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SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR SOCIAL OUTLIERS IN ANCIENT ISRAEL, PART 1: CULTURAL BACKGROUND

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Abstract: *The Torah interweaves guidelines for social justice throughout. While covering all of Israelite society, three groups considered social outliers—widows, orphans, and resident aliens—are addressed collectively with special provisions because they had common needs. This two-part article examines how the community structure of ancient Israel's agrarian culture produced key social norms for each interdependent community (part 1) and then shows how the three groups fell outside of those norms and thus needed special provisions (part 2). Part 1 describes the agrarian structure of a typical Israelite community, drawing on anthropological studies of analogous modern cultures in the same area. Part 2 clarifies the nature of the outliers and explains how the provisions of levirate marriage, gleaning, third-year tithes, and Sabbath-year garnering provided essential welfare support for those who needed it.*

Key words: *social justice, widows, orphans, resident aliens, farm, immigrant, Ruth*

Ultimately, Jesus's declaration of what we call the golden rule, "Do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matt 7:12 NIV), a standard God had already given Israel at Sinai, is the essence of social justice. Leviticus 19:18 records God declaring that they should "love [their] neighbor as [themselves],"[1] a more abstract way of expressing the same idea. Further, social justice concepts show up early throughout the Ancient Near East, indicating a racial awareness of the idea of justice from the beginning[2] and reflecting an equally long history of injustice.[3] While those historical evidences suggest that social justice as an abstract concept has long been considered an ideal to strive for, its implementation in any culture has been problematic at best, and periodically humans need not only reminders to be socially just, but also models of how to do so. Much of the OT law actually provides such models, designed to guide ancient Israel on how to implement social justice in their agrarian society.

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[1] All Bible citations are from the NASB, 1995 update, unless stated otherwise.

[2] F. Charles Fensham, "Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature," *JNES* 21.2 (1962): 129; Norbert Lohfink, "Poverty in the Laws of the Ancient Near East and of the Bible," *TS* 52 (1991): 34–35. See also Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 123–24; James H. Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1959), 243–44.

[3] In that context, Cain's response to God's judgment for the murder of Abel is a complaint that his punishment was not fair, that is, God was being unjust. Further, his fear that he would be murdered as a result constitutes a complaint that society would kill him (Gen 2:14).

To transfer guidelines designed for agrarian Bronze Age Israel to our post-industrial urban culture, we must find underlying principles that we can reformat for our culture.[4] But such discovery requires a solid understanding of that ancient culture, which is difficult. How can we understand accurately a foreign culture that is long gone and has left few records? Some evidences can be derived from archaeology, and recent studies in this field have proven very helpful, though archaeology does have significant limitations.[5] A less familiar aid is ethnoarchaeology, which might be described as cultural anthropology applied to archaeology,[6] though it also must be used with caution.[7] The purpose of this two-part study is to clarify aspects of Bronze Age Israel's agricultural society with respect to issues of social justice as presented in the Torah, especially as it applied to three groups of social outliers: widows, orphans, and resident aliens (hereafter collectively termed WORA).[8] This study will draw on insights provided by several anthropological studies coupled with archaeological data. Part 1 explores the social-economic background of Israel in the period for which the Torah states it was intended. In that regard, the legal directives will be examined as God's expectations for the nation when it settled in Canaan. To better understand how the culture likely functioned, the study will especially address areas where studies of more recent Middle Eastern cultures show significant similarities. After establishing a cultural baseline in the first part of our study, part 2 will address specific issues that made the WORA groups outliers, and it will evaluate specific God-given directives presented in the Torah as culturally appropriate guidelines to ameliorate their situations. The study will conclude by identifying underlying principles that might be developed for culturally appropriate social justice practices in modern America.

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[4] J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 26–32.

[5] In the case of ancient Israel, helpful recent studies include Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 21–30; Gershon Edelstein and Ianir Milevski, "The Rural Settlement of Jerusalem Re-evaluated: Surveys and Excavations in the Reph'aim Valley and Mevasseret Yerushalayim," *PEQ* 126 (1994): 2–23; Avraham Faust, "Differences in Family Structure between Cities and Villages in Iron Age II," *TA* 26 (1999): 233–52; Avraham Faust, "The Canaanite Village: Social Structure of Middle Bronze Age Rural Communities," *Levant* 37 (2005): 105; David C. Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan* (Sheffield: Almond, 1985), 235–51; Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 12–35; Baruch A. Levine, "The Clan-Based Economy of Biblical Israel," in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past*, ed. William G. Dever and Seymour Gitin (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 445–54; Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel 1250–587 BCE* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 1–66; Lawrence E. Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel," *BASOR* 260 (1985): 1–35; Lucian Turkowski, "Peasant Agriculture in the Judaean Hills," *PEQ* 101 (1969): 21–33, 101–13; D. Webley, "Soils and Site Location in Prehistoric Palestine," in *Papers in Economic Prehistory*, ed. E. S. Higgs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 169–80.

[6] Carol Kramer states, "Observations of contemporary behavior can facilitate the development and refinement of insights into past behaviors, particularly when strong similarities can be shown to exist between the environments and technologies of the past and contemporary sociocultural systems being compared." Carol Kramer, "Introduction," in *Ethnoarchaeology: Implications of Ethnography for Archaeology*, ed. Carol Kramer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 1.

[7] DeBoer and Lathrap warn that "many of our attempts at understanding the past are short-circuited through a comparison of unlike phenomena." Warren R. DeBoer and Donald W. Lathrap, "The Making and Breaking of Shipibo-Conibo Ceramics," in Kramer, *Ethnoarchaeology*, 103.

[8] The term גֵּר, defined by BDB and *DCH* as "sojourner," is translated variously in English Bibles as "sojourner" (RSV, ESV), "stranger" (KJV), "foreigner" (NLT), or "alien" (NIV, NRSV, NASB). The connotations of this term will be explored later, but in general the contexts suggest that these are individuals who have settled into the land but who have not been absorbed into the dominant native population. Craigie appears to be correct in using "resident alien," although he does not explain his rationale. Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 59. For this study, the term "resident alien" will be used.

I. DEFINITION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Recently, John Stonestreet observed that to do justice, one must first define justice.[9] That is especially the case with the concept of social justice, a phrase that is currently widely used and also greatly abused. A good start would be the very basic observation of Clayton and Williams who assert that "issues of social justice, in the broadest sense, arise when decisions affect the distribution of benefits and burdens between different individuals or groups."[10] In essence, social justice is a balance between benefits and burdens. As such, true social justice derives from balancing two questions that every individual should ask: "Am I getting my fair share [the benefits]?" and also, "Am I pulling my fair load [the burdens]?" Historically, it seems that these questions coupled together have guided the discussion. For example, John Locke defends private property (my share or "benefits") as a product of labor (my effort or "burden"). In the process, Locke limits "my share" to what I can reasonably use "before it spoils.… Whatever is beyond this is more than [my fair] share."[11] A conclusion of Locke's argument is that if I do not labor (i.e., I am not pulling my load), then I do not have any claim on the food and drink that should be acquired by my labor.[12] But this conclusion does not address the situation of an individual who may be unable to produce the required labor.

The lack of ability to do the required labor has been the dominant component of recent discussions of social justice, to the point where focus on the first question (benefits) has essentially come to exclude discussion of the second (burdens). For example, Phillips maintains that a key aspect of a just social order is that "everyone [has] adequate food, clothing, housing, medical care, security, and protection."[13] This description overlooks the contention that a just social order requires everyone to be "pulling his or her share of the load" (however that may be defined).

Limiting "social justice" to ensuring that every individual has his or her "fair share" struggles with two problems. The first problem is defining "fair share."

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[9] John Stonestreet with David Carlson, "Why Defining Justice Is Necessary for Doing Justice," *Breakpoint*, 8 February 2021, https://www.breakpoint.org/why-defining-justice-is-necessary-for-doing-justice/.

[10] Matthew Clayton and Andrew Williams, "Introduction," in *Social Justice*, ed. Matthew Clayton and Andrew Williams (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 1.

[11] John Locke, *Concerning Civil Government, Second Essay*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 35, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), 31.

[12] Locke, *Concerning Civil Government*, 34. There is an interesting correlation between this conclusion and the apostle Paul's admonition, "If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat either" (2 Thess 3:10).

[13] Derek L. Phillips, *Toward a Just Social Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 338.

While theorists seem to agree that the "fair share" concept takes priority, they differ strongly regarding what a fair share constitutes. For example, Rawls suggests that a fair society involves a system that provides "in the first instance a standard whereby the distributive aspects of the basic structure of society are to be assessed."[14] As I understand Rawls, he maintains that since people enter society with inequalities in terms of the social standing of their families as well as different abilities, society should be weighted in such a way to provide "the greatest expected benefit of the least advantaged."[15] In essence, his focus is on benefits.

Dworkin suggests an alternative that focuses on the freedom to use the resources one has. Arguing against what he calls "distributive justice" and focusing on what he calls "option luck," Dworkin seems to maintain that each individual should be free to use his or her resources as he or she sees fit, and pay the consequences.[16] But once again, the focus seems to be on benefits, since Dworkin argues for attempting to right the balance when he observes that a person born with a serious handicap has fewer resources and then contends that this justifies compensation. Interestingly, he then asserts that, in reality, nothing can "right the balance,"[17] in which case true justice is actually impossible.

A second problem of an excessive emphasis on benefit is that it overlooks human nature. A basic point of Christian theology is that because of the fall, every individual will focus on self (Jas 1:13–15).[18] Given this focus, humans in their unredeemed state tend to define "their fair share" very generously without consideration of others' needs, and the reality is that even redeemed "saints" struggle with this egocentric perception. How this aspect of human nature affects the issue of social justice is inadequately addressed in the literature.[19]

In contrast, ancient Israelite culture as outlined in the Torah seems to prioritize the "fair load" question, although it does not overlook "fair share." This is demonstrated in several ways. First, the OT is very clear that individuals within the nation of Israel (indeed, we would say all humankind) were not equal, whether in terms of the socio-economic or family status into which they were born or in terms of natural abilities. To use Rawls's terminology, these are aspects of the "social lottery" or the "natural lottery." Instead of viewing these differences as random (the lottery concept), however, the OT ties them to a sovereign, omnipotent God (Ps 139:13–16; Isa 44:24). As such, it does not portray those differences as negatives. Rather, instead of providing guidelines designed to offset differences in position or ability, it indicates that there would be different expectations of individuals based on these various factors. In this context, the words of Jesus in the parable of the talents ("each according to his own ability," Matt 25:15) would not have seemed strange or new to his Jewish audience. The OT balances this, however, by portraying success as contingent not just on individuals' properly using whatever God has given them, but more importantly on their maintaining a proper relationship of trust in God. In general, the OT presents this as a manifestation of God's blessing, which is counter to Dworkin's perspective that "luck" is a key differentiation of outcomes.

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[14] John Rawls, "On Justice as Fairness," in Clayton and Williams, *Social Justice*, 51.

[15] Rawls, "Justice," 74.

[16] Ronald Dworkin, "Equality of Resources," in Clayton and Williams, *Social Justice*, 117–25.

[17] Dworkin, "Equality," 123.

[18] Michael A. Harbin, *The Promise and the Blessing* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 70–76.

[19] Sider touches on this somewhat as he defines the nature of persons and the reality of sin, though he does not give it the depth that is warranted. For example, he notes that sin has become embedded in socioeconomic structures and thus calls for "structural change." Ronald J. Sider, *Just Generosity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 62–66. However, this seems to miss the issue that sinful humans will still be egocentric regardless of the socioeconomic structure, as has been demonstrated consistently over the past couple of centuries in a wide variety of idealistic socioeconomic structures that have been launched with great expectations only to end in failure, including most recently communism.

The biblical premise is that social injustice is generally a result of sin in a fallen world, but this should not be taken to imply a simplistic cause-and-effect relationship. Rather, social injustice is a complex, multidimensional problem where flawed, sinful human beings struggle with issues over which they have no control. In the NT, this is stated explicitly in the account of the man born blind (John 9). In the OT, the case of Job is equally strong: Job is described as a righteous man, but he faces unfathomable loss, both from sinful human sources, as well as from apparently "natural" phenomena.[20] We see similar issues today. Beyond various criminal or unethical acts by others, the earth quakes and buildings collapse. Storms wreak havoc. Tools break. Animals die. People get sick or are injured. And all of these things seem to occur at the most inconvenient times.

The result is that people do not necessarily prosper in accord with their abilities and efforts, but as Ecclesiastes notes, "Time and chance overtake them all" (9:11). Consequently, while the OT concept of social justice begins with the premise that every individual should pull his or her fair share, it also provides a cultural safety net to catch individuals who encounter unexpected tragedies in life and to allow them to get back on their feet. The OT presents this safety net as woven into the social fabric of Israelite culture, and so we must now refine our understanding of that culture, which significantly differs from modern Western culture in a variety of ways. The premise of this study is that two key components of Israelite culture underlay this safety net: the extended family structure of the OT culture and the demographics of the agrarian community. As will be shown, while these two components affected first the burden aspect of life, they also affected the benefits.

II. ISRAELITE SOCIAL STRUCTURE

While scholars debate the origin of the Pentateuch, it is generally agreed that it "presupposes a peasant agrarian society," as Blenkinsopp puts it.[21] Given that premise, de Vaux argues that that the purpose of the legal material was to govern

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[20] Job is stricken by four tragedies. Two are the result of foreign tribes, the Sabeans and the Chaldeans, raiding Job's possessions. The other two are a strong wind and "the fire of God … from heaven." Alden and others suggest that the latter may be lightning. Robert L. Alden, *Job*, NAC 11 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 59.

[21] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 200.

"a community of shepherds and peasants."[22] A major division exists, however, in understanding how the legal material is related to that community. Traditionally, this material has been accepted as presented, that is, given at Mt. Sinai and during the journey into the land of Canaan to provide advance guidance on how the nation was to live once it settled into the land—although it is doubtful that the nation ever followed that guidance.[23] Modern scholars argue for a much later attribution.[24] They still generally seem to agree that its legal material is oriented towards a Late Bronze agrarian society.[25]

Consequently, this study will approach the legal material within that Late Bronze historical-cultural context. In any regard, a huge cultural gap exists between the historical-cultural context presented in the legal material of the Torah and contemporary, Western, postindustrial culture, and this gap clearly presents several significant problems for any attempt to apply this material today. Some of the more obvious examples are addressed elsewhere.[26] The goal at hand is to evaluate specific aspects of the complex corpus of legal material that address issues of social justice pertaining to the outlier groups already mentioned. First, however, we need to clarify some of the agrarian practices of that historical-cultural period to establish a cultural baseline.

III. A TYPICAL MIDDLE EASTERN FARMING COMMUNITY

Archaeological evidence presents the typical Israelite farming community, like that of Canaanite contemporaries and predecessors, as a cluster of houses built in close proximity to each other, even to the point of having common walls, a pattern still evident today.[27] This village structure, especially regarding the relationship of the village to its farmland, would profoundly affect community relations, especially with respect to issues of social justice, and yet it is largely overlooked. A key help in understanding some of those social issues is a study conducted by anthropologist Richard Antoun in 1960 that examined a modern village in the highlands east of Galilee. According to his report, the farming techniques he observed were very similar to those presented in the OT.[28] His study was also revealing with regard to how the social structure and physical layout of the village affected community relationships, which will be the main focus of this study of social justice.

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[22] Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, vol. 1: *Social Institutions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 143.

[23] Herbert Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 180; G. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch in Its Cultural Environment* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 191–93.

[24] Martin Noth, *The Laws in the Pentateuch and Other Studies*, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 41; Lester L. Grabbe, "Leviticus," in *The Oxford Bible Commentary: The Pentateuch*, ed. John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 41, 128–29; Bernard W. Anderson with Steven Bishop and Judith H. Newman, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 5th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson-Prentice-Hall, 2007), 409–11.

[25] Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, trans. Bernhard W. Anderson (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981), 9. Elsewhere, while arguing for a late composition, Anderson suggests that the Priestly Writing "preserves many ancient traditions" likely dating to the Mosaic period. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 410.

[26] Michael A. Harbin, "A Typical Israelite Community in the OT Period," *ABR Newsletter* (25 July 2016); online: https://biblearchaeology.org/research/chronological-categories/conquest-of-canaan/2648-a-typical-israelite-community-in-the-ot-period.

[27] Thomas E. Levy, "Archaeological Sources for the Study of Palestine: The Chalcolithic Period," *BA* 49.2 (1986): 88.

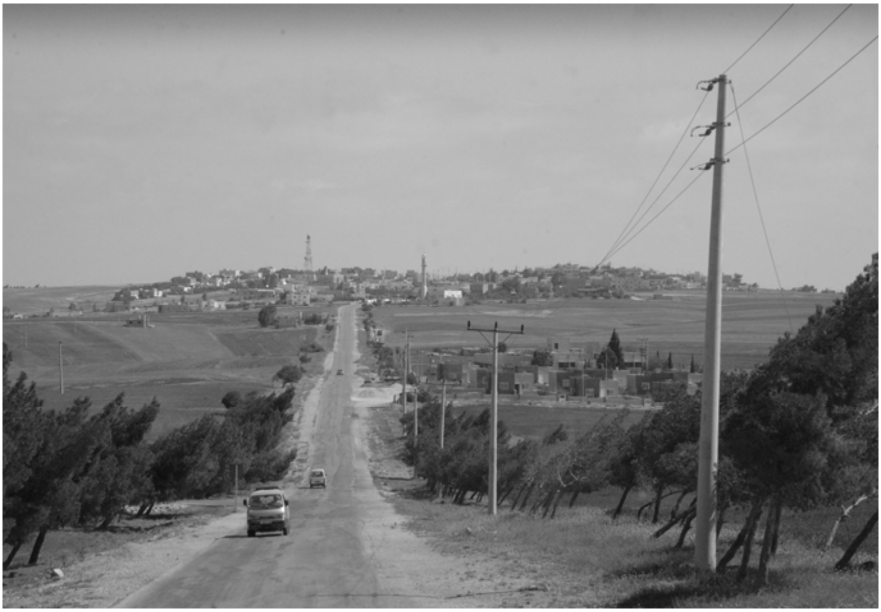

Figure 1: Unnamed Jordanian village. Photo by author.

Figure 1 pictures a typical (unnamed) Jordanian village.[29] As can be seen, the closely built village housing ends abruptly with unfenced fields stretching out in all directions. This is the same structure archaeologists have noted as typifying Israelite villages during the Late Bronze Age (LBA). Those two factors help explain aspects of OT social justice issues.

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[28] Richard T. Antoun, *Arab Village: A Social Structural Study of a Transjordanian Peasant Community* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1972), 9.

[29] While this picture was taken by the author in 2010, it is one example of a pattern observed during a number of trips through a half dozen Near Eastern countries over a period of several decades.

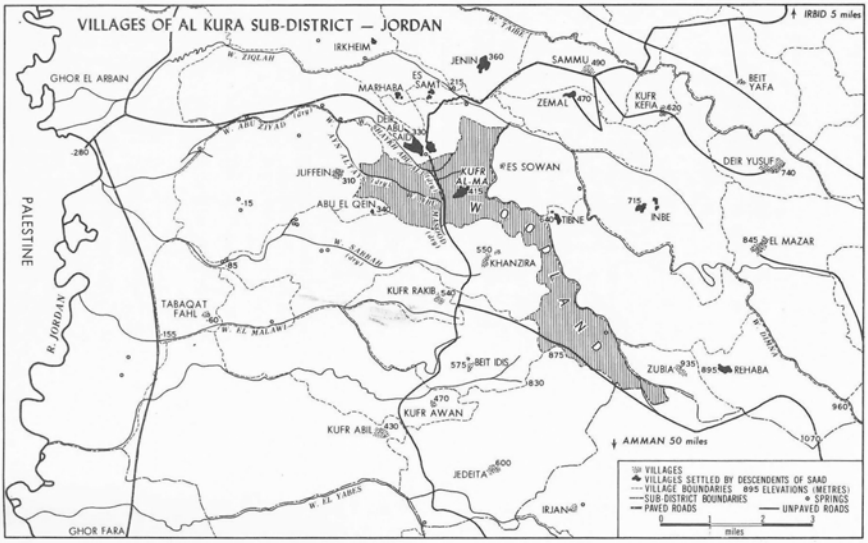
VILLAGES OF AL KURA SUB-DISTRICT — JORDAN
IRBID 5 miles
IRKHEIM
W. ZIQLAH
W. TAIBE
JENIN 360
SAMMU 490
BEIT YAFA
GHOR EL ARBAIN
MARHABA
ES SAMT
215
ZEMAL 470
KUFR KEFIA 620
DEIR ABU SAID 330
W. ABU ZIYAD
-280
ES SOWAN
DEIR YUSUF 740
JUFFEIN 310
KUFR AL-MA 415
WOODLAND
ABU EL QEIN 340
-15
715
INBE
540 TIBNE
PALESTINE
W. SABBAH
550
KHANZIRA
845 EL MAZAR
85
KUFR RAKIB 540
TABAQAT FAHL
-60
-155
W. EL MALAWI
R. JORDAN
W. DIMNA
875
575 BEIT IDIS
ZUBIA 935
895 REHABA
830
470
KUFR AWAN
960
KUFR ABIL 430
1070
AMMAN 50 miles
JEDEITA 600
W. EL YABES
IRJAN
GHOR FARA
VILLAGES
VILLAGES SETTLED BY DESCENDENTS OF SAAD
VILLAGE BOUNDARIES
895 ELEVATIONS (METRES)
SUB-DISTRICT BOUNDARIES
SPRINGS
PAVED ROADS
UNPAVED ROADS
0
1
2
3
miles

Figure 2: Map of Jordanian Al-Kura sub-district with village of Kufr Al-Ma highlighted. Richard T. Antoun, *Arab Village*, used by permission.

Antoun created the map in figure 2 during his 1960 study of the Jordanian village Kufr Al-Ma, which lies about eight miles east of the Jordan River.[30] Note that the "village" is the entire region highlighted on the map, not just the housing area, which is a surprising identification from a Western perspective. According to Antoun, Kufr Al-Ma was one of about 200 "cereal-growing villages of the Ajlun district of northwestern Transjordan" at the time of his study. At that time, Kufr Al-Ma had a population of approximately 2000.[31] The map area is approximately 170 square miles (about 440 square kilometers), although the boundaries of the Ajlun district are not indicated. Antoun identified at that time about twenty-five "villages" in that area. Like Kufr Al-Ma, each "village" was really a larger geographical region with a cluster of houses as a nucleus similar to the example in figure 1. As shown in figure 2, Kufr Al-Ma, the village of Antoun's study, consisted of two parts. The housing area lies within the roughly triangular northern portion.

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[30] Antoun did a year-long study of this village in 1959–1960. His study addresses several cultural issues from an anthropological perspective apropos to the overall topic of the present article, but our focus here will be on how the physical layout of the village affected its culture. Antoun, *Arab Village,* 24.

[31] Antoun, *Arab Village*, 1. According to Khlaif M. Gharaybeh, today the Ajlun (or Ajloun) district has an area of about 419.6 square kilometers (about 162 square miles). Khlaif M. Gharaybeh, *International Journal of Development and Sustainability* 4.10 (2015): 990; online: https://isdsnet.com/ijds-v4n10-2.pdf.

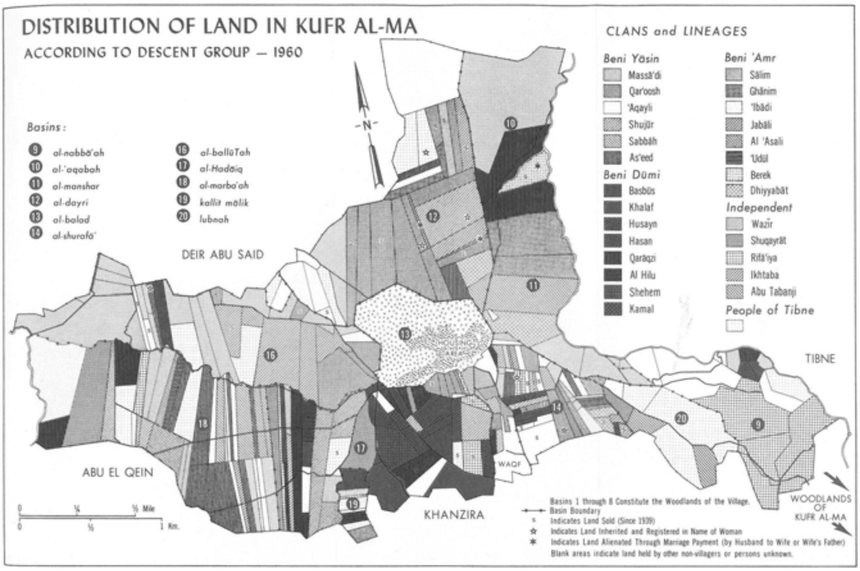
DISTRIBUTION OF LAND IN KUFR AL-MA
ACCORDING TO DESCENT GROUP — 1960
Basins:
9 al-nabbā'ah
10 al-'aqabah
11 al-manshar
12 al-dayri
13 al-balad
14 al-shurafā'
16 al-ballūTah
17 al-Hadāiq
18 al-marba'ah
19 kallit mālik
20 lubnah
-N-
DEIR ABU SAID
ABU EL QEIN
KHANZIRA
WAQF
TIBNE
CLANS and LINEAGES
Beni Yāsin
Massā'di
Qar'oosh
'Aqayli
Shujūr
Sabbāh
As'eed
Beni Dūmi
Basbūs
Khalaf
Husayn
Hasan
Qarāqzi
Al Hilu
Shehem
Kamal
Beni 'Amr
Sālim
Ghānim
'Ibādi
Jabāli
Al 'Asali
'Udūl
Berek
Dhiyyabāt
Independent
Wazīr
Shuqayrāt
Rifā'iya
Ikhtaba
Abu Tabanji
People of Tibne
0 ¼ ½ Mile
0 ½ 1 Km.
Basins 1 through 8 Constitute the Woodlands of the Village.
Basin Boundary
s Indicates Land Sold (Since 1939)
☆ Indicates Land Inherited and Registered in Name of Woman
✱ Indicates Land Alienated Through Marriage Payment (by Husband to Wife or Wife's Father)
Blank areas indicate land held by other non-villagers or persons unknown.
WOODLANDS OF KUFR AL-MA

Figure 3: Diagram of Kufr Al-Ma, Jordanian Arab village.
Richard T. Antoun, *Arab Village*, used by permission.

Figure 3 shows the triangular northern portion of the "village," indicating it had a long axis of about three miles and a cross axis of about a mile and a half. This larger scale map shows the tilled region with fields that belonged to the various clans and lineages differentiated by different textures (in the original, they are color-coded) and the area of habitation (the more darkly shaded portion of section 13). The farming region apparently was restricted to this northern portion of the village, with the more remote southern portion described as "woodlands."[32] While the village area concept is important to understand the context, for our present purposes we will focus on the northern triangle, which includes the habitations. As diagramed in figure 3, the habitation area was a portion of the *al balad* basin (area 13). Antoun described this basin as roughly circular, approximately a kilometer (a little over a half mile) in diameter.[33] The main point to note here is how the agricultural area surrounds the housing area (compare figure 1).

A larger scale map of the habitation area (figure 4) shows Kufr Al-Ma surrounded by both gardens and olive groves. Three items should be noted. First, this diagram does not include all the houses, since its purpose was to support Antoun's social structural study (i.e., the relations between clans and lineages). Second, the housing area was densely populated, with the estimated population of about 2000 people domiciled in a region of less than a tenth of a square mile (about .13 square kilometers). In figure 4, Antoun labeled approximately 270 "households," most of which seem to occupy one-room houses. Third, figures 3 and 4 show the gardens and olive groves closer to the village than the tilled fields. Although not addressed by Antoun or the OT, my experiences in the Middle East indicate that at least in some cases, farmers tilled around the olive trees (see figure 5). Faust indicates this to be a practice dating back to the OT period.[34]

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[32] Antoun describes the woodlands as consisting "largely of maquis" which "is a secondary growth of shrubs that follows the destruction of forest. In Jordan, the trees are usually a drought-resistant species of evergreen oak. They may grow taller than a man with semidwarf shrubs growing in the intervening spaces." Antoun, *Arab Village,* 2.

[33] Antoun describes the housing region as located on the side of a hill which surrounds a "wide open area at the center of the village on which front four village shops." He notes that when one enters the village, the housing density increases until one "is surrounded by houses abutting one on the other on either side of the narrow lane." Antoun, *Arab Village,* 1.

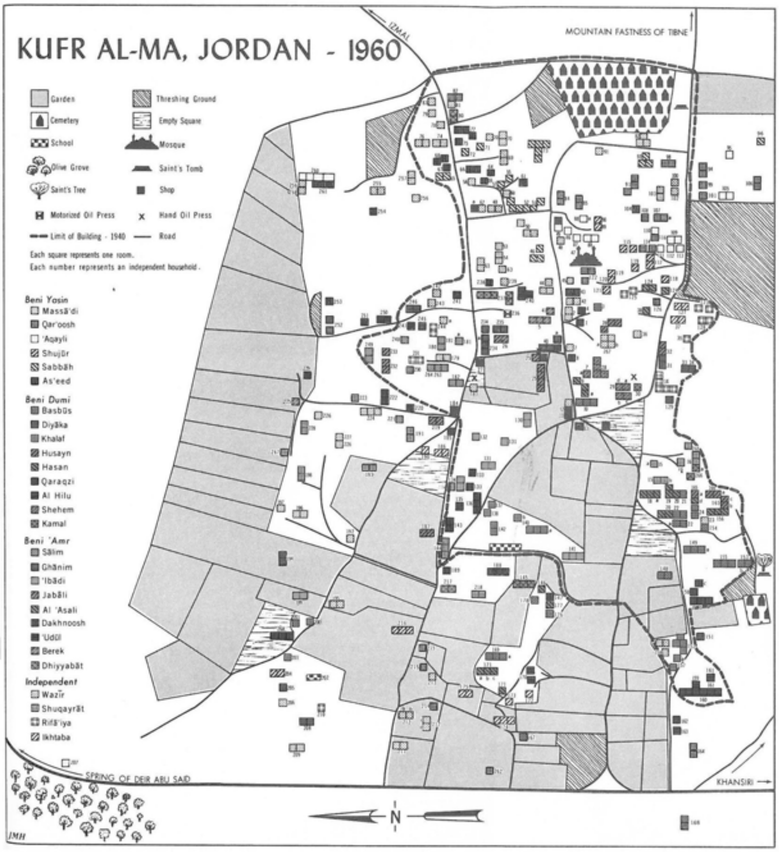
KUFR AL-MA, JORDAN - 1960
IZMAL
MOUNTAIN FASTNESS OF TIBNE
Garden
Threshing Ground
Cemetery
Empty Square
School
Mosque
Olive Grove
Saint's Tomb
Saint's Tree
Shop
Motorized Oil Press
Hand Oil Press
Limit of Building - 1940
Road
Each square represents one room.
Each number represents an independent household.
Beni Yasin
Massā'di
Qar'oosh
'Aqayli
Shujūr
Sabbāh
As'eed
Beni Dumi
Basbūs
Diyāka
Khalaf
Husayn
Hasan
Qaraqzi
Al Hilu
Shehem
Kamal
Beni 'Amr
Sālim
Ghānim
'Ibādi
Jabāli
Al 'Asali
Dakhnoosh
'Udūl
Berek
Dhiyyabāt
Independent
Wazīr
Shuqayrāt
Rifā'iya
Ikhtaba
SPRING OF DEIR ABU SAID
KHANSIRI
N
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Figure 4: Diagram of housing portion of Kufr Al Ma village in Jordan, showing lineage relationships. Richard T. Antoun, *Arab Village*, used by permission.

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[34] Avraham Faust, "The Rural Community in Ancient Israel during Iron Age II," *BASOR* 317 (2000): 25.

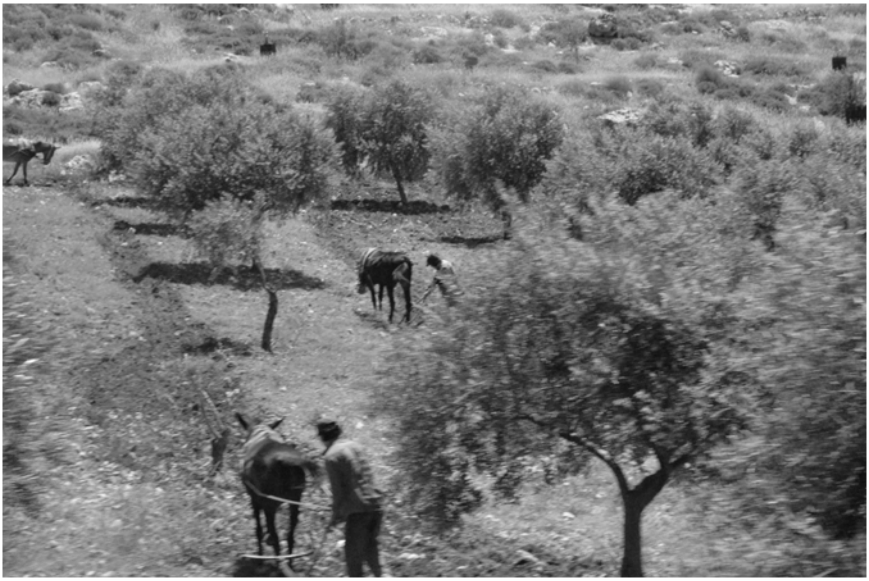

Figure 5: Plowing among olive trees in Ephraim portion of modern Israel. Even in 2010, plowing was done by animal power. Photo by author.

While modern, the layout illustrated in figure 1 and diagramed in figure 3 with a cluster of houses surrounded by the fields of the villagers is very similar to the standard village structure an Israelite in the LBA would have experienced, as Frick describes in his article on cities in the ANE. These visual images help the Western reader understand better various aspects of the culture of ancient Israel. Frick points out that "village," "town," and "city" tend to be used interchangeably in archaeological literature, noting that the key difference between a city and a village was a level of administration—that is, a city would be surrounded by "villages" and served to help regulate agricultural surplus. A city also was normally (but not necessarily always) walled.[35] Faust seems to add the number of "lineages" among its inhabitants as a difference, as well as what he calls "industrial areas," i.e., threshing floors and wine presses.[36] Due to lack of evidence in the archaeological record, neither author is able to address the basic domicile-tillage relationships, which is where Antoun's work (shown in figures 3 and 4) helps.

IV. BIBLICAL ANALOGY

If this model of a cluster of houses surrounded by the fields of the villagers was also the standard village structure of Israel in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages, i.e., the period presented as the time of the Judges and the early monarchy, certain implications should obtain with respect to routine life for the typical Israelite. While a number of studies cover families in this period, their focus is generally on individual family situations rather than the more complex relationships of a village.[37] The present study suggests that the implications of the larger village culture are evident in and significant for the biblical material, particularly the book of Ruth.

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[35] Frank S. Frick, "Cities: An Overview," *OEANE* 2:14–15.

[36] Faust, "The Canaanite Village," 23.

While the author of Ruth is unknown, the account is presented as taking place late in the period of the Judges and gives a glimpse into the agricultural system of that time. Ruth's position is presented as that of both resident alien and widow. As the author traces Ruth's redemption process, he touches on several social justice provisions that we will address in the second installment of this article. At this point, however, we note that the text also presents several details that reflect the community structure presented above as well as consequent social norms.

For example, when Ruth goes out to glean in Ruth 2, the model of a village surrounded by farmland best portrays the text. Ruth 2:2–3 twice mentions Ruth going to "the field" (singular) where the harvesters are at work. Verse 3 notes that a portion of that field (again singular) belonged to Boaz.[38] This suggests that while portions of the agricultural land surrounding the village belonged to different individuals, the totality of the tilled land was viewed as a collective whole belonging to the village, a scenario illustrated by Antoun's study (see figure 3 above). The same verse notes that Ruth "happened to come on the portion of the field belonging to Boaz who was of the family of Elimelech." This language seems to reflect the "ownership" of various tracts of the field, not only of Boaz, but of his lineage, again as seen in Antoun's study. It also suggests that there were no fences between the fields. If the farmers and harvesters were following the guidelines of the Mosaic law, as presented in Leviticus 19:9, they were "not reap[ing] to the פֵּאָה of [the] field." What is meant by פֵּאָה is not clear. Translators use either "corner" (KJV, NASB, NET) or "edge" (NRSV, NIV, ESV, CSB). Is it a corner, a single edge, or possibly the outermost section?[39] If the harvests in two adjoining portions both left behind the requisite "corner" and there were no fences, then a gleaner could easily "happen to come to," that is, pass inadvertently from the standing residue in the portion of the field belonging to one individual to that belonging to another. The lack of fences is somewhat surprising given the ubiquitous stones found in farmland throughout the region, stones that would have needed to be removed to prepare the field for agriculture. Turkowski notes that when preparing virgin soil, first larger stones would be removed to "mark the boundary of the plot."[40] At first glance this suggests stone fences; however, Deuteronomy 19:14 warns against moving the boundary markers, suggesting something more easily shifted.[41] Travels throughout the Middle East today suggest a common situation of no fences between the various portions (see figure 6). This does raise the question regarding what happened to the stones which were removed beyond those needed for boundary markers, since boundary markers did not require all that many stones (see figure 7). One possibility may be that the stones were used to develop terraces, but that is beyond the scope of this study.[42]

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[37] For example, see Borowski, *Agriculture*, 21–30; Gershon Edelstein and Ianir Milevski, "The Rural Settlement of Jerusalem Re-evaluated: Surveys and Excavations in the Reph'aim Valley and Mevasseret Yerushalayim," *PEQ* 126 (1994): 2–23; Faust, "Family Structure"; Faust, "The Canaanite Village"; David C. Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan* (Sheffield: Almond, 1985), 235–51; Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 12–35; Baruch A. Levine, "The Clan-Based Economy of Biblical Israel," in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past*, ed. William G. Dever and Seymour Gitin (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 445–54; Lawrence E. Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel," *BASOR* 260 (1985): 1–35; Lucian Turkowski, "Peasant Agriculture in the Judaean Hills," *PEQ* 101 (1969): 21–33, 101–13; D. Webley, "Soils and Site Location in Prehistoric Palestine," in *Papers in Economic Prehistory*, ed. E. S. Higgs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 169–80.

[38] Edward F. Campbell Jr., *Ruth*, AB 7 (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 143.

[39] Borowski views it as a "corner." Borowski, *Agriculture*, 61. Angerstorfer suggests that in this case it refers to an edge. Angerstorfer, "פֵּאָה," *TDOT* 11:461–62. This is the view of Milgrom who argues that the phrase *pe'at sadeka* would be a single edge, likely at the far end of the field, and that a better translation would be "last furrow." Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, AB 3A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 1625–26. While there is debate as to the specific meaning of פֵּאָה, commentators speak of the issue in more general terms. For example, Gane states that Leviticus 19:9 means "Do not be too thorough when you harvest," while Sklar similarly observes that it concerns "not harvesting a *field* or

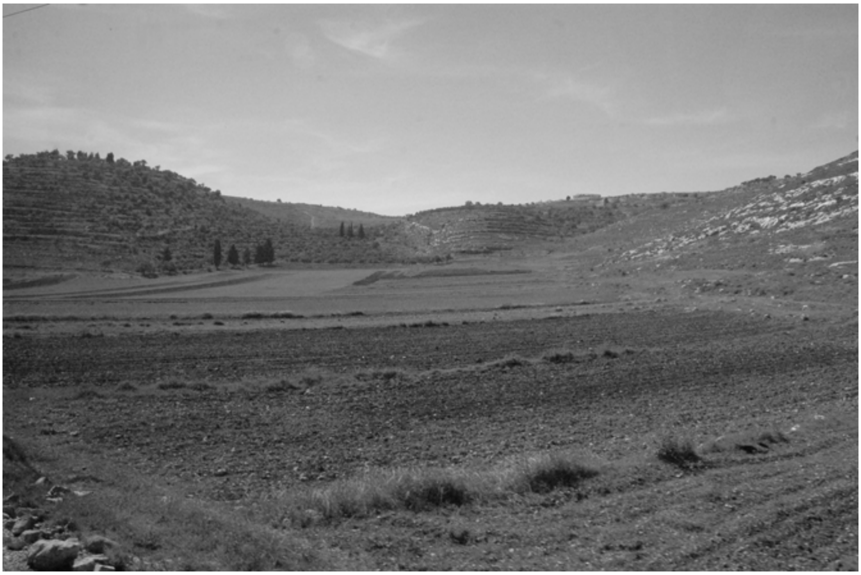

Figure 6: Unwalled fields in Ephraim portion of modern Israel. Photo by author.

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vineyard bare." Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 335; Jay Sklar, *Leviticus*, TOTC 3 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 244.

[40] Turkowski, "Peasant Agriculture," 25.

[41] So S. Barabas, "Field," *ZPEB* 2:533.

[42] Lack of fences might suggest that the process of removing stones from fields and piling them up led to the concept of terraces. Stager dates terracing to at least as early as 1200 BCE, although he does propose that the song of Deborah alludes to terraced fields. He does not address the possibility of using removed stones to produce the terrace walls. Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family," 5–9.

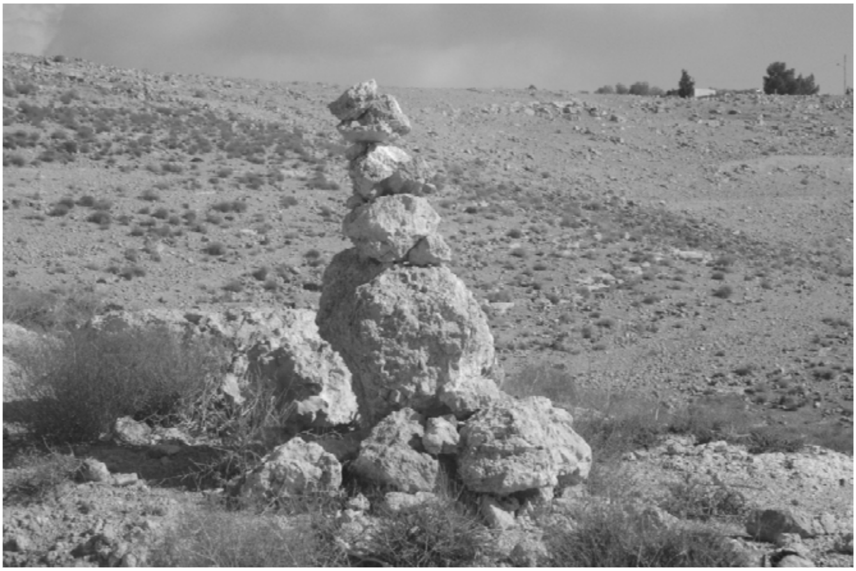

Figure 7: Boundary marker near Machaerus. Photo by author.

Another aspect of the Ruth account is the description of the threshing floor in chapter 3. Two points are relevant here. After threshing, the grain and chaff need to be separated and the grain cleaned. This process normally took place "on an elevated spot exposed to the wind"[43] (see figure 8). Faust observes that a terrace floor could be communal under the responsibility of larger social units (e.g., the lineage or the clan). While larger communities might have multiple installations, many had only one.[44] Hopkins notes that transportation limits suggest that threshing floors would be located "at no great distance from the grain-producing fields."[45] The village layout described above might suggest that a typical location would be away from the village.[46] Turkowski indicates that in the 1960s, threshing/winnowing was a several-day process involving a number of steps, usually all done at the threshing floor.[47] Given the distances involved, the amount of work required for threshing/winnowing, and the subsequent need to transport the processed grain back to the village, it apparently was a common practice for those involved to spend the night on the threshing floor as seen in Ruth 3:3–7.

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[43] Funderburk, "Threshing Floor," *ZPEB* 5:739. When driving through the mountains of southern Spain, I noticed a yellow cloud of chaff on the top of a local peak, which allowed me to locate a threshing floor where threshing and winnowing was in process.

[44] Faust, "Rural Community," 23.

[45] Hopkins, *Highlands*, 226, although 1 Kings 22:10 cites the case of Samaria where the threshing floor was "at the entrance of the gate of Samaria."

[46] Turkowski notes this as still being the case in the 1960s. Turkowski, "Peasant Agriculture," 105.

[47] Turkowski, "Peasant Agriculture," 105–9.

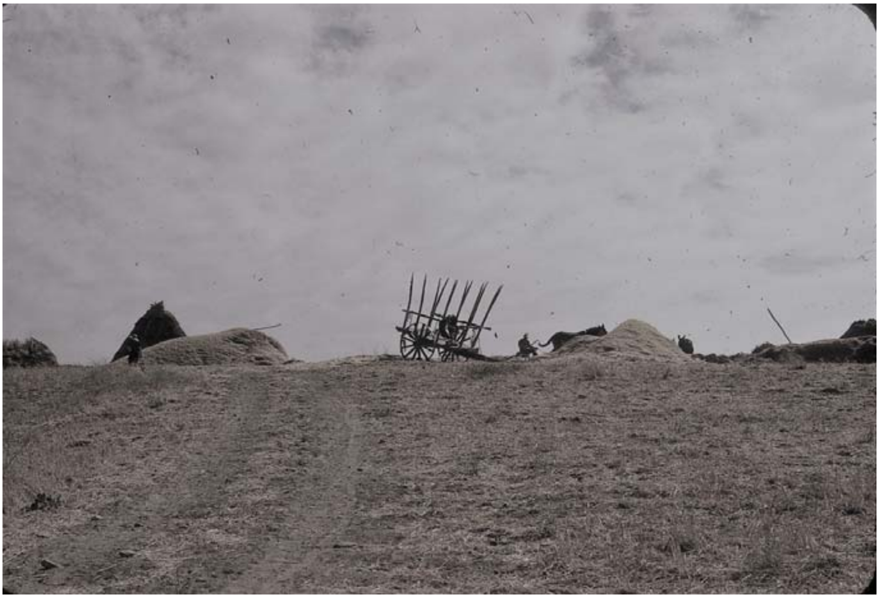

Figure 8: Threshing floor in rural Spain. Photo by author.

We noted above how the "woodlands" extended beyond the cultivated fields (see figure 2). While this is not discussed by Antoun, we suggest that this region would be used for the grazing of the sheep and goats of the region. If so, this would be in contrast to the more familiar Bedouin pattern, which is at least semi-nomadic.[48] The village layout described above would suggest that these pasture regions would be the most distant portions within the "village" region from the habitation portion, but clearly part of the community. If so, it would make sense that livestock would be allowed to remain in the pastureland overnight when the weather was better (which gives background to Luke 2:8). While far enough from the houses that the animals might not be driven to and from the fields on a daily basis, it would still be close enough to the houses that shepherds could work shifts, returning home at least part time.

V. DEVELOPING SOCIAL NORMS

The social norms of the premonarchal period are a product of the Torah given primarily at Sinai and developed through the settlement process conducted under Joshua. While the people brought many traditions and practices with them from Egypt, as God set up a new nation, he gave the Torah to refine and replace as necessary those traditions and practices so the people conformed to God's standards of justice. There would be some carryover from what other cultures had developed, but also innovations. Our task here is not to sort out which was which but to look at the final product as a divinely ordained system that would provide a socially just culture in a world populated by fallen human beings. For Israel, the expectation was that when they came into Canaan, they would be divided not only by tribes, but also by smaller groups, and as those smaller groups settled in cities and villages, they would implement local governance for routine issues.[49]

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[48] For further discussion, see Hopkins, *Highlands*, esp. 246–50. He also notes that apparently flocks and herds would be allowed to graze fields that had already been harvested which provided some fertilization. This practice would help to illuminate issues involved in Exodus 22:5.

The basic demographics described in the settlement process likely were somewhat similar to what the previous several generations had experienced in Egypt. The Torah provided modifications in terms of the social mores the nation was expected to follow, perhaps to raise the bar in terms of social justice. One example might be the prohibition on selling family land that was a product of the distribution of the settlement. While material such as the incident between Ahab and Naboth in 1 Kings 21 suggests that some tried to adhere to those standards, the overall prophetic message indicates that the people largely ignored them.

The demographics of the settlement would have affected significantly the social structure in a culture where the primary means of transportation was on foot. The layout of a community affected community relationships, work practices, and even matters such as marriage, given the distances between communities.

Joshua 13–21 outlines the division of the land between the tribes primarily by defining the boundary lines between the tribal areas but also by listing the "cities" contained within each tribal area along with their "villages" or outlying settlements. The text does not explain the process by which smaller units (e.g., a clan or a portion of it) might have settled a "city" or how various extended families might settle both the city and the surrounding "villages." In day-to-day life, this regional or local distribution through clans and extended families would have been more important to the average Israelite than tribal identity, since it produced the social organizations that determined burden and benefit once the Israelites were settled in the land, and thus provided the foundation of social justice. Consequently, our present concern is to evaluate the final step where the local village or city elders divided the collective field (as discussed above) into what we might call nuclear family holdings.

1. *Tribal distribution.* The conquest narratives assert that each Israelite family was given a piece of land from which they were to live. Kitz proposes that the procedure followed the standard Ancient Near Eastern process of distributing an "undivided inheritance."[50] A standard method of doing that was to cast "lots."[51]

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[49] Based on the material in Genesis, when the family of Jacob settled in Egypt, the entire family was in one region, Goshen. Given that Egyptians disliked the Israelites from the beginning (46:34), there is no reason to believe that as they increased in number they spread much beyond that area. The dispersion of the nation into tribal territories and widely separated "cities" would be a new social structure, especially after a full generation of living in the wilderness as a single encampment.

[50] Specifically, as the estate administrator, Joshua had two tasks: remove squatters from the land and distribute the inheritance among the co-heirs. Anne M. Kitz, "Undivided Inheritance and Lot Casting in the Book of Joshua," *JBL* 119.4 (2000): 607.

[51] Kitz, "Undivided," 610.

As presented in the text, all the families who settled the land were coming from the same forty-year wilderness experience, during which their needs had been taken care of by God (Deut 29:5). Now all were given resources for a new start (Josh 24:13).[52] The book of Joshua asserts that once the nation reached the land that had been promised, it was divided by lots in proportion to tribal size (14:1–5).[53] However, Joshua gives little information about the process, focusing instead on the result. Specifically, it gives several lists of individual "cities" within general outlines of each tribe's portion (Josh 15–19), and those lists vary in detail from tribe to tribe. Although cities (along with their villages) are listed, they are not described and in many cases are not named elsewhere.[54] What is important is that each tribe was given its portion "according to its families" (15:1). Specifically, this followed the directions that God gave through Moses in Numbers 26:53–56 that the land was to be divided "according to the number of names."[55]

2. *Who received land.* In theory, the individuals receiving the land were the physical descendants of Jacob, the third to inherit the covenant that originally gave the land to Abraham.[56] In reality, the group that came out of Egypt as part of the Exodus was a mixed company (Exod 12:38). As will be seen below, these also received land. The names referenced in Numbers 26:53 are the males who had been counted in the just-completed census.[57] The vague reference to "larger" and "smaller" in verse 54[58] likely refers to the two groups specified in the first census in Numbers 1:2, which directed that the census be done "by their families, by their fathers' households." Basically, large families would receive large portions of land (26:53–54). However, the text continues to delineate division by lot (v. 56) with no expla-

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[52] This should be viewed as a fair, but not equal (or even equitable) start. Several variables would affect outcomes, including individual abilities and character (implied in Deut 15:9 and Josh 17:15–18), sizes and composition of the families (illustrated in Num 27:1–7), and resources available on the land given (illustrated in Josh 15:19).

[53] Cole explains how in Numbers 26:52–56, two guidelines were given in anticipation of the settlement. First, the land was to be given with "proportionately greater territory for larger tribes, smaller portions for the less populated. Clan apportionment would be assumed under the aegis of their ancestral tribe." Second, casting of lots provided "providential probability." Since individual sections of land had varying quality, it was God's determination as to who got what. R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers*, NAC 3B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 461. What is not clear in this discussion is how far down into the tribal structure the casting of lots went. That is, how did the individual nuclear family get its share? Judges 1 suggests that distribution at that level may have been at least partially based on a reward system for faithfulness and valor. A significant factor here is that, in fulfillment of God's promise, Joshua claims that the Israelites settled in cities that they had not built (Josh 24:13; Deut 6:10–11).

[54] As Howard observes regarding Joshua 15, "fully two-thirds of the cities mentioned in this chapter (83 out of 122) are found only in contexts such as this, and nothing further is known about them. In addition, many of their locations are uncertain." David M. Howard, *Joshua*, NAC 5 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 340.

[55] Howard, *Joshua*, 303.

[56] Kitz, "Undivided," 606.

[57] Specifically, these were delineated as the males twenty years of age and up who were able to fight (Num 26:2).

[58] The text seems to refer back to the previous census, which divided the tribes by "families." The present study views these as clans based on the remainder of Numbers 26, in agreement with Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 534.

nation as to how the two groups mesh. BDB translates the first group, מִשְׁפָּחָה, as "clan" and the second group, בֵּית אָבוֹת, as "family or clan."[59] While the relationship between the two groups, as well as their relative sizes, is not clear and is debated among scholars, it is generally agreed that the two groups are subdivisions of the tribe.[60] Ashley translates the first term as "clan" and the second as "father's houses," suggesting that the clan is a larger group although "the usage of all of these terms varies in different contexts."[61] While the latter seems closer to a nuclear family, it more likely reflects an extended family, which itself can be rather ambiguous. At a minimum it likely would have included three generations including grandparent[s], a married child (a son), and then grandchildren.[62] However, the term "father's house" more likely included a wider scope of descendants from an individual who was no longer alive, which is evident even today in the Middle East.[63] In that regard, if an "extended family" in the broader sense settled in a village, this could include several "extended families" in the narrower sense—related, but more distantly so.[64] A clan then might have settled in one "village" or a small region including multiple adjacent villages, a scenario hinted at by Antoun.[65] Recognizing the uncertainties involved, this study will consider "clan" and "extended family" as intermediate steps between the tribe and the nuclear family, with a clan being a larger unit. The specific names given in Numbers are thus viewed as clans.

Ashley's solution to the division guideline in Numbers 26 is that the area for the overall tribe was determined by lot, while the territory within that area was divided proportionally. But he does not indicate what the proportions represent in terms of "extended family" or "clan."[66] However, the specificity of allocations given in Joshua 15–19, including boundaries and named cities, seems to imply not merely general geographical areas, but rather more specific plots at least to the clan level.[67] The directions in Numbers 34:13–29 regarding the future apportionment of the land seem to fit those guidelines. If so, then Numbers 26:54, which directs a larger inheritance, likely refers to a clan whose inheritance is subsequently divided by the clan leaders. This would explain why Caleb was given a "portion among the sons of Judah," which he subsequently divided himself.[68]

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[59] *BDB*, "מִשְׁפָּחָה" and "אָב." Clines translates them as "clan" and "phratry" respectively but indicates that the second term is often unclear. David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press; Sheffield Phoenix, 1993–2011), 91.

[60] See Faust, "Family Structure," 233–52; Faust, "Rural Community," 17–39; Hopkins, *Highlands*, 251–61; King and Stager, *Life*, 240–42; Lawrence Stager, "The Patrimonial Kingdom of Solomon," in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palaestina*, edited by William G. Dever and Seymour Gitin (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 70.

[61] Ashley, *Numbers*, 48. This is similar to the view of Faust, "Rural Community," 29.

[62] King and Stager define extended family as a "nuclear family plus married relatives, but only one married couple lives in the household." King and Stager, *Life*, 39. This seems to suggest that one member of the older generation had already passed away, which seems too restrictive.

[63] Antoun characterizes this as a "lineage." Antoun, *Arab Village*, 37–113. See also H. Ammar, "The Social Organization of the Community," in *Readings in Arab Middle Eastern Societies and Cultures*, ed. Abdulla M. Lutfiyya and Charles W. Churchill (1970; repr., Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 112.

[64] This seems to correlate with the distribution noted by Antoun in figures 3 and 4 above.

[65] Antoun, *Arab Village*, 44.

[66] Ashley, *Numbers*, 538. Other views are less helpful. Wenham does not go beyond the tribe, nor does Levine. Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 3 (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1981), 191; Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, AB 4A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 325. Cole's take is merely to assert that "clan apportionment would be assumed under the aegis of their ancestral tribe," although it is not clear what he means by this. Cole, *Numbers*, 461. Keil and Delitzsch seem to take a similar view when they tie this back to the guidelines for the two censuses and argue that the focus is on the number of individual names enrolled by family (cf. Num 1:2). They assert that the purpose of the lots was for geographical situation only. Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commen-*

Even if land portions were given out to the smaller units of extended families (in the narrow sense), the size of the extended family which was given each portion is unknown.[69] Equally important, perhaps, would be the size of inheritance each family received. As calculated elsewhere, it would seem that a typical inheritance could have been about five acres per adult male.[70] While a farm this size seems small by modern Western standards, it does seem to fit what we know about agriculture in the ancient world and even today in parts of the Far East.[71] One other

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tary on the Old Testament, Logos Library System ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 1:796. This is also the conclusion of Milgrom, as well as of King and Stager. Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 227; King and Stager, *Life*, 36–40.

[67] While this may be the intent, there are two problems understanding it. First, the details given for each tribe vary tremendously in that passage. Second, as noted, the distinction between a "clan" and an "extended family" in Israel at this time is unknown.

[68] This situation is difficult to sort out. According to Numbers 32:12, Caleb's father was a Kenizzite. The Kenizzites were one of the Canaanite tribes noted in Genesis 15 as then occupying the land. This could mean the Kenizzites collectively had assimilated into the nation by this time, or it could mean that only Caleb's family had assimilated. In any respect, Caleb was chosen to represent the tribe of Judah when the first advance reconnaissance party was sent out to "spy out" the land in Numbers 13. According to Numbers 34:19, Caleb also represented the tribe of Judah as the tribal leaders apportioned the land. Joshua 14:13–14 notes that Hebron, a city, was given to Caleb as his portion within the territory of Judah. These all indicate that by this point, Caleb was considered an Israelite of the tribe of Judah. Caleb also seemed to acquire Debir (Josh 15:14–16) which he *gave* to his nephew Othniel, who became his son-in-law. In the process, his daughter, Achsah, who married Othniel, noted that she had been *given* a field, and asked for springs, which were *given* to her (15:18–19).

[69] The impression sometimes taken from a casual glance at the OT is that large families were the norm. Jacob, who had a family of about seventy when he moved to Egypt, is a prime example, as are several of the judges, such as Gideon. Gideon is recorded in Judges 8:30 as having seventy sons (in this case, the term בֵּן could include grandsons in addition to sons, as with Jacob). That passage also records that he had many wives. On the other hand, Jacob's father, Isaac, had only a set of twins, Jacob and Esau. His grandfather, Abraham, had one son, Isaac, through his wife Sarah and a second through his concubine, Hagar. He did have six more sons through a third wife, Keturah, after Sarah died (Gen 25). Likewise, several judges had small families: Samson had no children, and he was an only child (Judg 13), and Jephthah seems to have had only a daughter. Later we read of Elimelech who had only two sons (Ruth 1). Avner cites archaeological evidence suggesting typical *extended* families (i.e., of two to three generations) of about twenty-five persons. While he suggests that this was a norm, he noted some sites "could have accommodated a larger number of persons." Uzi Avner, "Ancient Agricultural Settlement and Religion in the Uvda Valley in Southern Israel," *BA* 53.3 (1990): 132. Similarly, King and Stager estimate that Israelite women averaged four live births. While this translates to a nuclear family of six, King and Stager maintain that child mortality lowered the number to four. King and Stager, *Life*, 41.

[70] Michael A. Harbin, "An Old Testament Model of Social Justice" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, New Orleans, 18 November 2009), 4.

[71] Several extensive searches regarding how much land would be needed to support a family have provided widely varied conclusions with multiple reminders that there are a tremendous number of variables, including environment, soil, lifestyle expectations, and diet. Gordon Atkins claims that "agri-

factor to consider is that it generally seems to be assumed that all the families were primarily engaged in agriculture without anyone living in cities plying more specialized skilled trades. In contrast, King and Stager propose that by the Iron Age (which they begin about 1200 BC), specialists existed whose primary vocation was in various skills, including weavers, potters, smiths, and tanners.[72]

As reconstructed, each clan listed in Numbers 26 received a region based on lots. The clan area then would have been divided based on extended family lineages, most likely producing rather homogeneous villages. That is, in a sense everyone in the village would have been related to everyone else, at least distantly.[73] This relationship would seem to have been important in terms of widows and orphans as outliers in that they would be related in varying degrees to everyone in the village.

3. *Social norms.* The biblical text does not really address the rather mundane process of settlement. Nor does it provide much information regarding daily life, as already noted.[74] Still, several practical implications of the village layout that we have presented would have affected daily life, and in turn, they would have impacted social justice provisions. The following are specific deductions regarding daily family life in an Israelite village.

1. Given the proximity of the houses and the extended relationships, families would have been aware of each other's struggles and joys. It seems also that there would have been significant peer pressure (face-to-face instead of Facebook), that would have affected all relationships within the community.
2. In terms of daily work, the typical Israelite farmer would have left the housing cluster in the morning to walk to the portion or portions he

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cultural experts say the minimum in North America would be between 2–17 acres per person [to be self-sufficient, which is more intensive than subsistence living]" (https://thehomesteadinghippy.com/how-much-land-to-be-self-sufficient/). Diane Vuković states, "Depending on whom you ask, you'll hear numbers as low as ½ acre of land to be self-sufficient all the way up to over 50 acres" (https://www.primalsurvivor.net/much-land-need-self-sufficient/). The *Homesteading* website estimates 1–3 hectares (about 2.5–7.5 acres) for self-sufficiency (https://homesteading.com/subsistence-farming). For working purposes, I have been using a response from Charles Willis who stated that in terms of subsistence farming, "any number you pick will be a judgment call" (posted as a response to a question on a website, http://radlab.nl/radsafe/archives/9712/msg00120.html, which was accessed 26 October 2009, and is apparently now defunct). He concludes that it could range from 0.25 to 10 acres per person. He notes that in China there are approximately 4 people per arable acre. For the purposes of this study, it is assumed that as the head of a family, an adult male would be capable of tilling and maintaining about 3–5 acres—for the family. The suggested 5-acre plot used in this study is on the larger end of that spread. It would seem that for Israel, this apparently did not include the pastureland which lay beyond the fields they tilled. Harbin, "Typical Israelite Community."

[72] While King and Stager do not preclude these professionals from also farming, it is likely that these specialists would have lived in cities. This would have reduced the rural population, but we are not sure by how much. King and Stager, *Life*, 85–122, 129–176. See also Frick, "Cities," 14–15; Fritz, "Cities of the Bronze and Iron Ages," *OEANE* 20.

[73] Antoun notes that in eight of the twenty-five villages in the Al Kura subdistrict, a majority of the inhabitants claim to have descended from a common ancestor who lived some 500 years earlier. Antoun, *Arab Village*, 37.

[74] As Matthews and Benjamin put it, the Bible seldom explains farming, simply assuming the audience understands it so well that additional details are unneeded. Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World*, 37.

owned in the single common field. As a matter of practicality, it would be unlikely that he would have returned home until the daily work was done. Thus, as noted in Ruth 2:14, the workers ate lunch on site. At the same time, on days that he was not working in the field, the farmer would have been in the village, most likely at home or sitting in the "gate."

3. The size of field portions was limited by how much a person could effectively maintain through working by hand and with animal-pulled instruments, although it appears that each person may have had multiple portions. These individual portions likely were in the half-acre to acre range.
4. Since everyone walked to his portion(s) of the field, a practical limit existed both on the size of the agricultural community and how far out from the community the tilled part of the collective field extended.[75] While an hour trek might be the effective extent of the daily commute (suggesting an approximate tilled radius of about 3 miles [about 5 kilometers]), it seems likely that a tilled radius of about a mile (about 1.5 kilometers) or less from the city "gate" would be more typical.[76]
5. As shown by Frick, it is likely that there would have been a cluster of villages ringing a given city. He suggests that the primary function of a city was "to extract and invest" agricultural surplus and provide social leadership.[77] He does not address the function of a village, but the model developed suggests that it might be a small hamlet intended to provide mutual support for a small group of farmers. If this structure is correct, then it would seem, as noted under point 2, that the overall territory for a given urban cluster (i.e., a city and its villages) might have a

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[75] Hopkins, *Highlands*, 237–41.

[76] Figure 3 supports this supposition, showing that in Kufr Al-Ma, the tilled region extended about a half mile (about one kilometer) to the south and east, and the northwest. Although Antoun did his study in 1960, most local travel was still on foot or by donkey. A lobe on the north extends about a mile (one and a half kilometers), and another lobe to the west extends about a mile and a half (about two kilometers). In a stylized village (a perfect circle), a mile radius would give a region of about 2000 acres (about 800 hectares) of tilled land. If the typical farm for a male was about 5 acres (about 2 hectares), this would have provided an agricultural base for about 400 nuclear families if all the land was tilled. Looking at this from another perspective, a radius of three miles (approximately five kilometers) might be a good working figure for the territory of a city and its villages. Frick, "Cities," 15. It would seem likely that not much more than a mile (one and a half kilometers) or so beyond the city walls, one might transition from the field of the central city to the field of a village. Figure 2 shows that the spacing between villages identified by Antoun (only villages of a certain lineage are identified) is approximately one and a half to two miles (two to three kilometers). Assuming that each village had a surrounding field of about the same radius, about half a dozen villages could surround a single city under this distribution.

[77] Frick, "Cities," 15. Howard suggests that the "word for villages here [חָצֵר] refers to permanent settlements without walls, that is, outlying farming villages." Howard, *Joshua*, 312. Later in Joshua, the text includes a second category, בָּנוֹת, literally "daughters," that the NASB translates as "towns." For example, Joshua 15:45 refers to Ekron, "with its towns and its villages," using both terms suggesting two different types of settlement. These "daughters" may be slightly larger settlements intermediate in size between cities and villages.

diameter of about six miles (about ten kilometers), or an area of about 25–30 square miles (about 65–78 square kilometers).[78]

6. It seems likely that there would have been stretches of untilled territory between the villages that Israelites moved into at the time of the settlement. Much of that territory still may have been uncleared.[79]
7. We suggested that the model of Caleb in Judges 1:14–15 indicates that the extended family (or possibly clan) leader had the prerogative of granting particular portions of territory to specific individuals or nuclear families. While the Caleb example is presented as part of the conquest, it would seem that even after the land was divided (whether by lot or by grant), portions of "the field" of a given city remained that were not appropriated. This may have had implications in terms of fallow land during Sabbath years, but such implications are beyond the scope of this study.
8. Continuing with the model of Caleb, the text notes that his daughter asked for springs in addition to the land she had already been given. It thus seems likely that a farmer's various portions of the collective field could lie in different directions from the community center. Travel through the Middle East today suggests that a typical separate single field portion might be in the range of one-half acre to an acre (see figure 6). If a typical Israelite had a total inheritance in the range of three to five acres, then he likely had portions in different parts of the field. It is likely that different crops were grown on the different portions (e.g., barley and wheat) with all of the field portions in a certain area growing the same crop, which would be significant for sowing and harvesting, although even in this case, various portions of the "field" might differ in productivity in terms of "micro-ecology."[80] In this situation, it might also be possible that a farmer who needed to "sell" land would "sell" only a portion of what he possessed, with implications in regard to Jubilee provisions.[81]
9. The grazing portions of a community's land likely would have been beyond the plowed fields.[82] Given the further distances from the housing

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[78] This suggestion is based on a conservative evaluation of the numbers proposed in note 76 above. A city-and-villages complex might have a diameter of two to three times what is described if more people lived in the smaller housing clusters of the satellite villages as opposed to the large village (OT city) indicated by Antoun.

[79] An indication of this might be Joshua's admonition to the descendants of Joseph in Joshua 17:14–18 to clear the forests to get more land.

[80] Antoun, *Arab Village*, 6–8.

[81] Michael A. Harbin, "Jubilee and Social Justice," *JETS* 54.4 (2011): 690–91.

[82] While this is primarily an inductive conclusion, the description of a Levitical city in Numbers 35 seems to support it. Ashley notes that scholars do not agree on the meaning of that text, which gives a measurement of 1000 cubits (about 1500 feet or 460 meters) in verse 4 and a measurement of 2000 cubits (about 3000 feet or 915 meters) in verse 5. Ashley, *Numbers*, 545–46. The understanding presented here is that the 1000-cubit measurement would be to the beginning of the Levites' pastureland, which would extend another 1000 cubits all the way around the city. The land inside that 1000-cubit ring would

clusters, it seems likely that flocks and herds normally would have remained in their pastures day and night when they were grazing, although they would have been brought closer after the fields were harvested.[83]

10. Since the residences were located in the community centers separate from the field, even if a person leased all of his land under the Jubilee stipulations, he likely still would have had a place to live.[84] This might explain the situation of Naomi and Ruth in Ruth 2 after they came to Bethlehem from Moab: they were able to move back into Elimelech's house in the village or city.
11. The biblical text sets forth a standard that inherited land could not be sold but would pass on from a father to his son. However, this did not preclude dividing a farm, since the right of the firstborn was a double portion, not the entire farm.[85]
12. If King and Stager's model is valid, then as land passed from generation to generation, the members of the older generation, most likely widows, would live with their married sons. In that context, they would be supported in their old age by the adult children, although it is likely that as long as they were able, they contributed labor to the family pool. This implication is most significant in terms of a baseline for widows, which will be addressed in part 2 of the present study.

In relation to the fifth implication given above, Joshua regularly speaks of a number of cities, *and their villages* (cf. Josh 19:8). While it has been suggested that cities and villages were distinguished because cities were walled and villages were not, as noted above, this was not always the case, although it likely was the norm.[86] More importantly, this model shows how the biblical villages would serve as satellite communities that allowed farmers to live within a reasonable daily walk from their portion of the field—at least in times of peace. As such, the sphere of influ-

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be used for farming by the non-Levites who also dwelt in the Levitical cities (Hebron in Joshua 21 is a key example). As Noordtzij and others point out, the Levitical cities clearly included non-Levites as occupants. A. Noordtzij, *Numbers,* trans. Ed van der Maas, BSC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 296. Even if the Levites did not farm because of their liturgical responsibilities, the non-Levites within the Levitical cities likely did. If so, this understanding of the Levitical city would place the end of the tilled soil at a mandatory 1000 cubits, i.e., about 0.3 miles (approximately 500 meters) from the walls. However, for the non-Levitical cities, the distance of the grazing ring from the walls likely was more flexible, with the practical limits noted above. Since the measurements began at the city walls, a larger city would have a larger core, and thus more tilled land within walking distance from the city gates.

[83] Exodus 22:5 suggests that after a harvest, flocks would be allowed to graze in the harvested field portions to help finish off stubble and to then fertilize the land. Baker notes a Babylonian practice of grazing sheep on agricultural land for at least part of the year. David L. Baker, *Tight Fists or Open Hands? Wealth and Poverty in Old Testament Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 58.

[84] This may explain the distinction between the sale of houses in walled cities and those in villages (Lev 25:29–31).

[85] Contra Kitz, "Undivided," 610 (see note 52 above). This would have had significant implications in terms of both the Sabbath year and the year of Jubilee provisions. See Michael A. Harbin, "The Manumission of Slaves in Jubilee and Sabbath Years," *TynBul* 63.1 (2012): 68–70.

[86] Frick, "Cities," 15.

ence of a city would incorporate a number of villages that surrounded the larger city center.[87] If the cities were indeed walled, then in times of unrest, these farmers could flee there for protection.[88] However, a more basic function of a city would seem to be that these larger population centers also provided locations for commercial development where skilled craftsmen and artisans might set up shops and focus on non-agricultural careers—signs of a maturing and complex culture.[89]

VI. SUMMATION

As noted, previous studies have provided a good picture of life in ancient Israel, but they have focused on individual families and residences. In part 1 of this study, we have expanded that picture to provide some insight into how an individual family likely fit within the culture of the local village or city. This expanded picture might suggest that the *extended* family was expected to provide support for others within the family lineage. This raises several questions in terms of social justice. How did the provisions set forth in the Torah especially apply to a widow? Given the case of such a widow,[90] how does an orphan fit into the picture? More debatable is the question regarding the resident alien. Furthermore, given the disparate circumstances surrounding the three groups, why are they addressed collectively in terms of this aspect of social justice? It is with this picture and these questions in mind that in part 2 we evaluate how each of these three groups of social outliers was constituted and how the social justice provisions might apply to them.

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[87] The primary question regarding whether the city was walled or not stems from the number listed in Joshua where it describes the conquest of Canaan proper. Joshua 15 lists approximately 102 cities for Judah alone. No specific cities are cited for Ephraim and Manasseh, while the remaining seven tribes have approximately 130 cities listed (112 are numbered for Benjamin, Simeon, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, and Napthali, and 18 are listed but not numbered for Dan). This gives a total of about 232 cities that may or may not have had walls. The primary thing to keep in mind when thinking about the density of cities is that the primary means of transportation was walking.

[88] This seems to be reflected in Leviticus 26:25, which warns that in the case of disobedience, “when you gather together in your cities, I will send pestilence among you, so that you shall be delivered into enemy hands.”

[89] Frick, “Cities,” 14–15.

[90] Steinberg argues that the basic issue is one of socio-economic principles. Naomi Steinberg, “Romancing the Widow: The Economic Distinctions between the *’almānâ,* the *’iššâ-’almānâ* and the *’ēšet-hammēt*” (paper presented at “Women and Property in Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean Societies,” a conference at the Center for Hellenic Studies, Harvard University, 2003), 2–3; available at http://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/1219.