

1. The Land

With its north/south mountain ridges, The Land is not suitable as the home of a great power; it is rather a place of refuge *from* the great powers. It was dominated in turn by Egypt in the south and Mesopotamia in the north.

Its main divisions are Galilee, Israel, Judah, and the Negeb dryland.¹ The three northern parts are fertile; the Negeb wilderness requires a pastoral lifestyle. In times of drought, residents of all four may seek relief in Egypt, where the Nile, fed from upstream, provides constant water. The four are:

- **Galilee.** The Hebrews never occupied Galilee; it was an outland. The native tribes were Asher, Naphtali, Zebulun, and Issachar;² home to local seers like Elijah of Tishbe and the Witch of Endor, the latter once consulted by Saul.³
- **Israel.** The highland. Bounded by the Jezreel Valley on the north, with its major city Megiddo. The ritual center of Israel was at Shechem.
- **Judah.** The smaller lowland; its highpoint is Mt Zion at Jerusalem.
- **Negeb.** The southern wilderness. The town of Beersheba was a major contact point on the wilderness frontier.

The coastal plain came to be inhabited by the Philistines.⁴ Having first destroyed Ugarit in the north, they attacked Egypt, but were defeated in c01190 and were settled in the coastal towns Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Gaza. To these three they later added inland Ekron and Gath. The Philistines revolted from Egypt in 01150, and thereafter, as an independent entity, were a threat to Judah.

From Egypt, the main military route⁵ ran north along the coast, turned east to follow the Jezreel Valley to Beth Shan, then north again along the Jordan, and northeast past Mt Hermon to Damascus and Haran.⁶

Smaller parties could follow the Transjordan uplands northward from Elath, descending at some point to the level land in the Jordan Valley. The Hebrews from the south took that route, going past Moab and Ammon (modern Jordan), and crossing the Jordan River at a point near the major fortress city of Jericho, nine miles northeast of Jerusalem.⁷

Jericho would be their first conquest.

¹See the maps at p288 and Atlas 23.

²Atlas 58. For more detail on these natives, see §16, “The Twelve Tribes.”

³Galilee is NT country. Jesus’ first disciples were from wealthy fishing families, who exported dried fish through the nearby port of Acco.

⁴For more detail on the Philistines, see §44.

⁵Atlas 16.

⁶Atlas 37.

⁷For the location of that entry point (now called Khirbet el-Mastarah), see §39.