

12. CITIES, VILLAGES, AND FARMSTEADS: THE LANDSCAPE OF LEVITICUS 25:29–31

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THE relationship between the study of material culture, as revealed by archaeology, and the biblical text has received a great deal of scholarly attention. In most cases, archaeological finds are used to illustrate the text or to answer biblically driven questions. But after well over a century of searching the archaeological record for correlations with the Bible, it seems that this approach, worthy in itself, has been exhausted. A different approach, one that uses the archaeological finds as the starting-point for archaeological inquiry, can bring new insights, not only into the societies that existed at the time but also into the world behind the biblical text.

The case study to be discussed here is the Jubilee and the settlement system of ancient Israel in the late Iron Age. This study grew from my long-term research project on Iron Age rural settlements (see Faust 1995a; 1995b; 1997a; 1997b; 1999a; 1999b; 2000a; 2000b; 2003a; 2003b). It did not initially aim to illuminate the Bible; the correlations between the archaeological data and the biblical text emerged only after the analysis of the finds had advanced.

I will begin by presenting the biblical data from Leviticus 25:29–31 and noting the difficulties in the prevailing interpretations. This will be followed by a short discussion of the archaeological evidence regarding the rural settlements of late Iron Age Israel. We will then see how familiarity with the latter solves the problems in the text.

The Law of the Jubilee

The law of the jubilee has received a great deal of scholarly attention. The dating of this law, the background for its development, and the question of whether it was ever applied, have all been discussed (e.g., Lowenstam 1958b:578–82; Wenham 1979: 317–24; Milgrom 2001:2241–48; Wright 1992; Fried and Freedman 2000:2257–70). In brief, the jubilee is “the fiftieth year occurring at the end of the seven sabbatical cycles of seven years each, in which all land was returned to its ancestral owners and all Israelite slaves were freed” (Schifman 1996:549). The jubilee is mentioned and described in Lev. 25:8–17, 23–56; 27:16–25; and Numbers 36:4.

Whether the law was ever applied does not concern us here because a law, even a utopian one, re-

lates to an existing reality and is set against a “real” background. As King and Stager write:

For our purposes, then, it matters little whether the biblical accounts are “true” in the positivistic sense of some historians and biblical scholars. It is enough to know that the ancient Israelites believed them to be so. The stories must have passed some test of verisimilitude, that is, having the appearance of being true or real. In this sense the biblical account and many other ancient accounts, however self-serving and tendentious, become grist for the cultural historian’s mill. [King and Stager 2001:7]

Although this is said in reference to biblical stories, it is also true with respect to the biblical laws. In the words of the classicist Oswyn Murray:

It does not matter whether the stories which it uses are true, as long as they are believed to be true. And even a forgery is an important piece of evidence for the period that perpetrated it, since it reveals more clearly than a genuine article the conceptions and beliefs about the past of the age that created it. This principle of unconscious revelation through representation . . . is one of the most powerful tools in the modern historian’s study of mentalities. [Oswyn Murray, quoted in King and Stager 2001:8]

The Jubilee and בתי החצרים in Leviticus 25

Let us examine the settlement terminology used in Leviticus 25, especially in verses 29–31. Generally speaking, the law of jubilee prescribes that the land shall return to its original owner in the fiftieth year. Lev. 25:29–31, however, refers to the fate of houses, and it is those verses we wish now to discuss. We shall first present them in Hebrew (MT) followed by the English translation.

אִישׁ כִּי-יִמְכַר בֵּית-מוֹשָׁב עִיר חוֹמָה וְהִיָּתָה גְּאֻלָּתוֹ עַד-תֵּם שָׁנָת מִמְּכָרוֹ יָמִים תִּהְיֶה גְּאֻלָּתוֹ. וְאִם לֹא-יִגְאָל עַד-מְלֹאת לֹו שָׁנָה תְּמִימָה וְקָם הַבַּיִת אֲשֶׁר-בָּעִיר אֲשֶׁר-לֹא (קָרִי: לוֹ) חֹמָה לְצִמְתָּהּ לְקַנָּה אֹתוֹ לְדֹרְתָיו לֹא יִצָּא בַּיָּבֵל. וּבְתֵי חֲצָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֵין-לָהֶם חֹמָה סָבִיב עַל-שְׂדֵה הָאָרֶץ יִחְשָׁב גְּאֻלָּה תִּהְיֶה-לוֹ וּבַיָּבֵל יִצָּא.

If anyone sells a dwelling house in a walled city, it may be redeemed until a year has elapsed since its sale; the right of redemption shall be one year. If it is not redeemed before a full year has elapsed, a house

that is in a walled city shall pass in perpetuity to the purchaser, throughout the generations; it shall not be released in the jubilee. But houses in villages that have no walls around them shall be classed as open country; they may be redeemed, and shall be released in the jubilee. [Lev. 25:29–31, NRSV]

We shall comment on one word in this translation later. The main question to address is why, according to these verses, there is a difference between houses in walled “cities” (עיר חומה or עיר אשר לו חומה) and houses in “villages” (בתי החצרים). Many translations and interpretations have touched upon this question. Most scholars have understood these verses simply as contrasting walled cities with unwalled villages, as in the NRSV translation given above (see, e.g., Noth 1965; Porter 1976; Wenham 1979; Bess 1963; Kuchman 1996; Milgrom 2001; as well as Joosten 1996; Budd 1996; Snaith 1967; Wright 1992; and Hartley 1992). The mere existence of a city wall is seen indirectly, and sometimes even directly, as the most important legal element determining the fate of the house. Many scholars have therefore opined that the law differentiates not only between urban and rural sectors but also between houses in walled versus unwalled towns. Houses in the latter had the same fate as these in the rural sector (e.g., Noth 1965:190; Kuchman 1996:193).

But why is there a difference in the legal status of houses in towns as opposed to villages? Many scholars believe that this was because Israelite laws concerning land applied to the rural sector only while older Canaanite law still dominated the urban sphere (Noth 1965:190; Porter 1976:202; Bess 1963:81f.; Joosten 1996:156; Wright 1990: 125), presumably because there was, throughout the Iron Age, a sizable Canaanite segment in the urban sector (Hartley 1992:439; from a different perspective, see also Faust 2000a; 2005; Finkelstein 1999). Others believe that it was a result of changes in the ownership of land among the urban population (Lowenstam 1958b:580; Weinfeld 2000:176) and even served as “a barrier against the tendency toward socioeconomic development, which led to the appropriation of walled cities from the laws of jubilee and redemption” (Kuchman 1996:193; my translation).¹ Wright (1992: 1027) suggests that the “primary intention of the redemption and jubilee provisions was to preserve the economic viability of families through the secure

possession of their inherited land”; unlike “city houses,” “village dwellings were treated as part of the rural scene.” This distinction is elaborated by Milgrom (2001:2198f.). While also connecting the urban law with Canaanite law, Milgrom stresses that redemption was not relevant for houses but only for land, which is why in a walled city the house belonged (after a year) to the purchaser in perpetuity.² A house in a village, in contrast, was regarded as part of the land (Milgrom 2001:2199f.). Following Philo (*The Special Laws* ii 116), Milgrom believes that the village houses were “farm buildings” and that the “villages are the residences of the farmers and are inseparable from the land they work” (Milgrom 2001: 2200).

As we will see below, it appears that Milgrom correctly identifies the essence of the law, which connects the houses of the חצרים with fields (as the wording of the law indeed states, but contrary to most other interpretations). But he does not supply a good explanation for why houses in a village have the same fate as the land. After all, houses in villages were built within nucleated settlements and not directly on the agricultural land (see Dar 1986; Amit 1991; Riklin 1997; Faust 1995a; 1997a; 2000b).

Clearly, previous scholars have understood the geographical terminology in the following way: the city that is mentioned in the verses as “a walled city” is indeed a city surrounded by a wall. The חצרים are unwalled villages, hence the translation “houses in villages that have no walls around them.” Moreover, many scholars have explicitly cited the mere existence of a wall as the most important factor in differentiating between a city and a village in the biblical period: cities were surrounded by a fortification wall while villages were unwalled (Drinkard 1996:186; Blenkinsopp 1997:54; Frick 1970:44–45; Uffenheimer 1968:207–8). Some have even referred to it as the only factor (e.g., Drinkard 1996). This differentiation seems to be supported by the frequent combination of עיר and חצרייה, which is understood as the city and its (daughter) villages. Some have therefore assumed that when a settlement name includes the חצר component (e.g., חצר שועל in Josh. 19:3), it is a daughter village of one of the walled cities (e.g., Frick 1970:44–45).

We have seen that many scholars agree that the reason for the difference between urban and rural settlements is that the Canaanite law of land ownership was dominant in urban settings. For our pur-

¹ This is a problematic explanation because the law does not serve as a barrier against this development but rather acknowledges and even accepts it (as viewed by Lowenstam 1958b:580, see below). For a more complex suggestion, see Kuchman (1996:191–92).

² As to why it was possible to redeem the house at all, Milgrom’s answer is that it results from the “merciful foundations of the jubilee legislation” (Milgrom 2001:2199).

poses, however, the question of whether the law regarding the city reflects Canaanite law, or specific social circumstances, or some combination of the two, is a minor issue in the discussion of Lev. 25:29–31. Regardless of whether they invoke Canaanite law, all of the scholars cited above agree that Leviticus differentiates between the rural sector (villages and hamlets) and the fortified urban sector, and that the houses in these two sectors had different fates.

The Problem

This prevailing interpretation suffers from several drawbacks, in my opinion. First, the contrast in the verses is not between walled cities and unwalled towns or villages. That dichotomy results from what I believe is a mistranslation of the Hebrew text that stems from a misunderstanding of the terminology and the geographical and social reality behind it. The word translated as “city” is עיר. In Biblical Hebrew, however, עיר can refer to a settlement of any size (see Portugali 1984:284f.; Bendor 1996:99f. and n. 103; Schloen 2001:160; Kempinski 1987:59; Hulst 1976: 268–72; Zevit 2001:625). This is shown by verses like Deut. 3:5, where עיר is used to designate both fortified settlements and unfortified ones. The same is true in 2 Kings 17:9 and 18:8, where עיר is used for settlements ranging from fortified cities to simple watchtowers (see also Num. 13:19). The word therefore does not differentiate between a city and a village but between a settlement and something that is not a settlement.

In Lev. 25:29–31, that which is not a settlement is called בתי ההצרים, while the term עיר encompasses both cities and villages. A similar, though not identical, dichotomy can be seen in Deut. 28:3: “Blessed shall you be in the עיר, and blessed shall you be in the field”; and also in Deut. 28:16: “Cursed shall you be in the עיר, and cursed shall you be in the field.” These verses contrast the עיר (traditionally translated as “city”) with farmland; that is, the settlement as a place of dwelling is contrasted with the open field. Returning to Leviticus, it is clear that these verses contrast settlements and בתי ההצרים—something that is not a settlement.

Why have scholars missed the contrast in Lev. 25:29–31 between settlements and nonsettlements and have seen instead a contrast between cities and villages? Presumably, it is because this text appears to dichotomize walled cities and unwalled בתי ההצרים. In many historical periods, cities were walled while villages were not, so biblical scholars have assumed that the presence of a wall is the major factor in the dichotomy. It is clear, however, that the contrast be-

tween city and village does not derive from the language of the law, but is an interpretation resulting from the importance attributed to the wall by modern scholars.

As we have seen, the assumed dichotomy between city and village has even led scholars to posit two legal systems, one for cities (based on Canaanite law) and one for villages (based on Israelite law). But this distinction is not supported by the biblical text or by our current understanding of the social development in Iron Age Israel. The notion of two different legal systems was put forward only because interpreters have not found any other way to explain why there is a different law for houses in “cities” than for houses in “villages” (as they interpret the law).

To be sure, the wall around the settlement clearly has a legal significance, but previous interpretations of Lev. 25:29–31 do not explain the importance of the wall. Why would there be a different law for a house in a walled city as opposed to an unwalled settlement? It could be argued that the law itself has created this dichotomy, imposing a theoretical distinction with no basis in reality. A different reading of the law, however, drawing upon the rich archaeological information we now possess, makes sense of the distinction. An examination of the Israelite settlement system of the late Iron Age enables us to understand these verses.

Rural Settlements in the Iron Age II

The archaeology of ancient Israel used to concentrate on the large sites—a tendency that some scholars characterize as “tell minded” (Ahlstrom 1982:25) and have reproached for its “urban bias” (London 1989). Rural sites were not given much attention. For example, Herzog (1992), in his seminal and oft-quoted work on settlement and fortification planning in the Iron Age, referred to various types of settlements, from capital cities to administrative centers to smaller provincial towns. But this is where he stopped. He did not discuss any nonurban settlement. The “lower” end of the settlement continuum was simply ignored by the vast majority of scholars. The lack of data led Holladay (1995:373, 375, 392), in an important paper on Iron Age society, to refer to walled towns like Tell Beit Mirsim and Tell en-Naşbeh as “villages,” probably because these were the smallest and simplest Iron II settlements with which he was familiar. But many rural sites have been excavated in recent years, mainly in salvage excavations (see, e.g., Dar 1986; Riklin 1997; Amit 1991; Covello-Paran 1996; see also Faust and Safrai 2005), and the accumulating data enable us to draw various conclusions regarding

the rural sector (Faust 1995a; 1995b; 1997a; 1997b; 2000a; 2000b; 2003a; 2003b). Broadly speaking, there are three types of rural sites: large villages, small villages (hamlets), and farmsteads. This is not the place for a lengthy summary of the evidence from the rural sector, but one observation is of great importance for the present discussion, namely, that almost all excavated Iron II villages were surrounded by a boundary wall, a phenomenon evident also in some single-occupation sites that were only surveyed and never excavated. This is the situation, for example, at Khirbet Jamain (Dar 1986), Beit Aryeh (Riklin 1997), Khirbet Jarish (Amit 1991), Khirbet Malta (Covello-Paran 1996), Khirbet Kla (Eitam 1980), Mevasseret Yerushalayim (Edelstein and Kislev 1981), Kurnet Bir et-Tel (Finkelstein, Lederman, and Bunimovitz 1997:447), and many other sites. It is this observation that led to the development of the ideas expressed in this article.

Iron Age Villages and Biblical Terminology

The existence of boundary walls around Iron Age villages sheds new light on the distinction between the עיר with a wall and places with no walls. As already stated, the word עיר refers to a settlement of indeterminate size and not to a “city” in the modern sense of the word. In Lev. 25:29–31 the word has been interpreted as representing the urban sector because these verses stress the existence of a wall, which modern scholars have assumed must pertain to the urban sector as opposed to the rural sector. But if all settlements, urban and rural alike, were surrounded by a boundary wall, there is no reason to assume that the phrase עיר הוּמָה (“walled settlement”) is meant to differentiate between cities and villages. The dichotomy was therefore not between walled cities and unwalled villages, as the latter hardly existed, but between any walled settlement, city and village alike, and the בתי ההצרים, which are neither a settlement nor walled. The reference to a wall is not a legal criterion but merely a reflection of the reality that all settlements were surrounded by a wall of some kind. Lev. 25:29 should therefore be translated: “if anyone sells a dwelling house in a walled settlement [or simply “a settlement,” because the word “walled” was added just for descriptive purposes], it may be redeemed until a year has elapsed since its sale.”

The exceptions to the law are the בתי ההצרים. These are not regarded as settlements, so what are they? A close examination of the archaeological record is very helpful in this matter and, in conjunction with a careful reading of the text, can solve the problem.

Archaeological investigation has shown that there were habitation sites in Iron Age Israel that did not constitute “settlements.” I am referring to isolated farmsteads in which there lived only one family and not a larger community. Such farmsteads are known from all over the country (Faust 2003), including the region of Samaria (Hizmi 1996) and especially its western slopes (Finkelstein 1978; 1981; Faust 2003; Faust 2006; Dar 1982; Yeivin and Edelstein 1970), the Hebron hill country (Amit 1992), and the area around Jerusalem (Seligman 1994; Feig 1995; Maitlis 1993; Faust 1997b). They were isolated structures located on agricultural land amid agricultural installations such as cisterns and terraces. It is these farmsteads that were the houses of the unwalled הַצְרִים in Leviticus 25, in contrast to the houses found within walled settlements.

Such an interpretation of Lev. 25:29–31 does not result simply from reconstructing the settlement system on the basis of the archaeological evidence, but also from the wording of the biblical text itself. Verse 31 specifically states that these houses “shall be classed as open country” (note that the word translated here as “country” can also be translated as “field” and in the original is identical to the word used in Deut. 28:3 and 16, cited above). This is why “they may be redeemed, and they shall be released on the jubilee.” Unlike houses in walled settlements (villages included), the houses in isolated farmsteads could not be separated from the agricultural lands on which they sat, which is why they are grouped with agricultural fields in the law of the jubilee and shared the same fate.

Although this is true with respect to Iron Age farmsteads in general, it is even more clearly the case for farmsteads in the vicinity of Jerusalem. These were somewhat different in form from the farmsteads in other parts of the country because the farmhouse stood alone in the field between installations, terraces, and additional buildings, in contrast to farmsteads in other regions, where the house was part of a larger architectural complex that included additional structures, installations, and a courtyard (Faust 1997b; 2003b).³

The archaeological evidence, therefore, sheds light on the biblical terminology and allows us to under-

³ The differences between the farmsteads in the vicinity of Jerusalem and those in the rest of the country apparently stemmed from the high density of settlement around Jerusalem, which was Judah’s primary city. This density had reduced security problems in the area and turned animal husbandry into an insignificant branch of the economy (see Faust 1997; 2003).

stand the law properly. We no longer need to assume that the law in Leviticus 25 knew of, and accepted, a separate (Canaanite) legal system for urban settlements. The same principle applied in all cases. A house in a settlement (any settlement) could be bought and sold because it stood by itself and was not encumbered by the land on which it stood and thus by legal procedures regarding the land.⁴ Farmland, on the other hand, was to be returned to its original owner in the jubilee year. Lev. 25:21–23 is an appendix to the main jubilee law (which focuses on land), clarifying the disposition of houses. Houses within walled settlements were not exempted from the jubilee due to the existence of a Canaanite population or different social processes, but simply because these houses were not tied to particular plots of farmland and it was only the land (and not houses) that returned to its original owner in the jubilee. The only houses affected by the jubilee law were the *בתי ההצרים* because, unlike houses within settlements, they were not regarded as independent property but as part of the fields on which they stood, and it was impossible to return a field to its original owner while the house remained in the hands of the buyer.

Additional Implications

We have seen that the biblical text of Lev. 25:29–31 can be understood in relation to the settlement system of the late Iron Age. This implies that this settlement reality lay in the background of the biblical law of the jubilee, however artificial or utopian that law may have been. The law of the jubilee is part of the Holiness Code (H), but there is little agreement regarding the date and social background of the Holiness Code, or the precise relationship between it and other textual sources. A variety of views have been espoused, placing it in various contexts in the Iron Age and Persian period (Knohl 1987; Eissfeldt 1965:236–39; Milgrom 1991: 3–35; also Sun 1992 and Milgrom 1992, with additional references). H is usually associated with the Priestly source (P), but there is no agreement regarding the date of P either, which has been attributed to various contexts—preexilic, exilic, and postexilic—from the Iron Age to the Persian period (Eissfeldt 1965:207–8; Rofé 1994; Clines 1993:580; Hurwitz 1974; Wenham 1979:13; Weinfeld 1979:28–33; Friedman 1987; Milgrom 1991:12–13; Schwartz 1999:32–33).

⁴ It was possible to redeem a house within a year, but this is probably due, as Milgrom suggests, to the “merciful foundations of the jubilee legislation” (above). After a year the house belonged to the purchaser in perpetuity.

The close match between the law of the jubilee and the settlement reality of the late Iron Age seems to support a late Iron Age dating (at least for H). But it is not sufficient to show that the settlement reality of this period is compatible with the law. In order for this correlation between archaeology and the Bible to be of any value in dating the biblical text, it needs to be shown that the settlement reality of other periods (i.e., the Babylonian “exilic” period and the Persian period) could not have been the cultural background of these verses. While a lengthy discussion is beyond the scope of the present paper, suffice it to say that the exilic period is by no means a likely background, especially in Judah, because the countryside was devastated, especially near Jerusalem (Stern 2001; Faust 2003a; Faust and Safrai 2005). This was not the period in which farmsteads flourished.

As for a background in the Persian period, this also seems unlikely because the countryside was much less populated than during the Iron Age. The entire Persian period lay in the shadow of the collapse of the Iron Age society (see Faust 2004; 2007 for a detailed discussion of the settlements of the Persian period). Furthermore, it is very tempting to ascribe the description of the *הצרים*, which are part of the fields, to the unique situation in the late Iron Age in the area around Jerusalem, where farmhouses and other structures were scattered in the fields and were not concentrated into complexes as in other regions.

On the other hand, the text can also be understood quite well against the background of the more normal type of Iron Age farmsteads found throughout the country, and not only with regard to those near Jerusalem. And in any case, this can be only a preliminary attempt to date the text on the basis of its archaeological background because the information we currently possess concerning the Persian period is still incomplete and we need to study that period more thoroughly before any conclusions can be reached.⁵

Summary and Conclusions

Triggered by the discovery that Iron II villages were surrounded by boundary walls, research is being directed toward the cultural, social, and even legal implications of this reality. And this leads to a new look at the jubilee. It is debated whether this law was ever

⁵ Theoretically, it is possible that the law of the jubilee was written in the Persian period in reference to the remembered reality prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, but should this be the case, for all practical purposes we could consider such a law to be reflective of the late Iron Age.

implemented, but that does not concern us here because even a utopian law reflects a real background. An examination of the settlement reality of the Iron II period, followed by a detailed re-reading of the text, enables each type of data to illuminate the other.

Together, the archaeological and textual data present us with a coherent picture. Most studies of Lev. 25:29–31 have not correctly identified the meaning of the law. Scholars have assumed that the text distinguishes houses in cities from those in villages, and this requires them to explain why there is a different law for each. Explanations have included the suggestion that Canaanite law was practiced in the Israelite urban sector or that the difference was a result of socioeconomic processes. But neither of these suggestions is supported by our current understanding of the sociodemographic processes that took place in the period of the monarchy (Faust 2005) and they contradict both the language and the spirit of the text—and they do not take into account the archaeological finds. Furthermore, biblical scholars have ignored the most important clue supplied by the text itself, which explains that the houses of the *הצרים* are classified with the agricultural fields.

Understanding the settlement situation in the Iron Age II, when all settlements, cities and villages alike, were surrounded by boundary walls, enables us to understand the meaning of the text and the rationale of the law. Verses 29–31 do not differentiate between cities and villages: the term *עיר* refers to any settlement, villages included. The *הצרים* are not settlements and are therefore not villages or nucleated settlements but rather isolated farmsteads. The distinction in the text is between houses in settlements and scattered farmhouses (and as we shall presently see, this distinction is also secondary). Walls are mentioned because all settlements, both cities and villages, were walled, and this differentiated them from farmsteads.

The differential treatment of houses in two contexts is not due to the coexistence of two legal systems, one for the city and one for the village. The difference is between the legal status of houses versus farmland. The houses of the *הצרים* were part of the farmland because they had no existence without it, which is why they had the same status as land, unlike other houses. This is the intention of verse 31: to limit the special status of houses (that they can be owned by their purchasers in perpetuity) by stating that the houses of the *הצרים* were different because they had the same status as the land of which they were a part. After all, it was inconceivable to let the purchaser keep the farmhouse while the farmland was returned to the original owner.

The law of the jubilee deals with returning land to its original owner. The verses discussed in this paper are a sort of qualification stating that the law does not apply to houses. The status of houses is different and a transaction involving a house is final (after a year). The last verse (31) is meant to qualify the qualification and make clear that farmhouses, although technically houses, have the same status as the land, from which they are inseparable. In modern language, Lev. 25:29–31 should therefore be read:

If anyone sells a dwelling house in a settlement [lit. a walled settlement]⁶, it may be redeemed until a year has elapsed since its sale. If it is not redeemed before that time, a house in a settlement shall pass in perpetuity to the purchaser, and it will not be released in the jubilee. But farmhouses, with no walls around them,⁷ are classed as fields; and may therefore be redeemed, and they shall be released in the jubilee.

Appendix: הצר in the Bible and the Ancient Near East

The *הצר* in the Bible and the ancient Near East has received a great deal of scholarly attention. The terms *הצר* and *הצרים* are used in many places in the Bible and in other sources. The biblical examples are usually considered to reflect two different Semitic words which have come to be spelled the same way in Biblical Hebrew. One of these words, which is irrelevant for our discussion, refers to the area around a house, an enclosure or courtyard (*BDB* s.v. *הצר* (I); Kadari 1968:221; Hamp 1986:134–35; Clines 1996:296). This word reflects the Proto-Semitic root *ḤṬR* (cf. Aramaic *חוטרא*), which denotes a fenced area or pen (Lowenstam 1958a:273–74; Malamat 1962:143–50; 1963:183).

The second word, which is relevant for the present discussion, refers to a small unwalled site (*BDB* s.v. *הצר* (II); Kadari 1968:222; Hamp 1986:133–35). According to Malamat (1963:183), it reflects Proto-Semitic *ḤṢR*, which means “settlement” or habitation, in the sense of a dwelling for people and not for animals. There is no doubt that this is a “settlement form” that lies at the bottom of the settlement spectrum (Lowenstam 1958a:272; Portugali 1984:282). In the following we will discuss only this meaning.

In many instances in the Bible and in other sources (e.g., the Mari archives), the term *הצר* is mentioned in relation to seminomads (e.g., Jer. 49:28–33; Isa. 42:11), and this may be reflected in the relatively wide-

⁶ The “wall” is stressed in the law because it refers to a visible phenomenon that served to distinguish nucleated settlements—urban or rural communities—from isolated farmsteads.

⁷ This is also a descriptive clause.

spread use of the word as part of settlement names in the inheritance of the tribe of Simeon (Malamat 1963:184). According to Lowenstam: “In the *הַצְרִים*, which are settlements that are more than nomad camps but are not yet walled cities, dwelt mainly people who subsided on grazing, such as the Ishmaelites” (1958:273). Interestingly, Gophna (1963; 1964; 1966; 1970) describes *הַצְרִים* which he discovered in the northern and western parts of the Negev. These are extremely small sites that existed for brief periods. It appears that these were indeed settlement sites of nomads, and are worthy of the name *הַצֵּר* (in this meaning).

But *הַצְרִים* existed throughout the country. On 80% of the occasions in which a *הַצֵּר* is mentioned in the Bible, it is described as being close to a settlement (*עִיר*); for example, in the topographical lists in the book of Joshua (Portugali 1984:283). It seems, therefore, that *הַצְרִים* existed throughout the country. This wide dispersion accords well with the fact that that *הַצֵּר*, in the meaning discussed in this paper, cannot be equated only with the settlements of nomads but corresponds to small sites with one or two structures, such as farmsteads.

It is likely that the word *הַצֵּר* (from Proto-Semitic *ḤṢR*) has two separate meanings: (1) a type of settlement of nomads in pastoral zones, as seems to be represented both in Mari and in the Bible; and (2) a type of habitation in agricultural zones. In contrast to what is often thought, the latter were farmsteads and not villages (see Faust 1995a; 2003b). The idea that *הַצְרִים* were farmsteads was suggested some time ago, though not as part of a detailed discussion but more

as an assumption (Edelstein and Gibson 1983:23; for a more detailed analysis, see Edelstein and Milevski 1994:17–19; Maitlis 1993:99 explicitly connected the two, although his entire discussion is problematic).

Basically, *הַצֵּר* denotes an isolated structure (or several isolated structures) in the countryside. In most cases it relates to farmsteads, as in Leviticus 25, and perhaps also to placenames in the inheritance of the tribe of Simeon, which should perhaps be understood as “the farmstead of Shual” and “the farmstead of Susa.” The same word was used to describe sporadic settlements of seminomads in the Mari texts and in Isaiah and Jeremiah. However, Biblical Hebrew does not distinguish the socioeconomic role or origin of the inhabitants but describes all isolated structures with the same word. From the typological perspective of modern scholarship the word has two distinct meanings, denoting either a farmstead or structures built by seminomads (perhaps in the process of settling down). In Biblical Hebrew, however, there is only one meaning: an isolated structure or structures in the open country.

Acknowledgments:

I would like to thank Prof. Abraham Malamat, Prof. Shmuel Vargon, and Mr. Avi Shveka for reading and commenting on earlier drafts of this paper. The responsibility for the ideas expressed in this article, and for any mistake or error, is of course mine alone. I would like to thank the Dr. S. Krauthammer Chair in Archaeology and the Moskowitz and Straus Cathedras, all at Bar-Ilan University, for their assistance. A shorter and somewhat different version of this paper appears in Hebrew in *Studies in Bible and Exegesis Presented to Moshe Garsiel*.

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