**Paul Wright, Biblical Archaeology**

September 17, 2015

1. Introduction. In the flow of the biblical narrative line, people are exiled from Israel, but keep wanting to come back again. They are drawn by the notion that this is a home. The study of archaeology “sacralizes” the land, showing that geographical data substantiates the biblical text. Israel has exposed granite (Mount Sinai), sandstone, and limestone. Mount Hermon is Jurassic. The limestone is 60-70 million years old.
2. Example: Genesis 12. Abram was a poor, semi-nomad. Bedouin is a modern term. They tend to be associated with known urban centers, to which they are helpful.
3. Abram was associated with a city-state, Haran. He was leaving land and family, specifically the father’s home.
4. The worst thing to happen in the Middle East is not to die, but to be exiled or alienated from family or land. God was asking both of Abram.
5. Abram comes to Canaan. Although from that point on, Abram and his sons still travel, nevertheless he keeps coming back to Canaan.
6. Why doesn’t God make Moses a “Pharaoh”? The answer is that Canaan is home. People could have stayed in Babylon, but they wanted to return.
7. In “the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4), says St. Paul, God sent his Son; why does God choose to become incarnate in Israel?
8. Why Israel?
9. What is it about Israel, about this corner of the world, that makes this narrative line so believable, realistic, and ultimately right – more so than in other geographical locales?
10. What is the “center” of this land? Israel, Palestine, Canaan? Wright distributes the “point of balance” map, the map that situates Jerusalem in the center of a trio: Europe, Asia, Africa.
11. On the right, Semitic. The fertile crescent (Persian Gulf, up Tigris and Euphrates, and then west to Palestine, and then up the Nile). James Breasted of the University of Chicago.
12. On the left, Greek culture.
13. The Fertile Crescent.
14. Features.
15. Water. Rivers at each end (Tigris/Euphrates and Nile). These rivers run all the time.
16. Soil. Rivers bring fresh water and arable soil.
17. Flatland. Both Iraq and Egypt allow the rivers to be used for irrigation.
18. Communication. The rivers enable people to communicate and unite.
19. Earliest urban centers and the beginning of “civilization.” Sophisticated political, religious, judicial, and cultural centers (approx. 2,000 BC).
20. Urban Center, City State, Nation State, and Empire. These are the result of the geographical features.
21. Compare the Fertile Crescent to the land of Palestine.
22. There is no great river except the Jordan. The Jordan is distinctive because it is below sea level. It is basically a mountain stream.
23. Israel is a land of hills and valleys. Mostly, hills separate and divide. There is relatively few flat spaces.
24. Cultural differences. Although there is a “general Canaanite culture” that speaks “West Semitic,” nevertheless there are differences from Hebron to Bethlehem to Jerusalem to Ramallah.
25. Local people know the differences in language, last name, identity, clothing, etc. Differences are sharp in the hill country.
26. The Bible is written in biblical Hebrew. In it we find dialectical differences. Huckleberry Finn goes down the Mississippi, and presents different dialects. When Ruth comes from Moab to Bethlehem, she travels 15 miles. When Ruth speaks, she speaks with a Moabite accent.
27. Smaller Urban Centers. Hazor was once a city state, but then it fell back to being just a city. There are no “empires” in Canaanite history.
28. Trade. Israel was a “land bridge” between the ends of the fertile crescent.
29. From Egypt, gold.
30. From Saudi Arabia, spices (frankincense and myrhh).
31. From Asia, silk.
32. From Greece and Western Europe, tin and horses.
33. The Empires
34. Rome, Greece, Hittites, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia.
35. None of them had their heartland in ancient Israel. We might have called David and Solomon as “emperors,” and the Latin Kingdom of the Crusaders was an empire. But they didn’t last. When we see empires – Egypt, the Hittite empire, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome – they capture Jerusalem, but do not remain.
36. Hezekiah (705-701 BC) presided over Israel at the time of Isaiah. Sennacherib, the Assyrian King, was a threat. But to Sennacherib, Hezekiah means nothing. Sennacherib is on is way to gold in Egypt.
37. Rome wanted Israel as a barrier. It was just a corner of the Mediterranean. But they wanted to put Roman centurions around the Middle Sea, and they wanted to resist the Parthians.
38. Lands of the Bible.
39. Features.
40. Israel is not a good source of water or of arable soil.
41. St. Paul said that Israel was not a significant people.
42. What is the Name of the Land?
43. The memorable places are still memorable: Greece, Rome, Egypt. Wright notes that modern Iraq may divide into parts – Assyria and Babylon – with ISIS making a claim to the north, i.e., to Assyria.
44. Hebrew University students speak of the “land of Israel” on the strength of 1 Kings 4:21: “Solomon ruled all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the Nile.”
45. In a Palestinian discussion, they would speak of “Greater Syria.”
46. Today we speak of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Palestine. Or we speak of the “Levant” (where the sun rises). Jim Munson called it “The Land Between,” between the empires, and is a frontier for everybody, a frontier that needs to be conquered and surpassed.
47. Dan to Beersheva. Territoriality. Israel is like a mouse, in comparison to empires, which are like cats. When Abraham comes to the land, he meets the Canaanites and Amorites. Everyone else comes from outside the land. Amalekites from the south. Phoenicians from the north. Ammonites and Moabites from the east.
48. Who are the cats? The regal imperialists: Egypt, Nabateans, Greeks and Romans, Hittites, and the Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians. European Union, Putin, the USA.
49. Who are the mice: Semites and Arameans, Philistines, Ammonites, Israelites, Moabites, Edomites, and Amalekites. Mice want to survive. 90% of West Jerusalem people say, “We are survivors.” They want to be able to hide. They have modest demands. “Just let me survive.”
50. Discussion.
51. Continual Interplay between Cats and Mice. Arab Palestinians did not want to pay taxes to the Ottoman Turks. They didn’t want to pay taxes to Amman, when Jordan was in charge.
52. When the cat’s away, the mice will play, will dance on the table. When the empires are not present, things are better. Syria is fighting with Babylon. At one time, the cats were away for 500 years. Neco (Pharaoh of Egypt) defeated Neco. Zedekiah was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar.
53. Chart: The Land Between: 4000 Year Overview (James Munson, *The Land Between*). For most of the time between 3200 BC and 800 AD, the cats were at play. But for a brief time, approx. 1000 – 500 BC, there were kings in Israel (Iron Age I-II, that is, Joshua, Judges, Kings, up to Hezekiah).
54. The biblical story shapes itself: religious nationalism or temple-state combination. Was it the “Golden Age”? Then the cat comes back – Nebuchadnezzar.
55. “How does that work?” My thought: these events shaped us.

Break

1. Deuteronomy 11:10: “For the land that you are about to enter to possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you came, where you used to sow your seed and water it with your foot like a vegetable garden.”
2. What does this mean?
3. The *Sitz im Leben*: the account of the movement of Israel from Sinai to Transjordan into the land of Canaan. It is a series of speeches by Moses, the ten commandments (chapter 5), and their relevance to the land.
4. Stephen Kaufmann of Hebrew Union College showed that Dt. 5-25 is basically about the ten commandments in Canaan, in “settled areas.”
5. The Ten Commandments. It first command is “unpacked” in several chapter, including Dt. 11: 10.
6. Egyptian Agriculture. The overall way by which peasant farmers in Egypt grow is this: there are fields, and there are canals, and you make ridges of soil, and you make channels with water to your crops. When the water impregnates the land, and evaporates, there’s enough water to grow things. Wealth, security, ease and comfort are grounded in soil and crops that are predictable.
7. Canaanite Agriculture. Canaan “is a land of hills and valleys, where you drink water from the rain of heaven” (11:11). You can irrigate in Jericho, the plain of Jordan, which Lot chose because it was well watered (Gen 13), but you can’t irrigate up hill. Canaan is “that poor country that has to depend on rain,” according to the Egyptian joke.
8. East of the line between Petra and Damascus, there is not enough rainfall for wheat. West of the line, from Beersheba to the Galilee, you can grow wheat.
9. Strabo in Greece said that Jerusalem “was not a place that would be looked on with envy” (*Geography*, xvi, 2.36).
10. Deuteronomic View: Canaan is “a land for which the LORD your God cares. The eyes of the LORD your God are always on it, from the beginning even to the end of the year” (Dt. 11:12).
11. “The eyes of the LORD your God are always on it.” See the “song of Moses” and the “blessing of Moses,” Deut. 32.
12. The creation story of Deuteronomy 32:8 – “When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the boundaries of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.” People inherit land. God inherits people.
13. The Relevance of Toponymy.
14. Place names refer to a deity. Assyria’s God is Ashur. Israel’s God speaks of places: Bethlehem, Beth-Shemesh (sun god), Beth Ieroch (moon god), Beth-El. Most of these cities existed before Israel. The Israelites did not change the names.
15. Israelite names. Israelites added names: Isa-iah, Jerem-iah, Joel, Eli-jah, but these are names of people, not places. People inherit land, God inherits people.
16. Deuteronomy 32:10. “He [God] found him [Jacob] in a desert land and in the waste howling wilderness: he led him about, he instructed him he kept him as the apple of his eye.”
17. The people are God’s inheritance. A land, created in Genesis, becomes this land: the land of Jacob. Once the good land was Tigris, Euphrates, Gihon. Now God’s portion is his people. The howling wasteland is Genesis 1’s “formlessness and void.”
18. God guarded Jacob as “the apple of his eye,” or the “pupil of his eye.” The Hebrew word is “little man,” *ishyon*.
19. Just as the Holy Spirit hovered over the creation, so in Deuteronomy, “an eagle stirred up her nest, fluttered over young, spread abroad her wings, took them, and bore them on her wings” (Dt. 11:11).
20. Economy of the Land.
21. Fertile Areas. The main centers of Philistia, Phoenicia, and Galilee – the fertile areas – are also the places of the Roman Roads. Israel and Judah are less popular, more out of the way.
22. Shepherds.
23. Farming is difficult; so is shepherding. Life is short and precarious. When you’re a farmer, your life expectancy is low. You graze like sheep.
24. If the sheep find water, you have water. You have milk and cheese. “Don’t ask for fat-free yoghurt – yoghurt is protein.”
25. Meat is rare: you kill the fatted calf.
26. Examples. Israel is “a land flowing (gushing) with milk.”
    * + 1. Jael (Jdg. 4) is blessed of women. He wanted water, she gave him milk (or yoghurt).
        2. David and Goliath (1 Sam. 17:18). David’s brothers are fighting the Philistines. Jesse says to David: bring your brothers grain and bread. Give the commander something special: ten cups of cheese.
        3. Abel, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus were shepherds. The shepherd is the pastor. Jesus does not tell Peter, “catch my fish,” but “feed by lambs.”
27. The Farmer.
    * + 1. Deuteronomy 8:7-8. “The LORD your God is brining you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs flowing forth in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates, a land of oil olive, and honey.”
        2. The date palm is the sweet honey. The paste made from distilled dates. It is the same word as bee honey. “And honey – it is dates.” Jerusalem Talmud, Bikkurim, 1,3.
        3. Terracing began just as Israel had its Golden Age.