CHAPTER FIVE

GOLAN, BASHAN, HAURAN AND TRANSJORDAN

Historical and Geographic Background

In the last decades of the Second Temple period and on into the mishnaic and talmudic periods, Jews regarded the Golan Heights as the hinterland of Galilee. Jews had also settled to the east of Golan in Bashan (Batanaea) and Hauran. Administratively, Bashan and Hauran were not part of Palestine. Hauran and southern Bashan had been part of the province of Arabia as early as the first half of the second century, and at the beginning of the third century the rest of Bashan and Trachonitis became part of this province. Golan, by contrast, remained within the borders of Palestine during that entire period.

It should be noted, however, that the sages established their own borders of Palestine for observing the commandments dependent upon the Land of Israel. These borders (discussed below and explained in detail in Chapter 1) incorporate much of these regions. Sages were active in the areas immediately across these borders. They regarded these areas as part of the country’s hinterland and not as part of the Diaspora. Galilean sages maintained ties with the sages in the Golan, Bashan and Hauran, as they did with sages in other parts of Palestine, and from what we can gather from rabbinic literature, these were close ties. During the talmudic

1 Josephus, War, 2:117, 571. Compare idem, Antiquity, 18:4 and Sifra, Behar 4:1, ed. Weiss, 108c, in which Gamla is regarded as a mountain in Galilee. See also t. Makkot 3:2, ed. Zuckermandel, 440, Gamla replaces the Galilean Kadesh as a “city of refuge.”

period, sages deliberated as to whether the areas immediately across the border should also be regarded as part of Palestine in terms of the commandments dependent upon the Land. The geographic borders for the material presented in this chapter have been defined as those which were delineated in rabbinic literature and the areas adjacent to them. This approach is based on the fact that information that appears randomly in talmudic sources about rabbinic activity in Golan, Bashan and Hauran in talmudic times corresponds to the areas in these regions that were delineated by the sages as the geographic borders for the commandments dependent upon the Land. Apparently, most rabbinic activity took place within the borders established by the sages and, to a far lesser extent, on the outskirts of these areas, as will be seen in the discussion in the list of settlements below.

The borders of Palestine established by the sages are listed in a halakhic teaching cited in several tannaitic sources. Scholarly research has termed this list the *Beraita de-Tehumin* (= Tannaitic List of Boundaries), and it gives the names of the places that constitute the borders of Palestine on all sides. The territory lying within these borders is the area in which the commandments dependent upon the Land must be observed. The *beraita* lists, *inter alia*, several settlements in Bashan and Hauran as constituting the country’s borders, and talmudic literature provides corresponding information about rabbinic activity in these settlements. For example, the *beraita* mentions the important cities of Naveh in Bashan and Bostra in Hauran. The Talmud even discusses the exact location of the border in the vicinity of these two cities, and from that information we can deduce that Naveh was located within the border while Bostra was perhaps a short distance beyond the border. Another border city mentioned in the *beraita* is Edrei (Der’a), located about thirty kilometers south of Naveh, in the southwestern corner of Hauran, which is also the southern border of Bashan. Talmudic literature, and the Jerusalem Talmud in particular, supplies information on rabbinic activity in the three above settlements, and most of it was recorded because of ties that existed between local sages there and Galilean sages, who apparently regarded the former as members of their social class, albeit distant members.

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