

Numbers 34:2–12, The Boundaries of the Land of Canaan, and the Empire of Necho

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Introduction

Right after the Priestly summary of the Israelites' travel through the wilderness (Num. 32:1–49), God gives Moses an additional set of instructions regarding their future conquest of the Promised Land; they are to drive out the inhabitants, destroy their images and “high places,” divide the land by lot among the tribes and inherit it. Should the Israelites not obey these instructions, their fate will be like that of their predecessors (32:50–56).

In the following twelve verses, God then lays out the precise boundaries of that Land which the Israelites are expected to conquer:

The LORD said to Moses, “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 an inheritance, the land of Canaan in its full extent: your south side shall be from the wilderness of Zin along the side of Edom, and your southern boundary shall be from the end of the Salt Sea on the east; and your boundary shall turn south of the ascent of Akrabbim, and cross to Zin, and its end shall be south of Kadesh-barnea; then it shall go on to Hazar-addar, and pass along to Azmon; and the boundary shall turn from Azmon to the Brook of Egypt, and its termination shall be at the sea. For the western boundary, you shall have the Great Sea and its coast; this shall be your western boundary. This shall be your northern boundary: from the Great Sea you shall mark out your line to Mount Hor; from Mount Hor you shall mark it out to the entrance of Hamath, and the end of the boundary shall be at Zedad; then the boundary shall extend to Ziphron, and its end shall be at Hazar-enan; this shall be your northern boundary. You shall mark out your eastern boundary from Hazar-enan to Shepham; and the boundary shall go down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain; and the boundary shall go down, and reach to the shoulder of the sea of Chinnereth on the east; and the boundary shall go down to the Jordan, and its end shall be at the Salt Sea. This shall be your land with its boundaries all round.” (Num. 34:1–12; RSV)

Moses (not God, strangely enough) then goes on to explain that these borders are only meant for nine tribes and a half, since two and a half had already received their inheritances in Transjordan (in chapter 32). God then continues to instruct Moses on details of the future conquest: the tribal leaders, the Levitical towns and cities of refuge, and finally the inheritance law brought up by the Gileadites concerning their kinsman Zelophehad, thus ending the book of Numbers.

In their present context, the “boundaries of the Land of Canaan” are a part of those final instructions given by God to Moses, and through him to the Israelites, in the final

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days leading up to his death. It has long been realized that these boundaries are too detailed to be considered schematic or typological; on the other hand, they are not, for the most part, the natural borders of the Land. The intention of this article is to use the extant historical, archaeological, and literary evidence to show that the southern boundary is that of the kingdom of Josiah, while the northern line reflects the extent of Egyptian rule during the reign of Necho II, during the late seventh century B.C.E. The mention of Kadesh-barnea and the Edomite border in the south and of Riblah in the north will serve as the focus for our discussion. The Priestly composer of Numbers 34 and of several related texts and the prophet Ezekiel used this reality as a paradigm for their “once and future” Land. Ezekiel also used it as a model for his prophecy in chapter 6, emphasizing once again that very Riblah, where the people of Judah had suffered much pain and humiliation at the hands of their conquerors.

The “Borders of Canaan” in the Bible

A vast majority of scholars and exegetes have recognized that the Numbers 34 boundary description is related in concept to about a dozen other, more abridged descriptions of the “Land of Canaan” or “Land of Israel.”¹ This is certainly true for the description of “the land that remains” in Josh. 13:2–6, also phrased as a divine commandment, giving a kind of “negative” of the same borders, stretching from “the Shihor which is before Egypt” northward as far as “Lebo-hamath.”² The description of “the nations that remain” in Judg. 3:3, “the five lords of the Philistines . . . to Lebo-hamath,” seems to be an abbreviation of the same.³ The same is true of at least one of the descriptions of the journey of the spies that seem to be interwoven in the present text of Num. 13:21–26: they scout the land “from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, at Lebo-hamath,” returning to Moses “at Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran.” The opposite direction, “from Lebo-hamath to the Brook of Egypt,” is used in 1 Kgs. 8:65 to illustrate the borders of “all Israel . . . a great assembly” that participated in the Solomon’s festival after the dedication of the Temple (interestingly enough, 1 Kgs. 5:1–5 [Eng. 4:21–25] uses two different descriptions of Solomon’s domain, but see below). 2 Kgs. 14:25 uses similar language in describing the military successes of

1. Z. Kallai, “The Boundaries of Canaan and the Land of Israel in the Bible,” *Eretz-Israel* 12 (Jerusalem, 1975), 27–34 (Hebrew with English abstract); idem, “The Patriarchal Boundaries, Canaan and the Land of Israel: Patterns and Applications in Biblical Historiography,” *IEJ* 47 (1997), 69–82.

2. Mazar’s understanding of *לְבוֹאֵי חַמַּת* as a proper toponym and its identification with the town of Lebweh in the Lebanese Beqa’ has been accepted so universally that it needs no additional comment here. See B. Mazar, “Lebo-Hamath and the Northern Border of the Land of Canaan,” *Cities and Districts in Eretz-Israel* (Jerusalem: 1975), 167–81 (Hebrew; English in Sh. Aḥituv and B. A. Levine [eds.], *The Early Biblical Period: Historical Studies* [Jerusalem, 1986], 189–202); Y. Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible*, 2nd ed., trans. A. F. Rainey (Philadelphia, 1979), 72–73; cf. also NJPS.

3. As is illustrated thus: Josh. 13:2–6: “all the **regions** . . . from the Shihor, which before Egypt . . . **the five lords of the Philistines**, of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron, and those of the Avvim, in the south, **all** the land of **the Canaanites**, and Mearah which belongs to **the Sidonians**, to Aphek, to the boundary of the Amorites and the land of the Byblites, and **all Lebanon**, toward the sunrising, **from Baal-gad** below **Mount Hermon to Lebo-hamath** . . .”; Judg. 3:3: These are **the nations: the five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians**, and the Hivites who dwelt on **Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath.**”

Jeroboam II: “He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah.” This same victory seems to be what Amos 6:14 refers to in his prophecy that “they shall oppress you from Lebo-hamath to the Brook of the Arabah.” The Chronicler, besides repeating the above descriptions from Kings, uses a similar depiction when describing the bringing of the Ark from Kiriath-jearim (1 Chr. 13:5): “So David assembled all Israel from the Shihor of Egypt to Lebo-hamath.”⁴ And finally (though not in chronological order), it has long been recognized that the future land prophesized by Ezekiel (47:13–48:29), though described in very different terms, is also related to the Numbers 34 description.⁵

Another set of texts that are definitely related to the Numbers 34 list is the various descriptions of the southern boundary of the Land. The most obvious example of this is in the delineation of the territory of Judah in Josh. 15:2–4, which is so similar to Num. 34:3–5 that the two must be connected (see below). These passages and their interrelationships have been noted and studied by commentators and scholars since the beginnings of the study of biblical geography.⁶

Yet another group of texts that would seem to be related is the various descriptions of the land of Canaan/Israel that use the city of Gaza as their south-western focal point. These include Gen. 10:19 (“And the territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon, in the direction of Gerar, as far as Gaza, and in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, as far as Lasha”), Josh. 10:41 (“And Joshua defeated them from Kadesh-barnea to Gaza”) and 1 Kgs. 5:4 [Eng. 4:24]

4. The term שִׁיחֹר (šīḥr) is widely accepted to have been borrowed from the Egyptian (p^3)-šī-ḥr, “(the) waters of Horus” (cf. A. H. Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica* II [Oxford, 1947], 201), referring commonly to the eastern (Palusaic) branch of the Nile, but also to the Fayum (cf. Sh. Ahituv, “Shihor,” *Encyclopaedia Biblica* [Jerusalem, 1976], 7.619–20 [Hebrew]). The term appears five times in the Bible; in Isa. 23:3 and in Jer. 2:18 it clearly refers to the Nile; in Josh. 19:26 the combination “Shihor-libnath,” a place in the inheritance of Asher which is somewhere in the vicinity of the Carmel ridge (cf. R. Frankel, “Shihor-Libnath,” *ABD* 5.1212–13), obviously has nothing to do with the Nile. In Josh. 13:3 and in 1 Chr. 13:5 the term is used to define the south-western boundary of the Land of Canaan/Israel. Some scholars (such as S. Japhet, “Conquest and Settlement in Chronicles,” *JBL* 98 [1979], 208–10), assume that both refer to the Nile and *not* to “the Brook of Egypt” (for which see below), and that 1 Chr. 13:5 is directly dependent on Josh. 13:3; cf. also Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, *OTL* (Louisville, 1993), 277–78; H. G. M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, *NCB* (Grand Rapids-London, 1992), 115. H. Bar-Daroma, “The River of Egypt (Naḥal Mizraim),” *PEQ* 92 (1960), 37–56, was among those who understood these references as meaning that the boundary of the Land *was*, indeed, the Nile river. We, on the other hand, would agree with N. Na’aman, “The Shihor of Egypt and Shur that is Before Egypt,” *Tel-Aviv* 7 (1980), 99, that “in the course of time . . . it [“Shihor”] developed into a more figurative term for ‘river’, ‘stream’ or ‘wadi’.” While 1 Chr. 13:5 may very well have been influenced by Josh. 13:3, it is also dependant on the description of Solomon’s dedication of the Temple in 1 Kgs. 8:65; the term “Shihor of Egypt,” when linked to “Lebo-hamath,” seems to be a literary substitute for “the Brook of Egypt,” which is definitely not the Nile.

5. Cf. Aharoni, *Land of the Bible*, 69; K. D. Hutchens, “Defining the Boundaries—A Cultic Interpretation of Numbers 34.1–12 and Ezekiel 47.13–48.1, 28,” in M. Patrick Graham, William P. Brown, and Jeffrey K. Kuan, eds., *History and Interpretation—Essays in Honour of John H. Hayes*, *JSOTSup* 173 (Sheffield, 1993), 215–30.

6. See, e.g., the medieval commentaries of Rashi and Ibn-Ezra and the modern studies of S. H. Isaacs, *The True Boundaries of the Holy Land* (Chicago, 1917); F. M. Abel, *Géographie de la Palestine* I (Paris, 1933 [3rd ed. 1967]), 306; Z. Kallai, *Historical Geography of the Bible—The Tribal Territories of Israel* (Jerusalem-Leiden, 1986), 115; N. Na’aman, *Borders and Districts in Biblical Historiography* (Jerusalem, 1986), 62–66.

(“For he had dominion over all the region west of the Euphrates from Tiphseh to Gaza”). Additionally, Josh. 13:3, Judg. 3:3 and 1 Kgs. 5:1 [Eng. 4:21], as well as the enigmatic Exod. 23:31 (“And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates”), all refer to the land of the Philistines as the southern or southwestern corner of the Land.

Gaza is of course the southernmost of the five Philistine cities (cf. Josh. 13:3), lying near the Mediterranean shore just north of the estuary of what is now called Naḥal Besor. It is also the southernmost major city along the Canaanite coast, and thus the nearest major city to the “Brook of Egypt.” Especially if Na’aman is correct in his assertion that the biblical and Assyrian “Brook of Egypt” is, in fact, the Besor rather than the “traditional” Wadi el-‘Arish,⁷ then these descriptions too must be understood as repetitions of that same standard delineation of the southern boundary.⁸

Although it is not our intention here to engage in a full-length topographical discussion of the various boundary descriptions,⁹ a short summary is in order (see Map no. 1). According to Num. 34:3, the southern boundary begins at the southeastern tip of the Sea of Salt (today’s “Dead Sea”). The description in Josh. 15:2 מן הלשן הַפְּנֵה נֹבְהָ, literally “from the tongue (cf. Vulgate “lingua”; NJPS) that points southward,” is generally understood to refer to the southern tip (“bay” in AV; RSV) of the sea. It is tempting to identify this “tongue” with the peninsula known today as “Al-Lisān,”¹⁰ assuming that at the time that the description was written the lake’s water level, which has known quite a few fluctuations over the centuries, was roughly what it is today and that the outcrop was not submerged at the time.¹¹ However in the description of the Benjaminite border in Josh. 18:19, a similar expression, לְשׁוֹן יַם-הַמֶּלֶח צְפוֹנָה, is used to describe the northern tip of the sea.¹² Both Numbers and Joshua also refer to “the border of Edom” (in Numbers the expression is actually עַל-יַדֵי אֲדוֹם, “next to Edom”). Gen. 10:19 refers to the same area by listing the five

7. N. Na’aman, “The Brook of Egypt and Assyrian Policy on the Border of Egypt,” *Tel Aviv* 6 (1979), 68–90.

8. See also A. Demsky, “The Route of Jacob’s Funeral Cortège and the Problem of ‘Eber Hayyarden (Genesis 50.10–11),” in M. Brettler and M. Fishbane, eds., *Minḥah le-Nahum—Biblical and Other Studies Presented to Nahum M. Sarna, JSOTSup* 154 (Sheffield, 1993), 58–59; contra A. F. Rainey, “Toponymic Problems (cont.),” *Tel Aviv* 9 (1982), 131–32. P. K. Hooker, “The Location of the Brook of Egypt,” in M. P. Graham, W. P. Brown, and J. K. Kuan, eds., *History and Interpretation—Essays in Honour of John H. Hayes, JSOTSup* 173 (Sheffield, 1993), 203–14 suggested that while the “original” “Brook of Egypt” was, indeed, the Besor, by the mid-seventh century campaign of Esarhaddon the term had been “transferred” to Wadi el-‘Arish, thus including Raphah within the Assyrian-dominated areas.

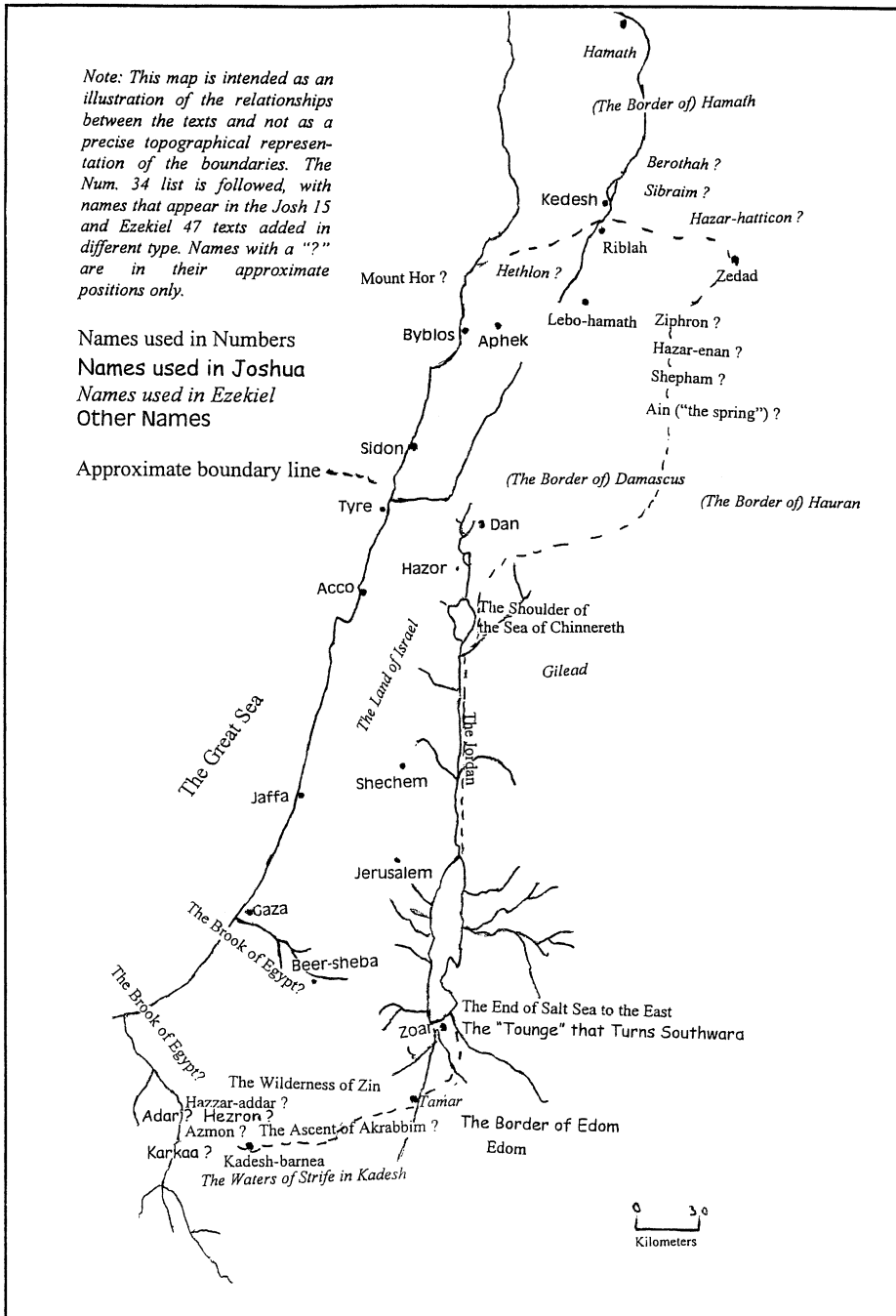
9. For such cf. Aharoni, *Land of the Bible*, 69–74.

10. So R. G. Boling, *Joshua, AB* (New York, 1982), 365; Kallai, *Historical Geography of the Bible*, 116.

11. For geological evidence of just such fluctuations cf. C. Klein, “Morphological Evidence of Lake Level Changes, Western Shore of the Dead Sea,” *Israel Journal of Earth-Sciences* 31 (1982), 67–94; A. Frumkin, M. Magaritz, I. Carmi, and I. Zak, “The Holocene Climatic Record of the Salt Caves of Mount Sedom, Israel,” *The Holocene* 1 (1991), 191–200. For an attempt to relate such fluctuations to biblical passages, including those discussed here, see A. Frumkin and Y. Elitzur, “Historic Dead Sea Level Fluctuations Calibrated with Geological and Archaeological Evidence,” *Quaternary Research* 57 (2002), 334–42.

12. See also Y. Elitzur, “*Katef*: a Topographical Term in the Benjaminite Dialect,” *HUCA* 70–71 (1999–2000), 28.

Map no. 1. The Boundaries of the Land of Canaan/Israel
 According to Num. 34:1-12, Josh. 15:2-4, and Ezek. 47:13-48:29



“cities of the plain.”¹³ Ezek. 47:19 and 48:28 refer to “Tamar,” which, assuming its identification with the Iron II and Roman fortress at modern ‘Ain Ḥuṣḥ/‘En Ḥaṣeva,¹⁴ is actually quite a way to the south of the Dead Sea.

The next two points in the Numbers and Joshua descriptions are “the ascent of Akkrabbim” and “Zin,” both rather difficult to pin down.¹⁵ Ezekiel mentions neither. The boundary then continues “south of Kadesh-barnea.” Since this is one of the key sites in the boundary descriptions, occurring in almost all its versions, a discussion of its identification is warranted and will be undertaken below. In Ezekiel, “Kadesh-barnea” is renamed מי מריבות קדש “the waters of Meriboth-kadesh” (so JPS, RSV; the AV, following the Vulgate’s “aquas Contradictionis Cades,” translates “the waters of strife in Kadesh”).

According to Josh. 15:3–4, the next four points are Hezron, Addar, Karka, and Azmon, while the Numbers version lists only “Hazar-addar” and Azmon. This would seem to indicate the primacy of the Joshua account, though this will be discussed below. The southern boundary then ends at “the Brook of Egypt,” flowing into “the [Great] Sea.” The identification of this “Brook of Egypt” has already been discussed.

Interestingly enough, all *three* accounts (that is, Numbers 34, Joshua 15 and Ezekiel 47) take the trouble to point out the western boundary, running along the “Great Sea.” In fact, the only account in which this would not have been self-evident is that of the inheritance of Judah, which seems to artificially include the Philistine coast south of Jabneel (Josh. 15:11–12).

The descriptions of the northern and eastern borders in Numbers and in Ezekiel and their relationship to each other, as well as the relationship between these descriptions and other definitions of the Land (such as that of a northern border on “the great river Euphrates” on one hand and that defined by the city of Dan on the other) have been the subject of countless inquiries and interpretations.¹⁶ Of all of these, the solution offered by Mazar’s above-mentioned identification of Lebo-hamath at Lebweh, south of the great Hamath itself, seems to be the most reasonable: the boundary is described as following a line from some prominent mountain on the Phoenician coast, somewhere to the north of Byblos. The identification of the “Aphek and the Amorite border and the Byblites” in the “Land that Remains” list in Josh. 13:4–5 with the ‘Afqa southeast of Byblos seems to fit, considering the aforesaid relationship between the two texts.¹⁷ Zedad, Ziphron, and Hazar-enan are to be found to the east of Lebo-hamath, on the edge of the Syrian Desert. The eastern boundary runs from there

13. Cf. Gen. 14:2, 8, except that there the fifth city “Lasha” is replaced by “Bela which is Zoar”; Gen. 19:20–22 gives an aetiology both for the name and for the city’s survival of the others’ destruction; Zoar, known in later sources as well, is commonly identified at Ghor eṣ-Şāfi, at the southeastern tip of the lake.

14. First proposed by Y. Aharoni, “Tamar and the Roads to Elath,” *IEJ* 13 (1963), 30–39; for the Iron Age remains at the site cf. R. Cohen and Y. Yisrael, “The Iron Age Fortresses at ‘En Haseva,” *BA* 58 (1995), 223–35; idem, *On the Road to Edom, Discoveries from ‘En Haseva* (Jerusalem, 1995).

15. See the discussion in Kallai, *Historical Geography of the Bible*, 116–18.

16. Cf. the opposing positions of K. Elliger, “Die Nordgrenze des Reiches David,” *Palästina-jahrbuch* 32 (1936), 34–73; and M. Noth, *Numbers, OTL* (London, 1968), 248–51.

17. In other words, we would expect both Aphek and the Byblites to be *within* the Numbers 34 boundary. See Map 1 and cf. Aharoni, *Land of the Bible*, 73, 238.

through an unidentified Shepham to a place called “Riblah to the east of Ain” (or “east of the spring,” following the Vulgate’s “in Rebla contra fontem”). This “Riblah,” another key point in our proposition, will also be discussed further. The boundary’s circuit is completed by running along “the shoulder of the Sea of Chinnereth eastward,” that is the top of the escarpment of what is now called the Golan Heights, specifically leaving the eastern sea-shore, together with the lake itself, *within* the boundary.¹⁸ The boundary continues down what is now called the Yarmuk, joining the Jordan River on its run to the Dead Sea. Ezekiel, as has been long recognized, apparently portrays the same boundary, using regional names of his own day, including Damascus and “the Land of Israel” within the Land and excluding Hamath, Hauran, and Gilead.¹⁹

The Boundaries as a Reflection of Reality

There have been several attempts to understand the geo-political reality behind the description of the boundaries of “The Land of Canaan” in Num. 34:2–12. Several of the Medieval commentators attempted to equate these borders with those of the Land promised to Abraham in Gen. 15:18.²⁰ Some modern scholars have considered the borders to be “to some extent ideal; the country included within them was never in its entirety in the occupation of the Hebrews.”²¹ Others assumed that Numbers 34’s listing of precise (and mostly otherwise unknown) boundaries must reflect a geopolitical reality, a real description of the Land in some historical period. Karl Elliger, for example, assumed them to reflect the kingdom of David.²² According to Martin Noth, they reflect the actual Israelite settlement at its greatest extent, the southern border being identical with that of Judah and the northern boundary reflecting the northern settlement of the tribe of Dan.²³ However, As Benjamin Mazar realized several decades ago, such boundaries that include the Phoenician coast but not the Transjordan do not reflect the political reality of the Israelite states at any known time. Mazar’s hypothesis is that the biblical boundaries reflect those of the thirteenth century Egyptian province of Canaan, fixed around 1270 C.E. after the battle of Kedesh between Rameses II of

18. *Contra* Aharoni, *Land of the Bible*, 73, who claimed that the boundary ran along the eastern shore of the lake and *contra* Elitzur, “*Katef*, a Topographical Term,” 35, who understood the description as including the whole width of what is now called the Golan Heights, up to the present-day Nahr er-Ruqqād. Interestingly enough, this topographical reality was also recognized by the various treaties establishing the border between British-controlled Palestine and French-held Syria in the 1920’s and again in the 1949 cease-fire agreement between Israel and Syria.

19. Though it is doubtful whether these were the actual names of “the Assyrian-Babylonian provinces,” as asserted by Aharoni, since there is no independent evidence for a “province” of Gilead and certainly not one called “the Land of Israel.” Ezekiel, it would seem, exercised some measure of “poetic license” in his description. The term גבול, “border,” in this context does not refer to the actual boundary-line, but to the “territory” or “district” of Hamath, Damascus, Hauran, and so on.

20. For a summary see Y. Z. Moskowitz, *The Book of Numbers, Da’at Miqra* (Jerusalem, 1988), 417–25 (Hebrew).

21. G. B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers, ICC* (Edinburgh, 1903), 452–53.

22. Elliger, “Die Nordgrenze des Reiches Davids,” 34–73.

23. M. Noth, “Das Reich von Hamath als Grenz-anachbar des Reiches Israel,” *Palästina-jahrbuch* 33 (1937), 36–51; *idem*, *Numbers*, 248–50.

Egypt and Hattushilis III of Hatti. According to Mazar, these boundaries of Egyptian-ruled Canaan were kept as a territorial concept during the Israelite period.²⁴ This theory has been accepted by a large number of scholars.²⁵ And while his theory was based mainly on his identification of Lebo-Hamath on the *northern* border, Mazar did point out, that he considered the Negeb and the southern border to be a part of that same reality.²⁶

One of the questions that is occasionally brought up by these scholars is that of the mechanism, the “how and why,” by which what Mazar called “a fixed territorial-administrative formula” from the thirteenth century Egyptian administration would have reached such a late Israelite tradition as the Priestly literature, usually dated to either the exilic or post-exilic period.²⁷ Rainey recently reconfirmed his basic agreement with Mazar’s hypothesis. He pointed out that, with the exception of Qidšu (Kedesh on the Orontes in Syria), all of the towns listed in the early fifteenth century topographical list of Thutmose III are south of the Num. 34:7–11 border and that the El-Amarna letters from those towns show particularly “Canaanite” language, compared to the Hurro-Akkadian dialect of those to the north. While specifically not claiming that Num. 34:7–11 is a copy of the treaty between Ramases II and Hattushilis III and recognizing that it does, indeed, show signs of its late composition (such as the centrality of Hamath), “the political and sociological situation that prevailed in the 13th century B.C.E. provided the matrix for subsequent developments in the Iron Age . . . the memory of Canaan as an entity was transmitted to subsequent generations.”²⁸ Levine’s answer is to admit that it is “a fascinating but somewhat ironic literary-historical situation: in a relatively late period . . . after the restoration from Babylonian exile, priestly writers were informed by a vision of the Promised Land that included all of Egyptian-dominated Canaan, as it was just before the beginning of the Iron Age.”²⁹ Kallai’s answer is also somewhat vague: “The borders of Canaan (cf. Num 34), though reminiscent of the last stage of the Egyptian Asian province . . . is depicted on the basis of borderlines taken from the successor states and territories. The southern border is modeled on that of the Land of Israel, the line along the Jordan is drawn between the West-Jordanian tribes in Canaan and the East-Jordanian tribes outside

24. Mazar, “Lebo-Hamath and the Northern Border,” 167–81.

25. Including R. De Vaux, “Le Pays de Canaan,” *JAOS* 88 (1968), 29–30; Z. Kallai, “The Boundaries of Canaan,” 28; idem, “The Patriarchal Boundaries”; Aharoni, *Land of the Bible*, 69–76; Na’aman, *Borders and Districts in Biblical Historiography*, 63—though in “The Inheritances of the Cis-Jordanian Tribes and the ‘Land that Remaineth’,” *Eretz-Israel* 16 (Jerusalem, 1982), 156–57 (Hebrew with English abstract) he refers vaguely to the northern border as being based on the Canaanite city states of “the Middle Bronze Age.”

26. Mazar, “Lebo-Hamath and the Northern Border of the Land of Canaan,” 170 and n. 14.

27. Though this is not accepted by all. For a post-exilic date for P, cf. B. A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20, AB* (New York, 1993), 101–9; idem, *Numbers 21–36, AB* (New York, 2000), 540; *contra* A. Hurvitz, “The Evidence of Language in Dating the Priestly Code,” *RB* 81 (1974), 24–56; idem, “Dating the Priestly Source in Light of the Historical Study of Biblical Hebrew A Century after Wellhausen,” *ZAW* 100 (1988), 88–100; and G. J. Wenham, *Numbers, Tyn. OT Comm.* (Leicester-Downers Grove, 1981), 22–23, who place P before D but still do not answer the question. See also R. E. Friedman, *The Exile and Biblical Narrative, HSM* 22 (Chico, 1981), who posits a pre-exilic D¹ followed by a pre-exilic P¹ followed by an exilic D² followed by an exilic or post-exilic P².

28. A. F. Rainey, “Who is a Canaanite? A Review of the Textual Evidence,” *BASOR* 304 (1996), 11–12.

29. Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, 540.

Canaan.”³⁰ In the later edition of his book Kallai explained that the Lebo-hamath boundary, though based on “the earlier history of the country,” actually reflects the political situation of the reign of Solomon.³¹ On the opposite end of the critical spectrum are Hutchens, who suggested that both the Priestly author of Numbers 34 and Ezekiel expanded on a common “cultic” source whose original intention was to provide a ritual definition of “the Holy Land” (not unlike later Rabbinic sources) and Davies, stating that “it is by no means clear how or why such an ancient document should have been preserved until the time of the Priestly writer.” In his view the boundary description is “idealistic, reflecting the dimensions of the land which it was considered fitting that Israel should possess.”³²

The Identification of Kadesh-barnea

One of the most peculiar aspects of the so-called borders of the Land of Canaan, especially if they are, indeed, a paradigm rooted in the reality of the Late Bronze Age, is the inclusion of Kadesh-barnea as a central site on the southern boundary.

The toponym *קדש*—*Qdš*, vocalized “Kadesh,” is mentioned a total of 24 times in the Hebrew Bible, all (perhaps with the exception of Ps. 29:8) in connection with a site or sites in the southern wilderness (at least four additional localities, mostly in the northern part of the country, are vocalized “Kedesh”). Ten of the 24 references include the additional designation “Barnea.” While the name “Kadesh” obviously refers to a sanctuary or holy spot, the meaning of the appellation “Barnea” is not clear.³³ The Septuagint consistently uses the forms *καδεις* and *καδεις βαρνε*, making no effort to either translate or identify the toponym.

The site known as Kadesh or Kadesh-barnea is mentioned in the Bible mostly in connection with the stories of the Israelites’ wandering through the wilderness on their journey to the Promised Land. It was the site of their principal encampment (Deut. 1:46); it was the point of departure and return for the twelve spies (Num. 13:1–26); the first, failed attempt to enter the Land was made from there (Num. 14:40–45); Miriam and Aaron died and were buried nearby (Num. 20:1, 22–19); and the final leg of the wandering began there (Num. 20:1; Deut. 2:1). Interestingly enough for such an important place, though Kadesh is also mentioned three times in the patriarchal narratives (Gen. 14:7; 16:14; 20:1), and a few times more in Joshua-Judges in passages that refer directly to the wilderness traditions (Josh. 14:6–7; Judg. 11:16, 17) it is totally absent from the rest of the Bible. Kadesh-barnea is surprisingly not referred to, even in allegorical terms, in either prophecy or poetry (again perhaps with the exception of Ps. 29:8).³⁴

30. Z. Kallai, “Territorial Patterns, Biblical Historiography and Scribal Tradition—A Programmatic Survey,” *ZAW* 93 (1981), 428.

31. Idem, *Historical Geography of the Bible*, 324–25.

32. K. D. Hutchens, “Defining the Boundaries—A Cultic Interpretation of Numbers 34.1–12,” 215–30; E. W. Davies, *Numbers, NCBC* (London-Grand Rapids, 1995), 350.

33. For several innovative suggestions see H. C. Trumbull, *Kadesh Barnea: Its Importance and Probable Site* (London, 1884), 24–25.

34. Kadesh is also totally absent from the Apocrypha, except for two references in the book of Judith. The second of these is clear: Achior the Ammonite, in describing how God led the Israelites through

Quite surprisingly, Josephus does not mention the site of the southern Kadesh or Kadesh-barnea even once in all his writings, even when narrating such stories as the dispatching of the spies, the death of Aaron and the sending of messengers to the King of Edom. In his version, the death of Aaron occurred at “a place in Arabia which the Arabs have deemed their metropolis, formerly called Ἀρακεμ, today named Petra” (*Jewish Antiquities* IV 82). Moreover, when recounting the killing of the five kings of the Midianites (Num. 31:8; Josh. 13:21—a story that has no direct connection with Kadesh-barnea) Josephus tells of the fifth king, Rekem, that “the city that bears his name ranks highest in the land of the Arabs and to this day is called by the whole Arabian nation after the name of its royal founder, Rekeme. It is the Petra of the Greeks” (*Jewish Antiquities* IV 161).³⁵ Eusebius, also probably reflecting a Jewish tradition of his time, identified καδεσ βαρνε “in the desert around Petra in Arabia.”³⁶

The identification of Kadesh-barnea with Petra, at least by that name, did not endure in Jewish tradition. In M. *Gittin* 1:2 Rekem is cited as the *eastern* boundary of the Land of Israel for the purpose of writs—without any identification of the site with Petra and without any direct referral to the biblical border delineations. The later Jewish Aramaic translations of the Bible such as Onkelos consistently translate “Kadesh” as קדש, “Rekem,” and “Kadesh-barnea” as רקם גיאנה, “Rekem of the valley.” The tenth century Jewish Arabic translation of Sa‘adia Gaon uses the form “Rekim,” again without any reference to the Nabatean Petra. However the identification of “Rekem” as the pre-Hellenistic name of the city of Petra seems to be proven by a Nabatean memorial inscription found on the site, which mentions one *Ptrys br* (son of) *Trpts* “who lived at *Rqmw* and died at *Gršw* (Gerasa) and was buried there.”³⁷

the wilderness, recounts that He “led them by way of Sinai and Kadesh-barnea . . .” (Jud. 5:14). The first allusion is less definite: in 1:9, the list of locations contacted by “Nebuchadnezzar king of Assyria” includes “Carmel, Gilead, Upper Galilee and the great valley of Esdraelon, Samaria and its towns, and beyond the Jordan as far as Jerusalem, Betane (Bethany? Botna near Hebron?), Chelus (Halhul near Hebron? Elussa in the Negeb?), Kadesh, the brook of Egypt, Taphses (apparently Tahpanhes), Ramasses and all the land of Gesem (Goshen).” The date of composition of the book of Judith has been debated among scholars, opinions ranging from the Persian period (5th–4th centuries B.C.E.—see Y. M. Grintz, *Sefer Yehudith [The Book of Judith]* [Jerusalem, 1957], 13–17 [Hebrew]) through the Hasmonean period (2nd century B.C.E.—see C. A. Moore, *Judith, AB* (New York, 1985), 67) to the Roman era (2nd century C.E.—see S. Zeitlin, “Introduction,” in M. S. Enslin, *The Book of Judith* [Dropsie University Edition—Jewish Apocryphal Literature 7; Leiden, 1972], 26). For a discussion of the sites, their various spellings and their identifications cf. Moore, *Judith*, 126–27. However, neither of these references, being, as they obviously are, dependent on the various biblical texts, add to our knowledge of the site.

35. This silence is also apparent in another approximate contemporary of Josephus, namely the author of the *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* usually known as Pseudo-Philo. In all of this book’s recounting of the Israelites’ wanderings, including the spy episode, the name of Kadesh is not mentioned even once. A place called “Cades” is mentioned in 45:4 in connection with the Gibeah incident of Judges 19–21 (which the *LAB* relocates to the priestly city of Nob), quite curiously considering that such a place is not mentioned in the biblical text at all. Cf. H. Jacobson, *A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo’s Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum with Latin and English Translation*, Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums 21 (Leiden, 1996), 1034; E. Regev, “The Guilt of Nob’s Priests according to Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum,” *Beth Miqra* 152 (1998), 53–66 (Hebrew with English abstract).

36. E. Klostermann, *Eusebius—Das Onomasticon Der Biblischen Ortsnamen* (Hildesheim, 1966), 113.

37. J. Starcky, “Nouvelle Epitaphe Nabatéenne Donnat le Nom Sémitique de Pétra,” *RB* 72 (1965), 95–97.

Several of the medieval Jewish exegetes noted that Kadesh is sometimes (such as in Num. 13:26) mentioned in connection with the wilderness of Paran, while at other times (such as in Num. 20:1) it is in the wilderness of Zin.³⁸

A very few modern scholars have claimed that there were, indeed, two sites by the name of Kadesh.³⁹ However most have assumed that there was, in fact, only one Kadesh. In the early years of research several sites were suggested, influenced mostly by Josephus, Eusebius, and by the biblical references to the border of Edom.⁴⁰ However since the late nineteenth century most scholars of biblical historical geography have identified the site of Kadesh-barnea with the oasis of 'En el-Qudeirat and the nearby 'En el-Qudeis, first visited in 1842 by John Rowland.⁴¹ A large Iron Age II-Persian Period fortress, apparently a part of the southern defenses of the Kingdom of Judah, was excavated by Dothan in 1956 and then again by Cohen in 1972–1982.⁴² The assumption has often been that “Edom” and “Seir” in many biblical texts could very well include the Negeb highlands, reflecting the geo-political situation at the time that the texts were composed.⁴³ Trumbull suggested that after the spy incident and the failed invasion the Israelites “scattered themselves . . . among the wadis of the desert, living a nomadic life . . . having, all this time, Kadesh as the northernmost limit of their roving.” Moses moved the tabernacle among them until, in the fortieth year, they rallied again at Kadesh in order to enter the Land.⁴⁴ In more recent research the apparent disparity among the various traditions has usually been considered to reflect different literary sources. Noth, for example, saw the Kadesh tradition as a residuum of the “old Pentateuchal sources.” Noth considered the mention of Kadesh in Numbers 20 to be a remnant of J in the Priestly narrative. Since, in his opinion, Kadesh was not, at the time of the composition of the “old sources,” near the border of Edom, “one has the impression that this information is meant to bridge the spatial distance between Kadesh . . . and Edom, with the help of a statement which is not to be taken too

38. While some of these commentators (such as the 13th century Ḥezekia bar Manoah (Ḥezkuni) on Num. 13:26) inferred from this that the wildernesses of Paran and Zin were close to each other and Kadesh-barnea was situated between the two, others (such as the 12th century Ibn-Ezra on Num. 20:14 and the 13th century Nahmanides on Gen. 14:7 and Num. 20:1) concluded rather that there were two different sites: Kadesh-barnea in the wilderness of Paran, at which the Israelites arrived during the second year of their wandering, and Kadesh at Mei-meribah in the wilderness of Zin, at which they arrived in the fortieth year. Cf. N. Mazuz, “Did Ibn-Ezra Misidentify the City of Kadesh?” *Beth Miqra* 162 (2000), 272–73 (Hebrew).

39. Isaacs, *The True Boundaries of the Holy Land*, 22–24; Wenham, *Numbers*, 152; and most recently D. Hacohen, “Kadesh and Rekem, Kadesh-Barnea and Rekem-Geah,” in Y. Eshel, ed., *Judea and Samaria Research Studies* 11 (Ariel, 2002), 25–40 (Hebrew with English abstract).

40. E. Robinson, *Biblical Researches in Palestine and the Adjacent Regions—A Journal of Travels in the Years 1838 & 1852* (London, 1906 [Jerusalem, 1970]), 2.194, suggested, for example, the site of 'En el-Weibeh—today's Ein-Yahav.

41. For the story of its discovery see Trumbull, *Kadesh Barnea: Its Importance and Probable Site*, 237–99; Y. Roman, “The Kadesh Controversy,” *Eretz Magazine* 3:2 (1988), 45–57.

42. M. Dothan, “The Fortress at Kadesh Barnea,” *IEJ* 15 (1965), 134–51; R. Cohen, *Kadesh Barnea—A Fortress From the Time of the Judean Kingdom* (Jerusalem, 1983).

43. J. R. Bartlett, “The Land of Seir and the Brotherhood of Edom,” *JTS NS* 20 (1969), 5–7; idem, “The Rise and Fall of the Kingdom of Edom,” *PEQ* 104 (1972), 33; L. E. Axelsson, *The Lord Rose up from Seir*, trans. F. H. Cryer, *Coiectanea Biblica Old Testament Series* 25 (Lund, 1987), 4.

44. Trumbull, *Kadesh Barnea: Its Importance and Probable Site*, 19–20.

precisely and which rests on only a vague idea of the geographical relationships involved.”⁴⁵ According to Dozeman, what he calls “the pre-Priestly version” depicts Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin as the stage for many of the events related to the wandering, while the later Priestly redaction moved these events to the wilderness of Paran.⁴⁶ In Levine’s view, the Israelites arrived at Kadesh in the JE version during their second year of their wandering and stayed only until after the spy incident (for which he quotes Deut. 2:14!). In his understanding of the Priestly tradition, the Israelites remained at Sinai during all those years, arriving at Kadesh-Zin in the fortieth year, “perhaps . . . to retain geographic proximity between the formative sinaitic theophany and the revelation of the elaborate laws and rituals they had retrojected into the wilderness period.”⁴⁷ Axelsson claims just the opposite: that most of the traditions originally had nothing to do with Kadesh and that the connection was made by the later Judahite redactor of the texts, reflecting the importance of the Qudeirat fortress at the time.⁴⁸

Kadesh-barnea and the Border of Edom in the Southern Boundary of the Land

As mentioned above, four of the descriptions of the southern boundary of the Land of Canaan/Israel include a site called “Kadesh” or “Kadesh-barnea.” Three of the four, Num. 34:2–12, Josh. 15:2–4, and Ezek. 47:19, are basically three versions of the same description. Kadesh-barnea, as we have already seen, is not known from either literary sources or from archaeological evidence in the Late Bronze or the Early Iron Ages and as such its inclusion in the boundary description cannot date from those periods. Besides, while Kadesh in the wilderness narratives is clearly thought of as being outside the Promised Land, in the boundary descriptions Kadesh serves to define the Land from within (that is, the boundary runs *south* of Kadesh). Mazar did not even address these peculiarities. They were also “passed over” by most other scholars who dealt with the boundary descriptions.⁴⁹

The difficulty was, however, noted by Na’aman, who did in fact consider the inclusion of the desert area from Beer-sheba to Kadesh-barnea in the boundary system to be “very strange.” His suggestion is that the later Judean [*sic!*] author, whom he seems to date to the time of “David’s kingdom at its zenith,” “artificially annexed to the Land of Canaan . . .” in order “to extend the territory of his tribe—which was also the king’s tribe—as far as possible and to legitimize the Judean hold on these recently acquired territories.”⁵⁰ In Axelsson’s opinion, the southern border reflects the line of

45. Noth, *Numbers*, 145–51—a classic case of circular reasoning!

46. T. B. Dozeman, “The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story,” *JBL* 117 (1998), 35–41.

47. Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, 95–97.

48. Axelsson, *The Lord Rose up from Seir*, 113–18.

49. Such as De Vaux, “Le Pays de Canaan,” 29–30 and Aharoni, *Land of the Bible*, 69–76. The comment made by Boling, *Joshua*, 365, is instructively typical of many of these scholars: “The lack of artifactual evidence for any pre-Solomonic settlement at Qadesh-barnea is mute but suggestive reminder of the small proportions and unsettled character of ‘Israel’ in its earliest association with this beautiful oasis.”

50. Na’aman, “The Inheritances of the Cis-Jordanian Tribes and the ‘Land that Remaineth,’” 156; idem, *Borders and Districts*, 64.

Israelite Negeb fortresses “from the latter part of the period of the United Monarchy.”⁵¹ On the other hand, Meshel has recently attempted to show that the Tamar-Kadesh (Qu-deirat) line is, in fact, a natural border between different geological, topographical, climatic, and vegetal zones. Meshel also considers the addition of Tamar to the Ezek. 47:19 version of the border and the Israelite station at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud to be proof that at least during the early eighth century B.C.E., the kings of Judah extended their control south and east of the Numbers 34 line.⁵²

Another peculiarity in the description of the southern border is the reference to “the border of Edom” (in the Joshua version; as we have pointed out, in Numbers the expression is actually על-ידי אדום, “next to Edom”). This statement presented no problem to such scholars as Mazar or Aharoni, who, writing in the 1950s and 1960s, still accepted Nelson Glueck’s dating of the “Edomite” pottery of southern Transjordan and the Negeb to the thirteenth century B.C.E.⁵³ Mention of the Edomite frontier also fits the literary context of the Book of Numbers, since the final leg of the Israelites’ journey had begun in Kadesh, on the border of Edom (20:14–16). Research of the past thirty years or so has made it quite clear, however, that there is little archaeological or epigraphic evidence for such a polity as “the kingdom of Edom” before the eighth century. Only in the seventh century did these Edomites begin expanding into what is known today as the Negeb highlands.⁵⁴

It seems to us that all of these discrepancies point in one direction: the southern border of “the Land of Canaan,” as depicted in Numbers 34, Joshua 15, and Ezekiel 47 has absolutely nothing to do with the Egyptian province of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age. The inclusion of Kadesh-barnea and the border of the Edomite kingdom at its greatest extent, combined with literary considerations, indicate that the boundary description must have been based on the geopolitical conditions prevalent at or near the end of the Iron Age, no earlier than the second half of the seventh century B.C.E. In order to verify this thesis, we must now examine the northern boundary as well.

51. Axelsson, *The Lord Rose up from Seir*, 82; R. Cohen, “The Iron Age Fortresses in the Central Negev,” *BASOR* 236 (1978), 77–78; and also Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, 91; for a critique of the identification of the Negeb sites as fortresses in the first place, see I. Finkelstein, “The Iron Age ‘Fortresses’ in the Negev Highlands: Sedentarization of the Nomads,” *Tel Aviv* 11 (1984), 189–209; I. Finkelstein and A. Perevolotsky, “Processes of Sedentarization and Nomadization in the History of Sinai and the Negev,” *BASOR* 279 (1990), 78–79.

52. Z. Meshel, “The Southern Border of Canaan and Judea—The Geographical Aspect,” in Y. Eshel, ed., *Judea and Samaria Research Studies* 9 (Ariel, 2000), 27–37 (Hebrew with English abstract). A recent attempt by D. Hacohen (“The Southern Boundary of the Land of Israel in Tannaitic Literature and the Bible,” *Cathedra* 88 [1998], 15–38 [Hebrew with English abstract]) to show the similarity of the Numbers 34 line with the *halakhic* borders of the Land of Israel depicted in Rabbinic sources would likewise show that these borders are based on some sort of geo-political reality.

53. Cf. Aharoni, *Land of the Bible*, 204–5.

54. Cf. Bartlett, “The Rise and Fall of the Kingdom of Edom”; J. A. Sauer, “Transjordan in the Bronze and Iron Ages: A Critique of Glueck’s Synthesis,” *BASOR* 263 (1986), 1–26; for a recent summary see P. Bienkowski, “Iron Age Settlement in Edom: A Revised Framework,” in P. M. M. Daviau, J. W. Wevers, and M. Weigl, eds., *The World of the Aramaeans—Studies in Honour of Paul-Eugène Dion*, *SJOTSup* 325 (Sheffield, 2001), 257–69; P. Bienkowski and E. van der Steen, “Tribes, Trade, and Towns: A New Framework for the Late Iron Age in Southern Jordan and the Negev,” *BASOR* 323 (2001), 22–26 and references therein.

Riblah on the Northern and Eastern Boundary of the Land

Having accepted Mazar's identification of Lebo-hamath and assuming, like Mazar, Aharoni, Na'aman and others that the northern boundary did run from some point on the Phoenician coast north of Byblos, through the central Beqa' valley north of Lebweh and from there into southern Syria north of Damascus as far east as Zedad, the next point on the list is Riblah. This, then, is our next topic of investigation.

A place or places called Riblah appear twelve times in the Hebrew Bible. The first of these is in the Numbers 34 boundary list, which is the subject of our inquiry. The next time Riblah appears, it is in connection with the final years of the Judahite monarchy (see Map no. 2). In 2 Kgs. 23:33, Jehoahaz son of Josiah, who had been enthroned by "the people of the land" after his father was killed by Necho of Egypt, was imprisoned by the same Pharaoh "in Riblah in the land of Hamath," while his brother Eliakim was enthroned in his place. This happened, presumably, after Necho's victory over the Babylonians at Haran and Charchemish in 609 B.C.E.

The next mention of Riblah is in 2 Kgs. 25:6, paralleled by Jer. 39:5 and again in 52:9. Here Zedekiah, after his capture in the plains of Jericho, is brought before Nebuchadrezzar and forced to witness the execution of his sons. Both of the Jeremiah references also emphasize that this Riblah is "in the land of Hamath," and they both mention the city again in the next verse, which tells of the killing of "the princes of Judah" as well. Verses 20 and 21 in the same chapter of 2 Kings, again paralleled by Jer. 39:26–27, then tell how Nebuzaradan, the Babylonian "captain of the guard," also brought the Temple functionaries to Nebuchadrezzar at "Riblah in the land of Hamath," where they too were killed.

There is no question about the identification of the Riblah "in the land of Hamath" of 2 Kings and Jeremiah, nor any real questions about the historical circumstances described in these passages. In 644 B.C.E. the Saite Psammetichus (Psamtik) I became the Assyrian-sponsored ruler of all Egypt, followed in 610/9 by his son Necho II.⁵⁵ Over the last ten years of Psammetichus' reign, however, the Assyrian Empire fell apart, and Egypt became more an ally of Assyria than a vassal. It would seem, that as the Assyrian forces retreated from the Levant in the period between 620 and 610, Egypt gradually assumed control of the area. An Apis stele from 612 B.C.E., Psammetichus' fifty-second year as counted from his ascension at Sais, lists Levantine rulers as Egyptian vassals.⁵⁶ According to both Egyptian and Babylonian sources, as well as in the traditions preserved by Herodotus (II, 157), Egyptian forces were involved in the fighting at Ἀζωτος (Ashdod), Gablini on the Euphrates, and at Haran in 616, 610, and 609.⁵⁷

55. For the date of Necho's ascension see D. B. Redford, "New Light on Egypt's Stance Towards Asia, 610–586 BCE," in S. L. McKenzie and T. Römer, eds., *Rethinking the Foundations: Historiography in the Ancient World and in the Bible, Essays in Honour of John Van Seters*, BZAW 294 (Berlin-New York, 2000), 190–91.

56. However cf. A. B. Lloyd, *Herodotus Book II—Commentary 99–182* (Leiden-New York-Kopenhagen-Köln 1988), 147, who suggests that it actually reflects Psammetichus' "commercial links maintained by sea."

57. D. D. Luckenbill, *ARAB* (Chicago, 1927), no. 1171; D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings (626–556 B.C.) in the British Museum*, (London 1956), 11–12, 18–23, 63; T. G. H. James, "Egypt: the Twenty-Fifth and Twenty-Sixth Dynasties," in John Boadman et al., eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd ed. III/2 (Cambridge 1991), 717.

It was en route to that second campaign to Haran that Necho was met at Megiddo by Josiah of Judah, resulting in the latter's death, as recounted in 2 Kgs. 24:29 and, in significantly different versions, in 2 Chr. 35:20–24, 1 Esdras 1:23–30 and Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* X 5.⁵⁸

The extent of Josiah's kingdom and the degree of independence that it enjoyed have been debated for years. Alt, Noth, Aharoni, and others have taken such information as the extent of his reforms in 2 Kings 17 and 2 Chronicles 34, the fact of his death at Megiddo and the finds at "Metsad Hashavyahu" as indicating that Josiah actually ruled "as far as Naphtali" as well as Gilead.⁵⁹ Others, such as Bright, have been more conservative.⁶⁰ Mazar, and following him Kallai, considered the area mentioned in 2 Kgs. 23:8 "from Geba to Beer-sheba" to be the actual limits of his kingdom, while the wider descriptions referred to his cultic influence.⁶¹ Miller and Hayes and Na'aman are of the opinion that Josiah had become a vassal of Psammetichus, who had taken over the Assyrian possessions in the Levant, and interpreted his arrival at Megiddo as compliance with a demand of fealty by Necho. According to Na'aman's hypothesis, Josiah was actually executed by Necho because his loyalty was under suspicion.⁶²

But whatever Josiah's status might have been, that of his successors is quite clear. As already stated, according to 2 Kgs. 23:33, Necho imprisoned Jehoahaz "in Riblah in the land of Hamath," extracted a tribute of gold and silver from Judah, and enthroned Eliakim, another son of Josiah, renaming him Jehoiakim. Necho, after stopping the Babylonians at Carchemish and Haran, became the titular and actual successor to what had been the Assyrian dominions in the Levant. He set up his "advance-command-center" (to borrow a modern phrase) at Riblah. Over the next three years, he fought the Babylonians at Kimuḥu, south of Carchemish, and again at Qurumati, north of the Euphrates.⁶³ Only in 605 did the Babylonian crown prince Nebuchadrezzar manage to defeat Necho's forces at Carchemish and at Hamath, forcing the Egyptians to retreat from their short-lived new Asiatic empire and making a powerful impression

58. Which many scholars have thought to preserve historical information not preserved in the Kings account. For various interpretations of the differences between the divergent reports, cf. A. Malamat, "The Last Wars of the Kingdom of Judah," *JNES* 9 (1950), 220, n. 14; J. M. Myers, *I and II Esdras*, AB (New York, 1974), 28–29; C. T. Begg, "The Death of Josiah in Chronicles: Another View," *VT* 37 (1987), 1–8; H. G. M. Williamson, "Reliving the Death of Josiah: A Reply to C. T. Begg," *VT* 26 (1987), 351–61; N. Na'aman, "The Kingdom of Judah under Josiah," *Tel Aviv* 18 (1991), 53; Z. Talshir, "The Three Deaths of Josiah and the Strata of Biblical Historiography (2 Kings XXIII 29–30; 2 Chronicles XXXV 20–5; 1 Esdras I 23–31)," *VT* 46 (1996), 213–36.

59. A. Alt, "Judas Gaue unter Josia," *PJB* 21 (1925), 100–116; M. Noth, *Das Buch Joshua*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen, 1953), 91–92; idem, *History of Israel*, 2nd ed., trans. P. R. Ackroyd (London 1960), 273–74; Aharoni, *Land of the Bible*, 401–4.

60. J. Bright, *History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia, 1972), 316–17.

61. B. Mazar, "Topographical Researches," *BJPES* 8 (1941), 35–37 (Hebrew); Z. Kallai, *The Northern Boundaries of Judah* (Jerusalem, 1960), 75–78 (Hebrew).

62. J. M. Miller and J. H. Hayes, *A History of Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia, 1986), 388–41; Na'aman, "The Kingdom of Judah under Josiah," 53. See also Talshir, "The Three Deaths of Josiah," 218.

63. For a discussion on the identification of these sites see Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings*, 21–23.

on such locals as Jeremiah (46:1–12).⁶⁴ A final attempt by Necho in 601/600 did no more than stabilize the boundary at Gaza.⁶⁵ The note in 2 Kgs. 24:7, placed after the death of Jehoiakim, says it all: “And the king of Egypt did not come again out of his land, for the king of Babylon had taken all that belonged to the king of Egypt from the Brook of Egypt to the river Euphrates.”

The events of the following fifteen years are well documented in Kings, Jeremiah, and the Babylonian Chronicle. Jehoiakim at first submitted to Nebuchadrezzar but soon rebelled, perhaps taking heart from Necho’s victory at Gaza.⁶⁶ After a couple of warnings, the Babylonians finally descended on Jerusalem in 597, only to find Jehoiakim dead and his son Jehoiachin on the throne. Jehoiachin managed to save the city by submitting to exile, and Nebuchadrezzar, perhaps taking his cue from Necho, enthroned another son of Josiah, Mattaniah, changing his name to Zedekiah. The new regent, however, perhaps encouraged by the apparent successes of Psammetichus II of Egypt, tried his hand at rebellion, too, bringing about a renewed Babylonian campaign, the destruction of the city, and the end of the Judahite monarchy.⁶⁷ And, once again, it was to “Riblah in the land of Hamath” that the captured king was brought to be mocked by Nebuchadrezzar and to see his sons and his chief ministers killed.

And so Riblah, identified at the present-day site of Tell Zarre‘ah near the village of Ribleh, some eleven kilometers south of Kedesh, by the Orontes river, became, for about a quarter of a century, the northern administrative center for the whole Levant, first under Egyptian and then under Babylonian rule.⁶⁸ And although we do not have a whole lot of knowledge of the Babylonian administration of the region during this time, it would seem that after Babylonian rule and the empire’s southern frontier were stabilized, Riblah’s importance declined.⁶⁹

While many scholars have no difficulty equating the *הרבלה* of Num. 34:11 with the “Riblah in the land of Hamath” of 2 Kings and Jeremiah,⁷⁰ others have not

64. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings*, 23–28, 67. See also I. Eph’al, “Nebuchadnezzar the Warrior: Remarks on his Military Achievements,” *IEJ* 53 (2003), 178–91.

65. Herodotus II 159, 2; Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings*, 67–69; K. A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1000–650 B.C.)*, 2nd ed. (Warminster, 1986), 407; James, “Egypt: the Twenty-Fifth and Twenty-Sixth Dynasties,” 716–17; Redford, “New Light on Egypt’s Stance Towards Asia,” 188–89; for the identification of the places mentioned in Herodotus’ account cf. W. W. How and J. Wells, *A Commentary on Herodotus* (Oxford, 1912 [1964 reprint]), 1.247; E. Lipiński, “The Egypto-Babylonian War of the Winter of 601/600 B.C.,” *AION* 32 (1972), 236–41; Lloyd, *Herodotus*, 161–63.

66. Cf. O. Lipschits, “Nebuchadrezzar’s Policy in ‘Hattu-Land’ and the Fate of the Kingdom of Judah,” *UF* 30 (1998), 469.

67. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings*, 28–37, 73; for a reasonable reconstruction of these events, cf. Lipschits, “Nebuchadrezzar’s Policy in ‘Hattu-Land,’” 471–73.

68. For a summary of the site’s identification and known history, see B. Oded, “1.2. Riblah, Ha-Riblah,” in *Encyclopedia Biblica* (Jerusalem, 1976), 7.320–21 (Hebrew); Y. Kobayashi, “Riblah,” in *ABD* (New York, 1992), 5.271.

69. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings*, 31, locates Nebuchadrezzar’s Syrian base in his 599/8 campaign at “Hamath, Riblah or possibly Kadesh” [*sic*—meaning Kedesh on the Orontes], noting that by 564 the Babylonian district governor was seated at the latter.

70. Cf. C. A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, ICC (Edinburgh, 1936), 73; D. H. Madvig, “Riblah,” in G. W. Bromiley et al., eds., *The International Standard Biblical Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, 1988), 4.185.

accepted this identification, stating that while the known Riblah of 2 Kings and Jeremiah is *north* of Lebo-hamath, this Riblah on the eastern boundary must be south of Zedad, or *east* of Lebo-hamath.⁷¹ Others have tried to harmonize the two texts. Kobayashi, for example, has suggested reading *משפם הרבלה* as “from Shepham of Riblah” rather than “to Riblah,” understanding the appellation as a definition of “Shepham *in the district of* [the famous] Riblah,” meaning that no town called Riblah is mentioned on the eastern border at all.⁷² Levine suggested that either the text is corrupt, or that the famous Riblah was inserted “artificially” into the text “because of its importance” (in his view as the site of the 13th century battle of Kedesh).⁷³ While these theories may or may not be correct, it would seem to us that these scholars have been demanding too much from the text. As in many other biblical border descriptions (not least in the parallel Ezekiel 47), the sites mentioned are not precise points along a boundary-line in the modern sense, but rather towns, whose hinterlands or surrounding villages and fields were within the delineated territory. Lebo-hamath was within, Kedesh was on the outside, and the actual border was where Lebo’s territory ended and Kedesh’s began. Riblah, situated northeast of Lebo and south of Kedesh, was specifically included because of its importance at the time of the list’s composition. The only known period in which Riblah achieved any kind of prominence was during the brief period from 609 to 586 B.C.E., as the northern administrative center of the first Egyptian and then Babylonian controlled Levant, under Necho II and Nebuchadrezzar.

The Date and Composition of the Boundary Lists

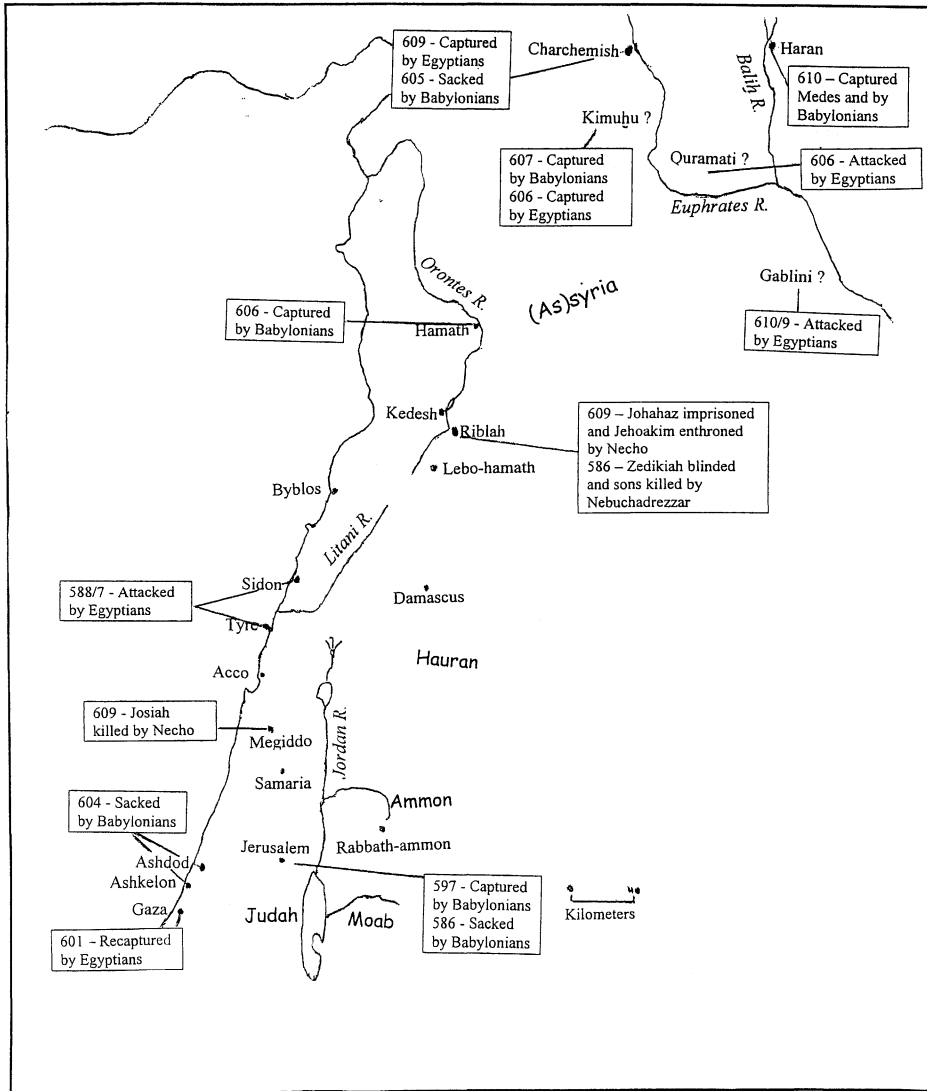
As we have already seen, a thirteenth-century B.C.E. date for the composition of the Numbers 34 boundary list does not make sense. Neither Kadesh-barnea in the south nor Riblah in the northeast are attested before Iron Age II. This aside, our present understanding of the composition of both the Priestly document, in which the Gen. 10:19 description, the Numbers 13 narrative, and the Numbers 34 list are included and the Deuteronomistic History, in which the Josh. 10:41, 13:3–6, 15:1–4 delineations and the various descriptions in the Book of Kings are found, makes their preserving a precise boundary list from pre-Israelite Canaan very unlikely. As far as we can tell, the Hebrew Bible in fact expresses no recollection of Egyptian rule of Canaan in that period. We also cannot agree with those who would “write off” the boundary as a late Priestly fantasy, having nothing to do with geopolitical reality. The precise definition of the Edomite frontier and the inclusion of the central Kadesh-barnea fortress in the south can only be based on the reality of the late monarchy, during the late eighth or the seventh centuries. On the other hand, Mazar was correct in his assertion that a northern border that includes the southern Phoenician coast up to Byblos and southern Syria up to Lebo-hamath and an eastern boundary that includes parts of the Bashan but none of Gilead do not correspond to any known period of Israelite rule. Mazar,

71. Cf. Oded, “1.2. Riblah, Ha-Riblah”; Aharoni, *Land of the Bible*, 73.

72. Kobayashi, “Riblah,” 271.

73. Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, 535.

Map no. 2. The Egyptian-Babylonian War in Northern Syria
According to 2 Kings, Jeremiah, the Babylonian Chronicle and Herodotus



writing in an era when a great deal of “mainstream” biblical scholarship still considered much of the information preserved in the early Pentateuchal sources to reflect a “pre-monarchial” period, could “stretch” those sources back a few generations to the late thirteenth century. I, on the other hand, propose a later, rather than an earlier, date.

I propose that the northern and eastern boundaries of “the Land of Canaan” in Num. 34:7–12 are actually a reflection of the Asiatic domain of Necho II, as established no later than 609 and maintained as an administrative unit by the Babylonians until after 586. It does not matter, for our case, whether or not Josiah was an Egyptian vassal or what the extent of his kingdom was. We know from the Jehoahaz incident that Necho established his base at Riblah, presumably either because the environs of Haran and Carchemish to the north were considered to be war-zones, or because Necho still saw them as being “Assyrian” territory. In any case it would seem that the Orontes made a convenient boundary marker. The exclusion of Gilead and the southern Transjordan, rather than reflecting the Israelite conquest of those territories under Moses, is a reflection of the independent (albeit vassal) status of the kingdoms of Ammon and Moab, including the formerly Israelite territory that they had expanded into after 733.⁷⁴ After the war of 605 Nebuchadnezzar apparently took over the Egyptian base and the administrative unit that was governed from it. This administrative structure was changed as the Babylonians established their own provincial administration during the first decades of the sixth century.

The southern boundary description, however, is not a part of this system. As already surmised by Noth and Levine, it would seem that the description of the borders of Judah in Josh. 15:1–12 predates the Priestly boundary of the Land in Numbers 34.⁷⁵ As stated, the abbreviated form of the Numbers description would seem to favor the primacy of Joshua 15. It is easier to imagine a later redactor deleting or abbreviating unfamiliar places, copied perhaps from a defective source, than one adding such places for no apparent reason. The emphasis on the Great Sea as the western boundary of Judah, which seems to artificially include the Philistine coast south of Jabneel (Josh. 15:11–12), is also only necessary in Joshua 15 (note also the inclusion of the Philistine cities in the town-list in verses 45–47, there too ending with “to the Brook of Egypt, and the Great Sea with its boundary”). The verbs **וַעֲבַר**, **וַיָּבֹא**, and **וַיֵּצֵא** in the third-person singular (referring to “the boundary”), which are used for the southern border in both Numbers and Joshua, continue to be used throughout the rest of the Joshua description but drop out of the remainder of the Numbers border in favor of **וַיֵּרֶד** and **וַיַּחֲזֶק**, as well as the second-person plural **וַתֵּצֵא** and **וַתֵּבֹא**, addressed to the Israelites. To us, this would indicate that the Joshua list is an integral whole, from which the author of Numbers 34 copied only the first four verses. Moreover, the format of the Joshua description, starting at one “corner,” moving from there first in one direction and then back in the other to complete the circuit, occurs

74. Cf. M. Weippert, “The Relations of the States East of the Jordan with the Mesopotamian Powers during the First Millennium BC,” in A. Hadidi, ed., *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan III* (Amman, 1987), 101, who assumes the Transjordanian kingdoms survived at least until Nabunidus’ campaign to Edom. See also L. G. Herr, “The Ammonites in the Late Iron Age and Persian Period,” in B. MacDonald and R. W. Younker, eds., *Ancient Ammon* (Leiden-Boston-Köln, 1999), 222.

75. Noth, *Numbers*, 249; Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, 539.

again in some of the other tribal boundaries in Joshua (cf. Josh. 19: 10–12, 26–27, 33–34). Likewise, as Elitzur has pointed out, all of the eight other times that the topographical term כֶּתֶף, “shoulder,” appears in the Bible are in the Joshua 15 and 18 boundary descriptions.⁷⁶ We take all of these as signs that Josh. 15:1–12 is a cohesive whole, the first four verses of which were copied in abbreviated form by the author of Numbers 34.

In all, we would tend to agree with a Josianic date for the Judahite boundary in Josh. 15:1–12, as posited by Alt and others. Its mention of Edom in the Zin area, the appearance of Kadesh-barnea and the emphasis on the Great Sea as the western border from Jabneel south would seem to fit the reality of the seventh century B.C.E.⁷⁷ This description was then known to the Priestly writer of Numbers 34 who “grafted” the southern boundary into his “Land of Canaan” description in order to form a complete circuit.⁷⁸

This does not, of course, mean that the concept of the “Brook of Egypt” or of Gaza being the southern border of the Land of Canaan originated in the seventh century B.C.E. The “Brook of Egypt” is, after all, as close to a “natural border” as exists on the southern frontier. Gaza appears as the first Canaanite city that one approaches coming from Egypt as far back as Thutmose III,⁷⁹ repeated again by Sheshonq I.⁸⁰ But the juxtaposition of Kadesh with Gaza and of the “Brook of Egypt” with Lebohamath would certainly point to an awareness of the geopolitical reality of the Levant during the final decades of the seventh century. And the inclusion of Riblah in the north, whether in its proper place or not, could only have occurred after Necho’s march to Carchemish and more likely after Nebuchadrezzar’s southward advance from the same place.

Riblah in Ezek. 6:14

At the end of his fiery prophecy addressed to “the mountains of Israel” the prophet Ezekiel declares: “And I will stretch out my hand against them, and make the land desolate and waste, throughout all their habitations, מִמִּדְבַּר דְּבִלְתָּה. Then they will know that I am the LORD” (6:14).

The phrase *mimmidbar diblāthāh*, defining the area that will be made “desolate and waste,” raises several difficulties. Its literal meaning, as understood by the Greek

76. Elitzur, “Katef, a Topographical Term,” 29.

77. Though these borders could have been achieved originally as early as the reign of Uzziah, whom 2 Chr. 26:6 credits with the sack of Gath, Jabneh (presumably the same as Jabneel) and Ashdod. We consider Boling’s proposal (*Joshua*, 370–72) that these are actually the borders of a “long forgotten kingdom of Hebron” that were taken over by David, to be untenable. We would also emphasize that the boundary of Josh. 15:1–12 and the Judahite town-list in vv. 21–62 are two separate documents that do not necessarily reflect the same reality.

78. Cf. Friedman, *The Exile and Biblical Narrative*, 116, who assumed that the Priestly writer of the Numbers boundary lists was familiar with the Deuteronomistic History, and G. Auld, “Creation and Land: Sources and Exegesis,” in *Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies—Division A: The Period of the Bible* (Jerusalem, 1982), 7, who pictured a gradual development of “the end of Numbers,” continuously conforming to the developing text of Joshua 13–22.

79. Pritchard, *ANET*³, 235.

80. Aharoni, *Land of the Bible*, 153. See also A. F. Rainey, “Sharhân/Sharuhen: The Problem of Identification,” *Eretz-Israel* 24 (Jerusalem, 1993), 178–87.

(ἀπο της ἐρήμου Δεβλαθα), the Vulgate (*a deserto Deblatha*) and the AV, would seem to be “from the desert of Diblathah.” This, however, leaves the sentence incomplete, without telling us where the desolation will end. This difficulty was recognized by several commentators, the obvious solution being to understand the Hebrew “Diblahah” as an accusative, “from the wilderness *as far as* Diblah” (NJPS; my italics).⁸¹ The “desert” or “wilderness” in question would then be the same southern “wilderness of the land of Egypt” that Ezekiel refers to in 20:36, thus indicating “the whole land,” similar to the well-known “from Dan to Beer-sheba.”⁸² However, no place called “Diblah” is known from any other source (equating this “Diblah” with the Trans-jordanian “Almon-diblathaim” of Num. 33:46–47 would be nonsensical). As early as c. 1200, the commentator and grammarian David Kimḥi recognized the possibility that “Diblah” is actually a scribal error for “Riblah” and identified this place with the Riblah of 2 Kings and Jeremiah.⁸³ This possibility has been borne out by several Hebrew manuscripts and has been accepted by most modern translations and commentators.⁸⁴

The prophet Ezekiel, then, by foretelling the desolation of the Land “from the wilderness of the south to Riblah in the north,” is basically recalling the same Numbers 34 boundaries of the Land of Israel that he expands upon in chapters 47 and 48. The southern wilderness is an obvious illusion to Kadesh-barnea in the wilderness of Zin, which Ezekiel later (47:19) calls “the waters of strife.”

Ezekiel’s choice of Riblah for the northern border would seem unexpected, especially since he does not mention the city in chapters 47–48, there preferring Lebo-hamath. However, as recognized by several commentators, the prophet chose Riblah here for this message of destruction “because of its painful association.”⁸⁵ Or, as stated more eloquently by Zimmerli: “After 587 Riblah remained alive in the mind of every Judean as the place of Judgment. The all-Israelite viewpoint of the judgment on the mountains of Israel . . . is again confirmed . . . In the surprising reference to Riblah instead of the more familiar לְבוּא חַמַּת, there is echoed a name grim with misfortune and catastrophe for the ears of the generation of 609 and 587 B.C.”⁸⁶

Conclusion: The Date and Composition of Num. 34:1–12

We would argue, then, that the “Boundaries of the Land” in Num. 34:1–12 are a literary composition, reflecting the needs and the ideology of their “Priestly” composers. They

81. Ezekiel uses the same type of construct in a similar prophecy of doom against Egypt in 29:10 and 30:6, in which the destruction will reach מִמְּגִדֹּל סִנְיָה, translated “a turre Syenes” in the Vulgate and “from the tower of Syene” by the AV, but now recognized to mean “from Migdol [in the north] to Syene [in the south]” (RSV, NJPS [brackets mine]).

82. W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, Hermeneia, trans. Ronald E. Clements (Philadelphia, 1979), 191; D. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1–24*, NICOT (Grand Rapids-Cambridge, 1997), 239.

83. The confusion of the letters *daleth* and *resh* is quite common in the Bible as both their block and their Paleo-Hebrew forms are quite similar.

84. M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, AB (New York, 1983), 137; Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 73; RSV; NJPS footnote.

85. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 73.

86. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 192. This may well explain why Ezekiel did not use Riblah in his description of the Land’s “future” boundaries in chaps. 47–48; there is no place for such a painful association in these prophecies of comfort, of a future in which all Israel is restored to its Land.

are not entirely, however, a work of fiction. As recognized by Mazar and others, the borders' very irregularity precludes their being based on an "idealized" and "schematic" conception of the Land. Of the identifiable points mentioned in the text, both the Edomite frontier and the fortress of Kadesh-barnea in the south would seem to point to a reality of the late monarchy, probably during the reign of Josiah. In our opinion, the description of the southern border was adapted from the Deuteronomistic description in Josh. 15:1-4.

The Northern border, including Lebo-hamath and Riblah, reflects a slightly later reality: that of the Levantine dominions of Necho II, killer of Josiah, preserved by Nebuchadrezzar II, destroyer of Jerusalem. Here, the central point is Riblah, elsewhere known only as the "command post" of both these kings. This was the geopolitical environment in which the "Priestly" boundary was composed. Ezekiel, whose ties to the "Priestly school" are well known, chose to use the same boundary description in both his message of doom in chapter 6 and his prophecy of hope in chapters 47-48. To Ezekiel and to the Priestly redactor of Numbers 13 and 34, the journey from the southern wilderness of Kadesh and Zin to the northern points of Lebo-hamath and Riblah was not only a journey through space, but also one through history, from the days of Moses up until the exile and beyond.