

Ezekiel's Lesson on Geography: Israel as a Holy Land

(47:13–48:7, 23–29)

Veritas Adult Community

College Church

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New Boundaries for the Land

¹³ Thus has the Lord YHWH declared: This is the boundary according to which you shall divide up the land as a special grant among the twelve tribes of Israel. [Joseph shall receive two allotments.] ¹⁴ The land that I swore to give to your ancestors, you shall receive as a special grant, equally apportioned. This land shall fall to you as a special grant.

¹⁵ This shall be the border of the land: In the north it shall run from the Mediterranean Sea through Hethlon and Lebo-Hamath ¹⁶ to Zedad, Beruthah, and Sibraim (which is located between the territories of Damascus and Hamath) as far as Hazer-hatticon, which is on the border of Hauran. ¹⁷ So the border shall run from the Sea to Hazer-enon, that is the northern border of Damascus, with the territory of Hamath to the north. This shall be the north side.

¹⁸ On the east side [the border shall run] from a point between Hauran and Damascus, between Gilead and the land of Israel, with the Jordan forming the border as far as the Eastern Sea, to Tamar. This shall be the east side.

¹⁹ On the south side [the border shall run] from Tamar as far as the waters of Meribath Kadesh, to the Brook and the Mediterranean Sea. This shall be the south side.

²⁰ On the west side the Mediterranean Sea shall form the boundary as far as a point opposite Lebo-Hamath. This shall be the west side.

²¹ You shall apportion this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. ²² You shall allot it as a special grant for yourselves and for the proselytes (*haggērîm haggārîm*) who reside among you, who have fathered children among you.

You shall treat them the same as you do the ethnic Israelites. They shall share the allotment [of land] as a special grant among the tribes of Israel. ²³ His special grant is to be awarded to him within whatever tribe the proselyte resides. The declaration of the Lord YHWH.

New Tribal Allotments

^{48:1} These are the names of the tribes:

First, beginning at the northern extreme, adjacent to the Hethlon road, Lebo-Hamath and Hazer-enon (which is the border of Damascus, with Hamath to the north), running from east to west, [the tribe of] Dan.

² Second, adjacent to the territory of Dan, from east to west, [the tribe of] Asher.

³ Third, adjacent to the territory of Asher, from east to west, [the tribe of] Naphtali.

⁴ Fourth, adjacent to the territory of Naphtali, from east to west, [the tribe of] Manasseh.

⁵ Fifth, adjacent to the territory of Manasseh, from east to west, [the tribe of] Ephraim.

⁶ Sixth, adjacent to the territory of Ephraim, from east to west, [the tribe of] Reuben.

⁷ Seventh, adjacent to the territory of Reuben, from east to west, [the tribe of] Judah.

Further Tribal Allotments

- ²³ As for the rest of the tribes, eighth, from east to west, [the tribe of] Benjamin.
- ²⁴ Ninth, adjacent to the territory of Benjamin, from east to west, [the tribe of] Simeon.
- ²⁵ Tenth, adjacent to the territory of Simeon, from east to west, [the tribe of] Issachar.
- ²⁶ Eleventh, adjacent to the territory of Issachar, from east to west, [the tribe of] Zebulun.
- ²⁷ Twelfth, adjacent to the territory of Zebulun, from east to west, [the tribe of] Gad.
- ²⁸ And adjacent to the territory of Gad at the southern end, the border shall run from Tamar, as far as the waters of Meribath-kadesh, to the Wadi [of Egypt], and the Mediterranean Sea.
- ²⁹ This is the land that you shall apportion by lot as a special grant for the tribes of Israel. These are their respective allotments. The declaration of the Lord YHWH.

B. The Tribal Allotments of the Holy Land

Observations

1. Ezekiel’s map involves the descendants of all the original sons of Jacob, with the Joseph tribe divided into Ephraim and Manasseh, as had been the case when Joshua originally allotted tribal territories.
2. The outer boundaries of the “land of [restored] Israel” from Hethlon and Lebo-Hamath in the north to the river of Egypt (Wadi El-Arish) in the south corresponds with ancient Egyptian definitions of “the land of Canaan.”
3. Ezekiel’s understanding of Israel’s tribal structure follows the traditional pre-monarchical order.
4. The tribal boundaries seem unconcerned about historical tribal realities.
5. The tribal boundaries run against the grain of natural topography.
6. The tribal parity allocations neutralize the inequities of the past (cf. Josh 17:14–18) and reflect the egalitarian ideals expressed earlier in 47:14, “each like his brother.”

Ezekiel’s Map of Territorial Allotments

Table 1 A Synoptic Comparison of YHWH’s First and Last Definitions of the Boundaries of the “Land of Israel”	
Numbers 34:1–15	Ezekiel 47:13–21
YHWH spoke to Moses, saying, ² “Command the people of Israel, and say to them, ‘When you enter the land of Canaan (this is the land that shall fall to you for a grant [את הארץ אשר תפול] את הארץ אשר תפול לָכֶם בְּנִתְּלָהּ, zō t hā’āres’ āšer tippōl lākem bēnaḥālā) the land of Canaan as defined by its borders),	¹³ Thus says the Lord GOD: “This is the border by which you shall divide the land as a grant among the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph shall have two portions. ¹⁴ And you shall divide equally what I swore to give to your fathers. This land shall fall to you as your grant (זֶה אֲנִי הַיְדִיעָה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם בְּנִתְּלָהּ, wēnāpēlā hā’āres’ āšer tippōl lākem bēnaḥālā). ¹⁵ “This shall be the border of the land:
³ your south side shall be from the wilderness of Zin alongside Edom, and your southern border shall run from the end of the Salt Sea on the east. ⁴ And your border shall turn south of the ascent of Akrabim, and cross to Zin, and its limit shall be south of Kadesh-barnea. Then it shall go on to Hazar-addar and pass along to Azmon. ⁵ And the border shall turn from Azmon to the Brook of Egypt, and its limit shall be at the sea.	On the north side, from the Great Sea by way of Hethlon to Lebo-hamath, and on to Zedad, ¹⁶ Berothah, Sibraim (which lies on the border between Damascus and Hamath), as far as Hazar-hatticon, which is on the border of Hauran. ¹⁷ So the border shall run from the sea to Hazar-enan, which is on the northern border of Damascus, with the border of Hamath to the north. This shall be the north side.
⁶ “For the western border, you shall have the Great Sea and its coast. This shall be your western border.	¹⁸ “On the east side, the border shall run between Hauran and Damascus; along the Jordan between Gilead and the land of Israel; to the eastern sea and as far as Tamar. This shall be the east side.
⁷ “This shall be your northern border: from the Great Sea you shall draw a line to Mount Hor. ⁸ From Mount Hor you shall draw a line to Lebo-hamath, and the limit of the border shall be at Zedad. ⁹ Then the border shall extend to Ziphron, and its limit shall be at Hazar-enan. This shall be your northern border.	¹⁹ “On the south side, it shall run from Tamar as far as the waters of Meribah-kadesh, from there along the Brook of Egypt to the Great Sea. This shall be the south side.
¹⁰ “You shall draw a line for your eastern border from Hazar-enan to Shepham. ¹¹ And the border shall go down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain. And the border shall go down and reach to the shoulder of the Sea of Chinnereth on the east. ¹² And the border shall go down to the Jordan, and its limit shall be at the Salt Sea.	²⁰ “On the west side, the Great Sea shall be the border to a point opposite Lebo-hamath. This shall be the west side.
This shall be your land as defined by its borders all around.” ¹³ Moses commanded the people of Israel, saying, “This is the land that you shall receive as a grant by lot, which YHWH has commanded to give to the nine tribes and to the half-tribe.	²¹ “So you shall divide this land among you according to the tribes of Israel.”

7. The tribal allocations respect the traditional genealogical relationships among the tribes, distinguishing among the descendants of Jacob's wives (Leah and Rachel) and their handmaidens.

Dan	(Bilhah [Rachel])
Asher	(Zilpah [Leah])
Naphtali	(Bilhah [Rachel])
Manasseh	(Rachel)
Ephraim	(Rachel)
Reuben	(Leah)
Judah	(Leah)
. . . The sacred <i>Terumah</i> . . .	
Benjamin	(Rachel)
Simeon	(Leah)
Issachar	(Leah)
Zebulun	(Leah)
Gad	(Zilpah [Leah])

8. The positions of Judah and Benjamin are reversed.
9. The tribal allotments suggest a return to an ancient theocratic ideal.
10. Levi's territorial ties differ radically both from the other tribes in this scheme and from Joshua's allotments.



Lessons from Ezekiel's Map

1. Ezekiel's vision of Israel's territorial arrangement offers a profound theology of land.
2. Ezekiel's territorial vision extends the concentric rectangles of graded sanctity beyond the Temple walls to the holy land of Israel as a whole.
3. Ezekiel's territorial vision proclaims a new understanding of the community of faith.