

The Biblical notion of land

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How did the notion of land develop, under what conditions, and when?

1. What was the status of the land in Phoenician texts? One would have to reflect on the myths of the late bronze period, especially on the localizations of temples and cults, references to divine palaces, burials, and the like, which might reflect actual practices and beliefs. One would expect a corporate association between the gods of the pantheon and the land.

Fertility would have been directly related to proper “investments” most properly expressed by the sacrificial systems (same for Abraham’s story, here incorporating something very old?).

2. Then, conquest of more land becomes problematic: how could it be organically related to the god of the ancestors, the local, emblematic divinity seated in a well localized temple on the neighboring hill or “mountain”, or near a sacred grove or tree, from which could be seen the local country (that is, the politically and geographically and economically manageable unit of land).

3. What happens, on the contrary, when land is lost?

The traditional (Iron II) explanation: corporate punishment by the god(s), based on a notion of group’s disease or impurity process, no matter the origin of the affliction (often unknown, or deemed unknown, such as a ritual failure, or an absence of recognition of sacred forces as of yet uncodified).

But is the expression found in Lev and Deut common: that the land itself, is sacred by “contiguity” (metonymically), i.e. by being inhabited (shakhen > shekhinah) by the god? Read (Pleins 2001) on this.

Here is where the analysis of Abraham’s saga, especially Gen 17–24, and especially 22–23, is so important.

4. Finally, the work done by Nehemiah is to be analyzed: see M. Smith, p. 38 of Davies’s work above, footnote. See also Schmidt

REFERENCES

- Pleins, J. David. 2001. "Territory and Temple." In *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible. A Theological Introduction*, 319–52. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press.