

Joshua 16:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the border of the children of Ephraim according to their families was thus: even the border of their inheritance on the east side was Ataroth-addar, unto Beth-horon the upper;

Analysis

And the border of the children of Ephraim according to their families was thus: even the border of their inheritance on the east side was Ataroth-addar, unto Beth-horon the upper—now the text focuses specifically on Ephraim's boundaries, distinct from Manasseh. The phrase **according to their families** (lemishpechotam, לְמִשְׁפְּחוֹתָם) indicates subdivisions within the tribe, as land was distributed not just tribally but to clans and extended families, ensuring every household received inheritance.

Ataroth-addar ("crowns of Addar," אֶטְרוֹת אֲדָר) was a fortified town on Ephraim's southern boundary, distinct from the Ataroth mentioned in verse 2. The specificity of place names—Ataroth versus Ataroth-addar—demonstrates the precision of biblical geography and the importance of accurate boundary documentation. **Beth-horon the upper** (בֵּית־חֹרֹן הַעֲלִיּוֹן) complemented Beth-horon the lower (v. 3), together controlling the strategic pass from the coastal plain to the highlands.

The eastern boundary formed Ephraim's border with Benjamin, while Beth-horon marked the southern limit. This prime central hill country provided fertile agricultural land, defensive terrain, and control of major north-south travel routes. Ephraim's strategic position contributed to its later prominence, though it also led to pride and rivalry with Judah that eventually split the kingdom (1 Kings 12).

Historical Context

The phrase "according to their families" reflects the clan-based social structure of ancient Israel. Clans (mishpachot, מִשְׁפָּחָה) formed intermediate units between tribes and individual households, typically comprising several hundred to several thousand people descended from a common ancestor. This structure ensured social cohesion, mutual defense, and economic cooperation. Land ownership was vested in families rather than individuals, preventing permanent alienation and ensuring each generation inherited agricultural means. The year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25) protected this family land system by requiring property return to original families every fifty years, preventing permanent poverty or wealth concentration. Beth-horon's archaeological remains confirm its strategic importance, with fortifications from multiple periods. The twin cities controlled the main western approach to Jerusalem, making them perpetual military objectives.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the distribution of inheritance to families (not just individuals or tribes) emphasize the importance of multi-generational faithfulness and legacy?
2. What spiritual territory has God given your family or community collectively that requires cooperation and mutual support to possess?
3. How can you guard against the pride that infected Ephraim—using God-given blessings and strategic position for self-exaltation rather than serving God's purposes?

Interlinear Text

וַיְהִי י	גֹב וּל	בְּנֵי	אֶפְרַיִם ים	לְמִשְׁפַּחֹתָם
H1961	And the border	of the children	of Ephraim	according to their families
	H1366	H1121	H669	H4940

וַיְהִי י	גֹב וּל	נַחֲלָתָם	מִזְכָּהָה	עָטָר וְת
H1961	And the border	of their inheritance	on the east side	H0
	H1366	H5159	H4217	

אֶתְרָד	עַד	בֵּית	חֹרֶן	עֲלִיּוֹן:
was Atarothaddar	H5704	H0	unto Bethhoron	the upper
H5853			H1032	H5945

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 18:13 (Parallel theme): And the border went over from thence toward Luz, to the side of Luz, which is Beth-el, southward; and the border descended to Ataroth-adar, near the hill that lieth on the south side of the nether Beth-horon.