

The Kingdom of Ishbaal

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The territories over which Ishbaal son of Saul reigned from his capital of Mahanaim are described in 2 Sam 2:9. Five areas are listed: Gilead, 'šwry, Jezreel, Ephraim and Benjamin; the overall territory is defined as "Israel in its entirety". The inclusion of Gilead, Ephraim and Benjamin in the district list is self evident; the appearance of 'šwry and Jezreel, on the other hand, involves serious problems. Various solutions have been offered by scholars to overcome these difficulties; but none of them was able to explain why the author selected these two toponyms in order to define Ishbaal's territory.

All scholars agree that the plain of Jezreel was under Philistine and Canaanite control before the Israelite-Philistine battle near Mount Gilboa (but see AHARONI 1961, 114-15; 1967, 255-57), and that following the great victory over Saul the Philistines strengthened their grasp on the plain (see 1 Sam 31:7). The assumed Israelite district of Jezreel cannot refer to the plain since it was located outside of Ishbaal's kingdom. Most scholars suggested that the region of "Jezreel" centered around the town of Jezreel that was located on a southern hill overlooking the valley (HERRMANN 1975, 144, n. 34; McCARTER 1984, 87; EDELMAN 1985, 87-88; MILLER and HAYES 1986, 139). It remains entirely unclear however, why this small area was mentioned alongside the other well known and larger districts of Gilead, Ephraim and Benjamin.

Some scholars suggested that Jezreel was a town of Issachar (Josh 19:18) and that the text reflects a kind of Israelite claim over the tribal inheritance (ALT 1953, 116-17; SOGGIN 1975, 42; DONNER 1984, 181; see AHLSTRÖM 1986, 91). The suggestion, however, is unlikely. First, most of the inheritance of Issachar (Josh 19:17-23) was located in the plain of Jezreel and north of it, in areas situated outside the kingdom of Ishbaal. It was conquered by David and incorporated into the Israelite kingdom, and only then settled by Israeliite families (GAL 1982; NA'AMAN 1986, 93-94). The concept of a tribal allotment of Issachar cannot reflect the reality of Ishbaal's time. Second, the assump-

tion that biblical texts reflect early Israelite hypothetical claims on tribal territories is doubtful (see NA'AMAN 1986, 83-84, 88-95, with earlier literature in p. 83, n. 20). The author of 2 Sam 2:9 intended to describe a historical reality and not hypothetical claims.

The tribe of Manasseh is not mentioned in the list. KALLAI (1986, 31), noting its absence, has suggested that "Jezreel" refers primarily "to the northern parts of Manasseh, or to the whole territory of Manasseh, in so far as it existed, minus the region of Dor". This bold suggestion is not supported by any biblical reference to Jezreel and reflects a desperate attempt to make territorial sense out of the list of five regions in 2 Sam 2:9.

Even more problematic than the place of Jezreel is the location of 'šwry. The versions offer conflicting testimonies, but the gentilic form is preserved in most witnesses and is probably original (McCARTER 1984, 82-83). The majority of scholars read it *hā'āšēri* (Targ. *ʿl dbyt 'šr*; see Judg 1:23), i.e. "the Asherite" (see the literature cited by EDELMAN 1985, 90, notes 4-5, DONNER 1984, 181; KALLAI 1986, 31). However, the inclusion of the Galilean tribe of Asher in the list is unlikely. First, the gentilic form remains inexplicable in this solution. Second, there is no evidence to support the assumption that Asher was a name for the entire area of Galilee. The clans of Asher were situated in the western Galilee, between the Acco plain in the west and the Upper Galilee mountainous range in the east, having only marginal place among the north "Israelite" groups. It is hardly conceivable that the area of Galilee was called by this "tribal" name. Third, the Philistines and the Canaanites remained in control of the plains of Jezreel and Beth-shean throughout the reigns of Saul and Ishbaal. The Galilee region was cut off from the kingdom of Saul and could not have been part of the Israelite state at that time (EDELMAN 1985, 86-88).

Some scholars suggested adopting the Syriac and Vulgate versions *ges(s)uri*, "the Geshurites", and assumed that the region of Geshur was either under Ishbaal's control or was claimed by Israel (see the literature cited by EDELMAN 1985, 90, n. 6; MILLER and HAYES 1986, 139-40, 169). It is clear, however, that Geshur was an independent small kingdom situated on the north-eastern border of the kingdom of Ishbaal and cannot have been part of his kingdom (EDELMAN 1985, 85). For the doubtful assumption of early Israelite hypothetical claims on adjacent regions, see the criticism above.

Recently, EDELMAN (1985) suggested reconstructing an early consonantal

text *h'syry*, identifying it with an Asherite enclave supposedly situated in the frontier region west of Benjamin and Ephraim (see AHLSTRÖM 1986, 88-89). The assumed location of "Asherites" in this area, which was an integral part of the inheritances of the two tribes, is inferred from the analysis of the Asherite genealogy of 1 Chr 7:30-39 (EDELMAN 1988, with earlier literature in p. 21, n. 1). Elsewhere (NA'AMAN forthcoming) I suggested that originally the genealogy of 1 Chr 7:31b-39 has nothing to do with the Asherite genealogy in vv. 30-31a. Its affiliation with Asher is the work of the Chronicler who identified Heber, the son of Beriah and grandson of Asher (Gen 46:17; Num 26:44-45), with Heber, the founder of the genealogy in 1 Chr 7:32-39, thus assigning the latter genealogy to the Galilean tribe of Asher. There is no basis for the assumption of an Asherite enclave situated in the region west of Benjamin and Ephraim. The area was inhabited by various Ephraimite and Benjaminite clans and families and was included within the inheritance of Ephraim and Benjamin in the district list of 2 Sam 2:9.

In light of the problems involved with the mention of Jezreel and *'/gšwry* within the district list of Ishbaal, a fresh examination of the text is desirable. As a point of departure I would like to emphasize that the list of areas which comprised the Israelite kingdom under Ishbaal appears within the overall description of the history of Saul and David and forms an integral part of the chain of development. It is against the background of the overall story that the place of Jezreel and *'/gšwry* in 2 Sam 2:9 should be interpreted.

In the story of Saul's defeat near Mount Gilboa it is explicitly mentioned that the Philistines camped in the plain of Jezreel (1 Sam 28:4; 29:11), whereas Saul and his troops camped by the spring at Jezreel, near Mount Gilboa (1 Sam 28:4; 29:1). Following their victory, the Philistines settled in the towns of the plain formerly held by the Israelites (1 Sam 31:7). The Israelites, according to the story, withdrew from both the plain and its periphery. Thus, the words *w'l yzr'ol* in the description of Ishbaal's kingdom can only mean, "and up to (the border of) Jezreel".

A somewhat similar solution may also be applied to *h'/gšwry*. The gentilic form strongly supports the reading *hgšwry* ("the Geshurites") adopted by the Syriac and Vulgate versions. I would suggest tentatively transcribing v. 9a thus: *wymlkhw 'l hgl'od <'od> 'gbwl¹? hgšwry*; "and he made him king over Gilead <to the> boundary² of the Geshurites". The preposition *'od* was possibly omit-

ted due to haplography, the noun *gbwl* was subsequently "corrected" into *w'l* in accordance with the overall structure of the description in v. 9. For the reconstructed text note in particular Josh 12:5: ... *wbkl hbšn 'd gbwl hgšwry whm'kty wḡsy hgl'd <'d> gbwl syḥwn mlk hšbwn*; "... and over all Bashan to the boundary of the Geshurites and the Maacathites and over half Gilead <up to> the boundary of Sihon king of Heshbon." (see e.g. NOTH 1953:66; BARTHELEMY 1982:22). Common to the two texts are the omission of *'d* due to haplography with *g'l'd* and the delimitation of a certain territory by the "boundary of the Geshurites". Compare also: (a) Josh 13:11 ... *whgl'd wgbwl hgšwry whm'kty*; "and Gilead and the region of the Geshurites and Maacathites". (b) Deut 3:14 ... *kl ḥbl 'rgb 'd gbwl hgšwry whm'kty*; "all the region of Argob to the boundary of the Geshurites and Maacathites".

The place of Geshur within the borders of Ishbaal's kingdom fits well into the story of David's rise to power. It was emphasized above that the scope of Ishbaal's kingdom is an integral part of the description of the history of his time. And indeed, the kingdom of Geshur and its king, Talmai, play a distinctive role in the story. David married Maacah, Talmai's daughter, in the first years of his kingship in Hebron. Their son, Absalom, was David's third-born son while he was in Hebron (2 Sam 3:3). Later on Absalom found it necessary to seek refuge in the kingdom of Geshur (2 Sam 13:37). According to the story he stayed there for three years (2 Sam 13:38) before he got permission to return to Judah. Geshur is portrayed in the story of David as an independent kingdom bordering Israel on its north-eastern boundary (MAZAR 1961). Its place in the district list of Ishbaal serves as a kind of introduction to the story of David, just as the mention of Jezreel in the district list is closely linked with the story of Saul's last battle against the Philistines.

The territory governed by Ishbaal from his capital of Mahanaim is described in 2 Sam 2:9 thus: "and he made him king over Gilead <to the> boundary? of the Geshurites, and up to (the border of) Jezreel, and over Ephraim and over Benjamin, that is, over Israel in its entirety". Ishbaal's kingdom encompassed three main districts: (a) the Gilead, i.e. the Transjordanian Israelite areas bordering Geshur on its northern side; (b) Ephraim, i.e. the hill country of Ephraim and Manasseh up to the plain of Jezreel; and (c) Benjamin, i.e. the territory of the king's tribe. The whole area was regarded by the author as "Israel in its entirety" (compare 2 Sam 3:12, 21), as against "the house of Judah" (2 Sam 2:4, 7, 11), which was ruled by David, Israel's rival and future lord.

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