

The Emergence of Israel in Canaan*

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Abstract

This paper reviews various models concerning the emergence of Israel in Canaan, and surveys archaeological evidence to attempt to integrate it with the written texts. Based on the balanced integration without minimizing any of the two, we have reached a current tentative conclusion of the indigenous origin of many Israelites. The combination of components from various models instead of only one may explain the hill country settlement.

1. Introduction

The emergence of Israel in Canaan is a much debated topic in Palestinian archaeology. Though the date of 13th century B.C.E. has almost reached scholarly consensus, models proposed for the nature of the emergence have not attained unanimous agreement.

According to the Bible, there are two different versions about the process of the Israelite settlement: one is Numbers and the book of Joshua, and the other is Judges chapter 1. Numbers and the book of Joshua, which are considered to be later material, give us the impression that after sojourning the desert for forty years, the Israelite tribes conquered the land of Canaan rapidly and systematically under the leadership of Moses and Joshua. There are three phases of the conquest according to the book of Joshua: the central, southern, and northern campaigns. The central campaign includes the miraculous fall of Jericho and the conquest of `Ai and Gibeon. The southern campaign describes the capture of cities such as Lachish, Hebron and Debir. The northern campaign proclaims the victory over Hazor, the prominent city in the region. The land of Canaan, then, was divided among the twelve tribes (cf. Dever 1990a:41).

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Judges chapter 1, in contrast, describes the situation that the Israelites have just begun to obtain the land after the death of Joshua. Military operations were conducted by individual tribes instead of the unified twelve tribes, and mostly the Israelites were unable to take complete possession of the land; the Canaanites were simply not driven out from the promised land. The chapter ends with a list of cities whose inhabitants lived side by side with the Israelites suggesting gradual infiltration of the Israelites into Canaan (cf. Dever 1990 a:41-42).

The biblical account of Numbers through Judges is said to be a composite construction. The book of Judges, which seems unaware of a conquest of Canaan by a unified Israel, must have traditions earlier than Numbers-Joshua, which know the conquest (Miller 1977:221). Therefore, the narratives of Judges are not filled with miraculous events, which are prominent in Joshua, and the conditions presented by Judges correspond with those in early Iron Age Palestine. The process of the Israelite settlement described in Judges seems to be more reasonable or historical than that of Numbers-Joshua, which is a carefully edited final version of the event (Miller 1977:280). In this paper, we will review various models for the emergence of Israel, recent archaeological data and its problems while suggesting a way to integrate the texts and the archaeological data.

2. Various Models

Three models have been suggested for the process of the Israelite settlement: conquest, peaceful infiltration, and a peasant revolt model.

The conquest model, started by Albright, accepts the conquest narrative of Joshua: The Israelites destroyed the Canaanite city-states and settled in many of them during the late 13th century B.C.E. They also brought new technology which enabled them to establish new settlements in the less occupied central hill country: waterproof lime plaster cistern and terrace farming (Albright 1960:113).

In order to prove the Israelite conquest, the proponents of this model concentrated on destruction debris of LB/Iron I transitional period. The excavation of Tell Beit Mirsim, for instance, revealed the destruction of the Late Bronze Age city followed by a brief occupation (C 2), which was thought to be an Israelite settlement. Identifying the site as Debir in the book of Joshua (10:38), Albright believed that the site was destroyed by the Israelites. However, many now suggest that Debir is to be located at Khirbet Rabud, which was not

destroyed though it existed at the end of the Late Bronze Age. Bethel also incurred destruction at the end of the Late Bronze Age followed by a poor settlement; the site was believed to be destroyed by the Israelites as Joshua (8:12-17) suggests. The Israelites were said to have destroyed Lachish (Joshua 10:31) and this was thought to be confirmed by the destruction of Level VI. The excavation of Hazor by Yadin unearthed the violent destruction of stratum XIII, and this was attributed to the Israelites (Bright 1981:131-132).

Three sites which were supposed to be destroyed by the Israelites, however, produced negative evidence: Gibeon, Jericho, and `Ai had no Late Bronze Age occupations to be destroyed at the time of Joshua. Nevertheless, Wright (1953:83) states, "We may safely conclude that during the 13th century a portion at least of the later nation of Israel gained entrance to Palestine by a carefully planned invasion." Bright (1981:143) mentions, "though we cannot reconstruct the career of Joshua, there is no reason to doubt that he played a leading role, as the Bible says." Lapp, finally, defended the conquest model by using archaeological evidence extensively and felt "more comfortable in the Albright tradition" (1967:300).

The peaceful infiltration model was proposed by German scholars such as Alt and Noth. This school, with less interest in archaeology, explains away the conquest account of Jericho and `Ai by using the notion of aetiology, i. e., an artificial story to explain the current situation. For instance, the conquest story of `Ai was told to explain why the mound of `Ai, which means ruin in Hebrew, was in ruin; thereby, the historical basis of Joshua's conquest was denied. This successfully solved the problem of the absence of Israelite destruction at the site (Dever 1990a:52).

This model notes that the Israelites occupied the central hills, which had been slightly affected by the spread of the Canaanite city-states in Late Bronze Age. The Israelites peacefully infiltrated the region, and settled down while gradually turning from their semi-nomadic way of life to an agricultural economy (Alt 1967:219-220). As Noth (1960:69) explains, the Israelites were "land-hungry semi-nomads."

The peaceful infiltration did not encounter or threaten the Canaanite city-states at first, but in a later stage of occupation, the expansion of the territory might result in military conquest (Alt 1967:220). This idea of two stage settlement could accommodate the archaeological evidence and the conflicting accounts of Joshua and Judges (Dever 1990a:53).

Aharoni (1976:75) adopted the peaceful infiltration model and claimed that the Israelites had to settle in uninhabited or sparsely populated regions, especially in the hilly areas. However, his date of early 14th century B.C.E. for the Israelite settlement seems to be

too high, and his high dates have never been accepted by others (Dever 1990a:51).

Fritz (1987) suggested a modified infiltration model: symbiosis hypothesis. By this term, he means a period of a partially sedentary life must have interspersed the nomadic existence of the Israelites. He allocates the Late Bronze Age for this symbiosis between Israelites and Canaanites. In this way, he tried to explain the cultural dependence of the Israelite tribes on the Canaanites while successfully excluding the possibility of their Canaanite origin. Though the idea may be brilliant, Israelites in the process of learning Canaanite culture during the Late Bronze Age cannot be attested.

The peasant revolt model was first suggested by Mendenhall (1962) who used a sociological and anthropological approach. Rejecting a nomadic origin for the Israelites as romantic nostalgia, Mendenhall states, "there was no real conquest of Palestine at all; what happened instead maybe termed--a peasant revolt against the network of interlocking Canaanite city states" (1962:73). Though his insight was provocative, Mendenhall failed to connect the peasant revolt with the archaeological data of Late Bronze Age Palestine: cultural breaks simply do not exist in the 14th and 13th century B.C.E. (Dever 1990a:55).

Gottwald (1979) matured the revolt model of Mendenhall and proposed the emergence of the Israelites in the 12th century B.C.E. as an assemblage of depressed Canaanites who revolted against the local rulers. These peasants created turmoil in Canaan by overturning their rulers or by joining other city states that offered more favorable conditions. It was this time that the Israelites entered Canaan and presented an attractive ideology, Yahwism. The revolting peasants and the Israelites joined under Yahwism, and occupied the high lands, where the Canaanite rulers could not contest these rebellious people (1979:210-219).

Recently, Dever introduced the concept of withdrawal, in which once nomadic peoples who had been settled reverted to pastoral nomadism. They opted for looser tribal affiliations instead of government control. Rather than escaping from intolerable conditions, they chose to seek a new society and a new lifestyle to start over. The early Israelites, in this opinion, withdrew from the society and migrated to the remote and sparsely populated hill country. Dever admits that his theory is speculative, but insists that the archaeological context of Canaan toward the end of the Late Bronze Age makes this scenario realistic (2003:178).

3. Archaeological Data

Archaeological data have accumulated since the time of Albright, but the evidence for

the conquest model is still the same. The Bible claims that sixteen sites were destroyed, yet only three of them, Bethel, Lachish and Hazor, produced evidence of destruction. Seven of them had no occupation or no trace of destruction, and the remaining six have disputed locations or insufficient excavation to produce evidence. On the other hand, among the twelve sites which the Bible describes undestroyed, five, in fact, produced no destruction, and six have inconclusive evidence or have been unexcavated (Dever 1990a:61). Therefore, the archaeological evidence cannot support the conquest model, and few scholars adhere to it.

Instead of searching destruction layers in the LB/Iron I sites, recent archaeological research produced data from “early Israelite” villages and surface surveys of the 12th and 11th century B.C.E. This will contribute to our discussion of the peaceful infiltration and peasant revolt models.

With the death of Callaway, full publication of `Ai and Khirbet-Raddana cannot be expected, but the summary is as follows: `Ai was founded on unoccupied site during 12th or 11th century B.C.E. Four-room houses with rock-hewn cisterns were unearthed. The pottery consists of cooking pots, “collared-rim” storage jars, and others in the Late Bronze Age tradition. There is evidence of industry: a hearth with a bronze chisel and a dagger. The site might have been destroyed during the rise of the Monarchy. Khirbet Raddana consisted of six courtyard houses with cisterns. The site shows similar pottery repertoire as `Ai, including an inscribed jar handle. The site was destroyed and abandoned almost at the same time as `Ai (Dever 1990a:68).

The excavation of Tel Masos in the Negev by Fritz & Kempinski (1983) cleared three strata beginning around 1200 B.C.E. Stratum III, which was destroyed after a century, includes courtyard houses with storage pits and early Iron I pottery. Stratum II consists of four-room houses and better pottery including northern imports, and was destroyed about 950 B.C.E. Stratum I was occupied until its abandonment around 800 B.C.E. The site, founded in the open area, may be an unwallled Israelite village which had some contacts with Canaanite culture.

The excavators of Tel Masos suggest the house plan derived from a Bedouin tent, basing this conclusion on the notion that the inhabitants had a semi-nomadic background (1983:31-34). Using the percentage of animal bones (sheep and goats 60%; cattle 26%), they state, “one of the main problems facing this Israelite settlement was its transition from a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life to a sedentary one” (1983:213). However, it is obvious that the settlers were experienced farmers rather than nomads in the process of sedentarization

because of the high percentage of domesticated cattle, which would require great skill to breed in the Negev (Dever 1990b:93). In addition, the fact that Late Bronze Age Lachish has almost the same percentage of animal bones as Tel Masos (Fritz & Kempinski 1983:217) vi-tiates a nomadic origin of the settlers.

Mazar's (1981) excavation of Giloh near Bethlehem uncovered a small fortified site. The pottery published can be dated around 1200 B.C.E. and shows a Canaanite tradition with some new element of the early Iron I (Dever 1990a:75). Mazar concludes, "archaeology cannot supply evidence for a possible nomadic phase which may have preceded the settlement---the variety of the archaeological finds illustrates the complex process of the Israelite conquest and settlement" (1981:36).

The only early Iron village site in the hill country so far published fully is 'Izbet Sartah by Finkelstein (1986;1988). This important site, perhaps biblical Ebenezer, is located a few miles east of Aphek. Three strata were identified. Stratum III, from 1200-1150 B.C.E., consists of a series of courtyard houses with silos arranged in an elliptical fashion inside a perimeter wall. Finkelstein thinks that the circular plan, most of which is simply conjectural, is derived from a Bedouin camp and that the Israelites were former nomads who peacefully settled in the hill country. Stratum II was briefly occupied after a gap around 1025 B.C.E. and yielded a large four-room house with many stone lined silos. An ostrakon was discovered from one of the silos. Stratum I, from 1000 to 950 B.C.E., was also a brief occupation with more silos and an addition to the central building.

According to Stager (1985:3), the central hill country survey shows that after 1200 B.C.E., the number and density of permanent settlements increased dramatically from 23 Late Bronze sites to 114 Iron I sites. The LB settlements were larger (median 5 ha.) than those of Iron I (median 1ha.), but the total occupied area was only 69 ha. in Late Bronze Age compared with 192 ha. in Iron I. This increase in population can hardly be caused by simple natural growth.

The characteristics of the hill country sites given by Dever (1987:235) are as follows:

(1) The sites were founded not on destroyed or deserted LB sites but in the central hill country during the early 12th century B.C.E.

(2) The sites were mostly small unwallled villages with agrarian material culture: "four-room" houses, rock-hewn cisterns and silos.

(3) Terrace farming with livestock herding and primitive industry supported the subsistence.

(4) The sites had less stratified social structure with some evidence of literacy.

(5) The pottery shows continuation from the LB age.

(6) Most of the sites were abandoned by the end of 11th century B.C.E. as an urban population grew in the Monarchy.

The surface survey of the Ephraim region by Finkelstein (1988:185-187) discovered similar shifts of settlements from LB to Iron I: 5 or 6 to 115 sites. Though the Iron I occupations were admittedly small, the sharp increase cannot be ascribed to natural growth alone. Thus, there was a sizable influx of new people into the highlands of Canaan in the 12th century B.C.E., and these new comers may be identified as "Israelites" (Dever 1990a:78).

After the survey of the Manasseh region, Zertal (1991:37) states that semi-nomads from the east entered the northern Jordan valley, probably from Transjordan. Using dubious comparison of cooking pot percentages, he identified three stages of such migration: in stage A (13thc.), the semi-nomadic inhabitants were in the process of sedentarization; in stage B (12thc.), they began to produce wheat and barley; in stage C (12th-11thc.), they developed terrace agriculture. However, the data he presented simply do not attest such migration.

According to Mazar, the daily artifacts in the hill country settlement sites included simple pottery vessels and various grinding stones used for processing food. Limited to a few forms, the pottery assemblage is simply sufficient to support basic subsistence, for example, cooking pots, storage jars for water, oil and wine, and a small number of other shapes. The vessel forms resemble those used by the Canaanites of the lowlands. Totally lacking in the hill country assemblage is the variety of shapes and decorations that the Canaanite had. It is significantly different from the contemporary Canaanites and Philistine culture (2007:89).

It seems that the inhabitants in the hill country did not possess their own tradition of ceramic production. They, at first, gained the essential pottery vessels from their Canaanite neighbors. When the original pottery was being produced without decoration, they produced a limited number of forms imitating Canaanite vessels. Despite the similarity in pottery forms, the hill country material culture was largely different from that of the lowland Canaanites (Mazar 2007:89-90).

As reviewed above, some archaeologists of recent field works, especially Finkelstein tend to claim that the "Israelites" were semi-nomads migrating from the East. This idea depends on the key site, 'Izbet Sartah, but the interpretation of the excavation involved a serious mistake as discussed below.

4. A Model for Integrating the Texts and the Archaeological Data

Like many textual scholars, Miller & Hayes (1986:72) once insisted that specific conclusions about the origins and earliest history of Israel and Judah must be based on the biblical materials. However, they admit that the evidence, or lack of evidence, is such that a confident treatment of the origins of Israel and Judah in terms of critical historiography is simply impossible (1986:78). This statement implies that scholars' efforts to interpret and utilize the biblical account almost or already reached its limitation. This situation is understandable considering the nature of the Bible, which cannot have any addition:

Biblical Data-----Closed & Edited: No More Addition

Interpretation-----Open: Almost reached Limitation

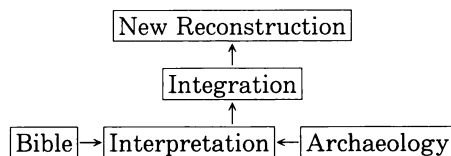
Archaeology, on the other hand, has unlimited potential for data collection as well as unregulated room for the interpretation:

Archaeological Data-----Open: Needs Careful Collection

Interpretation-----Open: Needs Careful Evaluation

It is this potentiality of archaeology that enables us to add more information for the Israelite settlement: new data come only from archaeology, which is equipped with socio-economic history through material culture. Our task is to correlate archaeological data with the Bible, which is equipped with religious and political history.

This approach was once called by Miller & Hayes (1986:76) a “compromise” since “the correlations usually called for some significant adjustments in the biblical account,” but it is our interpretation of the Bible, not the account itself, that will be adjusted in the light of archaeology. Therefore, the approach should be termed integration. It is gratifying to note that Gottwald (1979:xxv) foresaw the future research: “only as the full materiality of ancient Israel is more securely grasped will we be able to make proper sense of its spirituality.” The model for integration is as follows:



According to Grabbe (2007:35), archaeology and inscriptions are contemporary with

events; therefore, they should be considered as primary sources. A secondary source is the biblical texts because these were scribed and compiled after the events had occurred long time ago. However, the minimalist position is inadequate as a working principle since it insists that the biblical text cannot be used except where there is external confirmation. The biblical text deserve our consideration because one of the sources for the history of ancient Israel is the biblical text. We need to treat it like any other source (Grabbe 2007:224). Grabbe's work confirms that "the extreme skepticism regarding any history of 'ancient Israel' that has dominated the discussion since the early 1990s (especially in Europe) may have run its course" (Dever 2010:82).

In order to accomplish this potentiality of archaeology, we need to collect maximum possible data through excavation guided by research designs and to carefully evaluate the interpretation of the data. In this sense, evaluating the nomadic origin of `Izbet Sartah settlers is indispensable to reconstruct the Israelite settlement.

The pottery assemblage of `Izbet Sartah, except the presence of collared-rim jars, is similar to that of Gezer, which was a Canaanite/Philistine site. The stratum II at `Izbet Sartah coincides with strata XIII to XII at Gezer in the 12th century B.C.E. (Dever 1991:78). One may wonder if the inhabitants of `Izbet Sartah should be related to those of Gezer if ethnicity is indicated by ceramics.

Finkelstein (1986:106-138) thinks that the four-room house in stratum II developed from an interior arrangement of a nomadic tent and that the basic house form emerged in the 12th century B.C.E., followed by the development of additional pillars in the 11th century B.C.E. Though Dever et al (1986:88-110) have presented a clear example of the four-room house, Finkelstein failed to include in his argument this 12th century B.C.E. house found at Gezer, a Canaanite/Philistine site. In addition, Stager (1985:11-17) rejects the nomadic roots of the house as desert nostalgia and indicates its agrarian roots. The house was simply a home of farmers: the ground floor was allocated for food processing, stabling and storage; the second floor was used for dining and sleeping.

As the higher percentage of domesticated animals including cattle indicates, the economy of `Izbet Sartah was based on agriculture and animal breeding (Finkelstein 1986:151). However, since Finkelstein views the inhabitants of `Izbet Sartah as pastoral nomads who have been sedentaraized, he almost neglected the higher technology required for the agriculture in the highlands. As Stager (1985:6) mentions, the settlers in the highlands were already well advanced in the techniques of terrace agriculture when they established their

settlements. The settlement in the highlands was a risky enterprise, and many sites indeed fell victim of subsistence failure, demographic difficulties, and ecological deterioration (Hopkins 1987:190). The settlers of the highlands must have been experienced farmers.

Finally, as Dever (1991:87) indicates, Finkelstein simply believes that hill country transition to be an agriculturally based economy without understanding the operation. Therefore, he develops the concept that areas suitable for cereal cultivation and pasturage were settled early because such an economy is similar to that of pastoral nomads while other areas were settled later because of their suitability for mixed agriculture. For instance, Tel Masos was considered not to be an "Israelite" site since its economy of cattle breeding does not fit his concept. However, Tel Masos was contemporary with the hill country sites in the 12th century B.C.E. and had a similar site plan, courtyard houses and pottery; Tel Masos was perhaps an "Israelite" site.

Izbit Sarta, therefore, produced no evidence that nomads were in the process of settling down. The new comers in the hill country could be local farmers rather than nomads. We shall now join Lederman (1990:238) saying, "nomads they never were."

Mazar has pointed out that nothing in the archaeological findings from the period in question indicates the foreign origin of the hill country settlers. They brought no objects or traditions that might have come from outside the country. The pottery assemblage has used local Canaanite vessels as the prototype. As Mazar states, this can support various views presented above; that is, provided that settlers were semi-nomadic, they embraced local traditions in the settlement process and even bought goods from Canaanite cities or merchants. The hill country settlement and the origin of Israel may be explained by a combination of components from various theories (2007:94-95).

The settlement may be viewed as a complex process. It was necessary in such a situation that various clans and groups of people search new ways of subsistence in the uninviting hill country. Diverse origins can be expected from such groups, among which local pastoralists, and pastoralists from Transjordan and other areas may be included. It seems that the current archaeological data point to a settlement process of tribal groups with a pastoral way of life. Moreover, displaced Canaanites or people from Syria could be included in the group because they might be freeing from the collapsed Late Bronze political system around 13th century B.C.E. (Mazar 2007:95).

5. Conclusion

After reviewing models regarding the emergence of Israel in Canaan, we have surveyed archaeological evidence to attempt to integrate it with the texts. Based on the balanced integration without minimizing any of the two, we have reached a current tentative conclusion: the indigenous origin of many Israelites. The combination of components from various models instead of only one may explain the hill country settlement.

The exodus might have involved only the house of Joseph, and the other Israelites could be indigenous Canaanites, who joined the allegiance to Yahweh. One may ask if the Book of Joshua was simply wrong. In the view of the Deuteronomistic editor, there was no problem to consider that the Israelites conquered the Canaanite city states after wandering in the wilderness because the compiler concentrated on God's miraculous acts to give the Israelites the promised land despite their lack of advantage. Thus, the Book of Joshua could be an interpretation of what actually happened. What recent research has done, as Dever (1990a:83) states, is to choose alternative views of Judges concerning Israel's origins.

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