

Joshua 16 Ephraim

05/25/98 8:01 PM

Overview of the Territory

Extends from Bethel in the south to Shechem in the north (Macmillan's Atlas appears to be in error on this point; cf. 21:20,21; 1 Chr 7:28). Note Shechem, Shiloh, Bethel—all three crucial in later history.

The Promises

Two of Jacob's prophecies concerning his children deal with Ephraim.

In the blessing of the twelve sons, Gen 49:22-26 describes both of Joseph's children and promises their fruitfulness.

Jacob also gave a special blessing to Ephraim and Manasseh in Gen 48:1-20, promising that Ephraim, though younger, would be the greater of the two. Anticipated in the name Joseph gave his second son, "Fruitful," 41:52.

Numerical Manifestation

Fruitfulness seen in the multiplication of Joseph's offspring.

- At Sinai, Num 1:33,35, Ephraim (40500) + Manasseh (33200) is a total of 72,700 armed men, which would make Joseph the second largest tribe after Judah (1:27, 74,600).
- After the wandering, Num 26:34, 37, Ephraim (32500) + Manasseh (52700) is a total of 85,200, which puts them in first place (Judah, 26:22, is second at 76,500)

But note that Ephraim loses its position of numerical superiority to Manasseh! It is the larger tribe at the beginning of the wanderings (10th compared with Manasseh's 12th), but the lesser afterward (11th to Manasseh's 6th).

Where then are we to find the fulfillment of Jacob's promise? Answer: The tribe was much more prominent in Israel's later history.

Prominence of Ephraim

It and Judah yielded the two faithful spies (Joshua and Caleb).

It hosted the tabernacle when it was moved from Gilgal to a more central location (Shiloh) after the conquest, Josh 18:1. This was an extremely prestigious assignment.

Israel's first king (Abimelech) was the son of a Manasseite (Gideon), but his mother was from Shechem, and the people of Shechem crowned him king (Judg 9:1-6)

In the civil war under Rehoboam, Ephraim emerged as the head of the northern kingdom.

- 1 Kings 11:26, Jeroboam, who led the rebellion of the northern tribes, is described as an "Ephrathite," which is the gentilic form of "Ephraim," that is, an Ephraimite (and actually translated thus in Judg 12:5; other occurrences of "Ephraimite" in AV are actually just the

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tribal name “Ephraim”). (NB: the term can also be derived from Ephratah, the ancient name of Bethlehem, so that Jesse the father of David is called an Ephrathite in 1 Sam 17:12.)

- Jeroboam’s first capital was in Shechem at the north of Ephraim, and he put the southernmost of his two sanctuaries in Bethel, at the tribe’s southern bound, 1 Kings 12:25-33. (The later capital, Samaria, was strictly speaking in the territory of Manasseh, about where the large ‘S’ of “ISRAEL” is on Macmillan map 71.)
- The northern kingdom comes to be known by the name of “Ephraim,” see Isa 7:1-9 and the promise of millennial restoration in Ezek 37:15-28.
- Under this title, its agricultural abundance was legendary: Isa 28:1.

Applications

1. Once again, God keeps his promises. He is faithful.
2. Ephraim’s prominence was not altogether godly. The division of the kingdom was of God (1 Kings 11:11-13; 12:21-24), but Jeroboam’s idolatry was not, and the northern tribes became legendary for their apostasy, suffering early captivity under Sennacherib. Be careful how you use the blessings God gives you.

Unused Ideas

Compare Jdg 8:1-2 (Gideon, of Manasseh) with 12:1 (Jephthah, probably of Gad)—a recurrent trait of envy, but does not correlate with the territory.

Prominent cities:

- Gezer, by 21:20,21. Seesaws back and forth between Israel and Egypt (Merneptah, ca. 1230: “Hatti (land of the hittites) is pacified; plundered is Canaan with every evil; carried off is Ashkelon; seized upon is Gezer; Yanoam is made as that which does not exist; Israel is laid waste, his seed is not”; Egypt to Solomon 1 Kings 9:16)