

Joshua 15:33

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And in the valley, Eshtaol, and Zoreah, and Ashnah,

Analysis

And in the valley, Eshtaol, and Zoreah, and Ashnah—this verse begins the second district of Judah's inheritance: the Shephelah (שֶׁפְּלָא, shephelah), meaning "lowland" or "valley." This region consists of foothills between the coastal plain and Judah's central highlands, characterized by fertile valleys ideal for agriculture. **Eshtaol** (אֶשְׁתָּאֹל) and **Zoreah** (צֹרְעָה) are closely connected to Samson's story—he was born in Zoreah (Judges 13:2), the Spirit began moving him between Zoreah and Eshtaol (Judges 13:25), and he was buried between these cities (Judges 16:31). **Ashnah** (אֲשֶׁנָּה) appears twice in Judah's list (here and v. 43), likely indicating two different settlements with the same name.

The Shephelah's strategic importance cannot be overstated—it formed the buffer zone between Israelite highlands and Philistine coastal territory. Control of the Shephelah determined who dominated the region. The valleys and cities listed here became battlegrounds between Israel and Philistia throughout the judges and monarchic periods. Samson's exploits occurred in this contested frontier, and David faced Goliath in the Shephelah's Valley of Elah (1 Samuel 17).

Historical Context

The Shephelah comprises foothills rising from the coastal plain (100-300 feet elevation) to the Judean highlands (2,000+ feet). This transition zone includes five major valleys running east-west: Aijalon, Sorek, Elah, Guvrin, and Lachish. The region's fertile soil and moderate rainfall made it agriculturally productive, particularly for grain, grapes, and olives. Competing powers—Canaanites,

Philistines, Israelites, Assyrians, Babylonians—fought repeatedly for control.

Zoreah and Eshtaol's identification with modern Sar'a and Eshwa preserves ancient names across millennia. Archaeological excavations reveal Bronze and Iron Age occupation, confirming biblical chronology. Samson's connection to these cities shows how sacred narrative roots in specific geographical and historical contexts. The Spirit of God moved Samson "in Mahaneh-dan, between Zoreah and Eshtaol" (Judges 13:25)—divine calling happens in real places, not mythological never-lands.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does the Shephelah's character as contested borderland illustrate the spiritual reality that Christian life involves ongoing conflict with enemy forces seeking to reclaim territory surrendered to Christ?
2. What does Samson's connection to Zoreah and Eshtaol teach about how God raises up deliverers in frontier regions where His people face greatest pressure and opposition?
3. How can studying the geography of biblical events deepen your appreciation for Scripture's historical reliability and the incarnational nature of God's redemptive work in real time and space?

Interlinear Text

בְּשֵׂפֶלָה	אֶשְׁתָּאֹל וְ	זֹרֵעַ	אֲשֵׁנָה:
And in the valley	Eshtaol	and Zoreah	and Ashnah
H8219	H847	H6881	H823

Additional Cross-References

Judges 13:25 (Parallel theme): And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

Judges 16:31 (Parallel theme): Then his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the buryingplace of Manoah his father. And he judged Israel twenty years.

Numbers 13:23 (Parallel theme): And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs.

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