea," coming in from the sea, from islands and coastal areas of the northeastern Mediterranean. One of these peoples of the sea, one of these groups, inhabited an area here: Perasta or Pelasta. The word "Palestine" comes from this, Perasta, Palesta or Philistines. It is all the same root. And so a group if these sea peoples comes in and occupies this area. They will be the Philistines, the area that is now the Gaza Strip. And they found the five Philistine cities that you will hear about increasingly in the book of Judges: Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, Ashdod and Ekron.

[35] The idea of the immigration model is that Hebrew settlement would have probably occurred at about the same time in the latter part of the thirteenth century. The Hebrews could take advantage of all of these upheavals and the weakened hold of Egypt. Remember Egypt had control of this area but their grasp was weakening with the flood of people coming in from the sea and other migrations. Their hold was weakening and the Hebrews would have been able to take advantage of that and enter in and occupy areas in the central highlands. The problem with the immigration

model, again, is the archaeological record. Archaeologists have, indeed, found several sites in the central hill country — which is pretty exciting — and they were clearly newly established in the thirteenth, twelfth, eleventh centuries. So clearly something new was happening in the central highlands at this time. They extend throughout the land, but mostly the central highlands. And these are thought to be Israelite, especially because they appear in places that the Bible identifies as strongholds of Israel. Remember also, you have the Merneptah stele of 1204, in which the Egyptian pharaoh boasts that he managed to wipe out Israel. It is obviously a hyperbolic boast, but the point is it shows that there was an identifiable entity, Israel in Canaan, by 1204.

[36] These new thirteenth century settlements, however, are in their material culture, that is to say their pots and their jars and their houses, entirely Canaanite. The inhabitants seem to have been peasant farmers, like other Canaanites. One interesting difference is the absence of any pig bones, which is kind of interesting. But in any event, this suggests that these settlements were established peacefully, not by a group coming in and conquering. Maybe they emerged from within, rather than being established by peoples immigrating from without.

[37] So there are two other models, then, models different from the immigration model, two other models for understanding the formation of Israel, that build on this archaeological evidence. The second model is what we call the revolt model. The revolt model proposes that Israel began really as a social revolution within Canaan. We do have a set of letters. These are letters that date from the fourteenth century BCE. They were written by people in Canaan to the Pharaoh in Egypt — remember the Pharaoh still has control over Canaan at this time. And in these letters, there are lots of complaints about groups that are causing turmoil and upset in Canaan. They are challenging Egypt's rule. And these people are called Habiru, or Abiru. They were not an ethnic group so much as a marginal social group of people in revolt, if you will. Some have suggested that Israelites escaping from Egypt may have joined with these disaffected Canaanites in revolt, known as Habiru, these trouble makers, to establish their own

settlements and to worship a liberator god, Yahweh, rather than follow the rule of Pharaoh.

[38] A final model, then, is a model of gradual emergence, which simply holds that Israelites were basically Canaanites who had developed a separate identity and settled increasingly in the central highlands. They withdrew and settled in this area. The theory doesn't try to explain why they separated. We don't know. Perhaps it was disaffection. Perhaps they were pushed out by the invading sea peoples. And maybe it was something else. But they withdrew for some reason. And how and why they took up the worship of Yahweh or the cult of Yahweh isn't really clear; but it seems to have been what marked them as distinct from other Canaanites. The Yahweh cult may have been introduced by people escaping slavery from Egypt. Most scholars see the Exodus story as evidence for the presence of some escaped slaves among this community. So the important thing is that the Hebrews at this stage were probably not a united people. Various elements went into the final mix that would emerge as the nation Israel: local Canaanites who, for some reason, withdrew and established their own settlements, with a continuous material culture, and established agricultural lifestyle — you have them. You have escaping slaves from Egypt. And remember, we do have some evidence of destruction from outside, so there could also have been some foreigners coming in and destroying and settling. It even seems that some local foreigners were admitted to the community. We read of Midianites who covenant into the community [see note 3]. We read of Kenites who covenant into the community. And archaeology supports this picture of merging of peoples, a picture of the merging of peoples, rather than conquest or even large-scale immigration, because the new settlements in this period show such continuity with the past, not a complete break, not the initiation of something radically new. And, again, some of the elements within this group may have brought with them the story of a miraculous escape from Egypt. They may have understood this to be the work of Yahweh, a god known probably from southern regions. And so the mixed group that would join together to become Israel accepted Yahweh, though perhaps not exclusively, and adopted the national story of the Exodus as its own at some point.

[39] The Hebrew tribes, themselves, were likely still in the process of formation. But the tribal structure of Israelite society that would develop would be strengthened by the natural division of the land into these separate geographical areas: that only reinforced the tribalization of society. And these local tribes probably did assimilate elements of the local population. We've really seen already the ethnic mix of various elements reflected in religious imagery and institutions. We've seen that Yahweh is represented in terms reminiscent of the tent dweller, El, the god of the semi-nomadic tent-dwelling Hebrews and their patriarchs, and certainly a god of the Canaanite pantheon. We have seen that Yahweh is also represented in terms reminiscent of Baal of the Canaanite pantheon, the God of the settled Canaanite population. In fact, in the book of Judges, you will read of a temple to Israel's God, the God of the Covenant, and that temple is called the Temple to the God of the Covenant or Baal Berit. The word "berit" means covenant. It is referred to as Baal Berit; it's referred to as El Berit or Baal El Berit; and this is in reference to Yahweh. These terms are all used to describe the God of the Covenant. So in short, we really may hypothesize a union of cultural, religious and ethnic elements: local Canaanite agriculturists, semi-nomadic Hebrews perhaps, of the Exodus, escaped slaves, perhaps Habiru/Abiru, a disaffected group that is in revolt. All of these would come together to produce what would be a new political and religious reality called Israel.

[40] If so, why does the book of Joshua provide such a different account, one of outside conquest by means of a war led by the hosts of the Lord? Because in this account military skill is much less important than ritual preparation and purity. The Israelites march around Jericho for six days with seven priests carrying seven horns and the Ark of the Covenant, and then with a blast and a shout the walls tumble. The conquest is represented as a miraculous victory by God. That's emphasized in Joshua 24:12. It was God, not the sword or the bow, that drove out the enemy. And why the claim of the utter destruction of the Canaanites when evidence points to close Canaanite origins? This practice, which I mentioned before and is known as herem or the ban, is not unique to Israel. I know some of you have studied it in sections: you looked at the inscription of King

Mesha, King Mesha of Moab. There is a very important, famous inscription from the ninth century BCE, written by King Mesha of Moab. Moab is to the southeast of the Dead Sea, so King Mesha of Moab. And in the inscription, he writes, he boasts: “And the god Chemosh said to me, go, take Nebo from Israel. So I went by night and fought against it from the break of dawn until noon, taking it and slaying all 7000 men, boys, women and girls and maid servants, for I had devoted them to destruction for the god Ashtar Chemosh”, referring to herem. It is likely that such claims are hyperbolic in Moab, and it is likely they were hyperbolic in Israel. But that does not lessen the shock value for a modern reader, even though war in our time is no less savage and no less brutal.

[41] But the important question here is why a biblical writer or editor would want to insist that the Canaanites were to be completely destroyed. I think assertions of national identity and independence are often predicated on differentiation from others. If the Israelites were, in fact, basically Canaanites, who had withdrawn from the larger collective, who insisted on the overlordship of Yahweh, then Canaanites who did not join them in this were a special threat to the new Yahwism. This same dynamic of intense sibling rivalry appears again in the first few centuries of the Common Era, when some Jews separated from others and in differentiating themselves and creating their own identity as Christians, felt it necessary to engage in devastatingly vituperative and violent rhetoric against their fellow Jews. The interesting thing, however, is that we must not ignore another voice that’s in the biblical text, and it is a voice that adds a level of complexity to this picture. Because alongside the idealized portrayal of the Israelite conquest in the first half of the book of Joshua, alongside the call for the destruction of all Canaanites, we find interesting tales of alliances and incorporation of various Canaanite groups. Indeed, who was one the heroines of the Battle of Jericho, if not a Canaanite woman, a prostitute no less, named Rahab. She declares her faith in Yahweh and she delivers the city into Joshua’s hands. The biblical writer saw fit to preserve and include this account of a heroic Canaanite prostitute. Another Canaanite group, the Gibeonites, trick the Israelites into making a covenant with

them, and it is a covenant the Israelites then feel bound to observe.

[42] Michael Coogan has described such stories as etiological tales. They are attempts to explain the fact that there are lots of Canaanite groups included in Israel; and we need to understand and explain that reality as much as we are conveying an ideological account in which all Canaanites are obliterated or destroyed. At the very least, these stories raise questions about the biblical portrait or portrayal of invasion and conquest. And at most, they illustrate the biblical writers’ taste for literary subversion yet again, something we will see over and over.

[43] The imperative of preserving a distinct identity — based on giving up the worship of other gods or older gods and observing all that is written in the law of Moses — is reiterated in Joshua’s farewell address in Joshua 23, and in the covenant renewal ceremony in 24. And the central idea is that there is one proper response to God’s mighty acts on behalf of Israel, and that is resolute observance of the book of the Torah of Moses, without intermingling with the peoples that remain. So in Joshua 23:7-8: “Do not utter the names of their gods or swear by them; do not serve them or bow down to them, but hold fast to the Lord your God as you have done this day.” And verses 11 to 13:

[44] For your own sakes, therefore, be most mindful to love the Lord your God. For should you turn away and attach yourselves to the remnant of these nations — to those that are left among you — and intermarry with them, you joining them and they joining you, know for certain that the Lord your God will not continue to drive these nations out before you; they shall become a snare and a trap for you, a scourge to your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land that the Lord your God has given you.

[45] In 24, the Israelites are assembled at Shechem to renew the covenant, and Joshua recounts God’s mighty deeds on behalf of Israel and exhorts them to choose whom they will serve: Yahweh, who has done all of this for them so undeservedly, or the gods of those whose lands they are settling in. And the people are warned of God’s jealousy. He demands exclusive loyalty. He will not tolerate any deviation in the service of alien gods. The ban on intermarriage here is quite specific. It is directed against

Canaanites only, not all non-Israelites, for a very specific reason: religious purity. Marriage with Canaanites, the people closest to you, specifically, will lead to the worship of that spouse's god, and Israel is to show undivided loyalty to God, or God will take the gift of the land from her as he did the Canaanites.

[46] One last remark for you to think about. Consider the position of the Israelites in the sixth century, the time of the final editing of the Deuteronomistic history. The Israelites are sitting in exile in Babylon. They are trying to make sense of the tragedy that has befallen them, the loss of their land. Consider how a text like Joshua 23 and Joshua 24 would go a long way towards explaining their fate while retaining faith in Yahweh. We're going to return to this when we reach the conclusion of the Deuteronomistic history in 2 Kings.

[47] [end of transcript]

[48] Notes

[49] 1. Deuteronomy's placement as the capstone to the Pentateuch likely occurred in the post-exilic period.

[50] 2. Quotations marked RSV are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

[51] 3. According to the biblical narrative, Moses marries a Midianite woman. His father-in-law is instrumental in the establishment of a judicial system. Subsequent relations with the Midianites oscillate between peaceful co-existence and open hostility and conflict.

[52] References

[53] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical citations have been quoted from "Tanakh: The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text." Copyright (c) 1985 by The Jewish Publication Society. Single copies of the JPS biblical citations cited within the transcripts can be reproduced for personal and non-commercial uses only.

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