

Joshua 15:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the border was drawn from the top of the hill unto the fountain of the water of Nephtoah, and went out to the cities of mount Ephron; and the border was drawn to Baalah, which is Kirjath-jearim:

Analysis

And the border was drawn from the top of the hill unto the fountain of the water of Nephtoah, and went out to the cities of mount Ephron; and the border was drawn to Baalah, which is Kirjath-jearim. The boundary continues from Jerusalem's heights to the Fountain of Nephtoah (נְפָתֹח, "Waters of Opening/Unfolding"), likely the spring at modern Lifta northwest of Jerusalem. Water sources were crucial landmarks in the semi-arid hill country, making springs natural and stable boundary markers. Access to water meant survival, and spring locations were jealously guarded and precisely remembered.

Mount Ephron (הַר עֲפָרֹן) and its associated cities mark the boundary's westward progression. More significant is Baalah (בָּאַלָּה), identified as Kirjath-Jearim (קִרְיַת יְהָרִים, "City of Forests"). This city gained prominence in Israel's history as the resting place of the Ark of the Covenant for twenty years after the Philistines returned it (1 Samuel 7:1-2), before David brought it to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:2). The alternate name Baalah ("mistress" or related to Baal) suggests pre-Israelite Canaanite worship, later sanctified by the Ark's presence.

This verse illustrates redemptive geography: places associated with pagan worship (Baalah) become sites of true worship through God's transforming presence. The Ark's residence at Kirjath-jearim converted a Canaanite town into a holy site, foreshadowing how the gospel transforms defiled humanity into God's temple.

Historical Context

Kirjath-jearim is identified with modern Deir el-Azhar (Abu Ghosh), about 9 miles northwest of Jerusalem on the road to Joppa. Archaeological surveys confirm ancient occupation during the Late Bronze and Iron Ages. The city sat on Judah's northern boundary with Benjamin and Dan, making it strategically important for controlling access to Jerusalem from the coastal plain. The Ark's twenty-year residence here (c. 1070-1050 BCE) followed its capture by Philistines at Ebenezer, its destructive tour of Philistine cities (1 Samuel 5), and its return (1 Samuel 6). During this period, the Tabernacle remained at Shiloh (destroyed by Philistines) or later at Nob and Gibeon, while the Ark stayed separated at Kirjath-jearim—a liturgical anomaly reflecting Israel's spiritual disarray during the judges period. David's retrieval of the Ark reunited Israel's worship and centralized it in Jerusalem.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does Kirjath-jearim's transformation from Canaanite Baalah to Ark repository illustrate God's power to redeem and repurpose places (and people) with pagan pasts?
2. What does the Ark's separation from the Tabernacle for twenty years teach about the consequences of treating holy things carelessly (1 Samuel 4-6)?
3. How can the progression from Baalah to Kirjath-jearim to Jerusalem (Ark's journey) model spiritual growth from initial redemption through sanctification to final glorification?

Interlinear Text

רִמָּא	וְתָא	הַגְּבוּל	מִרְאֵשׁ	בְּרֵרָה	אֶל	מַעַיִן
was drawn	And the border	from the top	of mount	H413	unto the fountain	
H8388	H1366	H7218	H2022		H4599	
מִ	מִ	נִפְתָּח	וְ	אֶל	עַל	עַפְרָן
of the water	of Nephtoah	and went out		H413	to the cities	of mount
H4325	H5318	H3318			H5892	H2022
רִמָּא	וְתָא	הַגְּבוּל	הַיָּא	בְּעַל	הַ	יְעָרִים:
was drawn	And the border	to Baalah	H1931	H0		which is Kirjathjearim
H8388	H1366	H1173				H7157

Additional Cross-References

1 Chronicles 13:6 (Parallel theme): And David went up, and all Israel, to Baalah, that is, to Kirjath-jearim, which belonged to Judah, to bring up thence the ark of God the LORD, that dwelleth between the cherubims, whose name is called on it.

Joshua 18:15 (Parallel theme): And the south quarter was from the end of Kirjath-jearim, and the border went out on the west, and went out to the well of waters of Nephtoah:

Judges 18:12 (Parallel theme): And they went up, and pitched in Kirjath-jearim, in Judah: wherefore they called that place Mahaneh-dan unto this day: behold, it is behind Kirjath-jearim.