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**VALLEYS OF FRICTION  
A REGIONAL CONSIDERATION OF ISRAELITE AND PHILISTINE  
INTERRELATIONSHIP DURING THEIR EARLY ENCOUNTERS IN THE  
NORTHERN SHEPHELAH**

**By**

**Edgar B. Hardesty**

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 \_\_\_\_\_ Barry M. Gittlen 12/2/15  
Chairperson, Dissertation Committee Signature Type Name Date

 \_\_\_\_\_ Susanna Garfein 12/3/15  
Committee Member Signature Type Name Date

 \_\_\_\_\_ Allaire Stallsmith 12/3/2015  
Committee Member Signature Type Name Date

 \_\_\_\_\_ Victor Fisher 12/3/15  
Committee Member Signature Type Name Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Committee Member Signature Type Name Date

 \_\_\_\_\_ Janet V. Delaney 12-4-15  
Dean of Graduate Studies Type Name Date

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## **Abstract**

### **VALLEYS OF FRICTION**

#### **A REGIONAL CONSIDERATION OF ISRAELITE AND PHILISTINE INTERRELATIONSHIP DURING THEIR EARLY ENCOUNTERS IN THE NORTHERN SHEPHELAH**

**Edgar B. Hardesty**

Dr. William G. Dever, in his book “What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?” expressed in part the issue to be addressed by this study. Speaking of “Primary” and “Secondary” Sources and the separate yet parallel disciplines of Biblical Interpretation and Archaeology he comments,

*‘Biblical scholars, until recently, trained primarily as philologists, have always tended to overvalue texts as the more ‘objective’ evidence, even when they acknowledge as they must the inherent differences in interpretation. In my judgment, this reflects a certain naïveté about how texts serve as ‘symbols’ and an abysmal ignorance of how artifacts can serve in the same way’* (Dever, 2001, p.87).

This statement could also apply to the trained archaeologist who often undervalues the biblical text when evaluating the physical data uncovered in his or her professional activities. Thus, the extant literature addressing Philistine and Israelite interaction tends to reflect a parochial and often isolated view confined to the given researcher’s discipline. This dissertation will add a third parallel discipline, often neglected or ignored altogether, to the two aforementioned disciplines. The biblical narrative and the archaeologist’s understanding of material remains both exist within a “physical setting” which can be defined in terms of geography, geology and topography. The elements of that definition have a direct contextual connection with the Biblical text and the archaeological data. It is the purpose of this dissertation to combine the geographic environment, the Biblical narrative and the physical remains to further define and understand the Israelite and Philistine interrelationships during their early encounters in the northern Shephelah.



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## Chapter One

### Introduction

Few events had a bigger impact on the evolution of the ancient world than the end of the Bronze Age. In the 12<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, B.C.E, the human face of the eastern Mediterranean experienced one of ancient history's turning points. This, of course, is a topic of immense proportions. From the modern perspective, it was an era of transition that marked the disappearance of many centuries-old forms<sup>1</sup> as the Bronze Age gave way to a new era known as the Iron Age. The transition heralded deep and abiding changes in the human face of the Levant and the land of Canaan. While this study is not directed toward questions concerning the means by which new groups appeared, its attention is focused on the interaction and early encounters between two of these newly emergent populations, Israel and the Sea People known as the Philistines.<sup>2</sup>

The Philistines settled on the southern coastal plain of Canaan, west of the central highlands, between the foothills and mountains to the east and the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>3</sup> They established a number of communities surrounding and in close proximity to their five capital cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron and Gath. Israelite settlements in

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<sup>1</sup> See Robert Drews, *The End of the Bronze Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) and Eric C. Cline, *1177BC: The Year Civilization Collapsed* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), both of which outline the many competing theories seeking to explain the demise of the Late Bronze civilization.

<sup>2</sup> See the discussion of origins in Ann E. Killebrew et al. *The Philistines and Other "Sea Peoples" in Text and Archaeology* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 9-11, 77-80. See also David Howard's article in Alfred J. Hoerth et al., *Peoples of the Old Testament World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 231-250 and Assaf Yasur-Landau, *The Philistines and Aegean Migration at the End of the Late Bronze Age*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 282-330.

<sup>3</sup> The plain in question is currently referred to as "The Plain of Philistia," a designation which will be used throughout this study.

central and southern Canaan were located primarily in the central highlands to the east of the Plain of Philistia. Between the two population groups a series of valleys extending west to east connect the coastal plain with the foothills leading to the central highlands.<sup>4</sup> Two of these valley systems in the northern Shephelah, the Sorek and the Elah, are the primary setting for this study.

The biblical text's representation of the early encounters in the northern Shephelah between these two population groups is somewhat confusing.<sup>5</sup> For example, the biblical character Samson, raised at the eastern end of the Sorek Valley, is described in the text as Israel's deliverer from Philistine oppression.<sup>6</sup> Yet, despite the oppression clearly indicated in the text, he moves freely within the oppressor's territory. The Philistines are often referred to in derogatory terms as the "Uncircumcised Philistines" in the biblical account.<sup>7</sup> Yet Samson marries a Philistine woman from the central Sorek Valley and subsequently is intimately involved with several more Philistine women. The description of his activities directed against the Philistines, as recorded in the biblical book of the Judges, vacillates between freedom, oppression, open hostility and aggression. He is said to have slain multitudes of Philistine opponents and was eventually enslaved, incarcerated and abused at the western end of the Sorek Valley. He eventually commits suicide among his Philistine captors intentionally taking his own life and many of his captors with him in a heroic death described in hyperbolic language.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The geography and topography of the region is the topic of chapter 2 and will be addressed and defined there.

<sup>5</sup> The biblical text will be addressed in chapter three.

<sup>6</sup> Cf, 1 Samuel 13:4-5.

<sup>7</sup> Cf, Samson chronicles in Judges 14:3, 4; 15:3 and David in 1 Samuel 17:26.

<sup>8</sup> Cf, 1 Samuel 16:28-31.

A similar anomalistic situation exists in the biblical text describing David's early encounters with the Philistines. The text describes the setting for David's early encounter with the Philistines as a hostile face-off between the two populations. Israel and the Philistines have taken up aggressive positions opposite from one another across the Elah Valley. The Philistines call for a contest between their respective champions to settle the coming battle without the necessity of a full-fledged military encounter. David volunteers and defeats the Philistine champion, Goliath. Yet later, when the Israelite king, Saul, turns against David and seeks to take his life, David finds refuge as a trusted ally among the Philistines where he remains until Saul's death. Following Saul's death, David returns to Israel, ascends to headship over Israel as king, consolidates his position and then attacks and defeats the Philistines - his previous benefactors!

This study will seek to understand these seeming contradictions by examining the geographic/geological, biblical and archaeological context of the early relationship in the northern Shephelah between the Philistines and Israel. In his book "What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?"<sup>9</sup> William G. Dever expressed the tension often observed between scholarly approaches and disciplines. Speaking of the relationship between the biblical text and archaeological artifacts he suggests some common sense rules for fruitful investigation,

1. A text or an archaeological artifact requires an external referent, an *independent witness*, to corroborate it before it can become valid testimony.<sup>10</sup>
2. In the case of the Hebrew Bible, the only possible external witness will have to come from archaeology, either in the form of artifacts and ecofacts that it recovers or in extrabiblical textual evidence.

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<sup>9</sup> The term "early" is used in this study to describe the transition from the Late Bronze Age to early in Iron Age I, a time period normally understood as the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, BCE.

<sup>10</sup> Italics and quotation marks are Dever's.



3. The essential, indeed the only, correct method is to “interrogate” each witness separately; to use the same or closely similar interpretive methods in “reading” the evidence, agreed upon by both textual and material culture specialists; to establish the pertinent “facts” as such, critically and selectively; and to compare the various sources of information and the facts derived from them so as to arrive at a synthesis that summarizes what is known or claimed to be known.<sup>11</sup>

Such a methodology should apply to any and all disciplines seeking to understand the individual contexts of the witnesses under examination. Defining the context and its component parts is an essential prelude to understanding. Individual disciplines focusing on a narrow range of topics, often divorced from the broader context, cannot hope to find enduring answers to the questions they are asking.

Geographic studies concerning the land of Israel normally begin by consulting the plethora of atlases available today. In recent years some outstanding volumes have been published that seek to amend the shortcomings of earlier volumes.<sup>12</sup> Examples of note include *The Sacred Bridge*, authored by Drs. Anson Rainey and Steven Notley and published by Jerusalem based Carta. It seeks to acquaint the reader with a comprehensive Near Eastern background to the Land and the biblical text. Both Rainey and Notley taught classes in the physical geography of the land of Israel for many years. Both are teachers with vast experience studying the land and leading study tours to acquaint others with the land. *The Holman Bible Atlas* is authored by Dr. Thomas Briscoe, a professor of biblical backgrounds and archaeology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. It is a good classroom teaching tool for those who are encountering

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<sup>11</sup> Cf, William Dever, *What Did The Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp.106-107.

<sup>12</sup> The geographic sources mentioned in the above comments have been consulted through the geographic portion of this study found in chapter 2 as noted in the chapter footnotes and the bibliography following chapter 5.

the physical setting of the biblical text for the first time. The Zondervan Bible Atlas authored by Dr. Carl Rasmussen, professor emeritus of Old Testament at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota. He also taught and guided tours in Israel, Jordan, Turkey, Greece and Italy for sixteen years and served most of that time as an adjunct professor at Jerusalem University College on Mt. Zion, Jerusalem. The text couples solid and readable maps with clear full color photographs. A major portion of the atlas seeks to illustrate the biblical text through maps and historic references that accurately model the people and their life events found in the biblical text. Again, an excellent entry level work. The same comments are descriptive of The New Moody Atlas of the Bible authored by Dr. Barry J. Beitzel, professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. Its strongest asset is the extensive cross referencing of sites through a general index for locating proper names and important subjects. Its numerous endnotes provide documentation that is extremely helpful to the researcher. A new entry to the field is the Rose Then and Now Bible Map Atlas by Dr. Paul Wright, President of Jerusalem University College on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem. It includes all the above features with an additional benefit not seen in the others. The 120 full color topographical maps are enhanced further in their usefulness by the inclusion of occasional transparent plastic overlays indicating the modern political boundaries accurately interfacing with the maps beneath them. The best offering for introductory studies is the oversize soft cover series of maps and text entitled Regions on the Run authored by James Monson. The text acquaints the reader with the different geographic regions of the land of Israel. However, its greatest strength is a free 100+ page download available on the internet from their web site which guides the reader

through an exhaustive marking process indexed and illustrating the biblical text on 7 regional clear and accurate oversize maps.<sup>13</sup>

A multitude of biblical text based commentaries from widely divergent perspectives are available. For the purpose of this study, that broad field of available data has been limited to critical commentaries and articles that deal with the extant issues of text formation and literary analysis. A trustworthy primary text based source is found in the Anchor Bible series. The primary volumes consulted and formative to this study include: “Judges” by Robert Boling, Professor of Old Testament at McCormick Theological Seminary; 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel by P. Kyle McCarter, William Foxwell Albright Professor of Biblical and Near Eastern Studies at Johns Hopkins University; 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles by Jacob Myers, Professor Emeritus at Lutheran Theological Seminary; and an additional stand-alone volume outside of the Anchor Bible series is “Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel” by S. R. Driver, Regius Professor of Hebrew and Canon of Christ Church, Oxford.<sup>14</sup>

Archaeological investigation and research is best accomplished by accessing the primary documents or “dig reports” generated by the team of experts and specialists involved in the excavation site in question. The listing, cataloging and interpretation of the raw data generated on a specific site and its immediate context is best understood by those who are working on the site and intimately acquainted that all that is discovered “in

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<sup>13</sup> See downloads on [www.bibback.com](http://www.bibback.com).

<sup>14</sup> Additional bibliographic references to volumes and articles concerning the critical problems of text formation and the historicity and historiography of the biblical text are found in the introductory comments concerning the text in chapter one, the treatment of specific texts in chapter three and the full citation of sources in the bibliographic section of this study following chapter five.

situ.”<sup>15</sup> Articles and volumes generated subsequent to fieldwork are often helpful by illuminating and surfacing difficulties and problems not yet addressed. However, the starting point for all serious analysis must be the primary data. In terms of this study, the published dig reports and associated articles for Tell Gezer, Ekron/Tel Migne, Timnah/Tel Batash, Tel Beth Shemesh/ein Shems, Tel es-Safi/Gath, Tel Azekah/Tel Zakariya and Khirbet Qeiyafa are the primary sources consulted for the data presented in chapter four.<sup>16</sup>

The literature addressing each of the three disciplines mentioned above seek to provide data from the perspective of their respective disciplines. All three of the above mentioned disciplines or areas of study often cite data from one or more of the other fields of study. However, this researcher cannot find an extant example of all three disciplines standing alone as independent witnesses followed by a comparative analysis of the contribution each makes to a more comprehensive picture of the whole. Interrelationships of population groups and a clearer understanding of the greater context controlling those relations cannot be adequately addressed by any individual area of study. Therefore, this dissertation will seek to find a proper synthesis and balance between the presentation of the biblical narrative and the archaeological remains while adding a third often neglected and sometimes altogether ignored area of witness – the

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<sup>15</sup> “in situ” refers to the immediate and wider context of an item, feature, or artifact in its specific relationship to its surroundings as encountered on the excavation site before it is moved or removed for further study.

<sup>16</sup> The bibliographic data for these sources will be found in the citations accompanying the argumentation in chapter four and the fuller bibliographic entries following chapter five.

local and regional geographic/geological setting. Chapters two, three and four will address the primary question from each discipline's individual viewpoint.

The second chapter of this dissertation examines the geographic setting found in the northern Shephelah and explores the role natural boundaries and barriers play in defining the interrelationships between Israelites and Philistines during their early encounters in the Northern Shephelah. The role of the distinctive geographical features of each location in the greater ridge and valley systems between the central highlands and the coastal plain will be examined in terms of isolation and relative security, access routes between the coastal plain, the central highlands and international routes of trade and traffic, as well as the strategic merits of each site's ability to defend itself against uninvited intrusion. This chapter will conclude with a summary of the findings in terms of how the geography and topography impact access and security relative to Philistine and Israelite interaction in the Northern Shephelah.

The third chapter of this dissertation will examine the Hebrew Bible's textual representation of interrelationships between Israelites and the Philistines during their early encounters in the Sorek and Elah basins of the Northern Shephelah. The biblical texts selected include the Samson cycle located in the Sorek System as found in Judges 13-16; the David and Goliath narratives located in the Elah System as found in 1 Samuel 17; David and his encounter with the Philistines at Keilah as found in 1 Samuel 23; David living among the Philistines as found in 1 Samuel 27-31 and 2 Samuel 1; and the Ark/Ekron/Beth Shemesh narratives in the Sorek System as found in 1 Samuel 1-4. These narratives will be used as primary points of departure to explore the biblical text's perception of the ever changing regional relationships between Israel and the Philistines.

Additional biblical references in Joshua 10, 12, 16 and 21; Judges 1; 2 Samuel 5; 1 Kings 9; and 1 Chronicles 6, 7, 14 and 20 will be consulted with reference to the changing ethnic footprint observed in the text concerning Gezer, located in the Aijalon Valley system north of the Sorek. This third chapter also addresses interpretive issues arising from the biblical text's representation of the interrelationships between Israelites and Philistines. The text's description of events appears to be better understood within the framework of the biblical writer's contemporary world rather than that of the historic setting asserted by the text. How this is to be understood is a major element of this chapter's presentation and summary.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation examines the archaeological data from representative cities in their respective valley systems targeting the time period and geographic setting represented by the biblical text. The extensive information available from the Sorek basin from both Ekron/Tel Miqne and Beth Shemesh/Ain Shems will be the primary focus. Additional archaeological information from Timnah/Tel Batash, though of lesser value, will also be consulted. Newly available information from Tel es-Safi in the Elah basin will also be evaluated and summarized. Azekah and Khirbet Qeiyafa, also in the Elah system, will be utilized as corroborative sources rather than primary sources due to the paucity of material available in comparison to the Sorek Valley sites listed. Tel Gezer in the Aijalon Valley will be utilized as an additional archaeological source for purposes of regional considerations. The archaeological data contributing to a fuller understanding of the interrelationships between Israelites and Philistines will be summarized and presented.

The fifth chapter of this dissertation summarizes the contributions of the preceding chapters. The relative merits of the three primary disciplines are evaluated and related to one another in answer to the primary question raised in this Introductory Chapter - “How do the geographic/geologic, biblical, and archaeological witnesses contribute to our understanding of Israelite and Philistine interrelationships during their early encounters in the Northern Shephelah?” This researcher expects the aforementioned balanced and inclusive multidiscipline approach to the question posed will provide a model for further study and an interpretive context within which stereotypical understandings are broadened.

## Chapter Two

### The Physical Setting

#### A Regional Introduction

Population groups do not exist in a vacuum. The primary context of any group is the land upon which they live, interact with those around them or travel through. While archaeology examines the material remains marking their passage and literature seeks to tell the story of their existence, the physical setting in which they lived and died should be one's starting point. This chapter will examine the topography and geology of the land of Israel, and specifically the northern Shephelah, to establish a primary context in which one can more fully understand the significant contributions of the biblical text and the archaeological remains.

The text of the bible describes the boundaries of the land of Israel by utilizing landmarks familiar to the people of the biblical world. The most common description, as found in Judges 20:1, indicates the land extends from Dan/Laish to Beer-sheba/Tel Be'er Sheva, a north to south distance of approximately 233 kilometers.<sup>17</sup> The text further designates the area covered by the cities of tribal Judah to extend from Geba/Geva to Beer-sheba with the southern border of Judah extending to Kadesh-barnea, about 72 kilometers south of Beer-sheba.<sup>18</sup> The biblical text in Numbers 34:4 also states that Israel occupied the area now known as the Transjordan from Mount Herman in the north to the

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<sup>17</sup> The present day archaeological site of biblical Beer-Sheva is referred to as Tel Beer-sheba. The present day archaeological site of biblical Dan/Laish is now referred to as Tel Dan.

<sup>18</sup> 2 Kings 23:8, Numbers 34:4.



Arnon River in the south (see Figure 1).<sup>19</sup> The physical setting is best described as five distinct and well defined regions (see Figure 2) which lie between the Mediterranean Sea and the Transjordan Plateau. Following the latitude of the Dead Sea from west to east the regions are known as the Coastal Plain, the Shephelah, the Hill Country, the Wilderness, and the Arabah or the Jordan Rift Valley. The Hill Country occupying the north to south central ridge portion of the country is approximately 16 kilometers in width, west to east, and 112 kilometers in length, north to south.

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<sup>19</sup> Deuteronomy 3:8. It should also be noted that the southern border fluctuated between the Arnon and Wadi Husban (the southernmost tributary of the Jordan).

Adapted from Brisco, (1998), *Map 7*, p. 13.

The biblical writers often subdivided the mountainous central spine of the country into two general regions: the Hill Country of Ephraim that lies in the northern half of the country; and the Hill Country of Judah that lies in the southern half. The object of this study, the Northern Shephelah, lies west of these two mountainous territories and east of the coastal plain known as the Plain of Philistia.<sup>20</sup>

The main highways (see Figure 3) traversing the land of Canaan played an important role in the history of the land. From earliest times traders and caravans utilized these roads to transport products, special objects and the luxuries demanded by the societies they served. The routes were not open to trade and commerce alone. Those who were intent on military conquest and assertions of hegemony moved along these same routes, often leaving in their wake destruction and desolation. To locate and trace the geography of these routes is to understand the paths of interaction among the people of the Levant, Egypt and Mesopotamia. Israel, living primarily in the central hill country, was bounded to their east and their west by these two international routes. The more important of the two was the International Coastal Highway or the Via Maris (see Figure 2) exposing Israel's western border to the traffic and the population groups that occupied or traversed the Coastal Plain.

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<sup>20</sup> In Figure 2 the Plain of Philistia is simply designated Coast.



Figure 2: Israel's Regions  
Adapted from Aharoni, (1993), page 14.





along the eastern edge of the Sharon plain until it reached the Carmel range. From there it led through the Megiddo pass to the Jezreel Valley and beyond to Damascus, while branches turned towards the Beqa Valley in the north and Transjordan to the east.<sup>21</sup> The eastern branch, towards Transjordan, crossed the Jezreel valley and turned north at the Sea of Galilee towards Hazor/Tel Hazor.<sup>22</sup> North of Hazor, the road turns east passing below the Southern flank of Mount Herman and joins the King's Highway at Damascus. This highway was the main artery to and from Anatolia, Mesopotamia and Egypt. The bulk of the land traffic passing between the continents of Africa and Asia utilized it. The land of Canaan occupied the narrow strip of land between the desert to the east and the Mediterranean Sea to the west. The International Coastal Highway, located between the sea and the central hill country is the only easily navigated land bridge between the two continents. As such, this narrow strip of land traversing the coastal plain and the northern Shephelah (see Figures 2 & 3) has great strategic and economic value.

The King's Highway or The Royal Highway<sup>23</sup> was located in Transjordan and functioned as a second international north/south thoroughfare. Its northern section was sometimes referred to as the "Way of Bashan."<sup>24</sup> While its significance never rose to the level of that of the International Coastal Highway, it did serve as an alternate route and connected the port at Elat with Damascus.<sup>25</sup> As the two major north/south highways

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<sup>21</sup> See David Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 57.

<sup>22</sup> Hazor/Tel Hazor was strategically located in the narrow band of negotiable land between the swampy Hula Basin to the East and the mountains of Galilee to the West.

<sup>23</sup> Numbers 20:17 and 21:22 name the Transjordanian Highway the "King's" or the "Royal" Highway.

<sup>24</sup> Numbers 21:33; Deut. 3:1.

<sup>25</sup> See Lemche's excellent description of this highway. Niels Peter Lemche, *Ancient Israel*, (Sheffield: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1988), pp. 25-26.

approached Damascus they joined into one thoroughfare which continued north to eventually unite with the major east/west routes connecting Mesopotamia with Anatolia. The importance of such access to the world's trade routes for Egypt, Israel and the surrounding countries cannot be overestimated. Both of these trade routes offered the local societies the possibility of economic gain by taxing or charging tolls to transport goods through their territory. This is especially true of the International Coastal Highway. It should come as no surprise that the more sizable towns lay adjacent to these major routes. The importation and trading of material goods was of great benefit to the traveler as well as the indigenous population. Constant contact with the other great surrounding cultures and their religious and ideological views ensured that the people of the land were well acquainted with the multicultural aspects of life in the ancient Near East. However, the positive benefits of international routes and its subsequent trade also carried with it some undesirable elements. Traders, seeking to protect their goods and the trade routes that provided their livelihood would naturally want to make certain the routes available to them remained open and secure. A great and powerful producer could provide essential security for their trade by controlling the route and/or the land the routes traversed. Greater security would also provide their merchant's with a decided advantage in the marketplace thereby maximizing their profits. Though the routes were primarily utilized for trade they were also the major routes for moving military men and materials underscoring their strategic value for foreign armies on the move. The question of hegemony then becomes vital for foreign powers and the local population. Canaan was frequently both a field of confrontation and of battles for foreign powers, very much to the detriment of the local population. Evidence of foreign hegemony is seen in

descriptive terms employed by a Babylonian king, Burra-Burriyas, addressing an Egyptian king, Naphurureya, in Amarna letter EA 8. The Babylonian king refers to Canaan as the Egyptian king's country indicating his perception of Egyptian hegemony on the western coast of Canaan.

Now my merchants who were on their way with Ahu-tabu, were detained in Canaan for business matters....(others) sent their men, killed my merchants and took away their money....Canaan is your country, and its kings are your servants. In your country I have been despoiled.<sup>26</sup>

The positive and negative elements associated with the international highways paralleling Israel on her western and eastern flanks only stand to underscore the strategic importance of controlling both flanks. Any points of crossover or connection (see Figure 4) providing access between the two major highways would be of equal strategic value. Such crossover points could also prove to be areas of vulnerability for Israel.

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<sup>26</sup> Cf, William Moran, *The Amarna Letters*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) p. 16-17.



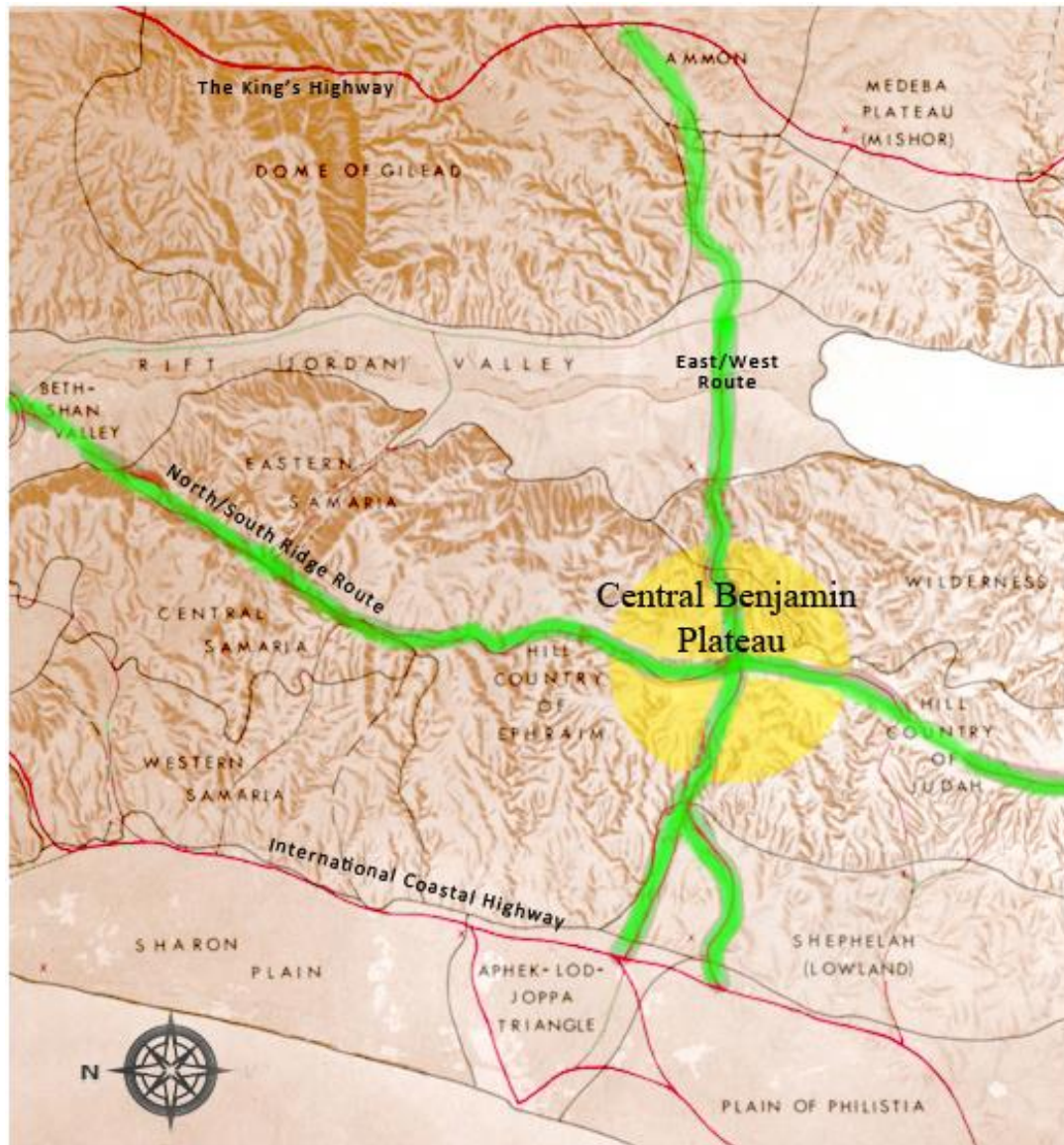


Figure 4: The North – South Ridge Route

Adapted from Monson, *Geographic Basics*, Map 3 (Eastern Orientation Map).

The North/South Ridge Route – “The Way of the Patriarchs”<sup>27</sup>

“When Israel occupied the highlands of Canaan, numerous regional and local roads developed. Probably the most important of these was the famous north/south thoroughfare. Already old by the biblical period, this central route passed longitudinally through the highlands of Judah and Samaria, connecting

<sup>27</sup> Allusions to this route can be found in Judges 19; 2 Sam. 15-16; 1 Kings 12; 2 Kings 10; Jer. 41; Gen. 12:6-9; 28:10-19; 35:1-27; 37:12-18.

such nationally prominent cities as Hebron, Jerusalem, Gibeah, Ramah, Bethel, Shechem, Ibleam, and Jezreel.<sup>28</sup>

This route is also known as the Central Ridge Route or the Watershed Route. It follows the north-south ridge traversing the central highlands and for much of its length marks the watershed of the mountainous spine of the country. Aharoni describes this route in a similar manner.

One longitudinal road of some importance is that through the hill country which runs along the length of the north-south mountain ridge.<sup>29</sup>

The two international routes, one to the East on the present day Jordanian Plateau, and one to the West, on the Coastal Plain, paralleled this third route which traversed the central ridge hill country from north to south. Judges 1:18-19, a passage that most scholars agree reflects the close of the Late Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age indicates that Israel proved unable to effectively control the international coastal route.<sup>30</sup> The Central Benjamin Plateau<sup>31</sup> (see Figure 3) possessed a section of the only north/south road consistently available to the Israelites until the time the biblical text represents as the United Monarchy under King David.<sup>32</sup> Several roads of lesser importance also existed. Indeed, their existence was made possible because of the generally level terrain of the Central Benjamin Plateau, a condition not present in most of the Hill Country of Judah and Ephraim.

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<sup>28</sup> See Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*, 117.

<sup>29</sup> Yohanan Aharoni, *Land of the Bible*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979), 57-58.

<sup>30</sup> Judges 1:18-19

<sup>31</sup> CBP shall be used to designate the Central Benjamin Plateau, the bowl shaped land area in the tribal district assigned to Benjamin some 8 kilometers north of Jerusalem.

<sup>32</sup> Circa 1000 B.C.E.

### The East-West Routes (see Figure 4)

Historically there have only been three prominent East-West roads within Israelite territory. Neither the east-west road in the north connecting the coastal areas with Beth-shean nor the east-west road in the south traversing the Negev, had a consistent existence or were always under the control of Israel. (see Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6)

“The third road and its alternate routes is then of paramount importance. Touching Gibeon, Ramah, and Geba as it traversed the Central Benjamin Plateau, this highway system ultimately connected the King’s Highway in Transjordan with the International Coastal route on the Coastal Plain. In doing so, this system joined Jericho via Ramah with the ascending and descending ridge route passing through Beth-horon and subsequently entering the Aijalon Valley in the Shephelah linking with the Chalk Route extending north and south thus connecting the Aijalon, with Joppa, Azekah and Lachish.”<sup>33</sup>

Harold Brodsky observes that “one would have had to travel beyond Shechem, some 40 kilometers farther north, to the Wadi Fari to find a route from the coast to the Jordan River that would have been equally attractive.”<sup>34</sup>

### The Eastern Entrances to the Central Benjamin Plateau

The rugged and desolate nature of the Judean wilderness has always been a somewhat formidable barrier to east/west traffic. Only a few roads passed through it in ancient times (see Figure 5). In the case of the routes leading to the eastern edge of the Central Benjamin Plateau (hereafter, CBP) it can easily be said that all roads lead from Jericho. The northern and southern of the three major Routes technically do not enter the CBP itself. However, they do intersect the Central Ridge Route just north of and just south of the CBP thereby affording easy access to the Plateau and necessitating their

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<sup>33</sup> Keith Allen Shubert, *The Role of the Central Benjamin Plateau in the Early Divided Monarchy*, (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 2000), 60-61.

<sup>34</sup> Harold Brodsky, “Bethel,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1, A-C, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), p. 711.



inclusion in this study.

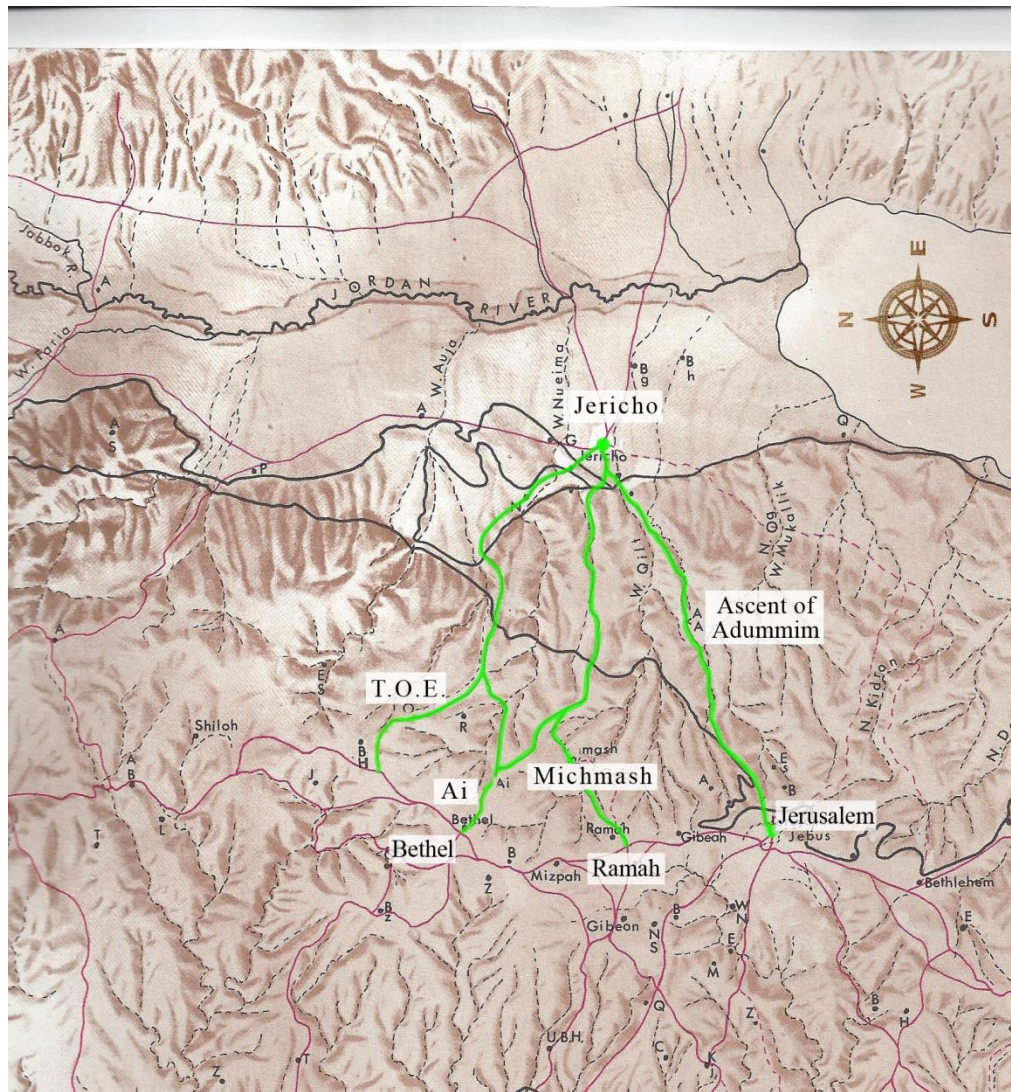


Figure 5: The Eastern Entrances to the Central Benjamin Plateau  
Adapted from Monson, *Geography Basics in the Land of the Bible*, Map 6.

*The Jericho-Ai-Bethel Road and the Taiyba-Ophrah-Ephraim (TOE) Road is the northern most of the three routes from Jericho to the CBP. It ascends along a ridge entered just west of Jericho and follows the natural line of the topography into the Hill Country. Near the summit of the ridge line where the terrain begins to flatten, an alternate*

route forks off towards the north bypassing Bethel. It intersects the Central Ridge Route northwest of Ophrah linking Jericho with Ephraim (see Figure 5).

*The Ascent of Adummim* or *The Jericho-Jerusalem Road* is the southern route of the three linking Jericho and points beyond with the CBP. It ascends westward skirting to the south of the Wadi Qelt drainage system following the ridge lines into the Hill Country, a route later duplicated by the Roman road builders. Several biblical citations refer to it as the “Arabah Road.”<sup>35</sup> As was the case with the Jericho-Bethel road, it too does not enter the CBP. Its importance is in the alternate route it provides by directly linking Jericho to Jerusalem just a few hundred meters to the east of the Central Ridge Route and to points beyond at the CBP’s southern terminus (Figure 5).

*The Michmash Road* is the most important of the three major routes from the east (see Figure 5). Jericho is linked with the village of Michmash beyond which the road forks to the northwest and the west. The northwest fork goes on to Bethel and the Central Ridge Route. The westward fork gains direct access to the CBP and links up with the Central Ridge Route. Most importantly, it provides a direct link with the major route(s) descending to the west eventually linking the CBP to the International Coastal Route.

#### The Western Entrances to the Plateau

The two most northern major routes ascending to the CBP from the west leave the coastal plain at the eastern terminus of their respective valley systems, the Aijalon and the Sorek. There are four major valley systems to the west of the Hill country in this central portion of Israel, of which the northern three and their respective routes to the Central Highlands, the CBP and the Central Ridge Route in the area of Bethlehem are of

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<sup>35</sup> Cf, 2 Kings 25:4; Jeremiah 39:4; 52:7.

importance to this study (see Figure 6). The valleys lie parallel to one another stretching from west to east in the Shephelah between the Coastal Plain and the Hill Country. These three, the Aijalon, Sorek and Elah Valley systems, afford the Hill Country an extra measure of protection because of the ruggedness of the surrounding terrain. The ridge routes to the central highlands ascending to the east of the valley systems are narrow with very steep sides creating deep “V” shaped valleys and gorges between them. If one is to travel to the east from the coastal plain these ridge routes offer the only reasonable passage.

*The Beth-Horon Ridge route* from Gezer to Aijalon to Gibeon was the western gateway to Jerusalem (see Figure 6). Several important local roads link the International Coastal Route with the base of the Beth-Horon ridge system providing access to the CBP, Jerusalem just to the south, Jericho and the King’s Highway beyond to the east. This strategic route was the only easy ascent into the Hill Country for kilometers in either direction. Lower Beth-Horon guarded access to the road from the west while further up the ridge, Upper Beth-Horon guarded access from the east (see Figure 6 and Joshua 10:10-11). Above Upper Beth-Horon the road fans out in several directions affording the traveler easy access to the CBP and its crossroads to the north east and south. This particular CBP access road is mentioned often in the bible.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Joshua 10:10-11 calls the route the “Ascent of Beth-Horon;” three armies used the route for hasty retreats (Josh. 19:10ff; 1 Sam. 14:31; 2 Sam. 5:22-25); Solomon fortified the cities along the ridge (1 Kings 9:17; 2 Chron. 8:5).

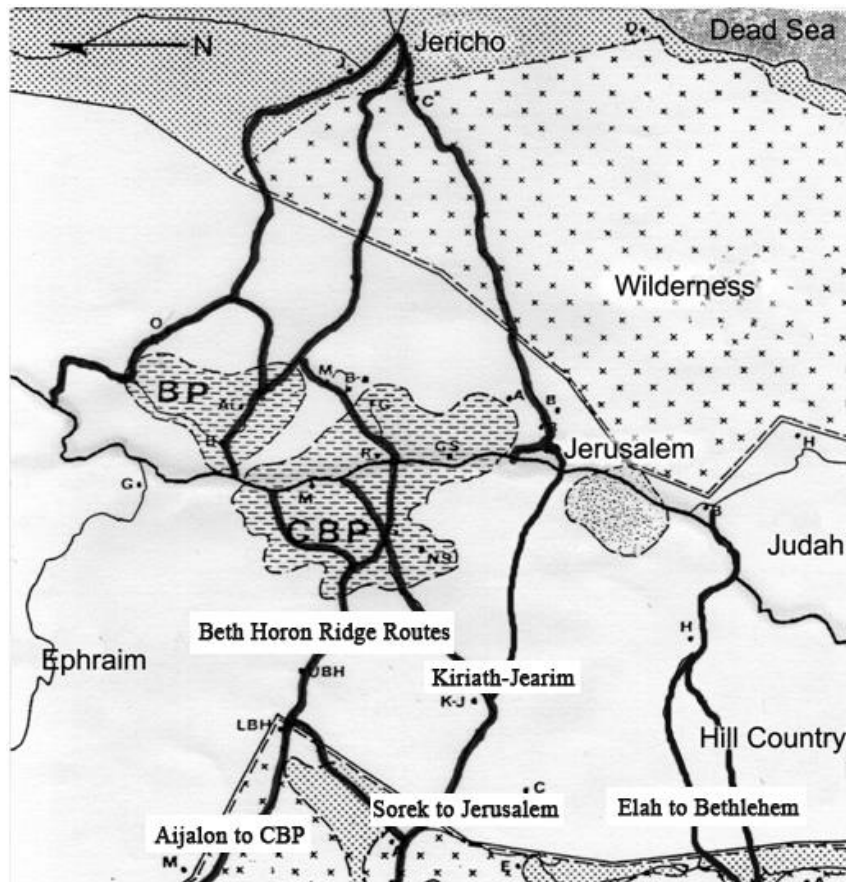


Figure 6: Access Routes to and from the CBP and the Central Ridge Route  
Adapted from notes and handouts distributed by Dr. Carl Rasmussen during a classroom lecture on geographic backgrounds to the Bible, Jerusalem University College, Israel, 1994.

*The Beth Shemesh-Kiriath Jearim route* is less direct and more arduous than the Beth-Horon route (see Figure 8). The route heads northeast from one of the Philistine capital cities, Ekron/Tel Migne, on the Coastal Plain entering the Sorek Valley, passing by Timnah/Tel Batash and finally Beth-Shemesh/Ein Shems, at the head of the Sorek Valley, then turns east to climb the ridges that intersect Kiriath-Jearim along the way. The ancient road forks at Kiriath-Jearim into two routes, the southern of which begins a more direct but very difficult climb to Jerusalem while the northern one joins the local system of the CBP above Upper Beth-Horon just west of Gibeon. Though a more difficult route and thereby less used, the biblical narrative describes the Ark's return from

Kiriath-Jearim to Jerusalem by this route.<sup>37</sup> The same road seems to fit the description of Judah's northern border which ran from Jerusalem through Me-nephtaoh, Kiriath-Jearim and on to Beth-Shemesh,<sup>38</sup> thus attributing greater importance to the route than would be justified by the amount of traffic it carried compared to the route flowing east out of the Aijalon.

*The Azekah-Bethlehem route* (see Figure 8) connects the Coastal Plain at one of the Philistine capitals, Gath, with the entrance to the Elah Valley twisting to the south past Azekah and then turning east, passing Socoh, exiting the Elah and climbing east up a steep and difficult ridge route to the Central Highlands in the Bethlehem area some 24 kilometers south of Jerusalem.

Geographic location drives the strategic, political and economic significance of these three valleys and the access they provide to the Central Benjamin Plateau and the North-South Ridge route (see Figure 8). They connect the Coastal Plain with the Central Highlands, provide access to the local population as well as the international community, and therefore their control directly affects the economic, political and military security of the Central Highlands. The critical movement of goods and services and the positioning of military equipment and manpower are both determined by the location of the roads and crossroads by which one gains access to the larger surrounding community and beyond. Therefore, the problems involved in understanding settlement patterns and interaction between various groups within the land are best approached by first observing the

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<sup>37</sup> Cf, 1 Sam. 6:20-7:2; 2 Sam 6.

<sup>38</sup> Cf, Joshua 15:9-10.





Israel's central highlands. The valley systems are the first line of defense for the Central Highlands. If one controls the traffic in the valley systems and especially their eastern terminus, access to the ridge routes is denied thereby protecting access to the Central Highlands. Each of the three valleys in question provides access to the traveler, be he peaceful or malevolent, seeking to gain passage to the highlands. The floors of the respective valleys in question (see Figure 7, colored in yellow) become the highways between the coastal plains and the ridge routes moving into the highlands at the eastern extremity of the valleys. Any eastward encroachment launched by the Philistines from their north-eastern capitals of Ekron and Gath on the coastal plain can be effectively opposed or countered by Israelite cities and towns within or at the Western end of their respective valleys. In the Sorek Valley, Ekron is countered by Beth Shemesh. In the Elah valley, Gath is countered by Azekah and (during Iron Age I) Qeiyafa (see Figures 7 and 8).

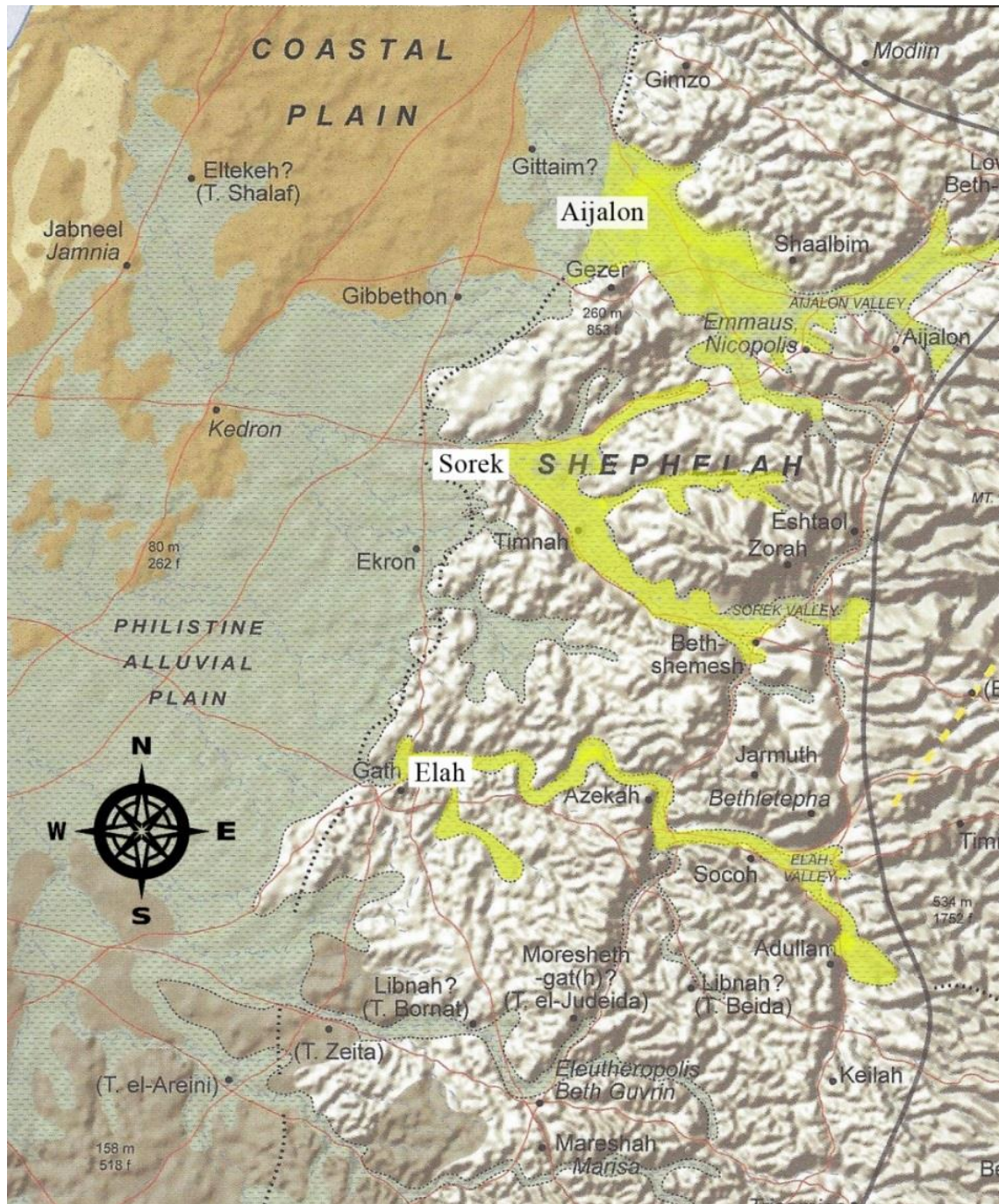


Figure 8: The Northern Shephelah and the Valley Systems  
Adapted from Monson, "Geobasics in the Land of the Bible," Page 18.



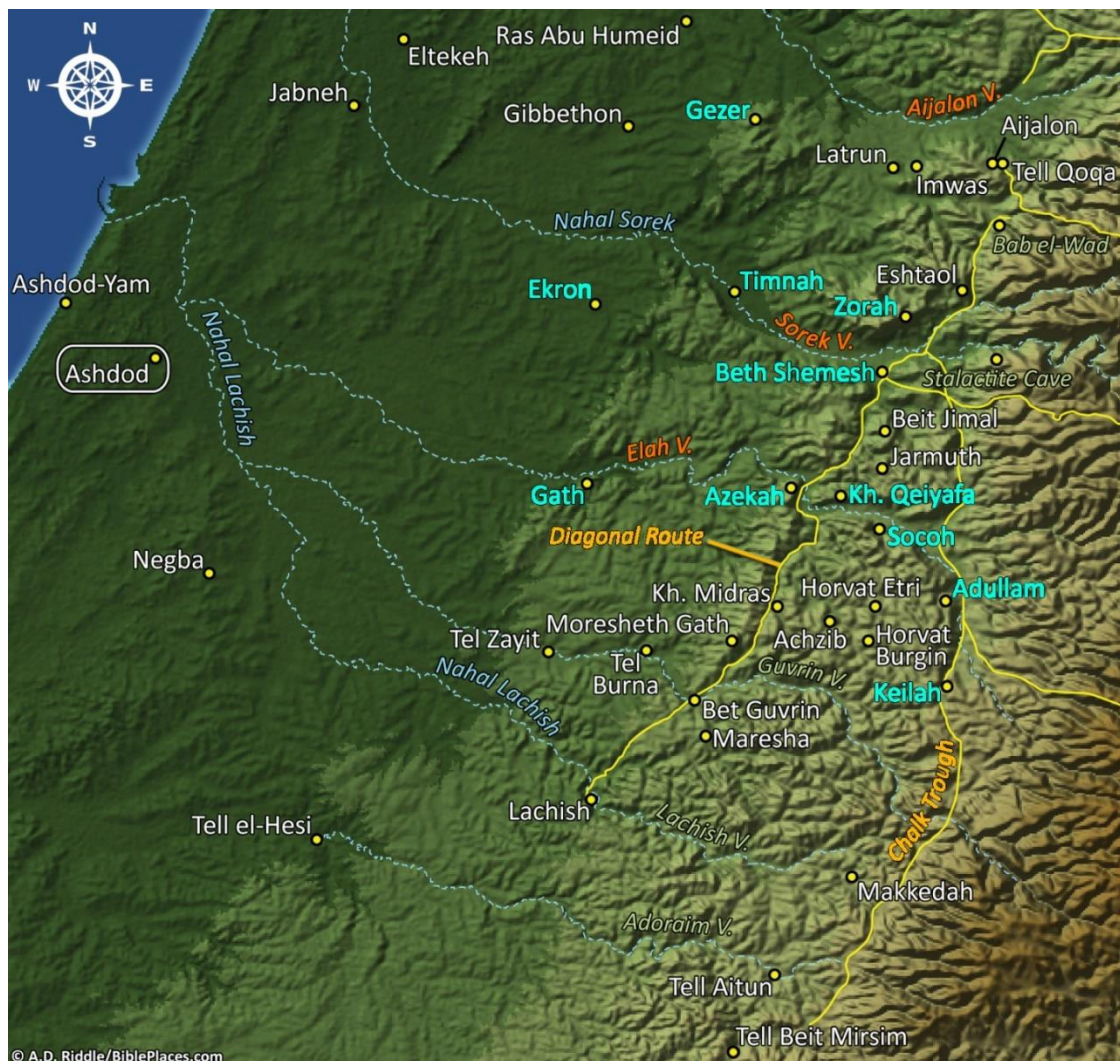


Figure 9: The Shephelah and Major North – South Routes

Adapted from stock photos found online @ [www.bibleplaces.com](http://www.bibleplaces.com) – The Shephelah

The Coastal Highway is paralleled inland by the north-south routes through the Shephelah. The primary route in the Shephelah begins at Lachish in the south and travels North passing to the east of Azekah in the center of the Elah Valley (see Figure 9) and continues through Beth Shemesh giving access to the ridge routes east of the Sorek and Aijalon Valleys (see Figure 7, the route marked Sh2, and Figure 9, the Diagonal Route). An alternative route, further east in the Shephelah and more thoroughly sheltered by the

surrounding terrain than the primary route, is a secondary road extending from Tell Beth Mirsim in the south, and extending north through Makkedah, Adullam at the eastern end of the Elah Valley, and joining the primary route east of Beth Shemesh (see Figure 7, the route marked Sh1 and, see Figure 9, The Chalk Trough). This route lies hidden from the Coastal Plain and affords the traveler exceptional security provided by the natural geological formations.

*Regional geological considerations* further explain the natural barriers and boundaries associated with the valley systems and the surrounding terrain. The valley floors are unusually fertile due to deep deposits of alluvial soil. This water borne soil descends from the hill country during the winter seasonal rains and collects in the valley basins and eastern portion of the coastal plain (see Figure 10, Alluvia is drawn in pale green). The East-West Valleys lying between the Coastal Plain and the Central Highlands are framed by steep rocky limestone ridges that define the valleys and separate them from each other. The Aijalon and the Sorek ridges are primarily made up of Senonian limestone, a chalky limestone that easily erodes off of the heights and is used primarily for a primitive plaster. Senonian limestone is not suitable for building major structures and is usually laced with flint beds and flint shards. It is often found between areas of Eocene chalk and Cenomanian limestone and sometimes erodes into deep and difficult canyons. The steep sides of the Aijalon and Sorek valleys are clear examples of exposed Senonian limestone while the alternate road, the Chalk Trough, is an excellent example of the passes that form in the seams between the differing grades of limestone mentioned above (see Figure 10, the area colored in brown). The Western edge of the Aijalon and Sorek valley ridges are made up of the softer Eocene limestone as are all of



the ridges surrounding the Elah valley - with the exception of the extreme eastern edge (see Figure 10, the area colored in beige and designated “Shephelah” in the darkly shaded area).

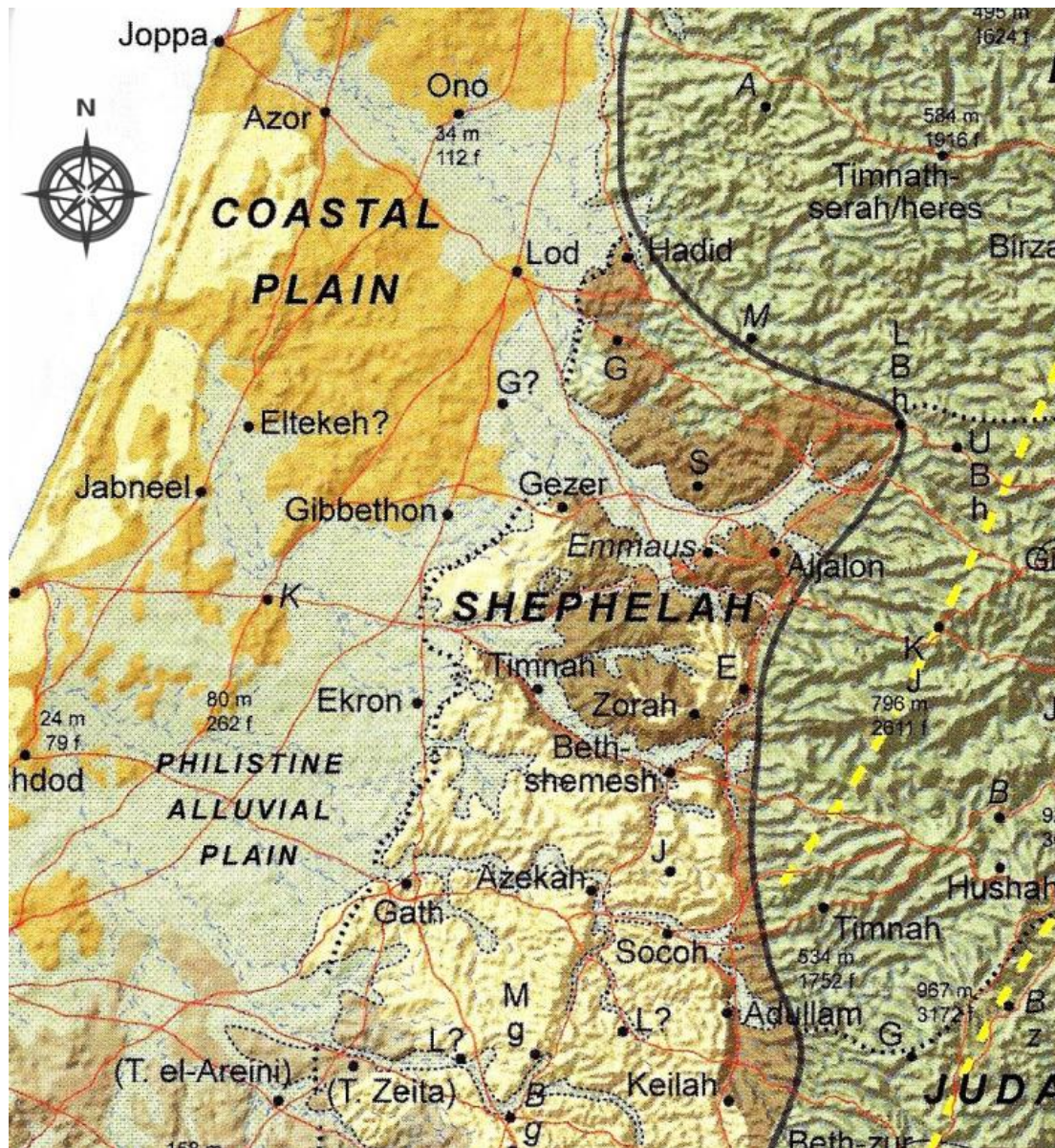


Figure 10: The Geology of the Shephelah  
Adapted from Monson, “Geobasics in the Land of the Bible,” p. 18.

*The Topographic - Geographic Barriers* that separate the various settlements, their respective industries and agricultural endeavors help one to understand and

anticipate how the people residing in each will relate to one another. The location of the roads and settlements are governed by and conform to the contours of the land. As the valleys narrow in their respective twists and turns, choke points are encountered. These narrow sections are of great strategic advantage forcing the traveler to pass in close proximity to the check points and villages situated for just such a purpose. This is especially true at the valley's eastern terminus providing ideal locations for defensive positions to guard the entry points of the ridge routes to the central highlands. The wide entrances of the Coastal Plain enjoyed by the eastward traveler rapidly give way to narrowing valleys bounded on either side by steep rocky hills that encourage one to remain on the valley floor. The resultant ease of travel would be of great advantage to a tradesman laden with goods or a military cohort laden with equipment. However, ease of travel comes at the cost of a lack of alternate routes or room to maneuver when one is under attack. Hence, what is seen as an asset can quickly become a liability when the respective roles are reversed.

Governing the western entrance to the *Aijalon Valley* is the city of Gezer. It is strategically located is just east of the International Coastal Highway (see Figure 6) and overlooking the road that 10 kilometers to the east joins the Beth Horon Ridge route to the Highlands. The location affords its citizens both ample opportunity for trade and exposure to invasion by hostile forces seeking access to the central highlands. The exceptional view of the valley beyond (see Figure 11) and the city's fortified gates and walls (see Figure 12) speak directly to the security challenges such a location requires. For purposes of this study, Gezer, its archaeological context and material record, will be secondary to observations made concerning the Sorek and Elah systems and utilized as a

contemporary corroborative witness to test the conclusions and findings forthcoming from the study of the two valley systems to the immediate south.

*The Sorek System* is central to this study. Its western terminus flows out onto the coastal plain and in close proximity to Ekron/Tel Migne, one of the five Philistine capital cities (see Figures 8 & 10).



Figure 11: The Aijalon Valley and the Central Highlands  
Adapted from a stock photo found online @ [www.holylandphotos.org](http://www.holylandphotos.org)  
Photo taken from Tel Gezer looking to the Northeast





Figure 12: The Aijalon Valley from Tel Gezer  
Private Photo taken from Tel Gezer looking to the Southeast, Summer, 2004.



Figure 13: Tel Mique (Biblical Ekron) in the Plain of Philistia  
Adapted from a stock image found online @ [www.archaeological.org](http://www.archaeological.org)

The Sorek, though much wider at its western entrance, gradually narrows as one moves east towards Timnah/Tel Batash (see Figure 14). As the valley turns to the southwest below Timnah, the floor begins to narrow as the hills on either side begin to steepen (see Figure 15).<sup>39</sup>



Figure 14: Tel Batash (Biblical Timnah) in the Sorek Valley  
Adapted from a stock image found online @ [www.archaeological.org](http://www.archaeological.org)

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<sup>39</sup> Figure 15 locates Timnah/Tel Batash just a few meters above the flat valley floor in the central portion of the Sorek. The valley narrows and the surrounding hills become steeper beyond this point as a traveler heads towards the east.

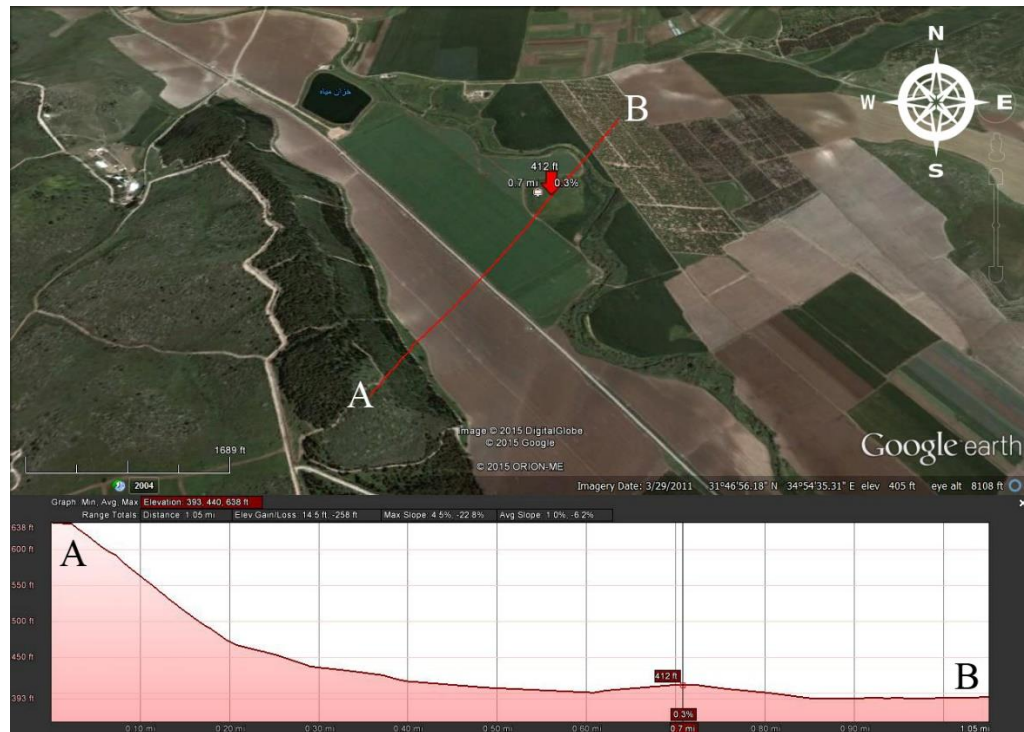


Figure 15: Sorek Cross Section at Timnah  
Adapted from [www.googleearth.com](http://www.googleearth.com)

Continuing another 8 kilometers to the southeast from Timnah, the valley gradually turns almost due east and passes north of Beth Shemesh (see Figure 16). As it moves toward Beth Shemesh it continues to narrow as the valley walls become higher and steeper (see Figure 17). Beth Shemesh guards the eastern terminus of the valley and its access to the routes climbing to the central ridge route and Jerusalem.





Figure 16: Tel Beth Shemesh in the Sorek Valley  
Adapted from a stock image found online @ [www.archaeological.org](http://www.archaeological.org)  
View to the South

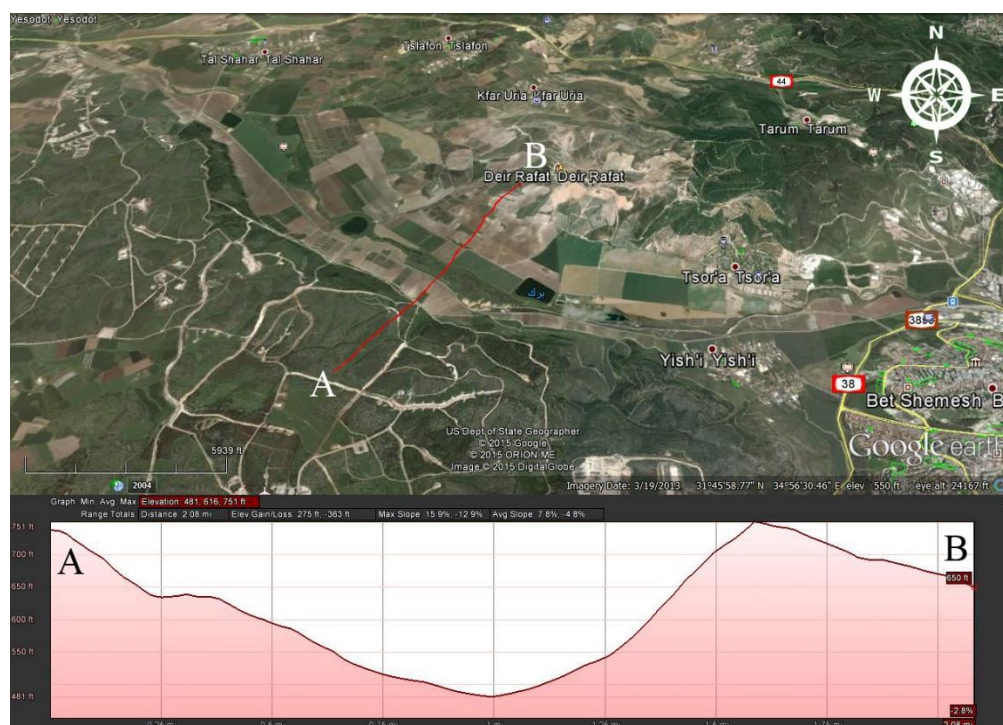
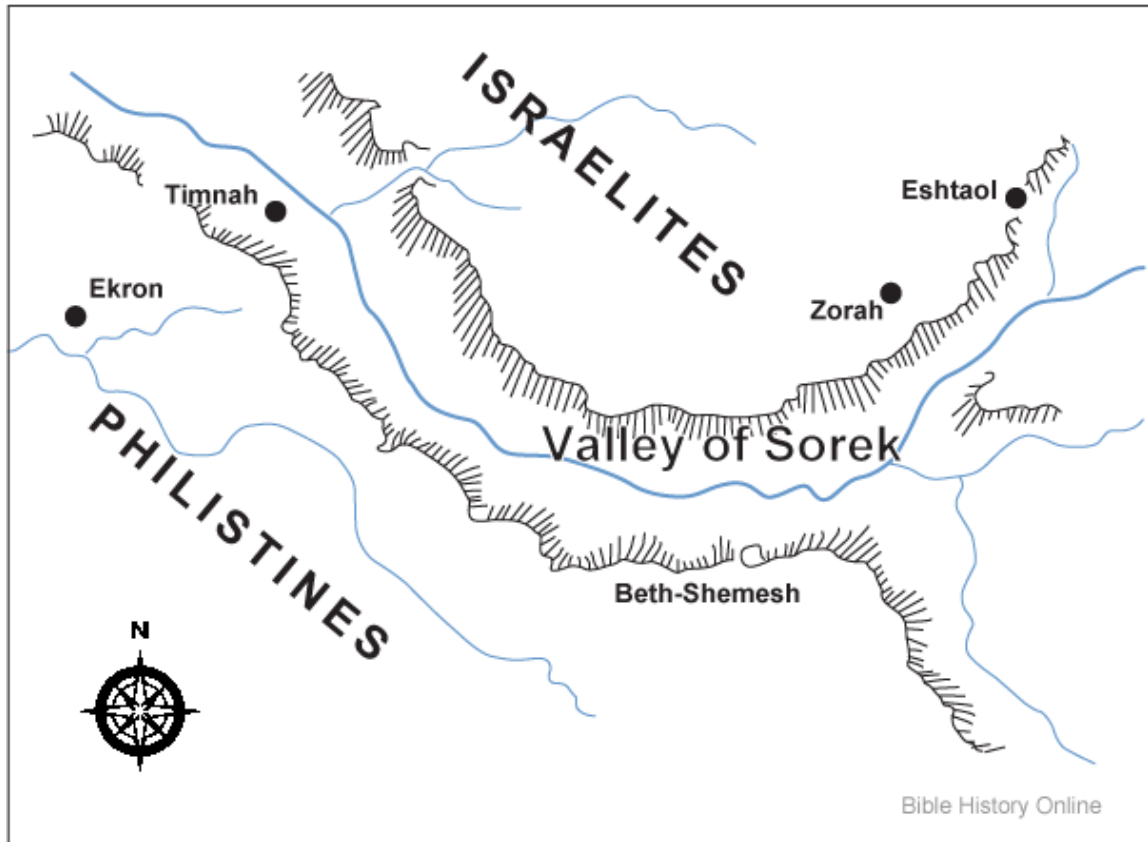


Figure 17: Sorek Valley Cross Section  
Adapted from [www.googleearth.com](http://www.googleearth.com)

Entering the Sorek System in order to gain access to the ridge routes climbing onto the central ridge requires the traveler departing from Ekron to pass by Timnah and Beth Shemesh (see Figure 18), an overall distance of 16 kilometers overall. The narrow and winding valley effectively separates the ridge routes from the coastal plain through a narrow pass far more easily controlled and defended than the open ground to the west (see Figure 19). The one who controls the eastern terminus of the valley also controls access to the ridges.



“Figure 18: The Sorek System  
 Adapted from [www.biblehistoryonline.com](http://www.biblehistoryonline.com)  
 Map of the Valley of Sorek in Ancient Philistia”

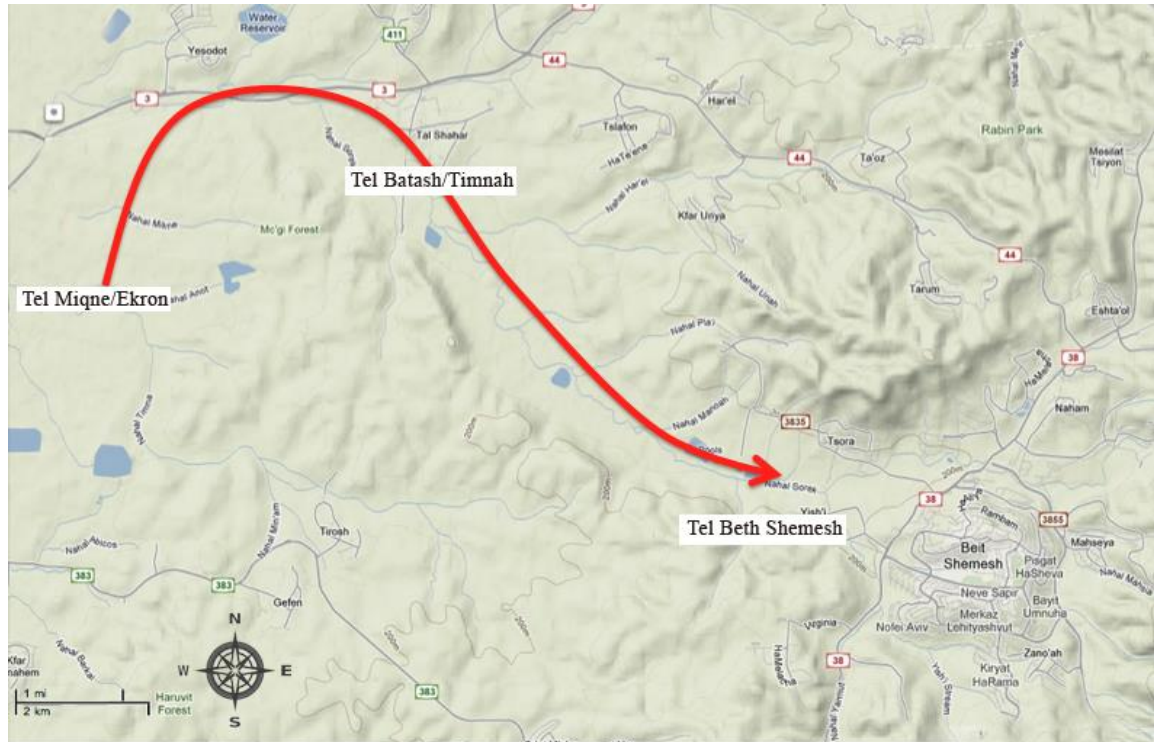


Figure 19: The Sorek Valley – Ekron to Timnah to Beth Shemesh

Adapted from a stock image found online @ [www.exploringbiblelands.com](http://www.exploringbiblelands.com)

*The Elah System* is far more narrow and restrictive than the two valleys to the North. The Western terminus and the location of the Philistine capital city Gath is within the mouth of the valley itself (see Figures 8 & 10). The narrow valley winds and twists its way east towards Azekah, a city literally set high on a hill (see Figures 20 & 21). The valley then abruptly turns south and wraps around Azekah before once again turning eastward. The valley in the area of Azekah is quite narrow with steep sides (see Figure 22).





Figure 20: Approach to the Ridge Routes from Gath via the Elah  
Adapted from Monson, "Geobasics in the Land of the Bible", p. 18.



Figure 21: Azekah in the Elah Valley  
Adapted from a stock image found online @ [www.BiblePlaces.com](http://www.BiblePlaces.com)



Figure 22: Elah Cross Section at Azekah  
Adapted from [www.googleearth.com](http://www.googleearth.com)



The valley once again turns to the east and proceeds towards its eastern terminus and the ridge route to the Central Highlands and Bethlehem. Passing Qeiyafa on the north side and Socoh on the south side the valley gently turns to the southeast towards Adullam and intersects the route to the highlands (see Figures 23 & 24). Both sides of the Valley have a commanding view of the entire eastern sector.

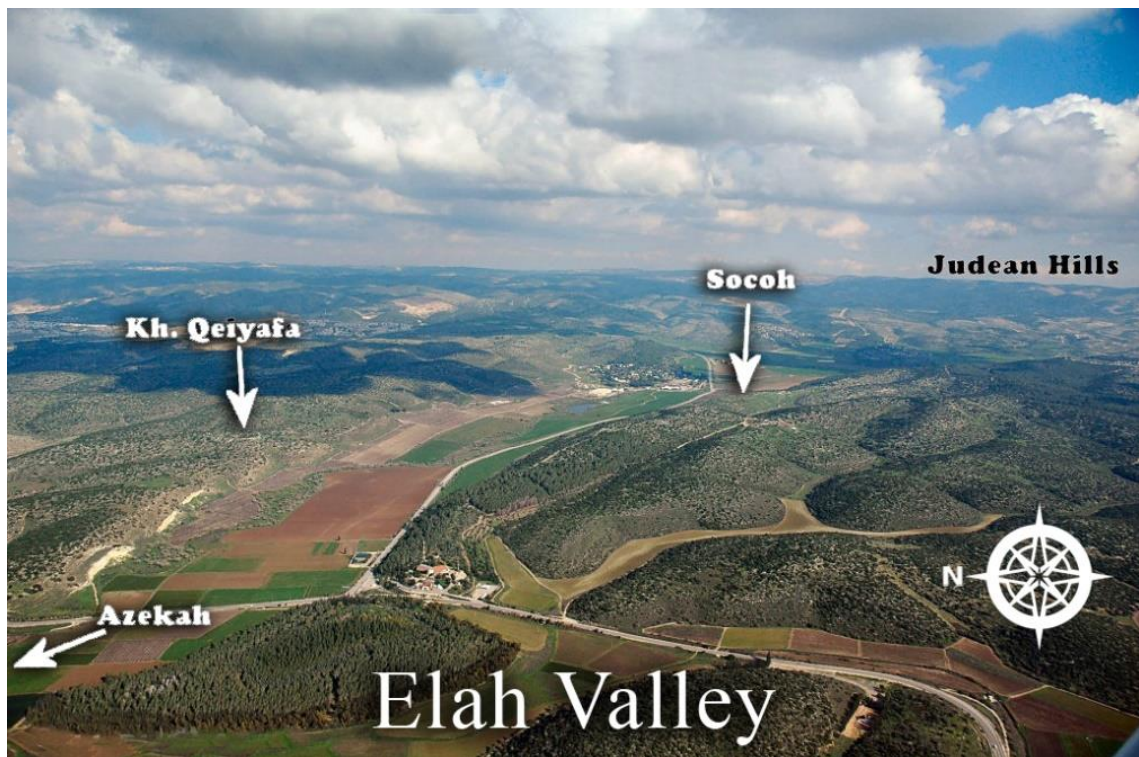


Figure 23: The Elah Valley –Eastern Sector  
Adapted from a stock Image found online @ [www.bibleplaces.com](http://www.bibleplaces.com)

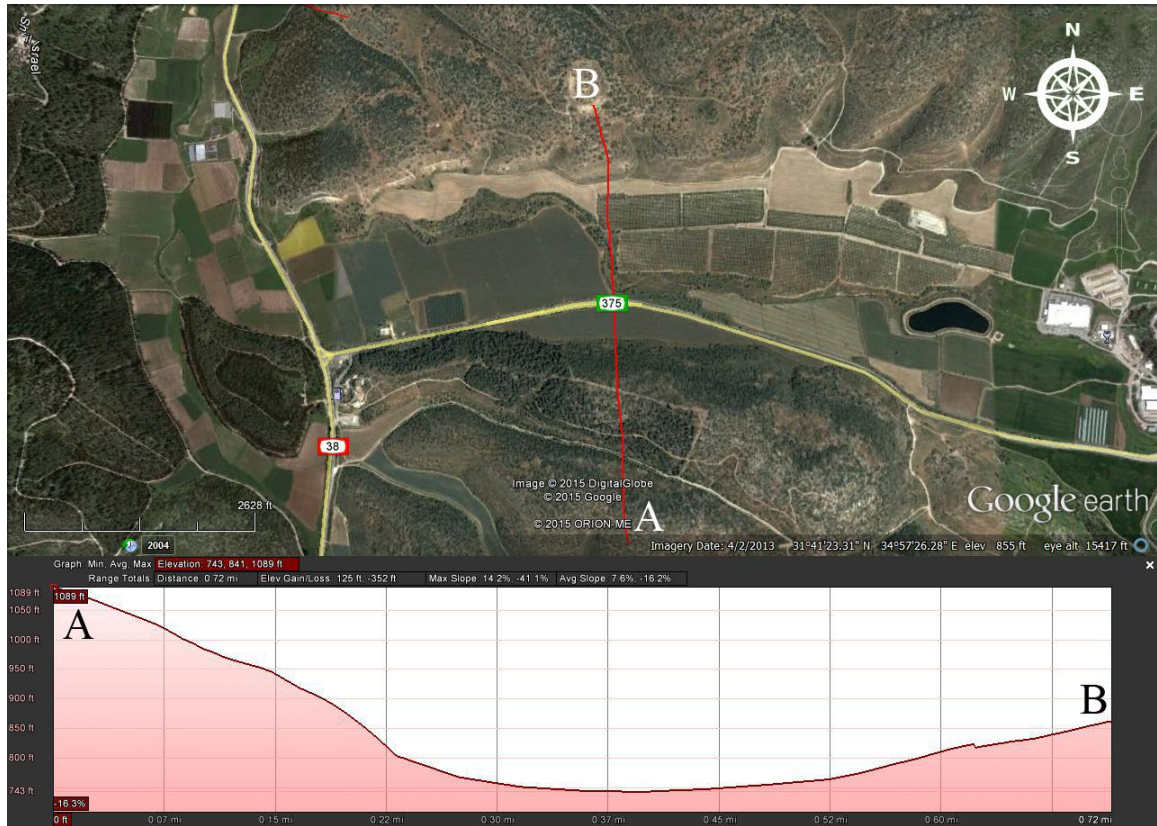


Figure 24: Elah Cross Section – Eastern Sector

Adapted from [www.googleearth.com](http://www.googleearth.com)

### Concluding Remarks

When one considers the elements present in the geographic location of the Shephelah between the Coastal Plain and the Central Highlands it becomes clear that geography plays a major role in understanding the interrelations and security considerations of the respective inhabitants. Coote and Whitlam's observations agree.

The lowlands of Palestine, set astride the major international trade route of the Middle East and beside the Mediterranean littoral, possess seemingly tremendous natural advantages. The flow of wealth and innovative ideas along the Via Maris (the Way of the Sea) and through the few Palestinian ports makes this a cultural melting pot. The great urban concentration of the plains grew up in response to these natural advantages. ...It was the coastal sites that were usually the quickest to revive once regeneration had begun in Palestine. However, it is precisely this strategic military and trade position as a land bridge between Africa, Europe, and Asia and the ease of communication which have led to continual fragmentation and destruction. In a sense the greatest strengths of the lowland sites were also

their greatest weaknesses since they provided rich and easy pickings for outside powers.<sup>40</sup>

East of the International Highway, the Sorek, Elah and Aijalon valley systems played a prominent role in determining the interrelations between the Philistines and Israel. The natural boundaries (see Figure 25) inherent in their configuration came to define the borders between the Philistines and Israel. Among the most important elements are the following:

1. The flat terrain of the coastal plain gives way to west-east valleys with steep sides effectively vectoring internal traffic to the valley floors.
2. As one travels east from the coastal plain, there are natural choke points and defensible positions within the valley systems before one has access to the routes ascending to the central highlands.
3. The north-south roads within the Shephelah follow the topography of the terrain and provide natural lines of demarcation or boundary.
4. The topography of the Shephelah provides natural buffer zones between the valley systems. Adjacent ridges and hills naturally separate settlement locations.
5. The rocky and uneven terrain effectively narrows the choices for settlement locations and does not lend itself to simple landscape alterations.

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<sup>40</sup> See Robert B. Coote and Keith W. Whitelam, *The Emergence of Early Israel*, (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1987), p. 85. “The Via Maris” or “The Way of the Sea” are alternative names for the International Coastal Highway. The reference to “regeneration” speaks to the emergence of the Israelite and Philistine cultures following the collapse of the Late Bronze communities of the eastern Mediterranean.



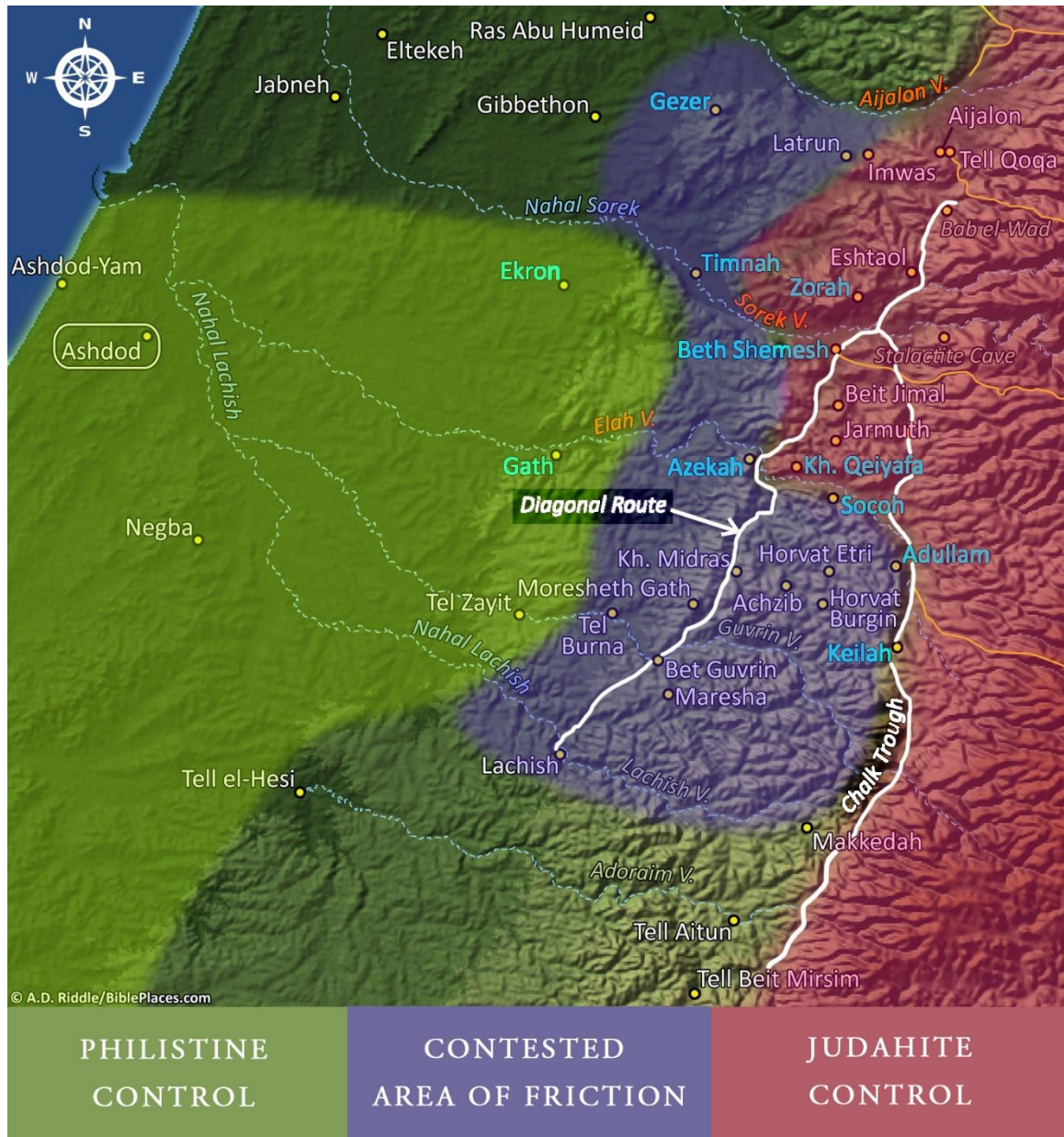


Figure 25: Areas of Friction

Adapted from stock photos found online @ [www.bibleplaces.com](http://www.bibleplaces.com) – “The Shephelah”

The natural boundaries between the hill country and the coastal plain (see Figure 25) are clearly defined in terms of the geography. The flat coastal plain is easily negotiable and relatively consistent in its topography until it reaches its eastern terminus at the western end of the valley systems. The rugged hill country descends from the

central ridge of the country towards the coastal plain until it too reaches a geographic transition and natural demarcation point. The area of geographic transition located between the two is the area of the northern Shephelah, the geographic topic of this study (see Figures 7 & 8). The transition to the hill country is at the eastern termini of the parallel valley systems (the Elah and Sorek) which are effectively separated from the hill country by the Chalk Trough road from the south, joining the Diagonal Route in the Elah Valley and continuing north through eastern terminus of the Sorek Valley. The western termini of the valleys are far less abrupt as the valley floors broaden and the defining ridges between them flatten. Cities located within or at the narrow eastern termini of the valleys would have a distinct strategic advantage when addressing questions of transitory traffic or defending against hostile intruders. The most efficient use of the existing terrain would utilize the natural boundaries and geographic features as reflected in Figure 25. The blue central area on the map would be the most difficult area in which to maintain consistent hegemony. The relative strength and resources of population groups located on either side of this area would have an immediate effect on the placement of the boundary between them. The western end of the valley systems would be the more difficult area to defend. Conversely, the eastern end of the same systems would require far fewer men and resources to defend due to the severity of the surrounding terrain, the narrowing of the valley floors and the additional cover afforded the defender. Clearly, the control of the valley systems in their midst would be one of the core issues governing interrelationships between population groups inhabiting this area of the northern Shephelah. Such issues could quickly become a source of contention between them regardless of whether their initial intentions were hostile or benevolent.

## Chapter Three

### The Biblical Text Setting

Geographic considerations alone cannot provide a clear picture of the daily events and situations that govern the interaction between population groups. Having described the physical setting of the Sorek and Elah valleys, this chapter of the dissertation will examine the biblical text's representation of the interrelationship between the Israelites and the Philistines during their early encounters in the Sorek and Elah basins of the Northern Shephelah. The biblical texts selected include the Samson cycle in the Sorek System as found in Judges 13-16; the Ark/Ekron/Beth Shemesh narratives in the Sorek System as found in 1 Samuel 4:1-7:2; the David and Goliath narratives located in the Elah System as found in 1 Samuel 17; David at Keilah in 1 Samuel 23; and David among the Philistines in 1 Samuel 27, 29-30. These narratives will be used primarily as points of departure to explore the biblical text's perception of the ever changing regional relationships between Israel and the Philistines. Additional biblical references in Joshua 10, 12, 16 and 21; Judges 1; 2 Samuel 5; 1 Kings 9; and 1 Chronicles 6, 7, 14 and 20 will be consulted with reference to the changing ethnic footprint of Gezer, located in the Aijalon Valley system north of the Sorek. This chapter will also address interpretive issues arising from the biblical text's representation of the interrelationships between Israelites and Philistines. As stated in the introductory chapter, the text's description of the historical context appears to be better understood within the framework of a 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE writer's world than that of the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE. How, then, is one to interpret the text in light of the text's representation of the historical context? The answer to this question is a major element of this chapter's presentation and summary.

### Deuteronomistic History, Historicity and Interpretive Problems

Following the Pentateuch, Deuteronomistic History is the name commonly used to designate the book of Deuteronomy as well as the second major division of the Hebrew bible known as the Former or Early Prophets.<sup>41</sup> This grouping includes the books of Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings. Most scholars theorize that these books comprise a single literary unit. The term “Deuteronomistic History”<sup>42</sup> and the theories associated with it originated with Martin Noth and the publication of his *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* in 1943.<sup>43</sup> Noth’s argument sought to explain the origin and composition of the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. In his understanding, these books are the work of a 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE historian whom he designated the “Deuteronomist” who was seeking to explain the fall of Jerusalem and the resultant Babylonian exile. Noth described this work as the first history of Israel on the basis of traditions which the Deuteronomist collected and collated by means of a common structure and chronology. Israel’s history was divided into four major periods: the time of Moses, the settlement of Canaan under Joshua, the period of the Judges, and the era of the monarchy. Noth felt that the composition of the DH had but one author and was entirely negative in its approach to show that the sufferings of the people of Israel

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<sup>41</sup> McKenzie. “Deuteronomic (D) Source, “*The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 160-168.

<sup>42</sup> Henceforth designated DH.

<sup>43</sup> For the purposes of this study references from Noth’s work will be cited from the English translation of the original German work as found in the Sheffield volume entitled “*The Deuteronomistic History*”.

were the consequences of their non-compliance with the stipulations found in their contract with Yahweh agreed upon at Sinai: i.e.; lessons to be learned and explanations to be offered for Israel's removal from the land as stipulated in the Suzerainty contract with Israel's God.<sup>44</sup> This contract is also referred to as the Mosaic Law or Mosaic Covenant. The formula stated in the biblical text required a vassal to accept the stipulations of the treaty in both its positive and negative consequences which were clearly delineated in Deuteronomy 11: 26-28.

<sup>26</sup> Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse:

<sup>27</sup> the blessing, if ye shall hearken unto the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day;

<sup>28</sup> and the curse, if ye shall not hearken unto the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known.<sup>45</sup>

And again we find the same stipulations reiterated in chapter 30, verses 11-20.

<sup>11</sup> For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not too hard for thee, neither is it far off.

<sup>12</sup> It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say: 'Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, and make us to hear it, that we may do it?'

<sup>13</sup> Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say: 'Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, and make us to hear it, that we may do it?'

<sup>14</sup> But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.

<sup>15</sup> See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil,

<sup>16</sup> in that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His ordinances; then thou shalt live and multiply, and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest in to possess it.

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<sup>44</sup> The Suzerainty treaty or contract found in Exodus 20:1-17 and major portions of Deuteronomy including 4:32-40 historical prologue language and structure of the treaty; 4:44-5:21 stipulations; 6:4-25 blessings and curses; 8 & 11 reflects all the sections of a Suzerain treaty; 17:14-20 reflects the relationship of a vassal king to the Suzerain; 20 reflects the language and structure of war-time arrangements between a Suzerain and his people; 27-28 curses and blessings; 29 covenant renewal; 30:11-19 a classic presentation of ancient Near Eastern treaties.

<sup>45</sup> All block quotes from the biblical text are sourced from the JPS translation of the Hebrew text unless otherwise stipulated.



<sup>17</sup> But if thy heart turn away, and thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them;

<sup>18</sup> I declare unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish; ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over the Jordan to go in to possess it.

<sup>19</sup> I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before thee life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life, that thou mayest live, thou and thy seed;

<sup>20</sup> to love the LORD thy God, to hearken to His voice, and to cleave unto Him; for that is thy life, and the length of thy days; that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

The admonitions and stipulations of the contract embodied in Deuteronomy 4 include the ultimate curse levied for and in the case of willful and long term disobedience. This final and most poignant curse was removal from the land as cited in verses 25-28.

<sup>25</sup> When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have been long in the land, and shall deal corruptly, and make a graven image, even the form of anything, and shall do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD thy God, to provoke Him;

<sup>26</sup> I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day that *ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over the Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed.*

<sup>27</sup> *And the LORD shall scatter you among the peoples, and ye shall be left few in number among the nations, whither the LORD shall lead you away.*

<sup>28</sup> *And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.*<sup>46</sup>

Most scholars after Noth would generally agree that the DH is an attempt to assemble or otherwise bring together the stories, texts and historic elements of Israel's past in an effort to explain the journey from exile to exile – from Egypt to Babylon in a single corpus. While the theory so stated by Noth has gone through many changes and emendations, the origin theory has essentially stood the test of time and remained the primary lens through which modern scholars view the biblical text utilized in this

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<sup>46</sup> Italics are mine.

study. Noth's position was to view the Former Prophets as a unified history of Israel written by a single, exilic author or compiler. As McKenzie points out,

Noth was not the only scholar to conclude that Genesis-Numbers and Deuteronomy-Kings represented two originally distinct literary units... However, it was Noth's volume that established this view in the field of biblical studies.<sup>47</sup>

The weakest aspect of Noth's theory and that which has spawned the most criticism appears to be the "judgment" purpose he understood to be behind the DH's work. Von Rad responded to this position in an article he authored in 1947.<sup>48</sup> He traced a theme of "grace" through the DH that provided a balance to the theme of judgment. He cites the postponing of the final destruction of Israel and Judah was in keeping with the prophetic nature of Nathan's oracle to David in 1 Samuel 7 and reiterated throughout 1-2 Kings.<sup>49</sup> The Messianic concepts embodied in the text provided a basis for hope on the part of the DH for the restoration of the Davidic monarchy. A second important article on the purpose of the DH was contributed by H. W. Wolff in 1961.<sup>50</sup> He notes that the process employed by the DH was considerably more complex than either Noth or Von Rad envisioned in their articles. Wolff posits that the DH envisioned a pattern of apostasy, punishment, repentance and deliverance – especially in the biblical text found in Judges. The present condition of Israel in exile indicated that they were in the second stage of that cycle – that is, they needed to repent and return to Yahweh. The essays of Von Rad and Wolff point to the tension between the Mosaic and Davidic covenants

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<sup>47</sup> McKenzie, "Deuteronomistic History," ABD, vol. 2 (1992), p. 161.

<sup>48</sup> G. von Rad. "The Deuteronomic Theology of History in I and II Kings," *PHOE* (1947), pp.205-221.

<sup>49</sup> See 1 Kings 8:20, 25; 9:5; 11:5, 13, 32, 36; 15:4; 2 Kings 2:4; 8:19; 19:34; 20:6.

<sup>50</sup> H. W. Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Deuteronomic Historical Work" in *The Vitality of OT Traditions*, ed. W. Brueggemann and H. W. Wolff, (1985), pp. 83-100.

which needed to be addressed in the ongoing development of Noth's theory.

Modifications to Noth's theories of authorship have been underway since the late 1960's.

The ongoing discussion is beyond the scope of this study and does not negatively impact our treatment of the material.<sup>51</sup>

While a deeper understanding of both the source material and the final form of the DH is still evolving and often hotly debated, one of the concerns of this chapter is to understand the literary methodology employed by the biblical author/editor and its resultant impact on the reliability of the historicity of the biblical narratives in question.

R. Alter expresses a view of the literary methods employed which transcends questions of literal historicity.

The Bible presents a kind of necessary information, not merely to delight. If, however, we fail to see that the creators of biblical narrative were writers who, like writers elsewhere, took pleasure in exploring the formal and imaginative resources of their fictional medium, perhaps sometimes unexpectedly capturing the fullness of their subject in the very play of exploration, we shall miss much that the biblical stories are meant to convey.<sup>52</sup>

In that light, McKenzie concludes his remarks with the observation that ongoing scholarship and examination of the DH should be careful not to obscure the unity of the

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<sup>51</sup> Williamson in *"Israel in the Book of Chronicles"*, p. 86, sums up the portion of the discussion that concerns this study by indicating in his concluding thoughts in a discussion concerning the date of Chronicles that, "There is no compelling evidence for dating Chronicles later than the Persian period, or at least for a date later than the time at which the impact of Hellenism was first felt in Judah. Chronicles should thus be dated at some point within the fourth century B.C." However, the dispute over the date of the Chronicler's work does not adversely affect the geographic markers we are referencing.

<sup>52</sup> R. Alter (1981: p. 46).

DH's work which was observed and clearly articulated by Noth.<sup>53</sup> This is considered to be Noth's enduring insight into the nature and content of the DH.

Lingering questions concerning the historicity and the DH portion of the biblical text are exacerbated by the hyperbolic language employed when describing the roles and relationships of the primary characters populating the narrative in Judges, Samuel and Kings. The narratives often describe the primary characters in heroic, larger-than-life terms and circumstances. Indeed, some of their exploits resemble folklore and children's stories rendered with the intention of conveying principles to be understood and assimilated rather than literal activities to be dissected and cataloged.

A similar phenomenon, the telling of a tale in hyperbolic terms to make a concrete point, can be observed within the literary genre entitled "realistic fiction" often employed in children's literature. Carol Lynch-Brown and Carl M. Tomlinson in their well-received "Essentials of Children's Literature" offer the following:

Themes in realistic stories often convey moral values, such as the rewards of kindness and generosity to others. However, these moral values must spring naturally from the story, as a by-product of the story itself, not as the main reason for the story. At times, adults write books for children with the sole intent of teaching or preaching, and the story itself is nothing more than a thin disguise for a heavy-handed moral lesson. This may have been acceptable in the past, but today a good story must be the *raison d'être* of a children's book. The moral must not overwhelm the story but may be its logical outcome.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See McKenzie, "Deuteronomistic History," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992), p.168.

<sup>54</sup> Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson (1999), p.131.

The “realist novel” genre in American literature is often described as a type of literature that emphasizes truthful representation of the actual.<sup>55</sup> The characters themselves need not be historic figures as long as the physical setting and the truth the narrative conveys remains accurate. Parables and proverbial literature often take such liberties within a structure that is accurate in terms of its setting and familiarity to the recipient. Such realism is above all pragmatic in that the conceptual truth it seeks to find and express is a basic life truth, associated with discernible consequences and verifiable by experience. However, such liberties have limits. Ancient scribes and writers may have employed hyperbolic and heroic language in the story line, but the greater physical and historic setting remained accurate and identifiable. Though not always clear in any one edition of a story available to us, such historic and physical setting accuracy can be observed often enough to establish the precedent. When this baseline of underlying accuracy was violated the scribe(s) would often return to the latest edition of the extant text and correct it in subsequent redactions or emendations. An excellent example from Ancient Mesopotamia involved the redaction of texts, editing of source material and the choices an author made in the collating of multiple sources. Though the multiple versions of the same story differed in terms of hyperbolic language the underlying truth was consistently visible. Subsequent editions of the same work sought to remove or redact much of the embellished language thereby making the underlying point more accessible.

Four different versions of the Assyrian king Sennacherib’s defeat at the hands of the Elamite serve as an adequate illustration of such liberties which were corrected in

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<sup>55</sup> Holman and Harmon (1992), p. 393.

later editions of the accounts chronicling the battle.<sup>56</sup> In this example, the embellishments should be viewed as literary devices to present the king in a “good light” rather than the full truth of the defeat Assyria suffered at the hands of the Elamites.<sup>57</sup> Sennacherib was the Assyrian king in question here (704-681 BCE). He fought against the Babylonian-Elamite coalition at Halule in 691 BCE. The earliest version of his eighth campaign contains numerous allusions to *Enuma Elish*, especially to tablet IV. Elnathan Weissert compared the Prism edition of the battle of that year with later editions and showed that this edition, completed before the account was redacted to its final form, contained numerous allusions to the well-known enthronement-creation myth.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> The versions and emendations in question are referenced and illustrated in the block quotes that follow.

<sup>57</sup> I am indebted to my colleague, Dr. Gary Schnittjer, for his guidance and permission to access portions of his unpublished research in the areas of Deuteronomistic History, borderlines and intertextuality.

<sup>58</sup> See Elnathan Weissert, “Creating a Political Climate: Literary Allusions to *Enūma Eliš* in Sennacherib’s Account of the Battle of Halule,” 191-202, in Hartmut Waetzoldt and Harald Hauptmann, eds. *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten*, Rencontre Assyriologique International, no. 39 (Heidelberg: Heidelberger Orientverlag, 1997). See Christopher B. Hays, “Echoes of the Ancient Near East? Intertextuality and the Comparative Study of the Old Testament,” 20-43, in J. Ross Wagner, C. Kavin Rowe, and A. Katherine Grieb, eds. *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hay* (Eerdmans, 2008).

(The scribe who spoke for)

**Sennacherib**<sup>59</sup> in the account of the Eighth Campaign (691 BCE)<sup>60</sup>

***Enuma Elish***<sup>61</sup>

the Babylonians [are] “wicked devils [demons]” (5.18; *ARAB*, 2: 125)<sup>62</sup>

Tiamat’s horde referred to as a “demonic host” (4.116-118; cf. Dalley, 254)

“The Babylonians placed him on the throne,--for which he was not fitted” (5.28b-29; *ARAB*, 2: 125)<sup>63</sup>

“though he had no right to be, you set him [Kingu/Qingu] up for chief god” (4.82; cf. Dalley, 253)

the enemy “sharpen their weapons” (5.62)<sup>64</sup>

“while the gods of battle were whetting their blades” (4.92; Dalley, 253)<sup>65</sup>

“They speedily (*urruhiš*) gave ear to my prayers and came to my aid” (5.66-67; *ARAB*, 2: 126)<sup>66</sup>

“soon (*urruhiš*) you will trample the neck of Tiamat” (2.146 [=148]; cf. Dalley, 243 [also see 3.65-66])

“The mighty bow which Assur had given me, I seized in my hands; the javelin,

“They gave him unstoppable weaponry that vanquishes enemies, ‘Go cut off the life

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<sup>59</sup> Bold type and underlining are mine.

<sup>60</sup> Translations cited from Daniel David Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (University of Chicago Press, 1924) which has the transcription and translation in parallel columns; here referred to by column and line numbers (see pp. 41-47) And I will include the page reference to Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, vol. 2, *Historical Records of Assyria from Sargon to the End* (University of Chicago, 1926, 1927) cited as *ARAB*. The translations are from Oriental Institute Prism of the University of Chicago; other copies include the Taylor Prism in the British Museum and one housed in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, see Weissert, 192, n. 1.

<sup>61</sup> *Enuma Elish* (here using column and line numbers) cited from Benjamin R. Foster, “Epic of Creation,” 390-402, in William W. Hallo, ed. *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 1, *Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (Brill, 2003); and list pages references from Stephanie Dalley, ed. and trans., *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*, rev. ed., Oxford’s World Classics (Oxford, 2000). Also see, James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d ed. (Princeton University Press, 1969), 60-72.

<sup>62</sup> For discussion of the parallel, including the verbal relationship, see Weissert, 193.

<sup>63</sup> See *ibid.*, 193-94.

<sup>64</sup> Luckenbill did not translate 5.62 (see *Annals of Sennacherib*, 44), thus translation here from Weissert, 194, n. 18.

<sup>65</sup> Weissert translates this “and the gods of battle, they sharpened their weapons” (194, n. 18).

<sup>66</sup> For a discussion of the significance of *urruhiš* in Sennacherib’s annals and *Enuma Elish*, see Weissert, 194.

piercing to the life [ <i>napšāti = nephesh</i> ] <sup>67</sup> , I grasped” (5.71b-73; <i>ARAB</i> , 2: 126) <sup>68</sup>	[ <i>napšatuš</i> ] of Tiamat”” (4.30-31; cf. Dalley, 250)
“(My) helmet, emblem of victory (battle), I placed upon my head” (5.68-69; <i>ARAB</i> , 2: 126) <sup>69</sup>	“on his head he was covered with terrifying auras” (4.58; cf. Dalley, 251)
“My great battle chariot, which brings low the foe, I hurriedly mounted in the anger of my heart” (5:69-71; <i>ARAB</i> , 2: 126); “The wheels of my war chariot, which brings low the wicked and the evil, were bespattered with blood and filth” (6.7-9; <i>ARAB</i> , 2: 127) <sup>70</sup>	“He [Marduk] mounted the terrible chariot, the unstoppable Storm Demon” (4.50; cf. Dalley, 251)
“Like the many waters of a storm, I made (the contents of) their gullets and entrails run down upon the wide earth” (6.3- 5; <i>ARAB</i> , 2: 127) <sup>71</sup>	“You have made their blood flow like water in the drains of the public squares. You have opened their veins and let the river carry off (their blood). The great Marduk saw and cried, ‘Woe!’ and clutched his heart” ( <i>Erra and Ishum</i> , 4.36-39, in <i>COS</i> , 1: 412; cf. Dalley, 304)

The conventional interpretations of this version of Sennacherib’s eighth campaign are that it is falsehood and smokescreen to hide his embarrassment at not achieving victory<sup>72</sup>. Weissert, however, takes another look at a later restatement of the campaign which is written oddly in present tense as though the events chronicled are contemporary with the redaction.

“They [the kings of Elam and Babylon] abandoned their tents and to save their lives they trampled the bodies of their (fallen) soldiers, they fled like young pigeons that are pursued. They were beside themselves (*lit.* their hearts were torn)

<sup>67</sup> See *HALOT*, 1: 711 (נֶפֶשׁ) *throat, life*.

<sup>68</sup> See Weissert, 194.

<sup>69</sup> For discussion of distinctive terminology used in *Enuma Elish* and Sennacherib’s annals here, see *ibid.*, 195.

<sup>70</sup> Again, very few references in annals to the significance of chariots, see *ibid.*, 196.

<sup>71</sup> Or, “I let (the blood of) their veins run down the wide land like a huge flood” (see *ibid.*).

<sup>72</sup> See Weissert, 197.



they held back (?) their urine [or, “discharging their (long-retained) urine” Weissert, 198], but let their dung go into their chariots. In pursuit of them I dispatched my chariots and horses after them. Those among them who had escaped, who fled for their lives, wherever they (my charioteers) met them, they cut them down with the sword”<sup>73</sup> (6.27b-31; *ARAB*, 2: 128).

The fate of the kings is not stated. The remarkable use of the present tense, says Weissert, is the scribal way of dealing with “the reality he found embarrassing, and also with the ideological codes [i.e., not lying] which guided his writing” (199). He goes on to explain how this passage, and the mythically charged ones from the creation myth noted above, underwent revisions in later editions of the annals (199-202). For example, “The king of Babylon and the king of Elam....ran off alone and fled from their land” (Luckenbill, *ARAB*, 2: 158). For Weissert, the use of mythic allusions—demonizing the enemy, and so on—is not a sign of trying to cover up a failure, but indicates the intensity and passion of the campaign which is still in progress. After the enemies were eventually taken the passionate rhetoric is unnecessary and is revised to conventional style (see 202).

Since most of the annals’ allusions are drawn from a section of *Enuma Elish* tablet IV, the following excerpts provide both contexts for comparison with the items mentioned above.<sup>74</sup>

Excerpt from *Enuma Elish*, tablet IV

...They gave him an unfaceable weapon to crush the foe.  
 ...And mounted the frightful, unfaceable storm-chariot.  
 ...His head was crowned with a terrible radiance.  
 ...You appointed him to rites of Anu-power, wrongfully his.

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<sup>73</sup> Underlining and bold typeface mine.

<sup>74</sup> *Enuma Elish* from Dalley, 250-54, and Sennacherib's annals from Luckenbill, *ARAB*, 2: 125-28.

...Meanwhile the gods of battle were sharpening their weapons.  
 ...The gang of demons who all marched on her right,

The Eighth Campaign of Sennacherib (*Against Elam; the battle of Halulê*)

In my eighth campaign, after Shuzubu had revolted, and the Babylonians, **wicked devils**, had closed the city gates, --their hearts planning resistance; Shuzubu, the Chaldean, a weakling hero, who had no knees, a slave, subject to the governor of the city of Lahiri,--about him there gathered the fugitive Arameans, the runaway, the murderer, the robber. Into the marshes they descended and made rebellion. But I surrounded him completely. I pressed him to the life. Through fear and hunger he fled to Elam. When plotting and treachery were (hatched) against him (there), he hastened from Elam and entered Shuanna [the sacred precinct of Babylon]. **The Babylonians placed him on the throne, --for which he was not fitted**, and intrusted to him the government of Sumer and Akkad.....

...As for me, --to Assur, Sin, Shamash, Bêl, Nabû, Nergal, Ishtar of Nineveh, Ishtar of Arbela, the gods in whom I trust, I prayed for victory over the mighty foe. **They speedily gave ear to my prayers and came to my aid.** Like a lion I raged. I put on (my) coat of mail. (My) helmet, emblem of victory (battle), I placed upon my head. **My great battle chariot, which brings low the foe, I hurriedly mounted in the anger of my heart. The mighty bow which Assur had given me, I seized in my hands; the javelin, piercing to the life, I grasped.** Against all of the hosts of wicked enemies, I raised my voice (*lit.*, cried out), rumbling like a storm. Like Adad I roared...

... I cut their throats like lambs. I cut off their precious lives (as one cuts) a string. **Like the many waters of a storm, I made (the contents of) their gullets and entrails run down upon the wide earth.** My prancing steeds harnessed for my riding, plunged into the streams of their blood as (into) a river. **The wheels of my war chariot, which brings low the wicked and the evil, were bespattered with blood and filth.** With the bodies of their warriors I filled the plain, like grass. (Their) testicles I cut off, and tore out their privates like the seeds of cucumbers of *Simânu* (June). Their hands I cut off.....

...that Umman-menanu, king of Elam, together with the king of Babylon (and the princes of Chaldea, who had gone over to his side, the terror of my battle overpowered them (*lit.*, their bodies) like a bull. **They abandoned their tents and to save their lives they trampled the bodies of their (fallen) soldiers, they fled like young pigeons that are pursued. They were beside themselves (*lit.*, their hearts were torn) they held back (?) their urine, but let their dung go into their chariots. In pursuit of them I dispatched my chariots and horses after them. Those among them who had escaped, who had fled for their lives, wherever they (my charioteers) met them, they cut them down with the sword.**

The assembling of source material, vetting the reliability of that material,

collating multiple sources in chronological order, editing and producing a final product

have always been the task of the ancient scribe as well as the modern story teller.

Eventually, the product is available for scrutiny and the inevitable later edition/redaction takes place. Such is the task of the chronicler, scribe, story teller and the Deuteronomist – all the while remaining true to the underlying principle or historical context he is seeking to convey.

The purpose of this study does not argue for the historicity of the characters and personages in the biblical narrative. However, it is vital that the historic integrity of the setting for those characters be accurately observed. Literary devices, heroic language and hyperbolic descriptions of characters to position kings or lesser subjects in a “favorable light” are incidental to this endeavor. While the part the characters play in the process of interpretation is hermeneutically vital for the reader to understand, their historicity in terms of the accuracy of the setting is not. In short, the accuracy of the setting is not dependent upon the historicity of the events. As demonstrated above, even scribal liberties are eventually redacted within reasonable limits. The elusive character of biblical narratives and the personages they employ to tell their story often forces the reader to engage other contexts which can be heard echoing within them. The reader who will not cross that borderline will not hear the other worlds already present in the narrative.<sup>75</sup> The texts chosen as the primary topical material of this chapter allow us to explore some of those echoes. They involve and articulate details concerning the physical setting and interpersonal boundaries that illuminate and help define the greater context of the early encounters between Israel and the Philistines in the northern Shephelah.

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<sup>75</sup> See Schnittjer, *The Narrative Multiverse*, p. 249/

### Samson and the Philistines - Judges 13-16

The Samson cycle is located in the third section of the book of Judges. The historic time frame the text attributes to the cycle is the era preceding Saul's rise to leadership about 1020 B.C.E.<sup>76</sup> His area of operation as a "Judge" included the western edge of the southern hill country of Judah and the southern portion of the Coastal Plain. The majority of the story takes place in the Sorek valley system of the northern Shephelah.<sup>77</sup> Covering four chapters, the story can be broken into four separate episodes:

1. The story of his birth (13)
2. His marriage to a Timnite Woman (4-15)
3. His visit to a harlot in Gaza (16:1-3)
4. The Delilah incident and its disastrous consequences (16:4-17)

The cycle's story begins in the tiny village of Zorah/Surah located at the Eastern end of the Sorek valley on the northern boundary ridge separating the Sorek system from the Aijalon system to the north. This is the area designated as the portion of the land assigned to the tribe of Dan.<sup>78</sup> The migration of the tribe of Dan to Laish/Tel Dan in the north and the establishment of a rival temple<sup>79</sup> is usually seen as much earlier in time than the Deuteronomic redaction (chapters 13-16) that precedes it in the narrative. The original polemics are aimed at the persons involved, not the location of the cult at this or that place.<sup>80</sup> As such, chapter 18 follows the Samson narrative in terms of the story line in

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<sup>76</sup> See Robert G. Boling, *Judges* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1975), 23, comments on the difficulties in establishing a workable chronology for this period. See also Kitchen, footnote 72 below.

<sup>77</sup> See Kitchen, *Reliability of the OT*, pp. 201, 205-207, 210 and 309.

<sup>78</sup> See Joshua 19:40-48.

<sup>79</sup> See Judges 18.

<sup>80</sup> See Boling, *Anchor Bible: Judges*, note on p.262 concerning Judges 18:2-3.

the book of Judges, but likely precedes it chronologically.<sup>81</sup> Chapter 18 begins the final section of the book of Judges and is quite different in character from the rest of the book. There is no suggestion of foreign domination apart from the inference that the migration of Dan was connected with the Philistine oppression and underlined by the lack of an emerging judge portrayed as their deliverer.

In terms of this study, Judges 13 informs the reader that Israel has undergone forty years of subjugation to the Philistines before the time period addressed by the chapter.<sup>82</sup> The text further notes that the subjugation was Israel's deity's response to their disobedience. Geographic references in this portion are limited to the specific mention of the village known as Zorah/Surah on the eastern end of the Sorek Valley within the tribal territory Dan. Lying 7.2 kilometers to the west<sup>83</sup> and occupied by Philistines was the tiny Sorek valley village of Timnah/Tel Batash. The opening comments imply that the child Samson is being singled out from among the Israelite population for a future role in breaking that alleged subjugation. Chapter 14 demonstrates that there is easy access and interchange between the Philistines and Israel and that it is not socially prohibited, albeit somewhat inappropriate to intermarry.<sup>84</sup> Samson acquires a Philistine wife from Timnah. The text indicates that the wedding's purpose is part of what will eventually precipitate an incident. That incident begins a series of events resulting in the liberation of Israel through Samson's activities. Indiscretion and intrigue in the young marriage immediately bring about strife and estrangement. Samson's confrontation with his wife's parents

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<sup>81</sup> See Boling, *Anchor Bible: Judges*, comment on pages 252-253.

<sup>82</sup> See Judges 13:1.

<sup>83</sup> See Judges 13:2.

<sup>84</sup> See Judges 14:1-4.

produces a hostile situation. His response, after being mistreated, leads to a confrontation in the hill country of Judah. As Samson flees the pursuit of the Philistines in an eastward direction he travels deeper into Israelite territory. Two sites Etam and Lehi, are mentioned in the text to locate the direction of his flight.<sup>85</sup> The common terrain surrounding the two towns lies east of the Sorek system and, in the case of Etam, well beyond the natural barrier of the chalk trough in the rocky terrain found on the western edge of the central highlands (see Figure 25).

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<sup>85</sup> See Judges 15:8-9

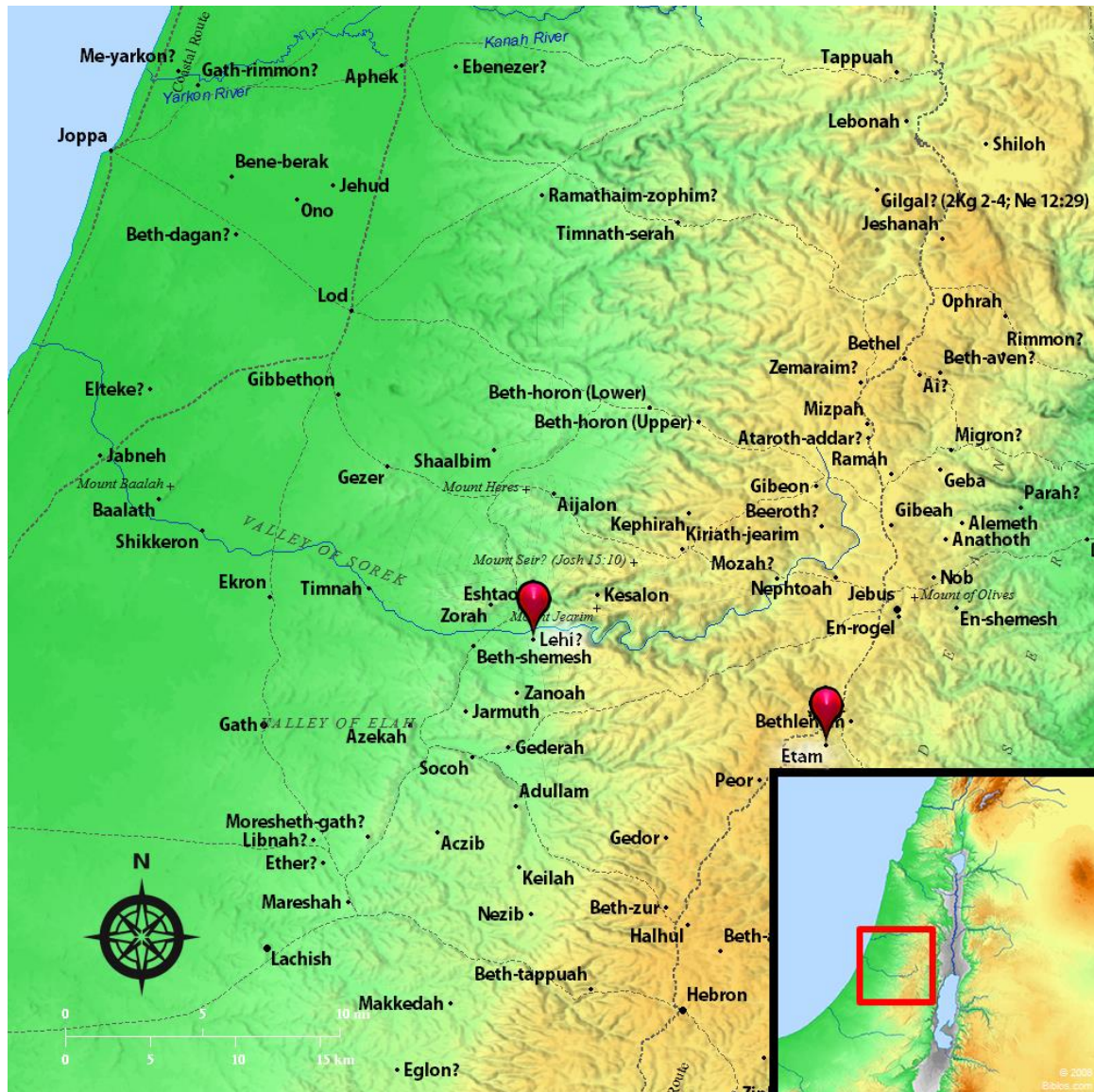


Figure 26: Lehi and Etam  
Adapted from bibleplaces.com – lehi.jpg.

Pursuit by the Philistines deep into Judah's territory is a venture made possible by the Philistine subjugation of Israel mentioned in chapter 13. The chapter ends after the Israelites narrowly avert a military confrontation with the Philistines pursuing Samson. Shortly thereafter, Samson is declared judge over Israel and exercises that position for twenty years countering the hegemony of the Philistines. As the narrative progresses the



practical everyday headship of one group over the other swings back and forth between the two population groups. Chapter 16 underlines the freedom of movement and interaction that exists between the Philistines and Israel as Samson travels without apparent hindrance to Gaza, a Philistine capital city southern most among the Philistine pentapolis of capitals. His activities there eventually take him east to Hebron, the capital of Judah located on the central ridge route 21.5 kilometers south of Bethlehem and 71.6 kilometers east of Gaza, well within Israelite territory.<sup>86</sup> The narrative now returns the reader to the Sorek system and indicates that both Philistines and Israelites inhabit the valley. Samson begins a new relationship with a Philistine woman described as a woman of the Sorek valley. This relationship eventually leads to another confrontation where Samson is captured, enslaved by the Philistines and carried off to Gaza. During a religious ceremony celebrating his capture and enslavement he is described as an “enemy” of the Philistines.<sup>87</sup> He dies at his own hand during the festival. The body is claimed and returned to Israelite territory. The Samson cycle closes with the mention of an Israelite burial location between Zorah/Surah and Eshtaol<sup>88</sup>, 4 kilometers northeast of Zorah located at the juncture of the Chalk Trough Road and the main Shephelah Road (see Figures 8 & 24). The area is honeycombed with caves and well within Israelite controlled land.

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<sup>86</sup> See Judges 16:1-3.

<sup>87</sup> See Judges 16:23.

<sup>88</sup> Now a Yemenite moshav under the jurisdiction of Mateh Yehuda Regional Council.

### The Ark/Ekron/Beth Shemesh Narratives - 1 Samuel 4:1-7:2

For the purposes of this study the primary focus of chapter 4 is the defeat of Israel at the hand of the Philistines described in the text as “a great slaughter.”<sup>89</sup> According to the biblical account, this battle involved large scale confrontation on the part of both participating peoples and far eclipses the minor or individual skirmishes described in Samson’s day. The text details a battle in the central highlands where the Ark of the Covenant was the captured by the Philistines. It was then moved to Ashdod, one of the five Philistine capital cities. The Ark was then transferred to Gath/es-Safi and then to Ekron/Tel Migne located at the western end of the Sorek Valley and placed in the temple of a Philistine deity.<sup>90</sup> Apparently the Philistine capitals, Ashdod, Ekron and Gath had been adversely affected and visited with maladies (hemorrhoids or tumors) as a result of the Ark’s presence in their land. After a seven month sojourn in Philistia, it was decided to return the Ark by oxcart from Ekron/Tel Migne to Israel. A golden guilt offering was included with the returning Ark. It was transported eastward through the Sorek Valley until it reached the “border of Beth Shemesh”<sup>91</sup> located at the extreme eastern end of the Sorek System.<sup>92</sup> The Ark was then moved eastward to Kiriath-Jearim located deep in Israelite territory, half way between the eastern end of the Sorek system and the central highlands (see Figure 27).

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<sup>89</sup> See 1 Samuel 4:10, 11.

<sup>90</sup> See 1 Samuel 5:1

<sup>91</sup> See 1 Samuel 6:12, noting the specific reference to the border. There is no mention of the transport passing Timnah located in the center of the Sorek, half way between Beth Shemesh and Ekron.

<sup>92</sup> Apparently Israel’s hegemony in the Sorek system did not extend very far west of the immediate environs of Beth Shemesh.

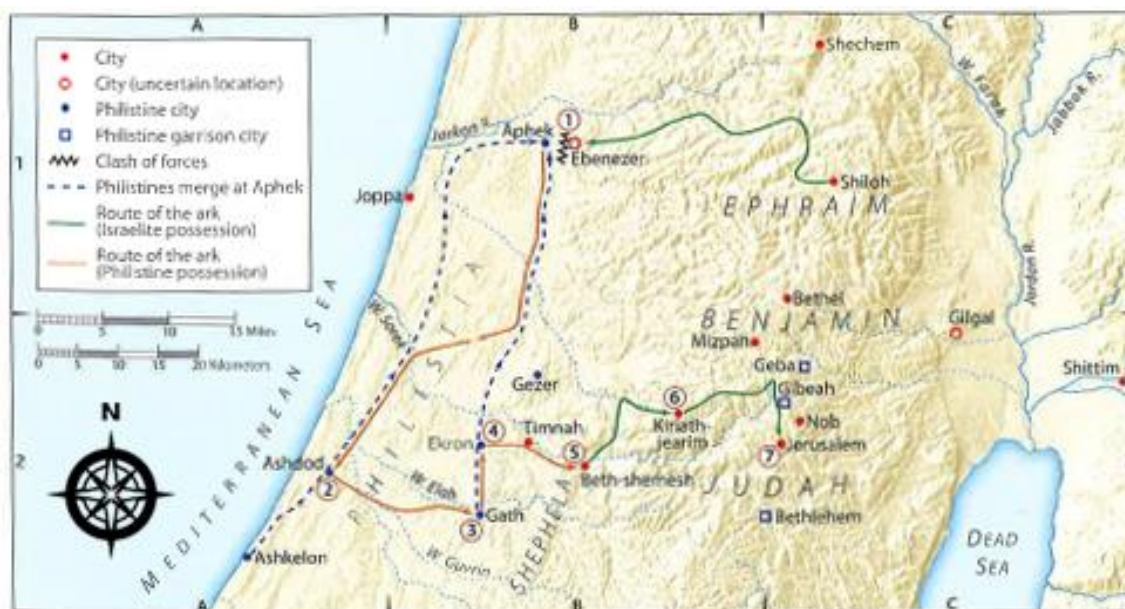


Figure 27: Kiriath Jearim

Adapted from "The New Moody Atlas of the Bible," p. 143.

### David and the Philistines - 1 Samuel 17, 23, 27-30

Our interest in the 1 Samuel 17 narrative describing the epic battle between the Israelite champion, David, and the Philistine champion, Goliath, has to do with the geographic sites mentioned and the national confrontation which the text indicates took place there.<sup>93</sup> The Philistines were encamped on the south side of the Elah Valley occupying the east-west ridge between Socoh and Azekah.<sup>94</sup> Israel was encamped on the north ridge overlooking the Elah opposite of the Philistine position.<sup>95</sup> The battle was to take place on the floor of the Elah valley between the two positions (see Figures 27, 28 & 29).

<sup>93</sup> The geographic markers and references in the biblical text are our concern here. Indeed, the accuracy of the physical setting of the story and its correlation with the topography examined in chapter two present close parallels.

<sup>94</sup> See 1 Samuel 17:1. See also Figures 22 and 23 for the location of the respective camps and the lay of the land.

<sup>95</sup> See 1 Samuel 17:2-3.

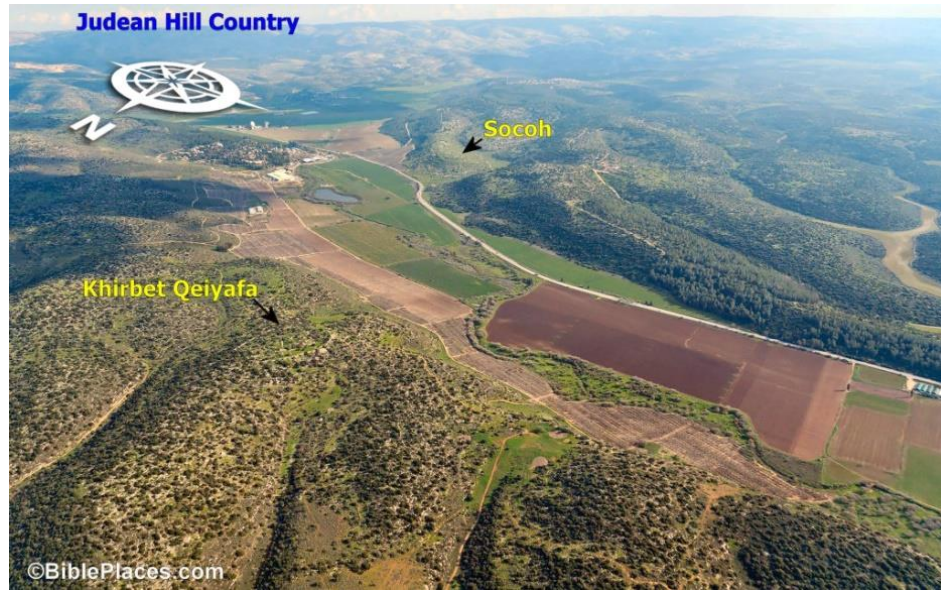


Figure 28: The Elah Valley – Looking to the Southeast  
Adapted from BiblePlaces.com

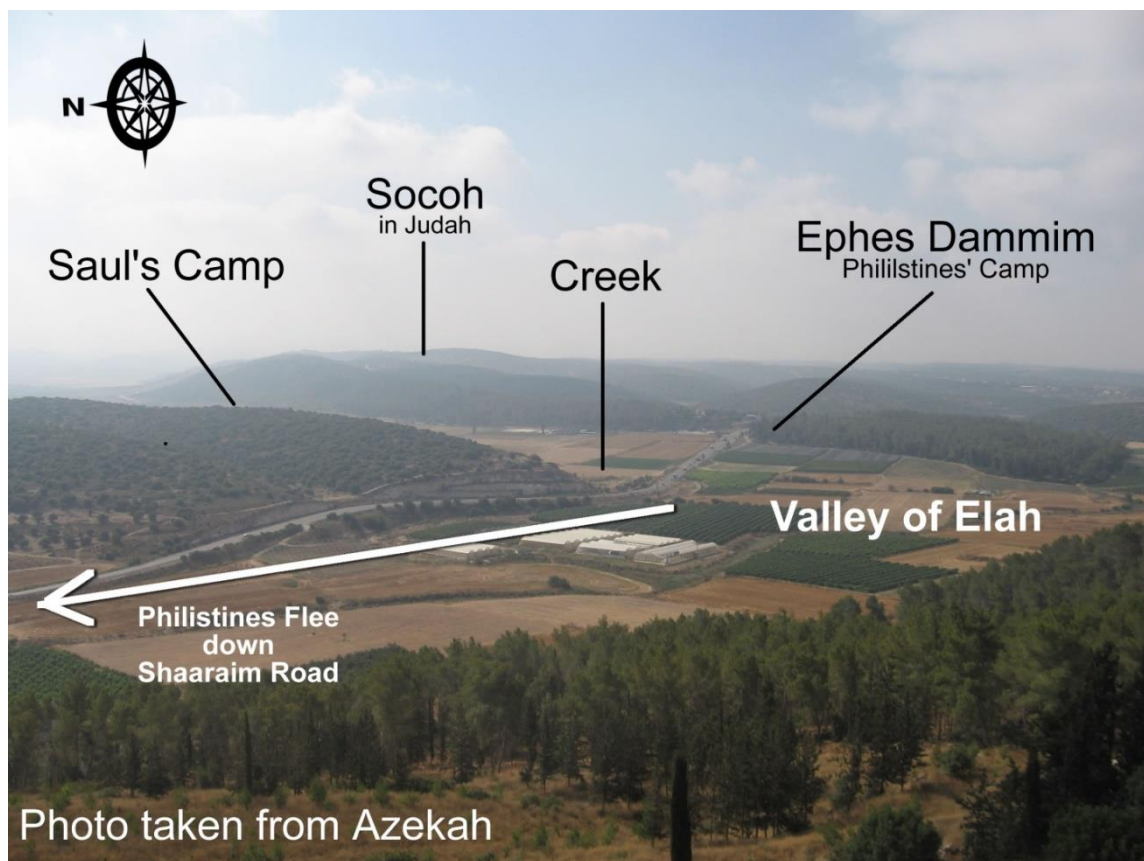


Figure 29: The Elah Valley – Looking East-Southeast from atop Azekah  
Photo taken from Azekah towards the Southeast  
Adapted from a diagram found online @ [www.generationword.com](http://www.generationword.com)

David descends westward from Bethlehem and joins Israel's forces on the north side of the Elah Valley. Eventually he answers the challenge of the Philistine champion and confronts him in the middle of the Elah between the two encamped forces. The pitched battle between the two population groups was averted when David slays the Philistine champion.

In 1 Samuel 23:1-6 the text describes David's victory at Keilah (see Figure 30). Keilah is a small town that sits perched on a steeply sloped hill 11 kilometers east of Maresha and 6.5 kilometers south southeast of Socoh. The site, today known as Qila, is on the east side of the Chalk Trough road just south of its intersection with the southern leg of the Elah Valley. This is clearly Israelite territory, the tribal area of Judah and was under attack by Philistines that were raiding the Israelite threshing floors.<sup>96</sup> David and his men defeated the Philistines and brought to an end the Philistine harassment of the inhabitants of Keilah.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> See 1 Samuel 23:1-5.

<sup>97</sup> The text in 1 Samuel 23:13 indicates that David's force numbered approximately 600 men – an increase of 50% or 200 more than the size of his force mentioned in 1 Samuel 22:2 at Adullam. Despite the increase this relatively small force also makes a clear statement concerning David's confidence in his ability to subdue the opposition force.



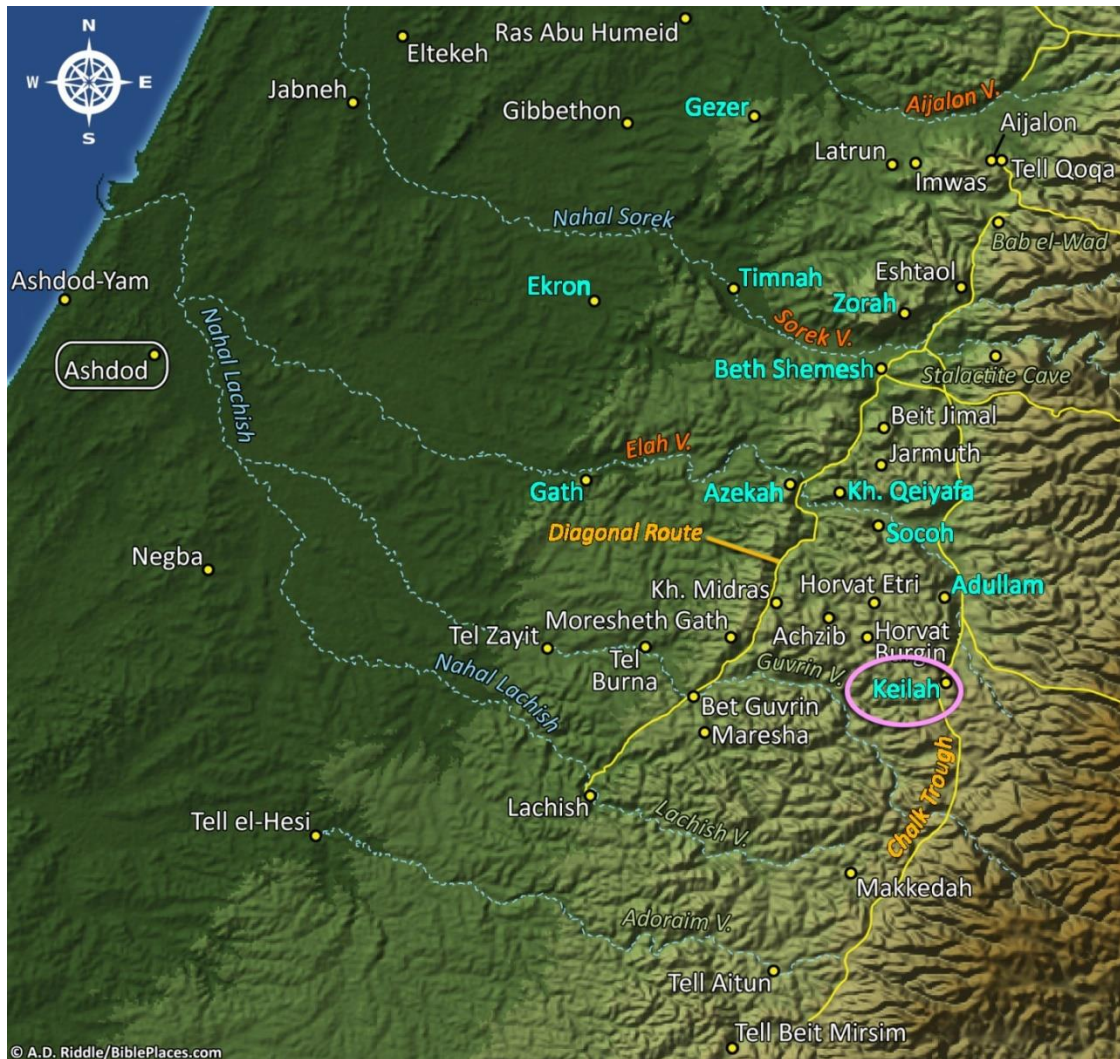


Figure 30: Keilah and the Chalk Trough

Adapted from stock photos found online @ [www.bibleplaces.com](http://www.bibleplaces.com) – The Shephelah

The narrative in 1 Samuel 27 and 29-30 relates David's sojourn among the Philistines. Pursued by Saul, David takes refuge with his enemy whom he had defeated at the contest in the Elah and the skirmish at Keilah. He finds favor and refuge under the patronage of King Achish, ruler of the Philistine capital Gath, located at the extreme western edge of the Elah Valley system. Achish cedes to David the tiny city of Ziklag, the location of which has not yet been positively identified. (see Figure 31: Ziklag)

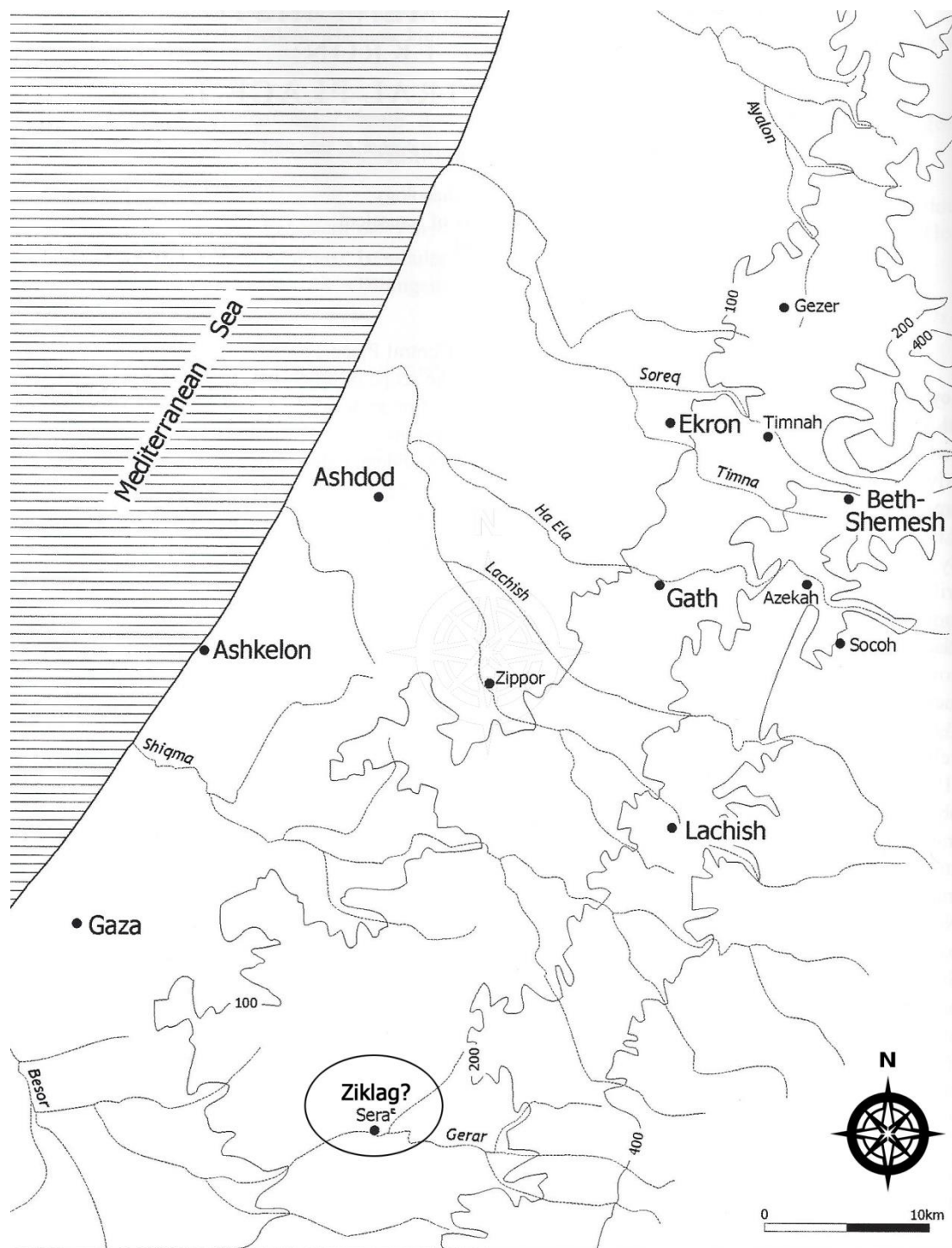


Figure 31: Ziklag/Sera  
Adapted from Garfinkel in "Up to the Gates of Ekron", p. 18.



Most scholars identify the site as Tell Sera (Tell esh-Sharia) located about half way between Beersheba and Gaza in the western Negev.<sup>98</sup> Originally assigned to the tribe of Simeon, Ziklag was apparently controlled by the Philistines during the time of Saul.<sup>99</sup> David used it for a home base to launch raids against those who would threaten Judah's southern border. He lived among the Philistines as a trusted ally of Achish for 16 months. However, as reflected in 1 Samuel 29, not all of the Philistine lords trusted David as much as his patron. Even so, he continued to live among the Philistines and only returned to Israel after the death of King Saul.

#### Gezer, the Philistines and Ethnicity

The book of Joshua present us with the same challenges encountered in Samuel and Kings. However, the purpose for which we are employing the texts cited will follow the same pattern as those addressed previously in that the historicity of the individual(s) in the story is not the focus of this study. Rather, as stated, the historical integrity of the setting is indeed the point being pursued. Several texts simply mention a group or an individual in the course of rehearsing the outcome of a battle as did the scribes associated with Sennacherib described above. Our purpose here is to show that the biblical text establishes the presence and location of the city we wish to examine archaeologically in the next chapter. Joshua 10, verse 33, speaks of Israel's defeat of Hiram, King of Gezer in a list cataloging Israel's triumphs under Joshua. Joshua 12:12, simply lists the fact that Gezer was defeated without mentioning any personage associated with that city. Chapter

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<sup>98</sup> Negev, A. & Gibson, S., ed. (2001). *Sharia, Tell esh-*. Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land. pp. 458–9. Also Meyers, Eric M., ed. (1997). *Sera, Tel*. The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East. pp. 1, 2.

<sup>99</sup> See Joshua 15:31; 19:5.

16:10, adds that though the city was defeated, the Canaanites were not driven out. There is no word as to whether subsequent to the defeat they were allowed to remain in Gezer or whether they reoccupied the defeated city at a later time. The text notes that the city of Gezer lay within the territory of the Tribe of Ephraim, Chapter 21:21 points out that it was then designated a Levitical city set apart for occupancy by the Levites known as Sons of Korah. Despite the designation, the text of Judges 1:29 agrees with the assessment offered in Joshua 16. That is, the Canaanites still occupied the city of Gezer. According to the biblical account, early in the period of David's United Monarchy the young king mounts an attack on the encroaching Philistines. They had invaded the valley of Rephaim and were pressing eastward in the direction of the central hill country threatening David's new capital, Jerusalem. The text in 2 Samuel 5 chronicles that battle and mentions that David pursued the Philistines down the slope and through the valley of Rephaim from Geba/Geva<sup>100</sup>, located on the Central Benjamin Plateau about 24 kilometers north of Jerusalem (see Figure 32: Geba), to Gezer (see Figure 1 & 7), at the western extremity of the Aijalon Valley.

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<sup>100</sup> See 1 Chronicles 14:16 which lists Gibeon/Al Jib rather than Geba/Geva as the city of departure for the battle between David and the Philistines.



Figure 32: Geba

Adapted from bibleplaces.com – benjamin.jpg.

Since the western end of the valleys flow out onto the Plain of Philistia, it is obvious that the text represents the Philistines as exercising control over Gezer even if they did not occupy it at the time of this battle. Beyond the scope of this study, but interesting to note in terms of hegemony is the text of 1 Kings 9:15-24, which indicates that an Egyptian Pharaoh, unnamed in the text, sacks and burns Gezer, kills the Canaanite inhabitants and then gives the city to his Egyptian daughter, one of King Solomon's wives. Solomon then rebuilds the city and increases its fortifications.

Gezer is also mentioned in 1 Chronicles 6:67 as one of the cities which was set aside by the tribe of Ephraim as a city of refuge. This portion of the text of Chronicles refers to towns designated for Kohathites who, though they were Levites and had received no tribal land allotment, did not serve a priestly function. Gezer is mentioned again in 1 Chronicles 7:28 in a list of tribal holdings reiterating that the city of Gezer and its surrounding towns were within the allotment designated for the tribe of Ephraim.

Although this study does not deal with the time period the text of 1 Chronicles 14:8-17 represents, it is interesting to note that the Chronicler describes a battle between Israel and the Philistines which erupts when “David was anointed king over all Israel.”<sup>101</sup>

The route chosen for the eastward attack of the Philistines was apparently by way of the Aijalon and/or Rephaim valley route gaining access to the ridges that led to the Central Benjamin Plateau. The route of attack is not specifically named, but can be deduced as one becomes familiar with the geography involved and the history of previous incursions into Israelite held territory. The description of the retreat of the Philistines does designate the route but it does name Gibeon at the eastern terminus and Gezer at the western terminus, clearly describing the Aijalon/Rephaim valley access to the Beth Horon ridge routes leading from the Coastal Plain - the Plain of Philistia, to the Central Benjamin Plateau. The text states that David pursued the Philistines down the above mentioned route from Gibeon to Gezer effectively describing the movement of the battle from Israelite territory to Philistine territory. The text of Chronicles further identifies Gezer with the presence of Philistines but does not clearly indicate whether Gezer is inhabited by the Philistines even though it goes on to speak of another war that broke out “at Gezer with the Philistines”<sup>102</sup> and Gath/Tel es-Safi.

#### Cooperation or Hegemony?

The assessment offered by the biblical text concerning the early relationships between Israel and the Philistines in the Northern Shephelah presents the reader with a constantly changing situation. Both groups in question exhibit militant dominance and

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<sup>101</sup> See 1 Chronicles 14:8-17.

<sup>102</sup> See 1 Chronicles 20:4.

both exhibit cooperation and peaceful co-existence. The picture portrayed is one of constant change and often puzzling contradiction.

The Samson narratives are a mixture of cooperation and hegemony. Hyperbolic language and heroic descriptions aside, the picture that emerges is one of constant change. The conflicts are primarily local and centered on individual or small group activities. Seldom do they rise to the level of a larger regional confrontation. Ethnic separation, with few exceptions, appears to be on a personal or family level. In the absence of antagonistic behavior on one part or the other, both groups seem to travel freely in each other's territory. Even marriage across ethnic boundaries, though discouraged, is not forbidden. The text indicates that strife between groups is usually on the level of personal vendettas. The headship of Philistines over Israelites and later Israelites over Philistines appears to be an easy arrangement to endure. The geographic and topographic comments made in the course of the text's narrative adopt the viewpoint of a local participant describing the events as one who is quite at home and familiar with his surroundings and whose audience is likewise without need of further explanation.

The narratives involving the capture and subsequent return of the Ark of the Covenant describe military confrontation on a national scale. An armed raid venturing into the central highlands at the seat of an opponent's central cult is confrontation begging a response of a larger magnitude than that of a personal vendetta. With the Ark's capture and its relocation in Philistine territory a series of revealing accounts emerge. While the purpose of this study is not rooted in the historicity of the events chronicled this particular instance clearly reflects a local understanding of the terrain mentioned in the narrative and an indication of defined borders between the two groups. Unlike the

earlier time period of the Samson narratives, there seems to be little freedom of travel across the border mentioned by the text in the Sorek System, giving one the impression that such lines of demarcation are tightly observed in times of national confrontation.

The David and Goliath narratives repeat the “local observer” qualities of the previous two narratives. The description of the encampment arrangements for both parties in the Elah Valley confrontation are geographically and topographically correct from the point of view of both the casual observer and the military strategist. The text represents the confrontation as a pitched battle of national proportions, albeit truncated by an interlude of hyperbolic proportions. In the midst of the larger than life saga, the text clearly lays out the battle lines, the strategic location of the majority of the forces arrayed against one another and the landmarks that anchor the setting in reality. The referenced locations make perfect sense from a strategic and logistical viewpoint and clearly give authenticity to the narrative.

The “David at Keilah” narrative chronicles a skirmish level activity. The text indicates that the Philistines had infiltrated an area normally controlled by Israel and were raiding the local community of Keilah as crops were being harvested and processed. Of particular interest to this study are the geographic markers noted in the narrative. The Philistine incursion extended east of the area normally controlled by Judah and had even crossed the formidable natural barrier of the Chalk Trough. While it was portrayed as a limited incursion by a relatively small force, the relative ease of the incursion gives us insight into the porosity of Israel’s western border at the southern extremity of the Elah Valley.



David's sojourn among the Philistines is enigmatic at the very least. It provides insight into the ever changing relationships between Israel and the Philistines. Therefore, it is included here. The text represents David, the former champion of the Elah and victor over Philistia's champion, as a local chieftain hiding from Saul within the territory of his former enemy, the Philistines. Under the patronage of Achish, the Philistine king of Gath<sup>103</sup>, David has become a trusted ally residing in Ziklag/Tel Sera, a city presented to him by his Philistine benefactor. Armed and able, he is free to move about among the Philistines, defend his city and mount small military campaigns against non-Philistine local enemies.

Despite the hyperbolic language and epic quality of the narrative the biblical text accurately portrays the geography and topography of the representative routes and approaches in the respective systems studied. The underlying physical setting, strategic options and contingencies, activities and settlement patterns mentioned in the text mirror precisely what one would describe and expect to encounter as a local observer. One cannot corroborate the changing politics and social interaction between the Philistines and Israel from geography and the text alone. However, the text is clearly in full agreement with the findings of chapter two's description of the physical setting, borders, boundaries, roads, natural barriers and choke points. Hyperbolic language and epic heroes notwithstanding, for the purposes of this study the text is solidly accurate.

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<sup>103</sup> See 1 Samuel 27, 29 and 30.

## Chapter Four

### The Archaeological Setting

The fourth chapter of this dissertation examines the archaeological data from representative cities in their respective valley systems targeting the time period, late Iron Age I and early Iron Age II, and the geographic setting represented by the biblical text. The extensive information available from the Sorek basin from both Ekron (Tel Mique) and Beth Shemesh (Ain Shems) serves as the primary focus. Additional archaeological information from Timnah (Tel Batash), though of lesser value, will also be consulted. Newly available information from Tel es-Safi/Gath in the Elah basin will also be evaluated and summarized. Azekah and to a lesser extent, Khirbet Qeiyafa, also in the Elah system, are utilized as corroborative sources rather than primary sources due to the paucity of material available in comparison to the other sites listed. Tel Gezer in the Aijalon Valley serves as an additional archaeological source for purposes of regional considerations. The archaeological data presented below contributes to a fuller understanding of the interrelationships between Israelites and Philistines.

#### Historic Setting

Dramatic changes marked the beginning of the Iron Age in Israel. One of the most widespread settlements was that of the Philistines who had migrated, at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 12th century BCE, from their homeland in the Aegean Region to the shores of the Mediterranean. The Philistines settled along the eastern Mediterranean coast at the time when the Israelites emerged in the Judean highlands. Their arrival was accompanied by a disruption in international trade and served as a

signal of the great changes that were about to take place. The first quarter of Iron Age Ia (1200-1150 B.C.E.) was contemporary with Egypt's Twentieth Dynasty and saw continued Egyptian dominance and a thriving Canaanite culture in many parts of the country. Iron Age Ib (1150-1000 B.C.E.) brought with it the demise of Egyptian control, the consolidation of Philistine control in the southern coastal plains, and the period thought to be that described in the biblical text as the time of the Israelite Judges.<sup>104</sup>

While such an archaeological identity for Israel in this time period is problematic at best, Dever points out<sup>105</sup> what can be said about early Israel with confidence. Commenting on the inscription found on the Merneptah Stele<sup>106</sup> commemorating Merneptah's successful Canaanite campaign, he notes the following:

1. There existed in Canaan by 1210 BC, a cultural and probably political entity that called itself "Israel" and was known to the Egyptians by that name.
2. This Israel was well enough established by that time among the other peoples of Canaan to have been perceived by Egyptian intelligence as a possible challenge to Egyptian hegemony.
3. This Israel did not comprise an organized state like others in Canaan, but consisted rather of loosely affiliated peoples – that is, an ethnic group.
4. This Israel was not located in the lowlands, under Egyptian domination, but in the more remote central hill country, on the frontier.

The inevitable contact between Israel and the Philistines on what Dever calls the "frontier" is the subject of this study.

Despite the strong tendency of the Philistines to assimilate among the inhabitants of their adopted country, they retained their political and traditional identity rooted in the

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<sup>104</sup> A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, pp. 371-375.

<sup>105</sup> See Dever (2003), p. 206

<sup>106</sup> See the fuller explanation of the Stele's import cataloging Merneptah's successful campaign into Canaan in Dever (2003), pp. 201-208.

Aegean/Mycenaean culture.<sup>107</sup> Architectural features and many material finds indicate this relationship, especially the early Philistine pottery decorated in shades of brown and black, which later developed into distinctive black and red decorations on white slip. Such traits continued to define them until the end of the Iron Age.<sup>108</sup>

As the Philistines began to exert greater control over the southern coastal plain their influence and their cultural distinctiveness became observable in the material remains of the surrounding communities. The central core of the power and influence they exerted was located in the five capitals they established in the southern Coastal Plain - Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron and Gath. Two of these sites, Gath and Ekron, are cities that play a major role in this study (see Figures 5 & 24).

#### The Ethnic Markers in the Philistine/Israelite Culture

Ethnic markers and the identification of population groups utilizing their material remains has always been problematic. There is much discussion concerning the efficacy of present methodologies employed to identify both Israel and the Philistines. Scholarly discussions notwithstanding, the two markers normally cited have not been adequately eclipsed to warrant setting them aside when looking for ethnic clarity in the northern Shephelah during the early Iron Age. Therefore, the distinctive nature and easy identification of Philistine wares (see the discussion below) and the absence of pig bones in the Israelite culture<sup>109</sup> are the two markers employed in this study.

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<sup>107</sup> See Dothan in “Reflections on the Initial Phase of Philistine Settlement” in *The Sea Peoples and Their World: A Reassessment*, Eliezer Oren, ed. (2000), p. 156.

<sup>108</sup> See Dothan, Gitin, Gunneweg and Perlman, “On the Origin of Pottery from Tel Mique-Ekron. *BASOR*, No. 264 (Nov., 1986), p.15.

<sup>109</sup> The prohibition concerning the ingestion of pork and pig products is found in the Biblical text – Deuteronomy 14:8.

During the initial stages of the Philistine culture, in the Iron Age I (ca. 1200-1000 BCE), their material culture was quite distinct. Certain aspects reveal much about the origins of the Philistines, while others can be utilized to understand various aspects of the Philistines after they settled in the Land of Canaan. Of first importance and the most readily available example of the material culture of the Philistines is their pottery. During the first stage of their arrival in the land, a distinctive type of pottery is found, belonging to the wares identified as Mycenaean pottery traditions (Myc IIIc:1b).<sup>110</sup> This pottery is identified with the Mycenaean culture and the region of the Aegean in which they lived. It also identifies the area of the eastern Mediterranean usually associated with the origin of the Philistines. Though imported examples of this pottery are known, there is also clear evidence of local “copy-cat” production in Philistia. Following this early stage, Philistine pottery goes through a unique developmental period, combining both Aegean and local cultural elements. It gives way to the ware described as Philistine bichrome pottery, (see Figures: 33, 34 & 35) which continued many of the foreign traditions of its predecessor while incorporating elements which are regarded as local.<sup>111</sup>



Figure 33: Philistine Bichrome Ware

<sup>110</sup> See Dothan 1982; Mazar 1992, pp. 265-266; Bunimovitz and Yasur-Landau 1996.

<sup>111</sup> See Dothan 1982; Mazar 1992, pp. 267-271; Dothan and Dothan 1992, pp. 89-92. See also Killibrew, (2005), especially pertinent to this discussion is her sub-section on the *Typology of Philistine Pottery*, pp. 219-230.

Adapted from BASOR, No. 333 (Feb., 2004), p. 15.



Figure 34: Philistine Bichrome Ware II  
Adapted from BASOR, No. 333 (Feb., 2004), p. 20.



Figure 35: Philistine Bichrome Ware III  
Adapted from [gath.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/choice-philistine-bichrome-pottery.jpg](http://gath.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/choice-philistine-bichrome-pottery.jpg)

### Pig and Swine Faunal Remains

A generally accepted explanation for the low levels of pig bones found in the “Israelite” highlands during the Iron Age, and the comparatively higher levels in Philistine sites near the Mediterranean, is that it provides evidence of an ethnic difference between Israelite people and Philistines as early as 1200 BCE. That is, the explanation of the difference is



sought in the ideological proscriptions against eating pork in the literature of the biblical text.

Leviticus 11:7-8

<sup>7</sup> And the swine, because he parteth the hoof, and is cloven-footed, but cheweth not the cud, he is unclean unto you.

<sup>8</sup> Of their flesh ye shall not eat, and their carcasses ye shall not touch; they are unclean unto you.

Among this view's defenders is William G. Dever:<sup>112</sup>

“One animal species is conspicuously absent in our Iron Age villages: the pig. Although not nearly as common as sheep and goats at Bronze Age sites, pigs are well attested then. They are also common at Iron I coastal sites that are known to be Philistine. But recent statistical analysis of animal bones retrieved from our Iron I Israelite sites show that pig bones typically constitute only a fraction of 1% or are entirely absent. A number of scholars who are otherwise skeptical about determining ethnic identity from material culture remains in this case acknowledge the obvious: that here we seem to have at least one ethnic trait of later, biblical Israel that can safely be projected back to its earliest days.”

However, a recent article<sup>113</sup> from the excavators of Tel es-Safi disputes the use of pig bone remains as an appropriate means of determining Philistine absence or presence in a culture. While most would agree that pig bones alone cannot be an adequate ethnic marker, the article affirms that there are good ecological and economic reasons for low levels of pig-farming in the highlands of Israel.

“...extremely high pig frequencies (c. 20 per cent or more) are found in sites in the Israeli coastal plain (Ashkelon, Tel Migne-Ekron)... At Tel es-Safi/Gath, located on the interface between the coastal plain and the hill country, pigs comprise 13 per cent of the Iron I fauna..., while Tel Batash, located in a similar setting, has yielded only 8 per cent pigs; at southern Philistine sites, the Nahal Patish temple...and the small village of Qubur el-Walaydah in the northern Negev...pigs represent less than 1 per cent of the faunal assemblage, a similar low

<sup>112</sup> Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* (2003), p.108.

<sup>113</sup> Cf: Maeir, *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 32, no. 1 (2013), pp 4-5.

frequency to that observed in coeval Israelite sites....Thus, it is very feasible that ecological, economic or functional factors, or a mixture of them, rather than ethnicity, were responsible for the relatively high frequencies of pigs in some Philistine sites and their dearth in others – Philistine and Israelite settlements alike”.

While there is merit in Maeir’s observation, the lower percentage of pig bone remains at Tel Batash/Timnah could be argued to be a product of its frontier location and the resultant mixed population (see chapter 3 – the Samson narratives). The neighboring community of Tel Beth Shemesh presents a greater problem to Maeir’s position since it is neither in the central highlands nor is it located on the fringe of the greater community. Indeed, it is the border town between Israel and the Philistines in the Sorek Valley and there is a total lack of pig bones remains during the time period addressed by this study. The differing percentages of pig bone remains still appear to be a legitimate ethnic marker in the Sorek Valley system during the Iron Age.

### The Sorek System

#### Tel Mique/Ekron: A Philistine City

Tel Mique/Ekron, just west of the traditional border between Philistia and Judah, was identified as the biblical Philistine city of Ekron in its final season of excavation.<sup>114</sup> The square shaped tell (see Figure 36) rises only a few meters above the surrounding fertile plain and consists of a small upper tell and a large lower one to the west and south. Major excavations were conducted at Tel Mique between 1981 and 1996, providing much information about the history and culture of Philistine Ekron during the 600 years

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<sup>114</sup> See article on line at <http://archive.archaeology.org/9801/abstracts/ekron.html>. Also see Gitin, Dothan and Naveh in "A Royal Dedicatory Inscription from Ekron." *Israel Exploration Journal* 48 (1997) 1-18.

of its existence (from the 12th to the end of the 7th century BCE).<sup>115</sup> The final proof identifying the tel as the ancient site of Philistine Ekron was found in an inscription uncovered in its temple complex the last week of the last year of excavation.



Figure 36: Aerial View of Ekron/Tel Mique  
Adapted from the cover photo of "Up to the Gates of Ekron"

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<sup>115</sup> See excavation reports in Meehl, Dothan and Gitin "Tel Mique-Ekron Excavations 1995-1996," Bierling in "Tel Mique-Ekron."

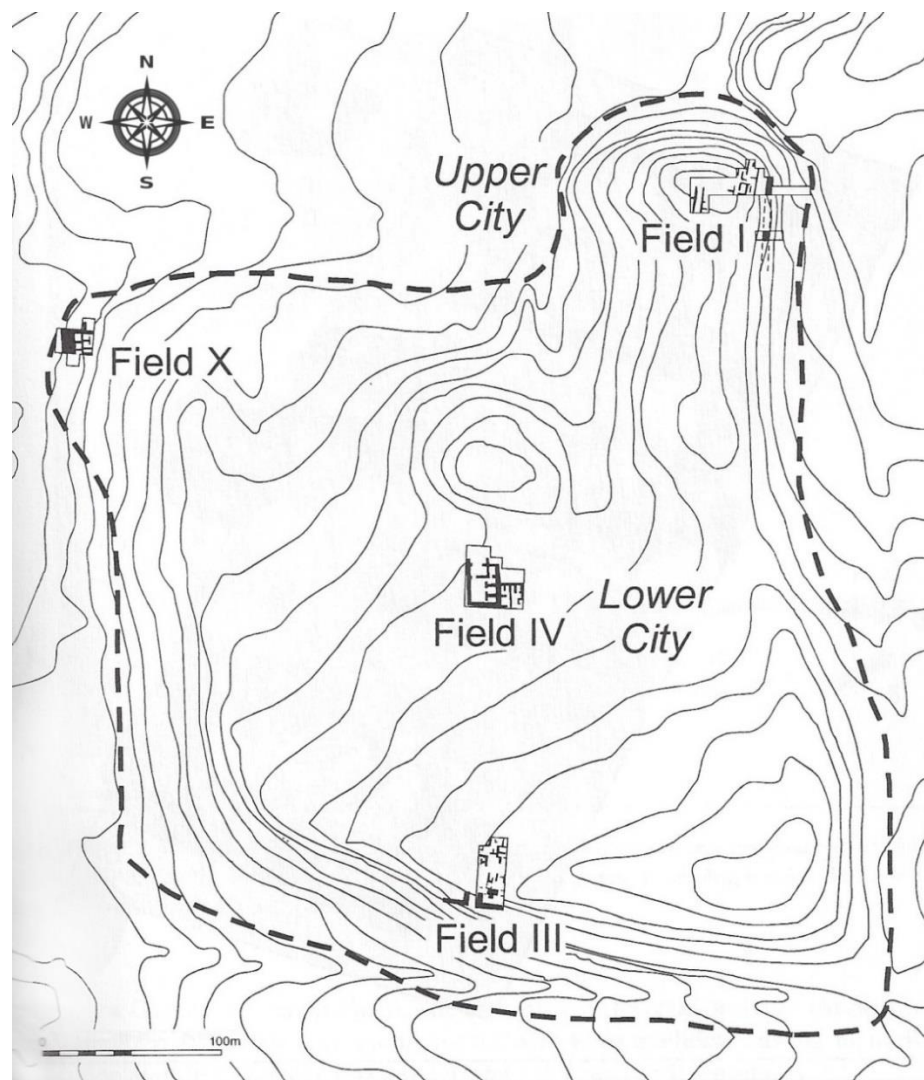


Figure 37: Excavation Fields at Ekron/Tel Mique  
Adapted from top plan, "Tel-Miqne Excavations, 1995-1996", page 22

Evidence of Philistine occupation begins in the first third of the 12<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>116</sup> It was a large, well planned and fortified city which existed for 200 years and covered the entire surface of the tel. During the 12<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE Philistine Ekron was a flourishing city enclosed by a sturdy, 3-meter thick brick wall.<sup>117</sup> At the center of

<sup>116</sup> See Gitin and Dothan, "The Rise and Fall of Ekron of the Philistines" in BA, vol. 50, No. 4 (Dec., 1987), p. 201.

<sup>117</sup> See Gitin and Dothan, "The Rise and Fall of Ekron of the Philistines" in BA, vol. 50, No. 4 (Dec., 1987), p. 201.

the lower city was a royal administration center consisting of well-planned, large structures, such as palaces and temples which yielded a multitude of finds (see figure 38, Field IV). Of particular interest is a large, well-constructed building (Building 350) which covers 240 sq. m.

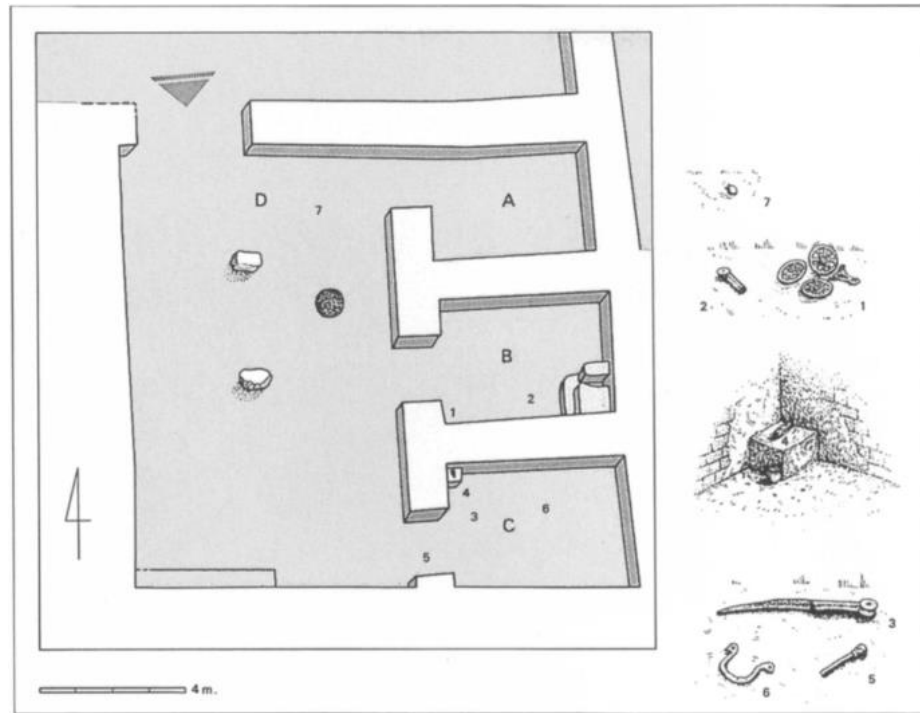


Figure 38: Building 350, Field IV, Tel Mique-Ekron

Adapted from Dothan in "Bronze and Iron Objects with Cultic connotations from Philistine Temple Building 350 at Ekron," IEJ, vol. 52, No. 1, (2002), p. 5.

This buildings walls are broad, designed to support a second story and its wide, elaborate entrance leads to a large hall, partly covered with a roof supported on a row of columns. In the floor of the hall is a circular hearth paved with pebbles, as is typical in Mycenaean buildings; other unusual architectural features are paved benches and podiums. Among the finds are three small bronze wheels with eight spokes. Such wheels are

known to have served as wheels for portable cultic stands in the Aegean region during this period and it is therefore assumed that this building served cultic functions.

According to the biblical text, Ekron was assigned to the Tribe of Judah (Jos. 15:45-46; Judges 1:18) and later, to the Tribe of Dan (Jos. 19:43). But archaeological evidence indicates a flourishing Philistine city during the 12th and 11th centuries BCE. When the Ark of the Covenant fell into Philistine hands, they displayed it in the Temple of Dagon in Ashdod and from there moved it to Gath and then Ekron (1 Samuel 5:10). Another biblical mention of Ekron followed the account of David's defeat of Goliath in the Elah Valley on the Philistine border with Judah. The biblical text points out that after the battle, Israel pursued the Philistines to the gates of Ekron (1 Samuel 17:52).

The text continues, in 2 Samuel 8, to point out that David eventually subdues the Philistines once he had consolidated his position as king. Therefore, it is reasonable to posit that from a biblical standpoint Ekron was probably destroyed by King David during his campaign against Philistia at the beginning of the 10th century BCE. Over the next 300 years, the material record at Philistine Ekron supports a reduction of habitation to the acropolis area of the tel.<sup>118</sup> In 712 BCE Sargon II, King of Assyria conquered Ekron and immortalized the siege of the city in reliefs on the walls of his palace in Khorsabad.<sup>119</sup>

During the 7th century BCE, Ekron was once more an important city-state.<sup>120</sup> It enjoyed economic prosperity under Assyrian rule, evidence of which is the expansion of

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<sup>118</sup> See Gitin in "Rise and Fall of Ekron of the Philistines," p. 206.

<sup>119</sup> See Gitin in "Rise and Fall of Ekron of the Philistines," p. 207.

<sup>120</sup> The Iron Age II references and comments are intended to show the continued occupation and productive nature of the Philistine presence in the Northern Shephelah.



the lower city and a new quarter to the north. At its peak it covered an area of some 85 acres and was thus one of the largest cities of the Iron II era. This city was carefully planned and divided into residential quarters, with a separate quarter for the rulers and the elite, the industrial and trade areas and a monumental temple.<sup>121</sup>

At the end of the 7th century BCE the city's fortunes declined and in 604 BCE, it was conquered and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. As the Babylonian army approached the city, residents hid their valuables and some of these hoards were found under the debris of the destroyed houses. One hoard consists of dozens of pieces of silver jewelry, precious stones, cut pieces of silver and silver ingots which served as standard of mercantile activity in that period.<sup>122</sup>

As mentioned above, during the final season of excavations in 1996 a unique, complete royal inscription was uncovered in the Babylonian destruction layer of the Temple Complex #650, identifying the site of Tel Mique as ancient Ekron (see Figure 39). This was a very large structure, 57 x 38 m., of clearly Assyrian architectural design, composed of a large courtyard surrounded by separate rooms. A long hall which probably served as a throne room, as indicated by a raised platform, separated the courtyard from a pillared sanctuary. The inscription, engraved on a rectangular stone measuring 60 x 39 x 26 cm., was found in the sanctuary in the holy of holies. It reads:

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<sup>121</sup> See Gitin in "Rise and Fall of Ekron of the Philistines," p. 207-208 and Nadav in Ekron Under the Assyrian and Egyptian Empires, BASOR, No. 332 (Nov., 2003), pp.81-91.

<sup>122</sup> See Golani and Sass, "Three Seventh-Century BCE Hoards of Silver Jewelry from Tel Mique-Ekron in BASOR, No. 311 (Aug., 1998), pp. 58-62.

*The temple which he built, 'kys (Achish, Ikausu) son of Padi son of Ysd, son of Ada, son of Ya'ir, ruler of Ekron, for Ptgyh his lady. May she bless him, and protect him, and prolong his days, and bless his land.*

This inscription is unique because it contains the name of the biblical city of Ekron and five of its rulers, two of whom are mentioned as kings in texts other than the Bible. It is the only such inscription found in situ in a securely defined, datable archaeological context. The title "ruler of Ekron" is proof of the identification of Tel Migne with biblical Ekron.

#### The Ekron Inscription

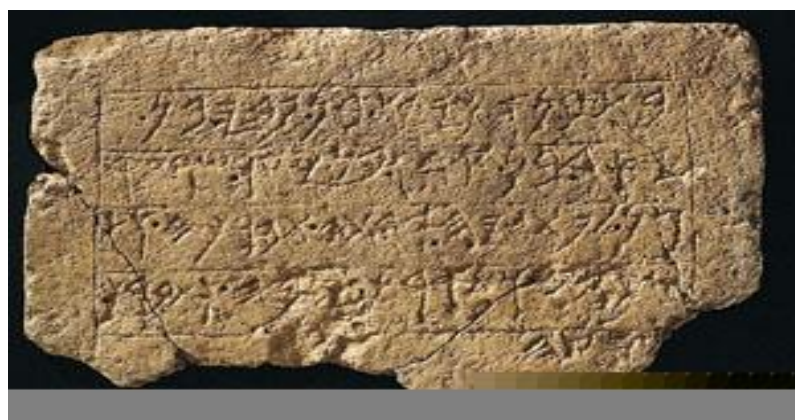


Figure 39: Ekron Inscription

Adapted from online article and picture, <http://archive.archaeology.org/9801/abstracts/ekron.html>  
Ekron/Tel Migne flourished in the 12<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE when it became a

densely populated urban center. Stratum VII<sup>123</sup> provides the evidence of a new material culture arriving at Tel Migne. The change was an abrupt and very clear one occurring in the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century BCE. It was characterized (for our purposes) by Aegean and Cypriot pottery elements, fortifications and industrial development all of which

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<sup>123</sup> Our target dates are found in Strata VII through Stratum V, from the 12<sup>th</sup> century BCE through the 11<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

suggested that a new ethnic footprint was being impressed upon Tel Migne.<sup>124</sup> Of particular interest to this study was large quantity of locally made monochrome pottery designated Mycenaean IIIC and making up about half of the ceramic samples found. This marks the beginning of the Iron I city of Ekron. Strata VI reveals the first appearance of a new kind of pottery - Philistine Bichrome ware dating to the last half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>125</sup>

In sharp contrast to the central highlands, pig constitutes some 19.46% of the faunal assemblage at Ekron in Strata VI-V,<sup>126</sup> a significant increase from the LBIIb level of 2.96% in Strata IX-VIII. Stager claims<sup>127</sup> that the Philistine preference for swine and pork, a popular food in the diet of Mycenaeans and Greeks, was brought with them to Canaan in the twelfth century BCE. Philistine pottery and the present or absence of pig bones will be one of the primary means of identifying a Philistine presence outside of their capital cities and their immediate environs.

### Timnah/Tel Batash

The biblical city of Timnah or Tel Batash (see Figure 39) rises above the flatland of the surrounding terrain in the center of the Sorek valley (Figures 13, 14 & 24). The city's mound is located 32 kilometers west of Jerusalem beside the Nahal Sorek, 9.6 kilometers south of Gezer, 8 kilometers east of Tel Migne/Ekron and 8 kilometers west of Beth-Shemesh. It was "rediscovered" in 1871 by the eminent French scholar and biblical archaeology pioneer, Clemont-Ganneau who at the time thought it was a Roman or

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<sup>124</sup> See Dothan in "The Rise and Fall of Ekron of the Philistines", p.201.

<sup>125</sup> See Dothan in "The Rise and Fall of Ekron of the Philistines", p.201.

<sup>126</sup> See Verlag in "Pig Husbandry in Iron Age Israel and Judah", p. 4.

<sup>127</sup> Stager, 1995:344.

Byzantine military camp. It was not until 1942 that the Israeli scholar Yaakov Kaplan, followed later by Benjamin Mazar, recognized the importance of the mound. At first, Mazar wished to identify the mound with the Philistine city of Ekron.<sup>128</sup> In the late 1950's Joseph Naveh suggested that Tel Migne was in fact Ekron,<sup>129</sup> a suggestion later confirmed by the thirteen season dig on that site under the direction of Trude Dothan of Hebrew University and Seymour Gitin of the American Schools of Oriental Research (see above).

The project at Ekron led to a change in thinking concerning the mound in the central Sorek. If Tel Batash was in fact not the Philistine capital Ekron, then the next logical identification of the mound was that of biblical Timnah.<sup>130</sup>

The mound of Tel Batash<sup>131</sup> stands on the south side of a gentle bend in the Nahal Sorek. It is square in shape, oriented toward the north and rises some 35 meters above the valley floor. Each side is 200 meters long at the base and 150 meters at the top covering an area of 10 and 6.25 acres respectively. The top of the mound is bowl shaped. This and the overall shape of the mound and the fact that it was surrounded by earth ramparts suggested to the excavation team that it was the site of a Middle Bronze Age fortified city, a theory which was confirmed in the course of excavations.<sup>132</sup> The mound preserves at least 11 layers of ruined cities and villages. The superimposed occupation levels span

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<sup>128</sup> See Gitin and Dothan in "The Rise and Fall of Ekron of the Philistines," p.198.

<sup>129</sup> See Gitin and Dothan in "The Rise and Fall of Ekron of the Philistines," p.198.

<sup>130</sup> See Kelm and Mazar in "Timnah", pp.1-4.

<sup>131</sup> Geographic background and the history of the identification of the site as Biblical Timnah are in *Timnah: A Biblical City in the Sorek Valley* whose introductory chapter and especially the endnotes, pp. 1-7, were found to be very helpful in terms of the descriptions offered and the literary resources available to answer further questions.

<sup>132</sup> See Kelm and Mazar in "Timnah", pp. 31-35.

more than a millennium; from the 18<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. to the Persian period in the 6<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.E. (see Table 1).



Figure 40: Aerial View of Timnah/Tel Batash

Adapted from on line photo, [http://archaeology.huji.ac.il/depart/biblical/amihaim/Mazar\\_Photo\\_1.jpg](http://archaeology.huji.ac.il/depart/biblical/amihaim/Mazar_Photo_1.jpg)

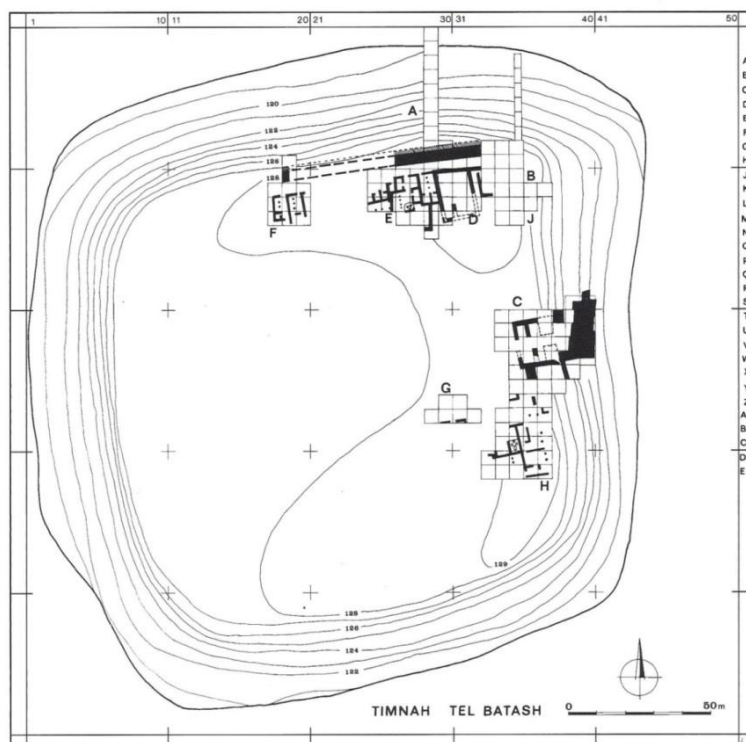


Figure 41: Excavation Fields at Timnah/Tel Batash  
Adapted from “Timnah: A Biblical City in the Sorek Valley, page 11.

<i>Stratum</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>Date</i>
I	Persian	
II	Iron Age II	7th century B.C.E.
III	Iron Age II	Destruction, 701 B.C.E. (gap?)
IV	Iron Age II	10th century B.C.E.
V	Iron Age I	Philistine city
VI	Late Bronze IIB	13th–early 12th? centuries B.C.E.
VII	Late Bronze IIA	14th century B.C.E.
VIII	Late Bronze IB	2nd half of 15th century B.C.E.
IX	Late Bronze IA–B	Mid-15th century B.C.E.
X	Late Bronze IA	Mid-16th to early 15th centuries
XI	Middle Bronze IIC	17th–16th centuries B.C.E.
XII	Middle Bronze IIB	18th or 17th centuries B.C.E.
	Chalcolithic	Isolated finds
	Neolithic	Isolated finds

Table 1: Timnah/Tel Batash Stratigraphy  
Adapted from “Timnah: A Biblical City in the Sorek Valley,” page 13.



### The Biblical Citations

The biblical text locates Timnah in the Sorek valley between the cities of Ekron (Tel Miqne) and Beth-shemesh (Ain Shems) describing it as a town on the Northern border of the tribal allotment of Judah<sup>133</sup>. The town was mentioned in the book of Genesis in a casual manner locating biblical characters during the Patriarchal period.<sup>134</sup> However, it is mentioned far more pointedly in the book of Joshua. The biblical writer, referring to the time period prior to area being associated with the tribe of Judah, describes the location of Timnah and surrounding area as the new ancestral home of the tribe of Dan.<sup>135</sup> This is the location indicated by the biblical text where Samson's famous misadventure with his first Philistine wife took place<sup>136</sup>. Following this period of Philistine domination, Timnah became Israelite territory in late Iron Age I extending into

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<sup>133</sup> Joshua 15:10 (*describing a portion of Judah's boundary*) From Baalah the boundary turned westward to Mount Seir, passed north of the slope of Kiriath-Jearim—that is, Chesalon—descended to Beth-shemesh, and passed on to Timnah. Joshua 15:57 (*describing a portion of Judah's boundary in the Hill Country*) Kain, Gibeah, and Timnah: 10 towns, with their villages.

<sup>134</sup> Genesis 38:12-14 A long time afterward, Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died. When his period mourning was over, Judah went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, together with his friend Hirah the Adullamite. 13 And Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is coming up to Timnah for the sheepshearing." 14 So she took off her widow's garb, covered her face with a veil, and, wrapping herself up, sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given to him as wife.

<sup>135</sup> Joshua 19:40-47, 40 The seventh lot fell to the tribe of the Danites, by their clans. 41 Their allotted territory comprised: Zorah, Eshtaol, Ir-shemesh, 42 Shaalabbin, Aijalon, Ithlah, 43 Elon, Timnah, Ekron, 44 Eltekeh, Gibbethon, Baalath, 45 Jehud, Bene-berak, Gath-rimmon, 46 Me-jarkon, and Rakkon, at the border near Joppa. 47 But the territory of the Danites slipped from their grasp.

<sup>136</sup> Judges 14:1-2, 1 Once Samson went down to Timnah; and while in Timnah, he noticed a girl among the Philistine women. 2 On his return, he told his father and mother, "I noticed one of the Philistine women in Timnah; please get her for me as a wife."

Judges 14:5a, So Samson and his father and mother went down to Timnah ....

Iron Age II as evidenced by the biblical writer's mention of the city being taken from Israel by the Philistines during the reign of Ahaz<sup>137</sup>.

### Historical Setting

It was likely that Timnah was transformed from a Canaanite city into a satellite of Ekron during the time of the Philistine ascendancy in Iron Age I. "It is also possible that the Philistine population of the town consisted mainly of overlords and aristocrats, while the lower classes were descendants of the earlier Canaanite inhabitants who had succumbed to Philistine control. Such a scenario is consistent with the basic features characterizing the Strata VI-V transition."<sup>138</sup>

### Recent Excavation History

Twelve seasons of excavations were carried out at Timnah from 1977 to 1989, the first three on behalf of the Baptist Theological Seminary in New Orleans, and the latter seasons on behalf of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, in cooperation with the Institute of Archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The expedition was directed by George Kelm, and the scientific director was Amihai Mazar.<sup>139</sup> The seasons of excavation and areas of concentration first began in the

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<sup>137</sup> 2 Chronicles 28:16-18, 16 At that time, King Ahaz sent to the king of Assyria for help. 17 Again the Edomites came and inflicted a defeat on Judah and took captives. 18 And the Philistines made forays against the cities of the Shephelah and the Negeb of Judah; they seized Beth-shemesh and Aijalon and Gederath, and Soco with its villages, and Timnah with its villages, and Gimzo with its villages; and they settled there.

<sup>138</sup> G. Kelm and A. Mazar, *Timnah: A Biblical City in the Sorek Valley*, p. 93.

<sup>139</sup> A explanation of the associations and affiliations brought to bear in the makeup of the resultant teams are available in the "New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavation," vol.1, p. 152 and the volume entitled "Timnah: A Biblical City in the Sorek Valley," by Kelm and Mazar, p. 9f.

northeast corner and eastern slope and top of the mound later followed by further excavations to the north.<sup>140</sup> (see Figure 40) This study will concern itself with the excavation activity at the level of Strata V in Areas B, C, D, E and J which contain the bulk of the archaeological evidence for the Philistine period of occupation.<sup>141</sup>

### The Archaeological Evidence and the Philistine Occupation

The Philistine town of Timnah (Strata V) was thriving during the time of the transition from Late Bronze to the Iron Age. When the Philistines arrived to settle at Timnah, structures of the last Canaanite level were renovated and reused<sup>142</sup> by the new settlers.<sup>143</sup> The remains thus far exposed by the excavations, though limited in scope suggest a densely structured urban center fortified by a city wall.<sup>144</sup> Many of the houses are built of the typical mudbrick common to the area. The remains of a large building were found where a city gate would be built in subsequent periods. This building was apparently a citadel or large fortified building of some kind. Strata V ends abruptly yet without a destruction layer. Moreover, there appears to be a gap in occupation between Strata V and the next level, Strata IV, suggesting that the Philistine town at Timnah was

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<sup>140</sup> See "Timnah", figure 2.1, p. 11 for the Topographical Plan and designated excavation areas of the mound.

<sup>141</sup> See Figure 41, Table 1 and "Timnah", Table 2.1, p. 13 for the Strata scheme and the Seasons and the respective Areas worked during the duration of the excavations at Tel Batash.

<sup>142</sup> Kelm and Mazar, *BAR*, Jan/Feb 1989, p.41.

<sup>143</sup> Kempinski and Reich, *The Architecture of Ancient Israel*, p. 191, observe that ...."the Philistine contribution to architecture was meager. This people may have been the cultural intermediary between the Canaanite coastal cities and the areas of Israelite settlement in the interior hill country. It is likely that they introduced gatehouses, fortifications, and probably even fortresses into the areas of Israelite occupation.

<sup>144</sup> See Mazar in "Timnah (Tel Batash) I," *Qedem* 37, p. 254.



included some painted sherds after the Philistine style and a clay bull's head which had probably been part of a zoomorphic vessel.<sup>146</sup> Finds in the spacious open area to the west and north include several silos, ovens and pits. This would indicate a major architectural change between the two levels in this location as the pits and the ovens were constructed over the remains of the ruined walls of Strata VI. Although some of the pits were plastered, many of them were without finished walls indicating they were likely used for rubbish. There were at least two or three phases of repair during which floors had been raised, ovens repaired, and pits dug into earlier ones bearing witness to this stratum's long duration. The extensive erosion at the edge of Area B has eliminated any evidence of the fortification wall which apparently existed during this period as its remains were found in Area C.

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<sup>146</sup> See Kelm and Mazar in "Timnah", P. 82, the color plate in Fig. C19 from Stratum V.

## Area “C”

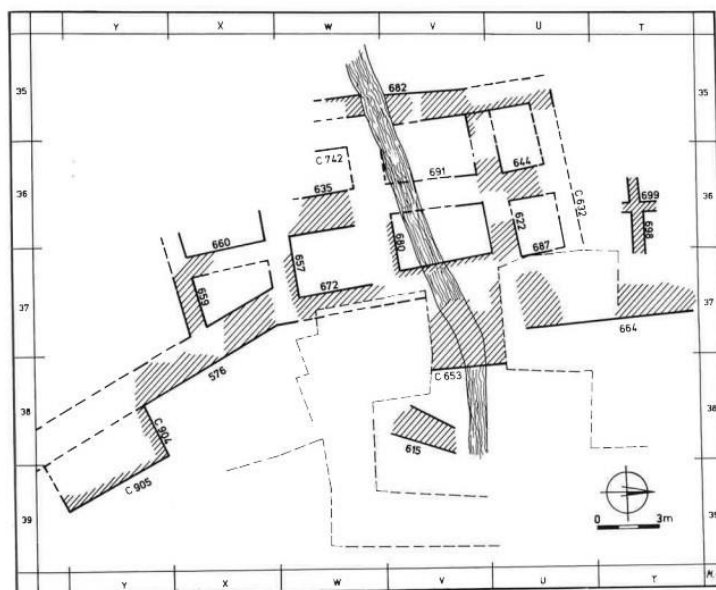


Figure 43: Area “C”, Strata V  
Adapted from Qedem 37, “Timnah”, p. 99.

The building remains of Strata V in Area C include a narrow city wall with a rectangular tower on the southern side of the area (see figure 43). In the central part of the area, the fortification line abuts a large structure, which was built of mud brick on a stone foundation and was divided by partitions into several rectangular compartments, two main spaces and four peripheral ones which were filled with bricks. Part of the structure (9.2 m by 14.5 m) was exposed under the foundations of Iron Age II gates built in the next occupational level. On the south side a 1.2 m thick wall was uncovered<sup>147</sup> abutting the structure with a floor abutting it. Iron Age I vessels were found on this floor thus

<sup>147</sup> Cf, *IEJ* 29 (1979), pp.241-243 for an early discussion concerning the mistaken notion that Timnah was an unfortified city under the Philistines in Iron I. Kelm’s holds that this structure negates the previous notion by pointing out the strategic position of the complex and the Iron I pottery found on the floor inside the city wall anchor the time period to Iron I during the Philistine occupation.



anchoring the age of the wall and adjacent features. These structures were probably erected in a late phase of the Iron Age I and presumably formed part of the city's fortifications at that time. A drainage channel 40 m long, which runs west-east across area C, should perhaps be ascribed to this period.<sup>148</sup> The channel is faced with stone and covered with a gable made of pairs of stone slabs. Noteworthy among the finds from this period are pottery vessels with characteristic Philistine decoration, a pyramidal seal bearing a schematic depiction of a harpist, and a seal impression on a bulla depicting a man and an animal, etched in characteristic Philistine style. Thick occupational debris again point to a prolonged duration of this city. As with all other areas excavated during the Iron I period on the mound, there is no evidence of a violent destructive end.

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<sup>148</sup> Mazar argues for an Iron I date and also includes the alternative argument for an Iron II date in Qedem 37, pp.104-105. The bulk of the data and the most convincing points made seem to tip the scales in favor of an Iron I dating.



foundations of the later Iron Age II city wall indicating that the Philistine buildings extended to the edge of the mound. In Area E, Strata V was only reached in isolated probes. Nevertheless, the top of a thin yellowish mudbrick wall was found and probably is the remains of a row of houses constructed along the northern edge of the mound. Associated with the wall was Iron Age I pottery.

#### Area “J”



Figure 45: Area “J”, Strata V  
Adapted from Qedem 37, “Timnah”, p. 94.

Area J is a southern extension of and contiguous with Area B. It yielded fragmentary remains of a stratum V building’s walls and a cobbled floor (see Figure 45). The date of the building was confirmed by the Iron I sherds found above and on the floor. Excavation of the area encountered heavy erosion which had obliterated most of the Iron I remains as indicated by the discovery of Late Bronze structures located just below the surface.

### Artifacts and Pottery

Among the special finds from this period is an interesting Philistine seal showing a schematic human figure seated and playing a lyre. Another important find was a bulla bearing the stamped impression of a seal that had been used to seal a papyrus document. Here is unquestionable evidence for writing on papyrus in Philistia during this period. The most clearly defined and lasting element of the earliest Philistine settlement is their distinctive pottery also known as “Monochrome Ware.” This is the archetype pottery from which the later “Bichrome” Philistine pottery developed as local ceramic traditions were assimilated. The pottery finds on Stratum V included painted pottery in the typical Philistine style, known from sites throughout Philistia, such as Ekron. The earliest Philistine pottery, locally made “Mycenaean III C” pottery, which is abundant at Ekron Strata VII and VI, is missing at Timnah. This seems to indicate that the Philistines occupied the site somewhat later than at Ekron. It follows then that Tel Batash became Philistine only during an advanced phase of Philistine material culture, perhaps sometime between 1150-1100 B.C.E.

The Philistine town of Strata V appears to have been a well established, fortified urban center. It is unfortunate that only a small portion of the Philistine occupation of the mound is available to us due to the limited scope of the excavations carried out on Timnah and the problem of site erosion in some of the areas excavated. However, there is enough archaeological data to suggest that the Philistine town was well planned and densely populated.<sup>149</sup> The extensive repair of existing structures and the repaving of

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<sup>149</sup> There are pig bone remains associated with Strata V. NEA 72:3 (2009), p. 124 represents the figure at 8%.

floors and open plazas suggests that the city enjoyed an extended occupation and intensive use. “The demise of Strata V Timnah can be dated to ca. 1000 B.C.E.. The town appears to have come to an end without violence or destruction, perhaps as a result of pressure from the emerging Israelite state of David. It was succeeded by an entirely different city that can be attributed to the reigns of David and Solomon.”<sup>150</sup> Still unanswered are questions concerning the full nature of the Philistine settlement, its origin and its end. Were the Philistines on Timnah the aristocratic elite from Ekron? Was Timnah primarily a military outpost – a buffer zone between the Philistine coastal plane and the Israelite Shephelah? Why was the site abandoned and why did it remain unoccupied for a time?

### Tel Beth-Shemesh

Tel Beth-Shemesh is located in the northeastern portion of the Shephelah, at the eastern extremity of the Sorek valley, near the modern town of Beth-Shemesh (see Figures 17-19). The site is approximately 20 kilometers west of Jerusalem just south of the main Jerusalem-Tel Aviv highway and in antiquity guarded the major western ascent to Jerusalem. The tel is elliptical in shape, rises prominently above the surrounding valley floor and measures approximately seven acres in size. The Hebrew name apparently preserves the tradition of an older Canaanite term meant to designate the existence of a temple within the city. The biblical text, in the border list of the tribe of Dan, calls it Ir-shemesh, “City of the Sun.” (*Joshua 19:41* “Their allotted territory comprised: Zorah, Eshtaol, Ir-shemesh...”)

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<sup>150</sup> Kelm and Mazar, *Timnah*, p. 104.



Figure 46: Aerial View of Tel Beth Shemesh  
 Adapted from photo in “The Archaeology of Border Communities”,  
 Bunimovitz and Lederman in *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 72:3, pp. 114-115.

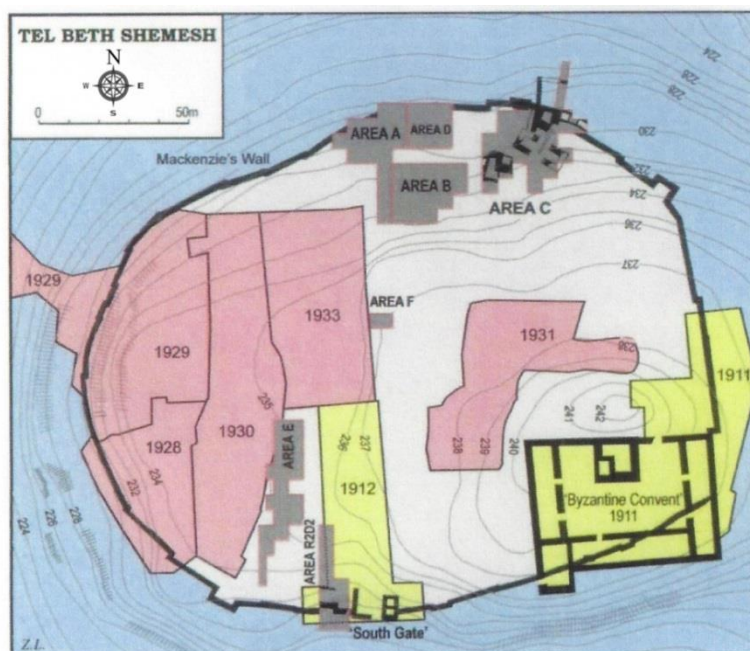


Figure 47: Excavation Fields at Tel Beth Shemesh  
 Adapted from photo in *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 72:3, pp. 114-115.



Stratigraphical Chart				
Level	Period	Date (B.C.E.)	Grant and Wright (1939)	Description
Level 1	Iron Age IIC	650–635		Short-lived, small small-scale settlement near the underground water reservoir: reservoir's last use and its violent blockage.
Level 2	Iron Age IIB	790–701	Stratum IIc	Last Iron Age settlement: private dwellings, olive oil and textile cottage industries, <i>bnlk</i> and "private" seal impressions, <i>qds</i> -inscribed bowl.
Level 3	Iron Age IIA	950–790	Stratum IIA–IIb	Governmental administrative center: fortifications, underground water reservoir, open "commercial area," iron smithy, store house in Area E and a large public building in Area B.
Level 4	Iron Age I	1050–950	Stratum III–IIa	Large village: peasant community, domestic dwellings characterized by thick plaster floors, use of monolithic standing stone pillars; olive oil extraction installations.
Level 5	Iron Age I	1100–1050	Stratum III	Large village: contiguous buildings, olive oil extraction installations, signs of settlement planning.
Level 6	Iron Age I	1150–1100	Stratum III	Large village: peasant community, contiguous houses found arranged on the periphery of the mound, long rooms, sparse use of flat stone pillar bases, gold jewelry hoard.
Level 7	Iron Age I	1200–1150	Stratum III	Village: fine architecture; impressive olive oil installation, no Cypriot and Mycenaean imported pottery, no monochrome Philistine pottery.

Table 2: Tel Beth Shemesh Stratigraphy

Adapted from a Table in "The Archeology of Border Communities",  
Bunimovitz and Lederman in *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 72:3, p. 116.

The site's Arabic name is Tell er-Rumeilah and the nearby village of "Ain Shems" ("spring of the sun") preserves the ancient name. The name "Beth-Shemesh" is not mentioned in any ancient document but the Bible. The name is found, as previously indicated, in the tribal territory lists, but also appears on the northern boundary of Judah,

*Joshua 15:10*

10 From Baalah the boundary turned westward to Mount Seir, passed north of the slope of Mount Jearim—that is, Chesalon—descended to Beth-shemesh, and passed on to Timnah.

And as a Levitical city in Judah.

*Joshua 21:16*

16 Ain with its pastures, Juttah with its pastures, and Beth-shemesh with its pastures—9 towns from those two tribes.

Following the battle of Eben Ezer and the capture of the ark by the Philistines, the ark was returned to Beth-Shemesh.

*1 Samuel 6:9*

9 Then watch: If it goes up the road to Beth-shemesh, to His own territory, it was He who has inflicted this great harm on us. But if not, we shall know that it was not His hand that struck us; it just happened to us by chance.”

During the reign of Ahaz, the Philistines seized Beth-Shemesh from Judah

*2 Chronicles 28:18*

18 And the Philistines made forays against the cities of the Shephelah and the Negeb of Judah; they seized Beth-shemesh and Aijalon and Gederot, and Soco with its villages, and Timnah with its villages, and Gimzo with its villages; and they settled there.

Beth Shemesh was later returned to Judah during the reign of Hezekiah.

### Synopsis of Excavation

Tel Beth-Shemesh was identified by Edward Robinson in 1838<sup>151</sup> and first excavated in 1911-1912 by Duncan Mackenzie.<sup>152</sup> From 1928 to 1933, an American expedition from Haverford College, Pennsylvania, headed by Elihu Grant, conducted five seasons of large-scale excavations. The results were later analyzed and published by G. Ernest Wright (1939), who emphasized the inherent difficulties of his tentative analysis and the need for a better controlled excavation.<sup>153</sup> In 1990, the Department of the Land of Israel Studies at Bar-Ilan University renewed excavations at Tel Beth-Shemesh,<sup>154</sup> under the direction of Drs. Shlomo Bunimovitz and Zvi Lederman, in order to answer some basic stratigraphic and cultural questions that remained and to integrate ancient Beth-Shemesh into the broader archaeological framework of the Sorek Basin.

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<sup>151</sup> Edward Robinson and Eli Smith in “Palestine, Mount Sinai and Arabia Petraea”, p. 225.

<sup>152</sup> Mackenzie dug on behalf of the Palestine Exploration Fund.

<sup>153</sup> Excavation history is updated in Bunimovitz Lederman, NEA 72:3 (2009), pp. 116-118.

<sup>154</sup> Tel Beth Shemesh will be referred to as TBS

### Early Excavation History<sup>155</sup>

The 1911 excavations under Mackenzie concentrated on a Byzantine convent, located on the southeast corner of the Tel, and the cemetery to the northwest of TBS. The following year Mackenzie excavated the central and southern portions of the tel. It was during the 1912 season that a “strong wall” (his terms) was uncovered. Mackenzie dated the wall in what he called the “Semitic Period” analogous to present understanding as Middle Bronze (approximately, for Mackenzie 1700-1800 BCE). After the discovery of the wall, Mackenzie began to seek out its extent by tunneling and trenching along the wall’s outer face until he had reconstructed its course around the tel, and exposed two “bastions” and a city gate with three pairs of piers on the south side of the tel. In the central area of the tel, he uncovered what he designated as three cities. The earliest, which was associated with the wall, ended with the disappearance of Cypriot and Mycenaean imported pottery at the end of the Late Bronze Age. The second was characterized by Philistine pottery and had been utterly destroyed, as evidenced by what Mackenzie called the “Red Burnt Stratum.” The third city, from the time of the Judean monarchy, seemed to ignore the former fortifications and to expand beyond their line. Mackenzie’s stratigraphy was basically confirmed and further refined in the extensive Haverford excavations on the western half of the tel.

Elihu Grant, though not skilled as an archaeologist, conducted extensive excavations from 1928 to 1933. Grant’s discoveries and records were put in order, as

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<sup>155</sup> The early excavation history of Beth Shemesh is included to establish and emphasize the long term scrutiny the site has received. The resultant clarity of occupational identity serves to anchor the site as “Israelite” in the early Iron Age and beyond.

much as possible, by G. Ernest Wright, who then published the final volume of the Haverford excavations. Wright's final report incorporated both Grant and Mackenzie's understanding of the stratigraphic record found at TBS. The lowest one, designated Strata VI consisted of Early Bronze IV and Middle Bronze IIA sherds all of which were found as the dig approached bedrock. Strata V dates to the Middle Bronze Age and includes Mackenzie's massive city wall and triple entry gate. During this time the city was well fortified with a few patrician houses and outside on the northwest, Mackenzie's tombs. Strata IV, Late Bronze Age, seems to have been a quite prosperous time for Beth-Shemesh including some of the most interesting objects found at TBS. Included in the list is a cuneiform tablet written in the Ugaritic alphabet, an ostrakon with a Proto-Canaanite inscription, and a spectacular jewelry hoard originally dated incorrectly to the Byzantine period. The Late Bronze city produced some fine domestic structures, many cisterns, a smelting furnace, and several tombs. Strata III, Iron Age I, contained a much shallower layer of debris than those previous. It represents Mackenzie's second city and is characterized primarily by Philistine bichrome pottery. The city, though large, seems to have been somewhat unplanned. The domestic architecture, as well as the pottery, retains strong Canaanite traditions. Wright related the violent destruction of Strata III to the Philistines and dated it to the mid-eleventh century BCE. Later evaluations list the cause of the destruction as unknown but dated to the early eleventh century BCE. Strata II, Iron Age II, is considerably more complex in its makeup than its predecessors. Three phases have been identified and designated: Iron IIA (c. 1000-950 BCE); Iron IIB (c. 950-8<sup>th</sup> cent BCE); Iron IIC (c. 8<sup>th</sup> cent-586 BCE). There is some evidence in Strata IIA that Beth-Shemesh was used as a provincial administrative center during the United Monarchy.

Stratum Iron IIb includes large olive-crushing installations and many Royal stamped jar handles attesting to the city's continued importance. The final destruction, as evidenced in Stratum Iron IIc, thought by the early excavators to have been carried out by the Babylonians (c. 586 BCE) is better related to the Judean campaigns of Sennacherib in 701 BCE. Stratum I, consists of architectural remains spanning the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and Medieval periods. Included in this is the large structure called the Byzantine Monastery or Convent by the earlier excavators.

#### Recent Excavations

Almost three quarters of the tel had already been dug down to bedrock (see Figure 47). Therefore, the excavation conducted by the Bar-Ilan expedition was concentrated in the mound's northeastern quarter which had been untouched by Grant and excavated by Mackenzie only at its perimeter. Four fields designated Areas A, B, C and D have been excavated since the work began in 1990. A fifth field, designated Area E, was opened in the summer of 1997 and expanded in the summer of 1999. Its location is on the south central portion of the tel between Grant's 1931 excavations and Mackenzie's 1912 site. So far the most ancient remains that have been uncovered date to Iron I. Much of what was previously discovered by earlier excavators has been verified and refined. The trench which opened up Area "A", also unearthed an Iron I "Patrician House" on whose floor were found a number of items of gold jewelry. The house itself still retained its column bases indicating Canaanite construction techniques. The material culture excavated was clearly Canaanite in origin with one major difference. After analyzing over 6000 bone fragments only one fragment could be possibly identified as pig bone in origin indicating

a clear break with the dietary habits of Beth-Shemesh's neighbors where the percentage of pig bones is as high as 18 %.

The Iron II remains approximate the architecture normally associated with the period of the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Area "B" was the site of a number of structures measuring some 15 meters across, public buildings, Iron II pottery and what has been designated a game board piece. Also found were the massive fortification walls first seen by Mackenzie complete with evidence of his tunneling techniques. Most impressive was the water reservoir system discovered quite by accident. The entrance had been intentionally blocked to deny the inhabitants access to the water. In excavating the entrance 20,000 sherds and 350 tons of debris were removed to reveal a system capable of holding 800 cubic meters of water – enough for a village of 1000 to survive for three months. The reservoir was constructed in the tenth century BCE in the form of a cruciform structure with each leg measuring approximately 9 meters long, 4-6 meters high and 2-4 meters wide. Plastered throughout, the reservoir lay some 6 meters below the surface of the Iron IIA city.

#### Iron Age I (12th-11th centuries BCE)

Remains of a large structure, probably a public building, were uncovered on the slope of the tel. Its walls, built of large fieldstones, indicate that it had a second story. There was also a large stone-paved courtyard surrounded by many rooms. To the east of this building were many simple buildings with ceilings supported by wooden pillars on stone bases. Large grindstones and clay ovens attest to the daily activities of their



inhabitants. This city was destroyed (the event is unknown) and its houses were buried under a thick layer of ash and bricks.

The pottery used by the inhabitants of Beit Shemesh during this period is in the Canaanite and Philistine tradition. But the bones of the animals they consumed attest to a diet typical of the Israelites who inhabited the hill country. Such finds indicate the cultural influences on the inhabitants of this border town; it is difficult, however, to ascertain their specific ethnic identity - Canaanite, Philistine or Israelite.

#### Iron I – Iron II (10th-7th centuries BCE)

In the late 10th century BCE Beth Shemesh was rebuilt, and may have served as a regional administrative center of the Israelite Kingdom. The remains show evidence of considerable planning and financial investment in the buildings. The city was surrounded by massive fortifications and its water supply guaranteed by a subterranean reservoir.

An elaborate system of fortifications, from the 10th century BCE, was discovered on the northeastern side of the tel. The main element is a tower with two very broad, perpendicular walls built of particularly large stones, each 1.5 m. long. A covered, hidden passage (postern) at the city wall, west of the tower, served as an escape route from the city. A casemate wall extending from the eastern side of the fortification is assumed to have surrounded the entire city.<sup>156</sup> The massive tower was built of large stones, and projected outward. This wall, exposed by the Macalister excavations, was erroneously

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<sup>156</sup> See Bunimovitz and Lederman in “The Iron Age Fortifications of Tel Beth Shemesh: A 1990-2000 Perspective, *Israel Exploration Journal*, vol. 52, No. 2 (2001), p. 127-129.

dated to the Bronze Age (2nd millennium BCE). It is now clear that it formed an integral part of the fortifications of the Iron II Israelite city.

### The Water System

Beneath the plaza inside the city gate, the excavators found a large subterranean reservoir - a unique find - not encountered so far in any of the other water systems of the Iron Age. The rock-cut reservoir is cruciform in shape (with four arms), coated with thick hydraulic plaster. The length of each of its arms is 9 m. and their width 2-4 m.; it is 6 m. high and has a capacity of 800 cubic meters. From the top opening of the reservoir near the city gate, one may descend via a broad staircase, finely constructed of large stones, which makes two turns around a built pier. At the bottom is a narrow opening covered by three large and very carefully cut cigar-shaped stones. Through this opening one enters the northwestern arm of the reservoir, which was filled with rainwater collected from the plaza above. Beth Shemesh was destroyed by the Assyrian king Sennacherib in his campaign against Judah in 701 BCE, and abandoned. But in the 7th century BCE some Judean families returned, refurbished the reservoir and lived for a while in its vicinity. Many pottery vessels, broken while drawing water, remained imbedded in the thick layer of silt accumulated at the bottom of the reservoir. On a bench hewn in the rock inside the entrance to the reservoir, two jars and a cooking pot were found, apparently left there by the last inhabitants of Beth Shemesh. Their Philistine neighbors and/or the ruling Assyrians deliberately blocked the entrance to the reservoir with 150 tons of earth and debris.

The Elah System

Tel es-Safi



Figure 48: Aerial View of Tel Es-Safi  
Adapted from an online photo in Images of Tel Es-Safi



Figure 49: Map of Tel es-Safi/Gath with location of the excavation areas.  
Adapted from Aren Maeir in Tel es-Safi/Gath I, p. 10

Tel es-Safi sits on a natural hill 91 meters above the plain of Philistia and 210 meters above sea level, between the coastal plain and the Judean foothills (see Figure 48). Its white-faced limestone precipices can be seen from the north and west. Stratigraphic evidence attests to settlement in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages. A large city in Iron Age I and II, the site was enclosed on three sides by a large man-made siege-

moat. The Western entrance to the Elah Valley is just north of Tel es-Safi and major north-south route is west of the tel near the coast (see Figure 7). The Elah Valley is one of the main west-east secondary roads leading into the Judean Hills toward Bethlehem and Jerusalem (see discussion above in chapter two and Figures 5 & 6). Two more Philistine capitals, Ashdod (to the west) and Ekron-Tel Mique (to the north) are close by (see Figure 2). Tel es-Safi is ideally located at the intersection of major trade routes and therefore has ample access to goods and services needed for an abundantly supplied thriving community.

Tel es-Safi/Gath is mentioned by name in the Bible more often than any of the other Philistine cities. The narrative speaks of various figures originating from Gath. Included in the Davidic cycle of biblical narratives are such notables as Goliath who fought David in the Elah Valley (I Samuel 17), King Achish, to whom David escaped from Saul (I Sam 21;27;29), and 600 of David's warriors who had followed him from Gath when he returned to Israel (II Samuel 15:18-23).

After Bliss and Macalister's brief excavations in 1899, except for some brief survey work, Tel es-Safi lay dormant archaeologically for close to a century. Beginning in 1996, the Bar Ilan expedition of Aren Maier discovered that the ancient city at Tell es-Safi was four times larger (more than 100 acres) than previously thought. The size of the site argued in favor of its identification as Gath.

One of the geographical arguments also used in favor of the identification of Tel es-Safi as Gath is its proximity to Ekron. The settlement histories of these two cities in the Iron Age (1000–586 B.C.E.) are for the most part mirror images of each other, especially in their later Philistine phases.

Massive amounts of early Philistine monochrome pottery<sup>157</sup> found at Tel Migne underscore the importance of Ekron during the earliest phase of the Iron Age I (1200 B.C.E.–1000 B.C.E.). Only a small amount of this early form of Philistine pottery has been found at Tel es-Safi.<sup>158</sup> However, large amounts of Philistine bichrome ware found at both Ekron and at Tel es-Safi, the pottery decorated with red and black and which came after monochrome pottery, indicate that both cities were major players during the period of Philistine expansion later in Iron Age I. At the beginning of Iron Age II (1000 B.C.E.), Ekron went into steep decline, from which it recovered only in the eighth century BCE after the 721 BCE<sup>159</sup> Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom of Israel. Tel es-Safi flourished in the tenth and ninth centuries BCE only to be destroyed in the late ninth and early eighth century BCE.

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<sup>157</sup> Ware decorated in only one color and known technically as Mycenaean IIIC:1b pottery.

<sup>158</sup> Maier posits in BAR, 27:06, Nov/Dec 2001”, [www.basarchiv.org.library.cairn.edu/bswbBrowse.asp?PubID=BSBA&Volume=27&Issue=6&ArticleID=1&UserID=2284](http://www.basarchiv.org.library.cairn.edu/bswbBrowse.asp?PubID=BSBA&Volume=27&Issue=6&ArticleID=1&UserID=2284) “this may be because we have not yet reached in many places the levels associated with the initial Philistine settlement of the site. This paucity may just be a reflection of the luck of the archaeological draw. Or perhaps Tell es-Safi did not have a strong Philistine presence during the earliest stage of Philistine settlement in Canaan.”

<sup>159</sup> See Dothan and Gitin in “Ekron of the Philistines, *Biblical Archaeology Review* (Jan/Feb, 1990), p. 27.

## Tel Azekah



Figure 50: Tel Azekah  
Adapted from a personal photograph

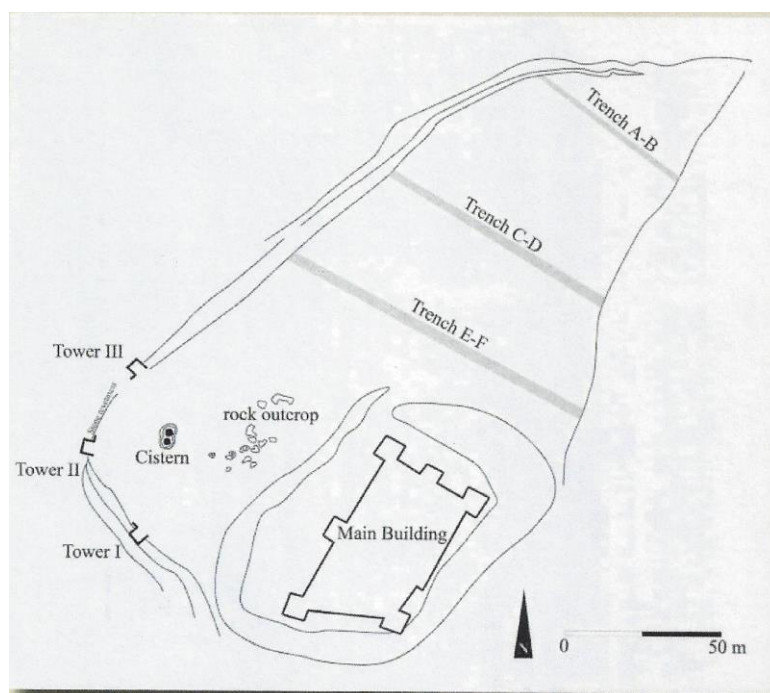


Figure 51: Tel Azekah Excavation Plan by Bliss and Macalister  
Adapted from Lipschitts, Tel Azekah "113 Years Later," NEA 75:4, p. 200.



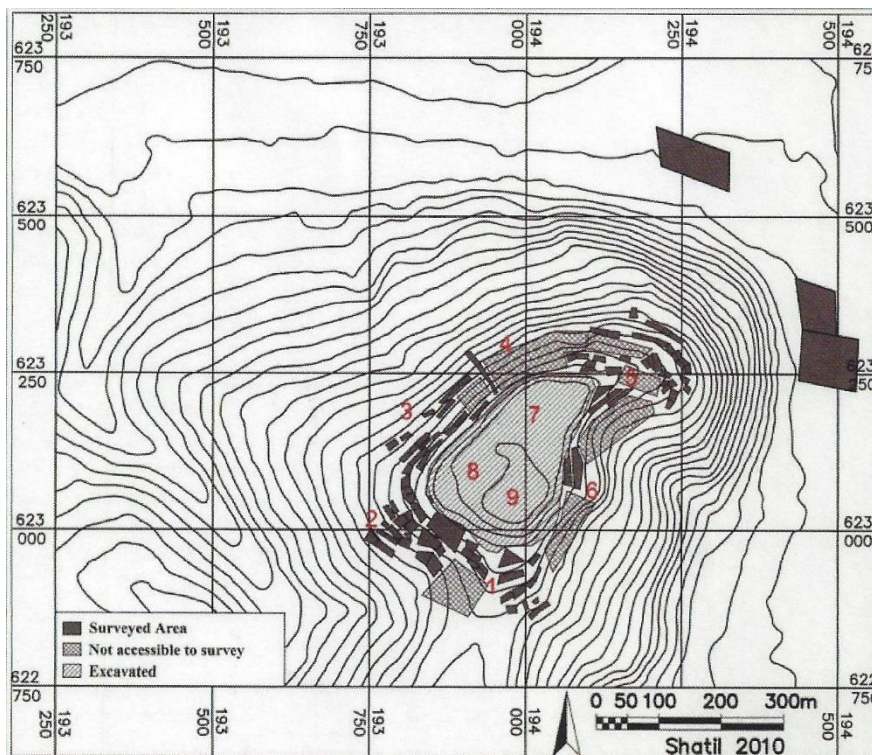


Figure 52: Topographical Plan of Tel Azekah

Adapted from on line source [www.generationword.com/fieldbook.pdf](http://www.generationword.com/fieldbook.pdf)

Tel Azekah, also known as Tel Zakariya, is located mid-way in the Elah valley between Tel as-Safi/Gath and Khirbet Qeiyafa, 1.6 kilometers to the east. It is 27 kilometers southwest of Jerusalem, 6 kilometers south of Beth-Shemesh and 8 kilometers east of Tel es-Safi (see Figures 20, 21 and 24). The upper part of the Tel measures about 11 acres with an acropolis located on the southeast corner of approximately 1.5 acres (see Figure 35).

Azekah is first mentioned in the biblical text found in Joshua 10:10-11, as part of the story of the five Amorite kings whom Joshua defeated at Gibeon.

<sup>10</sup> And the LORD discomfited them before Israel, and slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon; and they chased them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon, and smote them to Azekah, and unto Makkedah.

<sup>11</sup> And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, while they were at the descent of Beth-horon, that the LORD cast down great stones from heaven upon

them unto Azekah, and they died; they were more who died with the hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword.

The site is described within the borders of the Judahite controlled Shephelah in Joshua 15:35 and was said to be fortified by the Judahite King Rehoboam in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE. During the 7<sup>th</sup> and early 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, when Judah was attacked by the Babylonians, Azekah is mentioned by the Hebrew bible Jeremiah 34:7 as one of the Judahite fortified cities on the western border.

...when the king of Babylon's army fought against Jerusalem, and against all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish and against Azekah; for these alone remained of the cities of Judah as fortified cities.

The fortress nature of Azekah is again witnessed by an ostrakon<sup>160</sup> found in the burned city gate of Lachish dating to the Babylonian invasion of Judah early in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The inscription read “and let my lord know that we are watching for the signals of Lachish, according to all indications that my lord has given, for we cannot see Azekah” – a clear indication that Babylon was on the march south from Azekah which had already fallen.

Excavations at Tel Azekah by the British archaeologists Frederick J. Bliss and R. A. Macalister from 1898-1900 concentrated on three different areas: the towers at the southwestern edge of the tell; the fortress on the acropolis; and the open area of the surface of the tell. Bliss and Macalister planned to dig sixteen shafts along three parallel lines, producing sections in the tell from east to west (see Figure 52) as well as a large 18x24 meter “clearance pit” along the line of Trench C-D. Only the foundations of the

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<sup>160</sup> See Lachish Letter 4, Divito in ABD, vol. 4, pp. 126-128.

towers were uncovered. No connecting walls were discovered between them.<sup>161</sup>

Important to this study is the evidence Dagan uncovered in his regional surface survey of the Shephelah<sup>162</sup> indicating that the site was occupied in the Late Bronze and early Iron Age.<sup>163</sup> Further information awaits the newly reopened excavations under Oded Lipschits.

### Khirbet Qeiyafa

Khirbet Qeiyafa is located approximately 30 km southwest of Jerusalem, on the summit of a hill that borders the Elah Valley on the north (see Figures 22 and 23). This is a key strategic location in the biblical Kingdom of Judah, on the main road from Philistia and the Coastal Plain to Jerusalem and Hebron in the hill country. Constructed on bedrock, the city covers 5.6 acres and was surrounded by massive fortifications of megalithic stones. Five seasons of excavation were carried out in 2007-2011. Five areas of the site (Areas A-E) were examined, and nearly 20% of the city has been uncovered (see figure 53 and 54).

Though Qeiyafa was not an ingredient in the biblical narrative describing the Elah confrontation between the Philistines and Israel, its later existence and location underlines the frontier nature of the north ridge in the Elah valley opposite Socoh. The city has impressive early Iron Age II fortifications, including a casemate city wall and two gates, one in the west and the other in the south. The gates are of identical size (see

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<sup>161</sup> Bliss and Macalister 1902, pp. 13-14.

<sup>162</sup> See Dagan 2000, pp. 46-47.

<sup>163</sup> See Dagan 2011, pp. 80-83.

Figure 54), and each contains four chambers. This is the only known city from the Iron Age IIA period with two gates.<sup>164</sup>



Figure 53: Aerial View of Khirbet Qeiyafa

Adapted from on line image source  
[gath.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/building-up-to-qeiyafa.jpg](http://gath.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/building-up-to-qeiyafa.jpg)

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<sup>164</sup> Adapted from the on line information at the Hebrew University's site on Qeiyafa,  
<http://qeiyafa.huji.ac.il/>



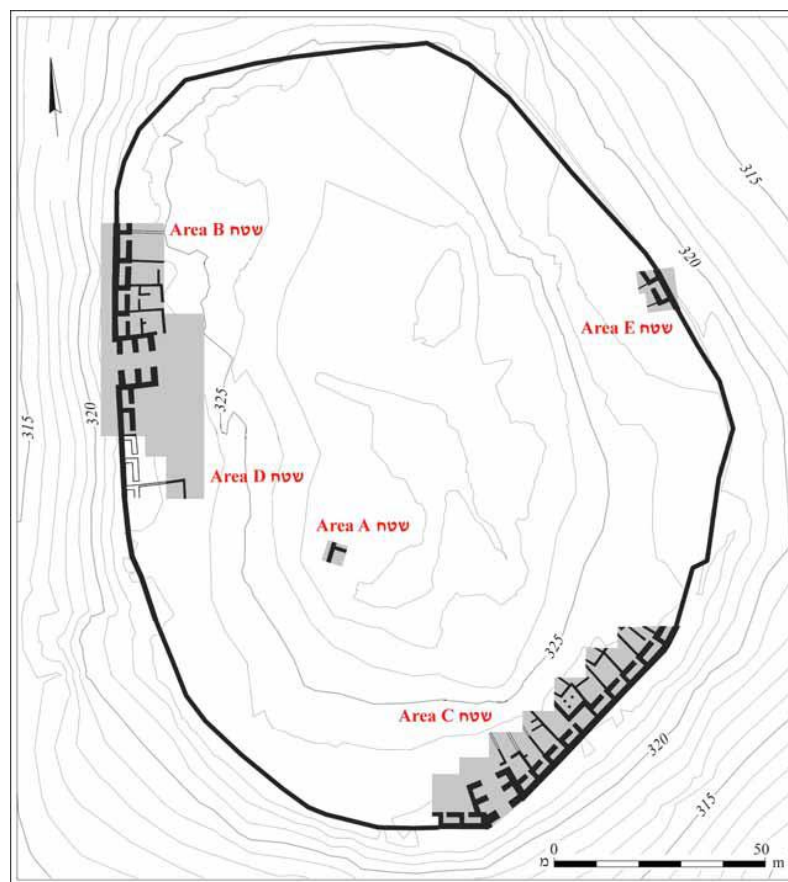


Figure 54: Excavation Plan of Khirbet Qeiyafa

Adapted from Garfinkel's "The Relative and Absolute Chronology of Khirbet Qeiyafa"  
*Israel Exploration Journal*, vol. 6, no. 2, p 174.



Figure 55: Four Chambered Gate overlooking the Elah Valley

Adapted from on line image, <http://qeiyafa.huji.ac.il/>

The massive construction of Khirbet Qeiyafa and its urban planning clearly indicate central authority in Judah in the early 10th century BC, the time of King David. Although the main period of Qeiyafa's occupation was in Late Iron Age I and Early Iron Age II and the target dates for this study are much earlier, Qeiyafa's data adds to our understanding of the Iron Age in the Elah Valley system. The casemate wall fortifications, the massive stones used in the construction, the double gate system, the abundance of Iron Age II storage jars with LMLK stamps on the handles and the obvious frontier nature of the city all contribute to the appearance and recognition of a city situated on a recognized border.<sup>165</sup>

### The Aijalon System

#### Tel Gezer



Figure 56: Aerial View of Tel Gezer

Adapted from on line image site, <http://www.bibleplaces.com/gezer.htm>

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<sup>165</sup> See Garfinkel in “The Contribution of Khirbet Qeiyafa to Our Understanding of the Iron Age”, pp. 39-54 and “The Relative and Absolute Chronology of Khirbet Qeiyafa”, pp. 171-183.





Nearly half of Tel Gezer was extensively excavated by the Macalister excavations during 1902-1909. While these excavations have provided an overview of the major fortification systems, the results are enigmatic and do not provide for an accurate reconstruction of the various cultural horizons of the ancient city. The Hebrew-Union excavations in the 1960s and 1970s under the direction of William G. Dever and associates addressed this problem in their research by defining the stratigraphic overview of the site with an emphasis on precise and disciplined methodology. This emphasis produced an excellent overall stratigraphic profile of the site.

### Iron Age Excavations

The Iron Age horizon at Gezer has been excavated in many areas (e.g. Fields I, II, III, VI, VII, and X) during various phases of excavation (Hebrew Union College Excavations Phase I by W.G. Dever and Phase II by J. Seger, and the 1984 University of Arizona Excavations by W. G. Dever). While the results have revealed that there are over ten strata dating to the Iron Age period, only two of the three excavated areas yielded broad exposures. These two areas date to the early Iron Age I (Field VI) and the late Iron Age (Field VII). None of these excavations have provided an appropriate amount of ceramic data for a complete reconstruction of the site during the Iron Age cultural horizon.

<u>Late Bronze Age</u> II-B	Strata XV	13 <sup>th</sup> c. BCE
- destruction layer	Strata XIV	late 13 <sup>th</sup> /early 12 <sup>th</sup> c. BCE
<u>Iron Age</u>		
- Philistine Period	<b>Strata XIII-XI</b>	<b>12<sup>th</sup> to early 9<sup>th</sup> c. BCE</b>
- Israelite Period	<b>Strata VIII-V</b>	<b>9<sup>th</sup> c./6<sup>th</sup> c. BCE</b>

Table 3: Tel Gezer Stratigraphy

Adapted from The Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land, pp. 434-442.

The Philistine period at Tel Gezer is well attested (see Table 3) and multiple phases of Philistine occupation are evident. The pottery is a mixture of local traditions, likely a hold-over from the Late Bronze Age plus the distinctive Philistine BiChrome wares. The Philistine occupation came to a violent end as evidenced by a clear destruction layer. Some would correlate this destruction with the campaigns of the Egyptian Pharaoh “Siamun,” mentioned in the biblical text of 1 Kings 9:15-17:

<sup>15</sup> And this is the account of the levy which King Solomon raised; to build the house of the LORD, and his own house, and Millo, and the wall of Jerusalem, and Hazor, and Megiddo, and Gezer.

<sup>16</sup> Pharaoh King of Egypt had gone up, and taken Gezer, and burnt it with fire...

The text then states Gezer was ceded to Solomon at a date beyond the scope of this study. However, the incident anchors for us that the stratigraphy and the biblical text both agree Gezer was non-Israelite at the time of the events cited above. Beginning with Stratum VIII the Gezer remains are clearly Israelite, further corroborating the timeline of the story chronicled in the biblical text.

### Concluding Remarks

As stated above, the distinctive nature and easy identification of Philistine wares and the incidence of pig bone faunal remains in the Israelite and Philistine cultures are the two ethnic markers employed in this study.

The abundant presence of Mycenaean IIIC/Philistine Bichrome ware at Ekron/Tel Miqne and Gath/Tel es-Safi in Iron Age I clearly indicates a strong Philistine presence at the Western end of the Sorek and Elah valleys. The lack of the ware during the same period at Beth Shemesh strengthens the case for ethnic separation in the Sorek while the Central and Eastern end of the Elah valley awaits further excavation and the resultant data.

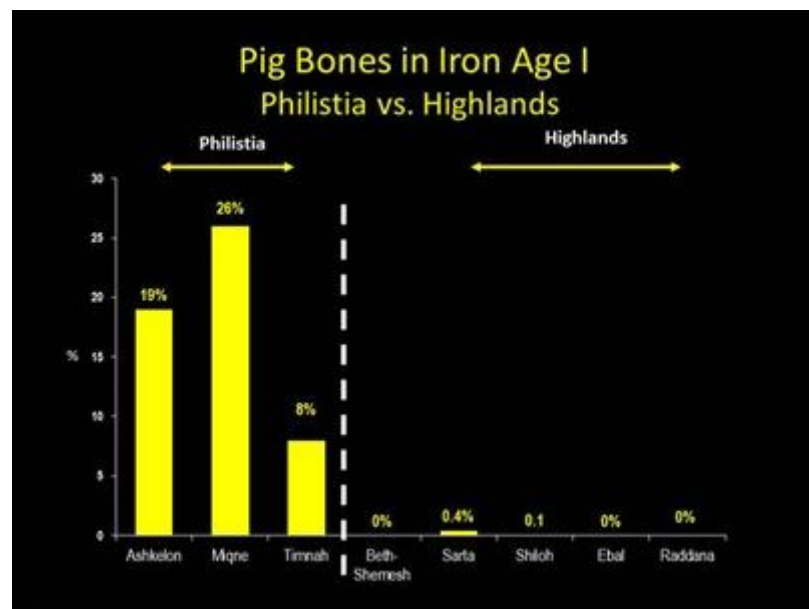


Figure 58: Pig Bones in Iron Age I

Adapted from Bunimovitz and Lederman in NEA 72:3 (2009), p. 124

The opening remarks for this chapter addressed the strengths and weaknesses of utilizing pig bone remains as an ethnic marker. The resulting data particularly in the Sorek valley is quite striking as it indicates a clear separation between those that partake and those that abstain (see Figure 58). The Sorek valley early in Iron Age I is this study's primary area of emphasis. On the Eastern end of the valley, at Beth Shemesh, the pig bone remains are 0% of the total faunal finds. On the Western end, at Ekron, they are

26% of the total faunal remains. Timnah, located in the center of the valley, has remains of 8% of the total faunal remains - a predictable compromise given the nature of the city, its partial archaeological record and the boundary nature of its location as seen in chapters two and three. The archaeological record utilizing these two markers as ethnic identifiers corroborates the findings of chapters two and three. The paucity of material in the central and eastern portions of the Elah valley system leaves the researcher without adequate archaeological data to make a definitive judgment. Tel Gezer, in the Aijalon valley has a clear Philistine presence in early Iron I (see Table 3).

In the northern Shephelah during early Iron Age I the archaeological data supports a Philistine presence on the Coastal Plain in the area of Tel Gezer, Ekron/Tel Mique and Gath/Tel es-Safi. In the Sorek valley, during this same time period, Tel Beth Shemesh/Ain Shems is firmly under Israelite control. Timnah/Tel Batash appears to be the boundary or border city as indicated in chapters two and three. Azekah awaits further excavation to provide the necessary data required to formulate an informed conclusion. The archaeological data for the sites cited and the time period studied supports the questions of ethnic separation as answered by chapters two and three in their respective fields of investigation.

## Chapter Five

## Conclusion

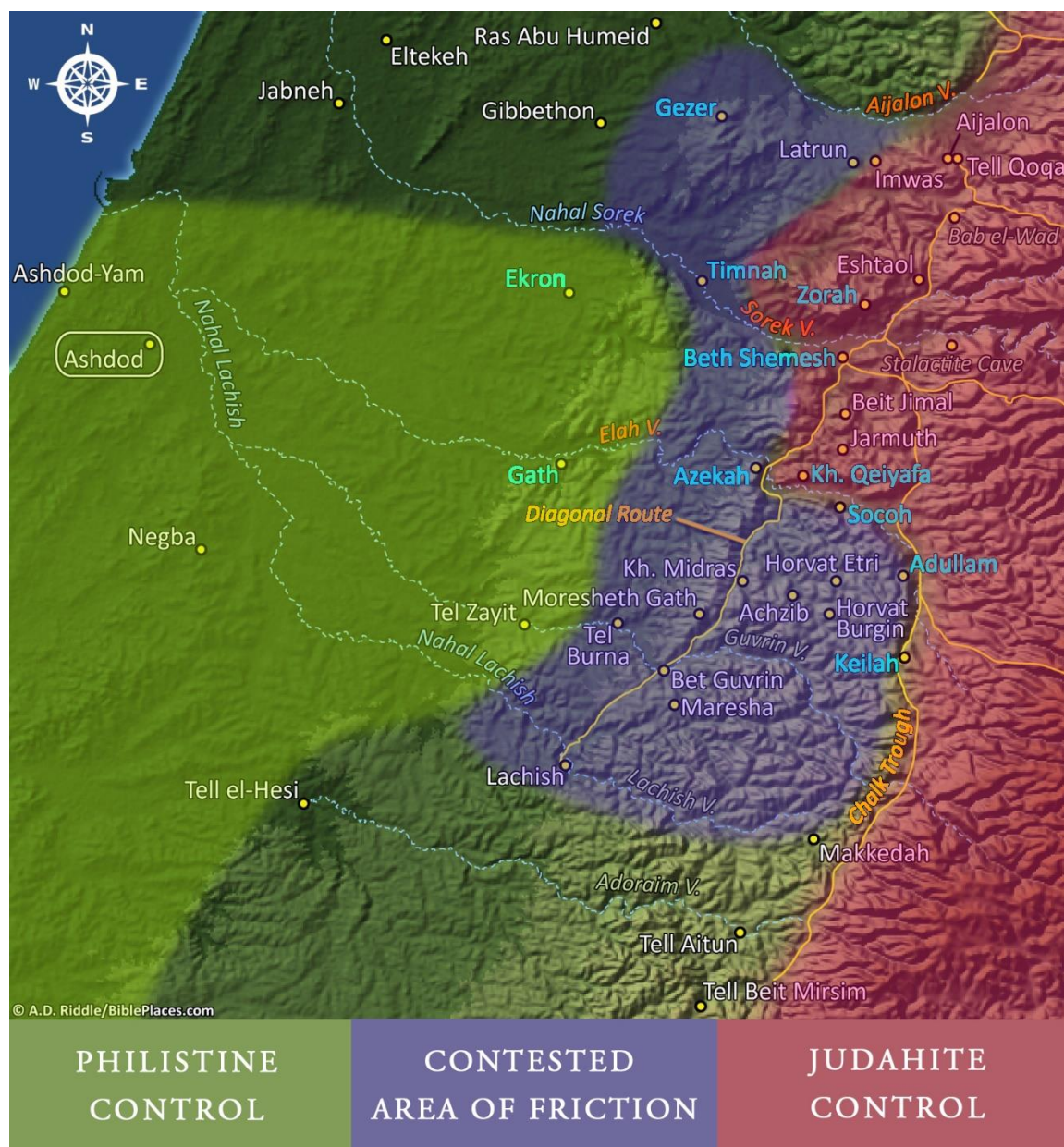
The Physical Setting

Figure 59: Borders and Boundaries

Adapted from stock photos found online @ [www.bibleplaces.com](http://www.bibleplaces.com) – “The Shephelah”

Geography plays a major role in understanding the interrelationships between the population groups of the northern Shephelah and the Plain of Philistia. The natural boundaries (see Figure 59) inherent in the physical configuration of the landscape define the borders and boundaries between Israel and the Philistines. Among the most important elements are the following:

1. The flat land of the plain gives way to valleys surrounded by deep “V” sides/borders vectoring internal traffic to the valley floors.
2. The North-South roads within the Shephelah provide natural lines of demarcation and an abundance of defensible positions.
3. There are narrow areas or choke points further restricting travel traversing the valley systems prior to their Eastern terminus giving way to the ridge routes ascending to the central highlands.
4. There are major barriers and/or ridges forming buffer zones between the valley systems and the adjacent ridges and hills that naturally separate settlement locations.
5. The geologic composition and formations making up the local terrain do not lend themselves to major topographic alterations.

### The Biblical Setting

The biblical text accurately portrays the geography and topography of the representative routes and approaches in the respective systems addressed. Strategic options and contingencies, activities and settlement patterns are mentioned from the viewpoint of a local observer giving the narrative an air of authenticity not found in an account fashioned by someone not intimately acquainted with the physical setting.

However, its representation of the changing politics and social interaction between the Philistines and Israel still remains problematic. Lingering questions concerning the historicity and the DH portion of the biblical text are exacerbated by the hyperbolic language employed when describing the roles and relationships of the primary characters populating the narrative in Judges, Samuel and Kings. The heroes and villains of these narratives are often couched in heroic, larger-than-life terms and circumstances. That being said, the biblical text cannot be relegated to a lesser role when engaging questions of physical settings, boundaries and borders, and the separation and/or interrelationship between of the population groups described in the narrative.

### The Archaeological Setting

The archaeological settings and data considered from the locations that are the concern of this study are in substantive agreement with the physical setting and the biblical text addressed in chapters two and three. The distribution of the Mycenaean and Bichrome pottery is consistent with the locations identified as Philistine as is its absence from Israelite sites. The incidence of faunal remains identified as pig or swine clearly define the separation between the two populations.

### The Question Answered

The biblical narrative and the archaeological remains both exist within a “physical setting” which can be defined in terms of geography, geology and topography. The elements of that setting have a direct contextual connection with the biblical text and the archaeological data. It has been the purpose of this dissertation to combine all three parallel disciplines to further define and understand the primary question, “How do the geographic/geologic, biblical, and archaeological witnesses contribute to our



understanding of Israelite and Philistine interrelationships during their early encounters in the Northern Shephelah.” It is clear that all three disciplines are in substantive agreement concerning their representation of the Israelite northern Shephelah and the Philistine cities of Ekron/Tel Mique and Gath/Tel es-Safi during the early Iron Age. The border and boundary markers in the biblical text are completely consistent with the physical settings one observes in the areas studied. Military forays and the occasional raiding party encroaching on the adjoining territory observe the separation, cover afforded, and obstructions of the local terrain. Those boundaries are accurately reflected in the material remains found in the respective cities. Ekron and Gath are both decidedly Philistine in the time period studied. Beth Shemesh is decidedly Israelite/Judahite. Timnah presents a more egalitarian and mixed identity, but it still retains its Philistine material record – likely a product of its frontier/outpost nature in the Sorek system – a buffer zone on the edge of and in between zones of hegemony. Azekah awaits the resultant data from the current cycle of excavations just begun before the picture of her role in early Iron Age 1 becomes clear. At present, this gate keeper of the eastern Elah can only be defined in terms of personal opinion based on the geographic position it occupies and the topography of the surrounding area. Azekah’s role in the biblical narratives of the time and location studied are less than helpful due to the general nature of the textual comments and the paucity of archaeological material available at present. Gezer remains the best known anchor in the Aijalon. Its cosmopolitan nature and the frequent changes in governance are well studied and documented. It offered no surprises to this study and remains a benchmark for comparative studies in the ethnic markers observed in the Sorek and Elah systems.

The biblical text, with its hyperbolic language, does not weaken the clarity of the underlying daily interaction between the subject people it chronicles. The freedom of movement and occasional local combative postures are nothing more than one would expect between differing ethnic groups vying for hegemony, desirable additions to their territory, commercial and agricultural betterment, and the resultant security afforded by all the above. To be sure, confrontation on a larger scale between Israel and the Philistines did break out. However, the texts and material remains studied represent a local interaction in the neighborhood of the northern Shephelah and do not reflect an elevated level of nationalism. When one moves beyond the epic/heroic/hyperbolic language employed by the biblical text, the two emerging people of the northern Shephelah are seen to be accurately described and defined in their everyday events and challenges by the substantial agreement observed between the extant three sources studied – the physical setting, the biblical setting and the archaeological remains.

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## Curriculum Vita

NAME: Edgar Berkeley Hardesty

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

PROGRAM OF STUDY: Jewish Studies

DEGREE AND DATE TO BE CONFERRED: Doctor of Philosophy, 2015

Secondary Education: Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, Baltimore, Md., 1963

<u>Collegiate Institutions Attended</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Date of Degree</u>
University of Baltimore Major: Business Management	2/63-3/66		
Cairn University Major: Bible Minor: Christian Education	9/72-5/75	B.S.	5/75
Dallas Theological Seminary Major: Christian Education	8/76-5/81	Th.M.	5/81
Jerusalem University College Major: History and Geography of Israel	Summer 94/95/97		
Baltimore Hebrew University Major: Bible and Archaeology Minors: Jewish History; Rabbinic Thought and Literature Recipient: The Joseph Heller Loveman Prize for Excellence in Research in Jewish History and Civilization Gedalia and Chana Cohen Prize for General Excellence	8/93-5/06	M.A.	5/06
Baltimore Hebrew Univ./Towson Univ. Major: Bible and Archaeology Minors: Jewish History; Rabbinic Thought and Literature	8/06-12/15	Ph.D.	12/15

Professional Positions Held:

Cairn University – 8/91 to present  
200 Manor Avenue  
Langhorne, PA 19047

Associate Professor of Bible, Archaeology and Jewish Studies  
Director: First Year Program, Israel and Archaeology  
Leader: Cairn University Israel Study tours

Redeemer's Fellowship – 7/90 to present  
17031 Mt. Airy Road  
Shrewsbury, PA 17361  
Pastor-Teacher

Multiple Pastoral Ministries: Maryland, Michigan and Pennsylvania  
Pastoral Staff, 1972-81  
Senior Pastor, 1981 to present

Previous Teaching Experience:  
Perry Hall Christian School 1981-82  
Baltimore School of the Bible, 1982-1985

Archaeological Field Experience:  
Tel Mique (ancient Ekron - one of the Philistine capitals) in the Sorek Valley  
Tel Beth Shemesh (three seasons) in the Sorek valley utilizing a scholarship grant from the Biblical Archaeology Society  
Tel Gezer in the Aijalon Valley utilizing a scholarship grant from the Biblical Archaeology Society of Northern Virginia  
Leader of Cairn University's annual study tours to Israel  
Leader of Cairn University's summer dig program in Israel

Board Member:  
Jerusalem University College

