

BIBLICAL MISTRANSLATIONS OF ‘EUPHRATES’ AND THE IMPACT ON THE BORDERS OF ISRAEL

Dr. Pallant Ramsundar

Abstract

The Word ‘Euphrates’ used in most translations of the Old Testament, stems from the Hebrew ‘perath’ meaning ‘to break forth’ or ‘rushing’¹. This paper examines the context of the Biblical verses in which the name is used and shows that, in many instances, the translation to ‘Euphrates’ cannot be correct.

Keywords: Ancient Israel, Euphrates, Promises to Abraham

1 Introduction

The Euphrates is central to Biblical claims of the territorial inheritance of the patriarch Abraham and his offspring, with present-day political implications for the region. Since the Old Testament Hebrew does not use the actual name ‘*Euphrates*’, it is important that any translations of the relevant original Hebrew terms be validated. This can be done by a careful examination of the context in which the name is used.

2 Genesis 15:18-21

The first time the name “*Euphrates*” is used in connection to land promised to Abraham (previously called Abram) is in Gen 15:18 ~ 21.

(NKJV)

Gen 15:18- On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates—

Gen 15:19- the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites,

Gen 15:20- the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,

¹ Strong, James. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance. [ed.] Rick Meyers. s.l. : e-Sword, 2014.

Gen 15:21- the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

The 'river of Egypt' is not the Nile, but is traditionally understood to be the Wadi El Arish river valley east of the Nile, terminating at Arish on the Mediterranean Sea (See Figure 1). A google earth examination clearly shows the dried-up river course.



Figure 1: Ancient Egypt²

Here as elsewhere, 'Euphrates' is translated from the Hebrew 'perath' meaning 'to break forth' or 'rushing'. The present-day Euphrates originates in modern day Turkey, flowing through Syria and Iraq, and terminates in the Persian Gulf (see Figure 2).

When we look at the demographic disposition in the region today, we see that the area described in Gen 15:18 is indeed populated by descendants of Abraham. Abraham had many sons. Ismael and Isaac are the most well-known, but Gen 25:1 ~ 6 lists six sons by Keturah and possibly unnamed descendants by other concubines (plural). Similar population growth

² Rudd, Steve. Map of Ancient Egypt. [Online] <http://www.bible.ca/maps/maps-master-archeological-bible-study-map-israel-promised-land-ancient-egypt.jpg>.

applied to all groups will likely show more descendants from Keturah than Abraham's other sons.

Present day Israel is largely populated by repatriates from the tribe of Judah, a great-grandson of Abraham. The Arabs, who trace their lineage to Abraham by Ismael, Esau and the sons of Keturah³, largely populate the Arabian Peninsula. Jordan which trace its roots to Lot, the nephew of Abraham, is likely intermixed with Abraham's descendants.

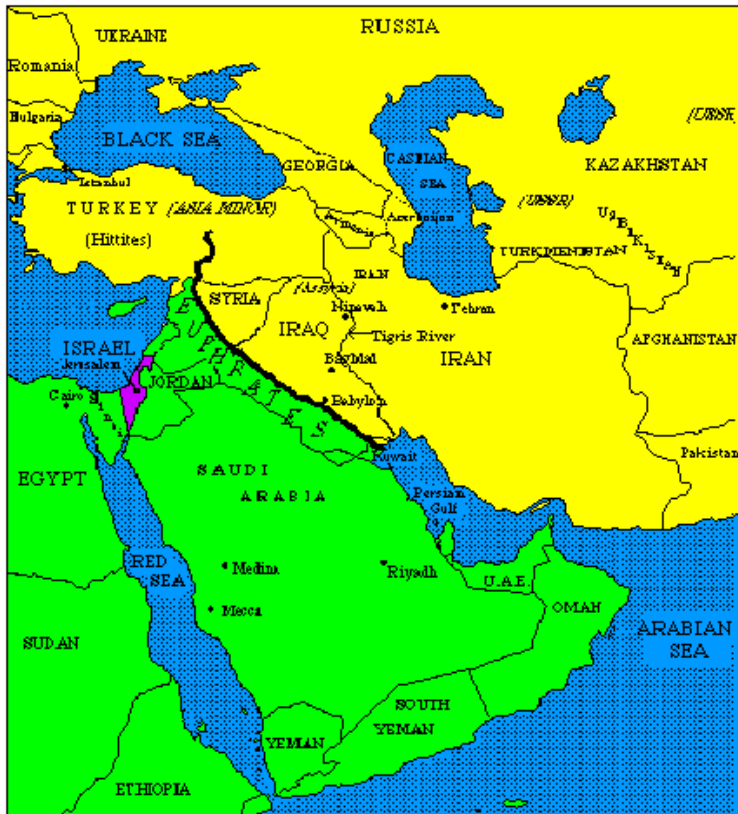


Figure 2: Euphrates River and the Middle-East⁴

³ Cox, Wade. Descendants of Abraham - Part IV:Sons of Keturah. [Online] 2017. [Cited: 3 23, 2019.] <http://www.ccg.org/weblibs/study-papers/p212d.html>.

⁴ Editor. Euphrates River and the Middle-East. Maps and Charts. [Online] 2015. [Cited: 03 23, 2019.] <http://www.ltradio.org/charts/End%20Time%20Charts/The%20Euphrates%20River%20and%20the%20Middle%20East.gif>.

The headwaters of the Euphrates originate in Turkey, which traces its lineage to Esau⁵.

Though we presently see the descendants of Abraham presently dominating the region from the *'River of Egypt'* to the present-day *'Euphrates'* river, there is some discrepancy in the translating *'perath'* into *'Euphrates'* in this verse. Consider the following:

- 1) In the verses that follow in Gen 15:19 ~ 21, the promise specifies the land of ten tribes all concentrated around the Jordan river and primarily west of it (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: Location of Tribal Land promised to Abraham in Gen 15:18 ~ 21⁶

- 2) In Gen 13:14 ~ 17, after Lot separated from Abraham, the promise to Abraham was refined to the land Abraham could see and also land that

⁵ Salemi, Peter. Turkey in Prophecy. British Israel Church of God. [Online] [Cited: April 20, 2019.] <http://www.british-israel.ca/prophecy.htm>.

⁶ http://www.remnant.net/promised_land.htm

- he walked on. Abraham never ventured any great distance beyond the Jordan river thereafter (Gen 24:24).
- 3) In Gen 26: 2 ~ 4, that same area was promised to Isaac's descendants. The promise of the Messiah was also passed to Isaac. Isaac also never ventured far from the Jordan river.
 - 4) Isaac then passed these birthright blessings to Jacob (Gen 28:4) which were reconfirmed by God (Gen 28:13 ~ 15; 35:11 ~ 12).
 - 5) Gen 28:14 extends the promise to Jacob, to a spreading in all directions. Jacob in Gen 48 and 49 passes on these blessings to his twelve sons prophesying expansion on a global scale. The global expansion of the descendants of Israel is fulfilled beyond the region of the Middle East⁷. Incidentally, this global expansion beyond Central/West Europe to the New World and the far corners of the earth, is shared by almost all tribes of the Earth.

These details suggest that the '*perath*' used in Gen 15:18, likely refers to the Jordan River and not the Euphrates. In ancient times the Jordan was a substantial waterway, with a steep fast-flowing upper course and broad flows in the lower courses, providing a natural defensive boundary. Present day water flow in Jordan is just 2% that of sixty years ago. William Lynch, a US naval officer reported on an April 1847 trip that the Jordan grew from 160 feet wide and 2.5 feet deep from the Sea of Galilee to 240 feet wide and 7 feet deep at the Dead Sea⁸.

Specific borders of ancient Israel

The borders of Israel were specified in Num 34:1 ~ 15. Jos 13:1 ~33 gives some more details. Ex 23:31 gives the four borders as the Red Sea (Jordan river), the Philistine Sea (the Mediterranean), the Desert (Wilderness of Sin) and the River (not specifying the Euphrates) but Ex 23:28 again references the land of the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites. I Chron 5:11,

⁷ Armstrong, Herbert W. The United States and Britain in Prophecy. s.l. : Authorhouse, 2002. 978-1403342669.

⁸ Crossing the Jordan river during the biblical period: north versus south. Moster, David. Oxford : ARAM Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies Forty-First Inter 4

23 adds some details to the borders of the tribes on the East of the Jordan. Using this information and the natural defensive features of mountains and rivers, the borders of Israel are estimated as shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Borders of Israel⁹

Other Old Testament references to Euphrates

- Deut 1:7 (NKJV).

⁹ Borders superimposed on {Physical Geography of Palestine. Bible Maps. [Online] 1998. [Cited: April 26, 2019.] <http://www.seektheoldpaths.com/Maps/007.jpg>. }

- Here the Northern border is stated as '*Lebanon*', the Western border is the '*Seacoast*' and the Southern border is simply called the '*South*'. The other border indicated in the NKJV is the '*Euphrates*', but since that would be the Eastern border, it cannot be the present-day Euphrates river, which is more North than east, and some 500 miles from the Sea of Galilee. '*Euphrates*' here is the Jordan river.
- Deut 11:24 (NKJV).
- Here the Northern border is stated as '*Lebanon*', the Western border is the '*Western Sea*' and the Southern border is the '*Wilderness*'. The other border indicated in the NKJV is the '*Euphrates*', with the previously stated deficiencies.
- Josh 1:4 (NKJV).
- Here the Northern border is stated as '*Lebanon*', the Western border is the '*Great Sea*' and the Southern border is the '*Wilderness*'. The other border indicated in the NKJV is the '*Euphrates*', with the previously stated deficiencies.
- 2 Sam 8:3 (NKJV).
- Zobar was a kingdom on the north-east border of Israel. 2 Sam 10 gives the background and more details to this incident. Hadadezer had hired his troops to Ammon. Joab leading the army of Israel attacked Ammon and defeated them and their mercenaries, which included Hadadezer's men. When Hadadezer saw this, he assembled his army to defend his border with Israel. David gathered the army of Israel, crossed the Jordan and defeated Hadadezer and his allies, and put the Syrians under tribute. Here we clearly see that the '*Euphrates*' mentioned in 2Sam 8:3 is the Jordan river, where all the action took place.
- 1Kings 4:21; 1Chron 18:3 (NKJV).
- Solomon inherited the kingdoms subjugated by David. The Philistines, Moab Ammon, Edom and the Syrians were placed under tribute by David, but north of Syria was Toi, King of Hamath who was allied but not subjugated. Thus, David never penetrated to the present-day Euphrates river which is to the north of Hamath. The borders specified in this verse has the '*river*' juxtaposed to the '*land of the Philistines*' as referring to east vs west borders. Israel, close to a triangle in shape, has the '*border of Egypt*' as the southern border,

closing the triangle, which confirms the *'river'* in this verse to be the Jordan river,

- 2Kings 23:29, 24:7; 2Chron 35:20 (NKJV).
- These verses deal with the battle between Egypt, Assyria and Babylon at the Euphrates River. *'Euphrates'* in these verses is correctly represented.
- 1Chron 5:9 (NKJV).
- This verse speaks of the inheritance of Reuben as from the wilderness to the river *'Euphrates'*. Here *'Euphrates'* is clearly the Jordan river as Reuben's western border with the wilderness as the Eastern border.
- Jer 13:4 ~ 7.
- Jeremiah never journeyed to the Euphrates river (Jer 53:61 ~ 63). The Euphrates river is some 500 miles away and in hostile territory. It is not an easy journey by any measure, and these verses entail two complete round trips. In these verses, *'Euphrates'* here refers to the Jordan river.
- Jer 46:2 ~10; 51:63 (NKJV).
- *'Euphrates'* in these verses is correctly represented.

3 New Testament references to Euphrates

In Rev 9:14; 16:12, *'Euphrates'* is translated from the Greek and is likely correct in representing the present-day Euphrates river.

4 Ezekiel 47:13 ~ 23 and implications for the future regathering of Israel.

Ezek. 47:13 ~23 outlines the borders of Israel at a future regathering of Israel after the return of the Messiah. These borders closely match the borders given in Section 4. These verses also describe a society in which non-Israelites who desire to live in Israel, share in their inheritance.

Summary and Conclusions

In many versions of the Old Testament, the word '*Euphrates*' is translated from the Hebrew '*perath*' meaning '*to break forth*' or '*rushing*'¹⁰. The context shows that in the scriptures pertaining to the inheritance of Israel, whenever the word is translated to '*Euphrates*' it is incorrect and should be translated as the '*Jordan*' (river). The one case in which '*perath*' may have been correctly translated to '*Euphrates*' is in Gen 15:18 where the promise is made to Abraham and not specifically to Israel, and that is because the promise is actually fulfilled, when including Abraham's other descendants in Ismael, Esau and children of Keturah. Even so, the subsequent verses in Gen 15:19 ~21 cast some doubt on that translation to '*Euphrates*' as well.

Sources

1. Strong, James. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*. [ed.] Rick Meyers. S.I. : e-Sword, 2014.
2. Rudd, Steve. Map of Ancient Egypt. [Online] <http://www.bible.ca/maps/maps-master-archeological-bible-study-map-israel-promised-land-ancient-egypt.jpg>.
3. Editor. Euphrates River and the Middle-East. *Maps and Charts*. [Online] 2015. [Cited: 03 23, 2019.] <Http://www.ltradio.org/charts/End%20Time%20Charts/The%20Euphrates%20River%20and%20the%20Middle%20East.gif>.
4. Cox, Wade. Descendants of Abraham - Part IV:Sons of Keturah. [Online] 2017. [Cited: 3 23, 2019.] <Http://www.ccg.org/weblibs/study-papers/p212d.html>.
5. Salemi, Peter. Turkey in Prophecy. *British Israel Church of God*. [Online] [Cited: April 20, 2019.] <Http://www.british-israel.ca/prophecy.htm>.
6. Physical Geography of Palestine. *Bible Maps*. [Online] 1998. [Cited: April 26, 2019.] <Http://www.seektheoldpaths.com/Maps/007.jpg>.
7. Armstrong, Herbert W. *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*. S.I. : Authorhouse, 2002. 978-1403342669.
8. *Crossing the Jordan river during the biblical period: north versus south*. Moster, David. Oxford : ARAM Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies Forty-First International Conference, 2017. Vol. 29, pp. 403 - 412.

¹⁰ Strong, James. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*. [ed.] Rick Meyers. s.i. : e-Sword, 2014.

-----*End*-----