Conquest of the Land

I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

1. The Promise of the Land to the Patriarchs.

The theme of the possession of the land is rooted in the patriarchal narratives in God's election of Abram in Gen 12:1: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.” When Abram reaches Canaan, YHWH assures him that he will give this land to him and his offspring (Gen 12:7; 13:15-17). The gift is one where the patriarchs sojourn as immigrants in the land: “I will give you the land” (Gen 15:12-21). This expression of the traditional borders “from Dan to Beersheba” results from a later insertion into the original speech of YHWH to Abram (1:1-3:6). A. The land is the place of the God’s promise to Abraham: he will give him all of Canaan “as an everlasting possession” (Gen 17:8). B. That land, however, is inhabited by Canaanites and other peoples (Gen 12:6; 13:7; 15:19-21). C. The opening account of Joshua (Josh 1-2) sets the stage for a conquest theme: YHWH’s promise to Abraham is to give it to his descendents. D. The promise of the land is the center of the Deuteronomistic conception. E. The land is a historical source for the origins of Jewish identity, history, and national identity. F. The promise to be heirs of the land both before the conquest and since (Buber: “the sons” of Abraham). G. God’s promise to Abraham to give it to his descendents is also the basis for the claim on the land by the Jewish people.

2. The Conquest of the Land under Moses. According to the story of Moses’ call (Exod 3), YHWH promises he will drive out the Canaanites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites to make the land “a possession” (3:8). A. The battle itself follows long preparations, such as the battle against the Amalekites (Ex 17). B. The conquest theme connects with the Deuteronomistic tradition: the Israelites should not associate with these nations (Deut 7:2). C. The conquest of the land is a historical source for the origins of Jewish identity, history, and national identity. D. The Deuteronomistic conception of the conquest of the land is a historical source for the origins of Jewish identity, history, and national identity. E. The land is a historical source for the origins of Jewish identity, history, and national identity.


In Deuteronomy, Moses’ assistant, Joshua, is destined to secure the conquest of the land (Deut 1:3; 13:22-23; 34:9). After Moses’ death, YHWH instructs Joshua to take possession of the land. The conquest of the land reminds him of its borders: “from the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, the Great Sea (i.e., the Mediterranean), and to the west, as the Lord spoke to Moses” (Josh 13:8-11). The conquest of the land is the basis for the claim on the land by the Jewish people. The Deuteronomistic conception of the conquest of the land is a historical source for the origins of Jewish identity, history, and national identity.

II. Judaism

1. Jewish literature of the Second Temple period.

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