

BOOK DESCRIPTION

THE TRIBES OF ISRAEL A STUDY IN THE HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE BIBLE

by

Prof. Zakhariah Kallai*

Kallai's book is the most complete, comprehensive and profound study to date of the geographical lists in the Book of Joshua which describe the territorial allotments to the Tribes of Israel. The discussion, extending over four hundred pages, is based on two fundamental assumptions. 1) The geographical lists in the Book of Joshua reflect an historical reality. "We assume, as we have said, that the description of the tribal boundaries is not the product of theory, vision and promise, but rather that its connection to precise geographical conditions proves that it was guided by a reality known to the scribes from either a written or an immediate source" (p. 244). 2) The date of the geographical lists must be determined by an historical, not a literary, criterion. Therefore, the author devotes the first part of his book (pp. 19-83) to an historical review of three ages in the history of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel: a) the period of the settlement and of the Judges; b) the age of David and Solomon; c) the monarchial age of Israel and Judah.

This review starts out with the geographical lists whose setting, in the author's opinion, definitely resembles David's census (II Sam. 24:2) and Solomon's list of districts (I Ki. 4). The author's conclusion in the first part is that Israelite rule extended over the entire Land of Israel only during the period of David and Solomon, and neither previous nor subsequent to that (pp. 80-83).

The second and third parts of the book are devoted to a geographical and historical analysis of the system of tribal boundaries in the Book of Joshua (pp. 87-271). The author concludes that "The only period which fits the historical background of the boundaries is the period of the United Monarchy, the reigns of David and Solomon, principally in the latter part of David's and during Solomon's reign" (p. 235).

If the author finds one uniform historical background for the tribal boundaries it is not in relation to the city-lists embedded in the geographical lists in the Book of Joshua (Part Four, pp. 275-375). His opinion is

(*) Jerusalem, Bialik Institute, 1967; original Hebrew title:

נחלות שבטי ישראל — מחקר בגיאוגרפיה ההיסטורית של המקרא.

that the lists are not contemporaneous; in any case, they are *not* based on a unified document from the period of Josiah, as A. Alt maintained. The list of the cities of Judah dates from the time of Hezekiah (p. 286), the list of the cities of Benjamin reflects the extent of the conquests of Abijah, King of Judah (p. 285), the list of the cities of Dan is identical with the second district of Solomon (pp. 292, 299), and the list of the cities of Simeon reflects the historical-territorial situation in the time of David (pp. 292, 299). The rest of the city-lists were linked mainly to the description of the portions and complement it, and therefore they date from the time of the editors of the description of the boundaries (p. 277).

Like other commentators, Kallai assumes that the Levitical city-lists (Josh. 21; I Chron. 6) date from the United Monarchy (Part Five, pp. 379-403), or more precisely, from the second half of Solomon's reign, before the transference of the territory of Kabul to Hiram (p. 387).

The reader of Kallai's book will certainly be impressed with his erudition in the subject, with his consistency and the way in which he locates the lists of tribal holdings in their appropriate framework by applying known and accepted methods, in harmony with the mass of historical material.

The attached map, the tables and detailed index so facilitate following the elaborate discussion that the work becomes an important reference book for the historical geography of Eretz-Israel (the Land of Israel) in the Biblical period.

In spite of the profound discussion and convincing theses of the author, the book does not, of course, offer a full and perfect solution to the problems of the geographical lists in the Book of Joshua. The nature of the Biblical material, especially of the lists under discussion, "offers room for the abundance of commentators, each according to his own method" (p. 137). And so, the various scholars who have dealt with this subject have put forward equally various, contradictory solutions. It is well, therefore, that Kallai has prefaced his book with a general introduction (pp. 1-15) in which he reviews the principal opinions expressed by various commentators concerning the nature and dating of the geographical documents.

Summarised by Bustenai Oded